

Citizenship: Forgiveness
Part One: Our Role as the Offender
Matthew 18:15-20, 5:23-24

Something we all have in common is that we have all been offended. We have all been the recipient of rude behavior, a violation of trust, and attacks on our character. Everyone hearing my voice has been offended by someone in some way. Knowing this truth, I know this message will not fall on deaf ears. Dr. Charles Swindoll said, "Forgiveness is a required course in the curriculum of the Christian life and the exams are tough to take." When I heard this, I thought to myself, "I couldn't agree more!" Forgiveness is hard to ask for, but even more difficult to give. Yet, there are few things more satisfying than a forgiving spirit.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus placed great emphasis on the teaching and practice of forgiveness. His greatest teaching was how he showed us the epitome of forgiveness through the shedding of his blood on the cross for the remission of our sin. The writer of Hebrews taught us this essential doctrinal lesson when he said, "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22, NIV). Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law when he died that death, therefore, his blood covers all who believe. Because great love has been shown to us, we are to show it to others. Paul said to the Ephesian church, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31-32, NIV). Basically, to those much as been given, much is expected. God is serious about forgiveness. As we grow in Christlikeness, this is a quality in which we are not only asked but required to make our own. In Matthew's gospel, he quoted Jesus saying, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15, NIV).

Over the next two weeks we are going to look at both sides of forgiveness: as the *offender* and the *offended*. Our response during times of offense shape the vital essence of our personal theology, our personal values of faith, and our appreciation of the grace and forgiveness of God upon our lives.

This morning, we are going to look at our role as the *offender*. Before we approach our text from Matthew 18, we need to go back to some foundational teaching of Jesus on forgiveness found Sermon on the Mount. I personally view the Sermon on the Mount as a teaching that established Jesus' core values in which everything he would say and do afterward would harken back to. Among the important topics of this sermon are mercy, mission, love, worship, prayer, heaven, and relationships, both earthly and heavenly. Contained within any relationship on earth are a multitude of blessings as well as the prospect of pain. We would not know the joy of unity unless we knew the pain of discord. This is why Jesus takes time to talk about forgiveness in Matthew 5:23-24. It reads like this: "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come back and offer your gift" (Matthew 23-24, NIV).

In the verses just before this in which we just read, Jesus equates the judgment of murder with that of anger against another brother when he said, "I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" (Matthew 5:22a, NIV). Although the judgment will fall upon the one who harbors anger against his brother, the verse we read places the responsibility of reconciliation on the *offender's* shoulders. Suffice to say from the context here that the *offender* is the link between someone's salvation from the judgment of anger and the terrible effects of anger. After reading this text, I thought to myself, "I know anger is harmful in many ways,

but just how painful can it be?" So I looked it up on Google and found this article which listed the following problems related to anger. I encourage you to navigate to the following web address and at least read the sections on "Health Problems With Anger" and "Unhelpful Ways to Deal With Anger":

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/anger-how-it-affects-people>.

Now, anger in everyone does not always lead to the extremes written about in this article, but I think we could all agree that any physical, emotional, and/or spiritual ailment as a result of an event or an occasion, either intentional or unintentional, should be quickly alleviated. If we got a pain in our shoulder, we wouldn't just sit and focus on the pain, remember the pain, and think intently on the pain. No. What would we do instead? Run to the nearest bottle of Alieve, right? So why do we not do the same with the pains of anger? Especially if we know we have caused someone the pain...

In this picture Jesus paints of the person in prayer, reconciliation is elevated as just as much an important part of worship as prayer is for when this person kneels to pray and goes into a mindset of worship, their intended worship is interrupted. This is the only time in Scripture where we are told to stop praying and go do. Know this, though, it was in the efforts of the person to draw closer to the Lord that they were convicted. If we are not wholeheartedly seeking the Lord, this sort of prompting/conviction will not take place. When God strikes the chords of our heart strings, we are to answer then and go. We don't want to put it off and put it off until someone is dead. We don't need that guilt. If you think it's bad now, just wait. So then, we are to leave our moment of worship immediately and seek to reconcile with that person in which God has laid on our heart. The Greek translated into English, "be reconciled," in deeper meaning means "to change, "to alter" something. We understand this today as the literal process of growing through altering a relationship for the better. In context, to change hostility to peace. I want to remind us that this is not easy, but it is right. We are not responsible for their reaction, God is. We are told by Jesus to do what's right and leave the rest to him. We have done our part in honest faith and obedience and God will handle the rest as we return to our regular state of worship. In his sermon on this topic, Dr. Charles Swindoll said that "God is honored by immediate obedience and others are healed by vulnerable confession."

As we read in our main text, if we have a problem with a brother or sister, we are obligated to go to them and settle it if it causing pain in our heart toward them. I do not need to expound on the process for it is clearly stated in the text. However, there are times when this will not be the case. Even if that person never comes to us to point our fault or error against them, sometimes God may call us, the *offender*, to initiate the process of reconciliation ourselves.

When we reach heaven's gates, we do not need to have bound to our souls the fact that we did not do the will of God or we did not forgive even though we have been so greatly forgiven. We need to loose these things/ways now that they will not hold us back forever, that the effects of anger will not keep us bound here and now. We need to not only find in common and agree that we have been offended or that we have been an offender before, but we need to agree more so that reconciliation and forgiveness is best. As Paul said to the Ephesian church, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bound of peace" (Ephesians 4:3, NIV). If forgiveness is present, there also is Christ.

So then, who do we need to go to that we have offended to bring about restoration?