

God's Mercy

Question:

In His example prayer in the "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus instructed His disciples to pray "forgive us our debts (trespasses) as we forgive our debtors (those who trespass against us)" (Mt 6:12). What did Jesus mean by these words? Can God actually be moved to forgive by our forgiveness?

Our Answer:

Scholars are divided concerning what Jesus meant in this verse. The following are three ideas:

- Some hold that Jesus was explaining that our forgiveness of others is the motivation that drives God's forgiveness - i.e. we activate His forgiveness by forgiving others.
- Others think that Matthew was trying to convey an Aramaic present perfect tense such as: "Forgive us our debts, as we also with this prayer forgive our debtors."
- Still others believe that the point Jesus was making was that a Christian should adopt an attitude that will make forgiveness possible. With a humble viewpoint, a person would tend to keep in mind his own glaring faults, and thus be willing to forgive others

However, we at *Blow the Trumpet* would like to offer the following thought.

The desire to forgive and to extend mercy is something that sets God apart from mankind. It is an extraordinary power. But God desperately wants His people to develop this quality because it is absolutely essential to their survival. Without God's mercy our fate would be sealed and what would await us would be horrible—a death from which there is no escape.

Thankfully, God has made forgiveness possible through the sacrifice of His Son. This offering stands as the greatest act of mercy in history. The point Jesus was making with this lesson and throughout the Bible is that our extension of mercy is essential to our entrance into God's Kingdom in the same way that God's mercy is. Consider what Jesus said directly as well as through His servants.

And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. (Mk 11: 25-6)

But love you your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and you shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be you therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged: condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: forgive, and you shall be forgiven: Lk. 6:35-7

When writing to the church at Colosse, Paul admonished Christians to extend mercy and forgiveness.

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (Col 3:13)

A Lesson from two debtors

One of the most powerful lessons ever given by the Messiah was expressed in a parable about two debtors. One owed a huge amount of money (ten thousand talents) to a very powerful king. When the king requested payment the debtor became frightened because he couldn't honor the debt. He then begged for mercy and so moved the king that the debt was totally forgiven. He wasn't simply given more time to pay; he was forgiven of any obligation to pay the debt at all. Now that's MERCY!

Regrettably, this debtor wasn't nearly as gracious as his king was. When someone owed him just a small amount of money he showed no mercy at all. The consequence of this cruelty was dramatic. When word got back to the king that his debtor refused to show the same mercy he so desperately craved, the king was furious. Notice what he says to this unmerciful servant.

O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired me: Should not you also have had compassion on your fellowservant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. (Mt. 18:32-4)

Jesus then explains the point of this parable with words that should cause all believers to take serious pause.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (Mt. 18:35)

The point here is that God's mercy toward us is profoundly affected by our mercy toward others. Perhaps James, the brother of the Messiah, expressed this sentiment as well as any.

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. (Jas 2:13)