

Forgiving Those Who Are Not Sorry

One of the standard teachings of the modern church is that if someone wrongs you then you should forgive them, even if they're not sorry. If you ever hear a sermon on forgiveness, this is what you will be told. It's everywhere.

And yet, take a look at this:

Luke 17:3: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

4 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."

This verse completely goes against the modern teaching on forgiveness. It clearly says that if someone wrongs you then you should *rebuke them*. If the person then *repents* then you are to forgive them, but that last step – the step of repentance – is required. There can be no forgiveness apart from repentance.

Does God forgive people who haven't repented? No, He does not. Does He let people into Heaven who have refused to repent of their sins and ask forgiveness? Absolutely not! The Bible makes it quite clear that repentance is a required part of salvation:

Matthew 3:1: "In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 4:17: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Matthew 9:13: "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus preached a gospel of repentance, and He Himself said that He came to call sinners to repentance. Repentance is absolutely required in order to be reconciled with God. It is not optional. In order to find forgiveness you must repent.

Somehow the church has forgotten that repentance is a required part of reconciliation. They have come to see repentance as an optional thing that isn't really that important. They have overlooked the clear teaching in Luke 17 that repentance is a required component of forgiveness. If someone repents then we must forgive them – *but they do have to repent*. As Luke 17:4 points out, it may be that they will keep on sinning. However, if they do keep on sinning but they then turn around and repent of it, we must forgive them. But repentance is required.

This whole area of reconciliation has been sadly neglected. However, it is vitally important. Jesus said that reconciliation was so critical that it even impacts our ability to give gifts to God:

Matthew 5:23: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Jesus said that if you have wronged your brother, don't even try to give God anything because He's not interested in receiving it. Instead go and repent of your wrongdoing and become reconciled to your brother. After you have repented you can then come and give your gift to God – but you have to be reconciled first. It may be that your brother will forgive you, or it may be that he won't; regardless, you have to repent and ask forgiveness. *It is required.*

This whole idea that “it doesn't really matter if they are sorry” is utter nonsense. Forgiveness is the canceling of a debt, and the debt *cannot* be canceled in the absence of repentance. God Himself will only cancel your debts if you repent. He will not forgive anyone who is not sorry and who refuses to ask forgiveness. God never says “I don't care if you're sorry or not; I forgive you anyway”. Repentance is mandatory.

Am I really supposed to believe that, even though *God Himself* won't forgive people who aren't sorry, that *I* am supposed to? I am supposed to be *more forgiving* than God? Really? I don't think so. That is not what Luke 17:3-4 teaches. If our brother sins against us we should rebuke him; if he repents we should forgive him. But *forgiveness is not possible without repentance*.