

FORGIVENESS

We all have witnessed troubles in the church, such as families torn apart and brethren grown apart. Feelings of ill-will are then handed down to the next generation and so on. A largely contributing factor is that we have not learned to forgive those who wrong us.

Let's look at the Bible definitions of forgiveness. In Isaiah 55:7 we read, "*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.*" The first definition of forgiveness, "to pardon," means to release a person from further punishment for a crime or to excuse somebody.

Another definition of forgiveness mentioned in Isaiah is a blotting out. "*I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins*" (Isa. 43:25). A blot is a spot or stain; a bad mark. To blot out means to erase that bad mark.

Jeremiah defines forgiveness as remembering no more or forgetting.

"And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:34)

We find that the act of forgiving is a godly thing; it is like God. True forgiveness can only be done by godly people. According to Psalms 86:5, it is God's nature to always be ready to forgive: "*For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*"

In the forgiveness of God, his grace comes into play. Jesus told a parable about a creditor who forgave two debtors in Luke 7:40-43. In this parable, God is pictured as a creditor, and we are the debtors because we have sinned. The point is that all the money in the world will never be enough for us to pay our debts. Therefore, God frankly forgives us. It takes a lot of grace and mercy to forgive. The more you have to forgive, the more grace

it requires (Rom. 5:20). The reason that God can forgive is that He is full of grace and mercy.

Forgiveness is a godly thing because it involves the death of Christ. *"In [Jesus Christ] whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:"* (Col. 1:14) It was required that Jesus die first, so that we could have the forgiveness of sins. *"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."* (Heb. 9:22) Jesus' blood was shed. If He had never shed His blood, then there never would have been forgiveness.

So far we have discussed forgiveness from the standpoint of God being the one who does the forgiving. There are many things that God does that man cannot do because of man's lack of wisdom and power. However, forgiveness is one thing that God does that man can also do! Let us go into the subject of forgiveness as it applies to us.

Consider Jacob and Esau. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob, and Jacob stole Esau's blessings. Would you forgive Jacob if you were Esau? Most people would not. Notice the reaction of Esau in Genesis 33:4-15. He forgave his brother. Likewise, a Christian is obliged to forgive his fellow man. Some might say, "Yes, I will forgive Jacob after that birthright incident, but that little trick about obtaining Isaac's blessings is too much!"

Jesus said in Luke 17:3-4,

"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

If a person does you wrong multiple times in a day you must forgive him, but only if he repents. Repentance is the key to forgiveness. The Bible does not teach that we have to forgive everybody who wrongs us. We must be ready to forgive, and if those who wrong us seek forgiveness, we are not to withhold it from them. Forgiveness is conditional according to Luke 17:3.

Some will ask, "What if he doesn't repent? Should I still be ready to forgive him?" All I can tell you is to turn to the scriptures and let it be your guide. Christ said in Matthew 18:15-17,

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."

So even if someone does us wrong and that person does not ask for forgiveness, we still have an obligation and a responsibility to try to make things right. This is similar to the way God waits for our baptism before adding us to the church.

What would you do if someone cursed you and said bad things against you? This happened to David. This example of forgiveness can be seen in 2 Samuel 19:18-20 where a man asks for forgiveness from David. In the following verses we read of two different reactions to this plea.

"But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed? And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king swore unto him." (2 Sam. 19:21-23)

Are we like Abishai, ready to kill a man for sinning or are we like David?

We also have New Testament examples, most notably that of Jesus. He was wrongly punished with an unfair trial. What would you do, hanging on the cross and looking at those who had a lot to do with your torture? In Luke 23:33-34 we find that Jesus forgave.

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots."

We showed earlier in Luke 17 that it takes repentance on the part of the sinner before he can receive forgiveness. But these people did not repent at this time. In Acts 2 we read that 3,000 did repent, and that is when they were forgiven of this great crime. The conclusion is that these people were not forgiven at the time that Jesus gave this saying, but it shows the willingness of Jesus to forgive.

Consider the benefits of forgiving. Human nature is not to forgive unless we get something out of it. Mark 11:25-26 says, *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."* It is a great benefit when we forgive someone, to know that God will also forgive us. Another benefit is that by forgiving a brother or sister, we can help restore that person to Christian fellowship and back on the pathway that leads to heaven.

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." (2 Cor. 2:6-7)

Instead of punishing our brethren for doing wrong against us, we should forgive and comfort them in hopes of restoring them back to being a Christian.

Forgiving is a hard thing to do. The objective is to make up for a wrong, to overlook it, and to save the offender. How does one forgive? You don't go and "tell one off" to embarrass him, to get even, or to hurt that person. Very likely that will only make matters worse. The proper thing to do (See Matt. 18:15-17) would be to go to the offender and let him know in a kind and considerate manner that you have been wronged and that you would like to see things corrected. It would be best to state the wrong as objectively as possible and state clearly that you believe it is of sufficient consequence that it deserves attention. Admit at the outset that your calculations might be faulty and ask for help to understand what appears to be a puzzling situation. There is the possibility that you may have misunderstood and that you may have contributed to the wrong. Express a readiness to repent if you have contributed in any way to the unpleasant situation. With the right spirit, the matter can be corrected.

Ask yourself the following questions about forgiveness. "Can I forgive?" "Do I want to forgive?" "Am I able to forgive?" "Do I have a burning desire to forgive?" Be ready to forgive!

Adapted from a sermon by RAY MCMANUS
Deceased

APOLOGIA

QUESTION: What is the meaning behind Psalm 82:6, "*I have said, ye are gods*"? Jesus quoted this passage to the Jews in John 10:34 when He asserted His deity to them. It has been stated by some interpreters that these passages support the idea that there can exist lesser gods, and that Jesus was in fact one of them. How should we understand these verses correctly?

ANSWER: The bedrock of the Christian system is a firm belief that Jesus is the Son of God. This was what Jesus said would be the foundation of His church. In Matthew the 16th chapter in verses 15-18 we read,

"He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

In fact we find that our belief in the truthfulness of His deity is a requirement to enter into the new birth as was evidenced in Philip's message to the Ethiopian eunuch recorded for us in Acts 8:26-38. After the preaching of the Gospel the eunuch asked what would hinder him from being baptized. To which Philip said, "*If you believe with all your heart, you may.*" *The eunuch responded by saying, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God".*

It is no surprise that Satan has for centuries sought to bring into question the deity of Christ. As the question suggests, there are those who seek to use the Scripture to substantiate the idea that Jesus was not God but rather a lesser being. The passages in our question are often used as proof texts to this idea.

Therefore, before we look at what is meant by the passages mentioned above it is necessary for us to set forth the answer

to the question "Is Jesus a lesser god or is He God?" The Bible is plain in answering this question.

One of the most powerful statements in the Scripture on this matter is found in John 1:1-3.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made."

We find two notable truths in the above passage. First, we find that the Word was in the beginning. Note that it did not say the Word began in the beginning but that when all things began the Word was! Secondly, we note that the Word coexisted with God and that the Word was God. Whoever the Word was there can be no question of His nature. Here the writer plainly states that the Word was God, thus indicating that the Word was deity. The identity of the Word was stated a little later in the passage. In verse 14 we read,

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only begotten of the Father, full of grace."

From the above we find that the Word is God and Jesus is the Word, resulting in the indisputable fact that Jesus is God! We offer the above passages so that one can see that whatever is meant by the statement "ye are gods" does not mean that Jesus was not God or was a lesser god as some have erroneously concluded.

Now that we have established what the phrase does not mean we will turn our attention to what is meant by the phrase. Our readers will note that the main passage is found in the book of Psalms and then was quoted by Jesus in His discussion with the people of His day.

The context of Psalms 82 is that of God as the divine judge, the judge of all judges so to speak. The latter part of verse 1 states that He judges among the gods who are said to judge unjustly by showing partiality to the wicked. In addition these "gods" were failing in defending the widows and the fatherless. The context shows that the term "gods" was used to refer to the judges or magistrates of Israel . They were rulers that were perverting their roles and failing to do that which God had

called them to do. However, for that failure they would be judged by God. Note verse 6 and 7:

"I said that, "You are gods," and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men and fall like one of the princes."

God had given these rulers, who were children of the Most High, their authority which they abused. As a result they would fall from their position.

The word god is used here to mean mighty and great, not divinity. In fact the Hebrew word from which it is translated can mean strength and power as well as different offices, people, or concepts. It does not always refer to deity.

Now we turn our attention to the use of the word by Jesus in John 10. The passage shows that the event that caused Jesus to use this Old Testament passage was the reaction of the Jews to His claim of being God. Jesus had said that *"I and my Father are one"*. They considered this to be blasphemy which was punishable by death under the Law of Moses.

Jesus did not deny that He was God. In fact, if He was not deity, here would have been a good time to tell them. Instead He quotes Psalm 82:6.

"Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If He called them gods unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"

This purpose in using this passage was not, as stated previously, to deny that He was God but rather that it was right to apply the term to those who had authority or those in office. If it applied to the judges or magistrates among them, it cannot be considered blasphemy to apply this word to one who is more exalted than they. If it could be applied to those to whom the Word came why could it not be applied to one sanctified by the Father who was the Word? If mortal men carried the title then surely they could not object to the claim that Jesus made.

His was not an attempt to deny anything about His nature but rather to show that they were not consistent in their application of the scripture. This is similar to the passage in Matthew 19 where Jesus told the rich young ruler that there was

none good but God. He was not denying being God but was showing the misuse of the term good by the young man.

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GOSPEL MEETINGS

<u>DATES</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SPEAKER</u>
Nov. 7 - 9	Mount Olive Congregation Arab, AL	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)
Nov. 7 - 9	Fayetteville Road Congregation Fairburn, GA	Don Avaritt (Conway, AR)
Nov. 28 - 30	Verona Congregation Verona, KY	Joe Hill (Hager Hill, KY)
Nov. 28 - 30	Willow Oaks Congregation Russell Springs, KY	J.D. McDonald (Woodbury, TN)

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. According to Deuteronomy Moses said that because God was angry with the people, God would not allow Moses to do what?
2. What did Job say that once his testing was over he would come forth as?
3. In Lamentations Jeremiah said that people who remained in Jerusalem were doing what?
4. In Luke's account when the prodigal son wasted all his inheritance, what did he end up doing?
5. What gift did Paul state that the Corinthians should especially desire?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. How many of Jacob's descendants originally went to Egypt? SEVENTY (Exo. 1:5)
2. According to the book of Joshua, when instructions were given for setting out for the new land, how far away were the people supposed to stay from the ark of the covenant? TWO THOUSAND CUBITS (Josh. 3:4)
3. In Psalms 14, What has the fool said in his heart? "THERE IS NO GOD" (Psa. 14:1)
4. Which disciples accompanied Jesus to the top of the mountain where the transfiguration occurred? PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN (Mark 9:2)
5. According to Romans, Paul said that God shows mercy to some people and to others what does he do? HARDENS (Rom. 9:18)