**Receiving and offering Forgiveness**

**by JC Graaff**

Soap operas on tv offer a surprisingly realistic view of mankind. Romantic liaisons and family relationships are shown for what they are. People treat each other in deplorable ways, and there is usually no mention of offering or receiving forgiveness.

Jesus spoke about this very issue 2000 years ago by means of a story, a parable. He was able to do this because "he knew what was in a man" (John 2:24). You can find this parable about offering and receiving forgiveness in Matthew 18: 21-35. The story is an answer to Peter, who asked Jesus, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" And Jesus answers, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (70x7=490)

**Correct proportions**

Jesus' answer is almost humorous. But he knows how often conflict crops up and remains unresolved in relationships. He also understands the disastrous consequences of such broken relationships in our lives--consequences that affect spirit, soul, and body. That is why it's so important to delve deeper into this parable of Jesus.

Because of great strides in the field of psychology, a lot more is known these days about the effect of guilt and guilt feelings involving human relationships. This is why offering forgiveness is such a crucial element of a healthy way of life. Jesus was well aware of this.

In order to put the concept of guilt in relationship to God and to other people in the proper perspective, Jesus juxtaposes two amounts of money in this parable. The slave owed the king about four and a half million dollars. Another slave owed the first slave forty-five dollars. Jesus uses these two vastly disproportional amounts to emphasize the difference between guilt before God versus guilt towards our fellow man.

In spite of this, we are often affected more deeply by the things people do to us, than by the way our own sins and trespasses hurt the eternal God. This is what Jesus wants us to see. It tends to be a lot easier for us to accept God's forgiveness for our own sins, than to forgive other people for what they have done to us.

**A debt-bond**

That is not the only point of the story, however. It also has something to say about living with a debt-bond, of which we are often not even aware. This is revealed by the conclusion of the parable. Initially, the king sets the slave free after his debt has been canceled. But when the king gets word of how this man treated his fellow slave, he imprisons him, after all. There is even mention of torture. What else does Jesus want us to learn from this story?

First of all, canceling the impossible debt of his slave is an act that liberates the slave. We often don't think about the fact that a debt always involves two parties. Whenever someone lends money to someone else, the one who receives the money becomes the debtor of the other person. The one who provides the money becomes the creditor. The debt creates a relationship between the parties, which we call a debt-bond. The two parties are not free from one another until the entire debt has been paid.

Any kind of debt, therefore, results in two parties sharing a bond. When the king in the parable canceled the enormous debt of the slave, not only was the slave free from the king, but the king was also free from the slave. However, when the king hears that the slave himself was involved as a creditor in a debt-bond with a fellow slave, the king concludes that the slave is not worthy of his freedom, which is why he does not live in genuine freedom. He belongs in the same prison in which he has thrown his fellow slave. The conclusion which Jesus draws from the parable is this: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you fotgive your brother from your heart."

**Liberation**

This story is about genuine inner freedom. It turns out to be a spiritual law which is closely related to the genuine freedom which the Lord offers to all who are reconciled to Him in Jesus Christ. This forgiveness is not just for believers themselves; they are to extend it also to the people in their lives.

Jesus' goal for every person is genuine relational freedom. When we violate this principle, we harm ourselves. This is not just about our spiritual well-being, but also about our psychological and physical well-being. The difficulties of our daily lives often center around relationships.

This involves our thoughts, inner irritations, lack of openness towards one another, personal loneliness, feeling isolated, grudges and sorrow. These kinds of feelings often adversely affect our physical health. This can lead to vague physical symptoms, but also to specific illnesses such as heart and stomach disease, chronic headaches, etc. Spirit, soul and body are interrealated to the extent that problems on one area also affect the other areas.

The counterpart to this truth, however, is that God's freedom, gained for us by reconciling us to Himself, has a salutary effect on the person as a whole. God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit whom we receive through faith in the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, desires to affect our physical being via our psyche. This is the profound, and far-reaching, effect of God's forgiveness. He offers us freedom from guilt and guilt feelings. This includes the forgiveness and the freedom which we are now able to offer other people by means of that same grace. This results in a healing freedom both for us and for the other person, which is God's intention for us.

"And forgive us our sins,

as we also forgive everyone who sins against us. . ."

JC Graaff

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