

Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 22

Must I Forgive?

The ringing telephone woke up Lillian Dyer from her sleep. Glancing at the clock she saw that it was well past midnight. "Who would be calling me at this hour of the morning?" she wondered.

The solemn voice of the policeman wiped away any remaining grogginess. Lillian needed to come to her daughter's house right away. Adrenaline pumping through her veins, with heart pounding she drove to her daughter's house. When she arrived, flashing red and blue lights reflecting off of the house and police cars greeted her.

"Are you Lillian Dyer, mother of Janice Fain?" a large policeman said to her.

"Yes, I am."

Tipping his head slightly forward the policeman said, "I am sorry to inform you that your daughter is dead."

Lillian stood there frozen in shock. It was not the first child she had lost by death. Her young child Pricilla had drown while quite young. But this was different altogether.

"Mrs. Dyer, I need you to come to the hospital and make an identification of the body."

"What happened?" Lillian asked weakly.

"Mrs. Dyer, your daughter was killed by your son-in-law."

Lillian Dyer was a devout member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and was confronted with perhaps one of the most challenging things a Christian can face. Her challenge was not to give up drinking or smoking or other aspects of a worldly lifestyle. Lillian had been a follower of Christ since her youth and had taught Sunday School in the Baptist Church for many years before hearing the Adventist message. Lillian Dyer had no large sins in her life. She was the model of Christian behavior and a leader in the church. What was it that would challenge her faith to a deeper level than anything before? What command of Christ would she wrestle with?

Matthew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Jesus did not say that those who wronged us must repent and ask forgiveness before we forgive them. In order for our sins to be forgiven we must forgive others their sins. It was stated in Jesus' prayer that we read last week.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.

If we want our sins forgiven we must have a forgiving attitude toward others. We are to cherish no animosity or hatred toward someone no matter how terribly they have sinned against us.

Now what are you going to say to Lillian Dyer in this situation? How can you look her in the eyes and tell her she must forgive the man who murdered her daughter? The son-in-law is in prison yes, but that does not give Lillian's daughter back to her. She is gone for the rest of her life. There will be no grandchildren to cheer her old age. The loss is irreplaceable. What will you say to Lillian? Will you say to her, "You must forgive the man who murdered your daughter because Jesus said we must do so"?

Some people don't want to forgive someone who has wronged them because they feel that there is no justice. They feel that someone is getting away with evil without punishment. If Lillian forgives her son-in-law does that mean he will go to heaven and there will be no punishment for his sin and no compensation for Lillian's loss in this life?

Psalm 89:14 Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.

The Bible clearly tells us that the kingdom of God that Jesus has been preaching about in the sermon on the mount is founded on principles of justice. Justice involves law and punishment for the transgressor. Yet here in Psalm 89:14 we read that mercy is also an aspect of the character of God. We see this concept in our memory verse this quarter.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

How can God be merciful and maintain justice at the same time? If Lillian forgives Janice Fain's murderer where is justice? This is extremely important so let's investigate.

When a person sins against us there are at least 4 parties involved: God, Satan or one of his angels, the perpetrator and ourselves. When someone does wrong to us, they sin against God because they have injured His property and broken His law of love. When the prophet David committed adultery and then killed the woman's husband he wrote:

Psalm 51:4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight -- That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.

David had sinned against the woman's husband for sure. Then what is David saying when he said, "Against You and You only have I sinned"? It is God's law that has been broken and His property that has been damaged.

1 John 4:3 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

Many Christians today teach that when Jesus died on the cross, He did away with the ten commandments. If that were true, then there would be no such thing as sin, for sin is lawlessness. They say, "Jesus had just one law and that is the law of love." The principle underlying all of God's laws is love and it can be summarized that way. But how is the love carried out into practice? We see in the ten commandments an expression of the law of love. The law of love does not eliminate the ten commandments. Jesus shows this in the sermon on the mount. The ten commandments are the law of love and when Jesus died He did not cancel any one of them.

If there was no law nothing would be considered sin and no there would be no justice. Everyone would simply do evil and there would be no punishment.

When Lillian Dyer's son-in-law killed Janice, against whom did he sin? Yes he sinned against Janice but primarily he sinned against God. Satan or his angel's were involved in the temptation and sin. And of course Lillian lost her daughter. Those are the players in the drama.

If Lillian Dyer forgives the son-in-law does that mean that the son-in-law will be free from punishment by God? No. The forgiveness that God requires from Lillian Dyer is different from God's forgiveness. How?

God desires that Lillian love her son-in-law instead of hate him. God doesn't want her to seek retaliation or revenge. Why? Revenge and retaliation are not love. God is love. Revenge and retaliation are the spirit of Satan. The spirit of revenge and retaliation will not enter heaven. Anger, hatred and bitterness would ruin Lillian Dyer in this life. If she forgives the son-in-law she is free from these evils that would destroy her. The forgiveness that God requires from Lillian and you and me is to love, and leave justice in the hands of God. It is God's law that is broken and Lillian's attitude of love does not cancel the son-in-law's responsibility to God and His law.

God also desires to forgive the son-in-law. But God's forgiveness is more comprehensive than a human being's forgiveness. How? Let's see what the Bible says about this.

Isaiah 55:7-9 Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon. ⁸ " For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. ⁹ "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

God's pardon goes behind a judicial act where He frees us from condemnation. His ways are higher than our ways. God's forgiveness involves the reclaiming from sin. While Lillian Dyer's forgiveness could not change the heart of the son-in-law, God has the power to change the sinner.

Listen to David's prayer when he had sinned by committing adultery and murder.

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, *So* far has He removed our transgressions from us.

David's prayer is a desire for renewal. He wants to be changed. But this is a miracle from God. David cannot change himself. God is love and He is not trying to punish, He is trying to reclaim the sinner. But if the sinner resists and refuses God's forgiveness, there is nothing left but justice and punishment. The wages of sin is death.

If you want to see God's punishment of sinners look at Jesus on the cross. Jesus paid the sin debt of death on the cross for every person. Those who accept the merits of Christ's sacrifice for themselves will not only be pardoned, but God will create a new heart of love in them. They will be free from hate and bitterness and revenge. God forgives and He renews.

Each one of us has sinned against God. We are deserving of death also because we are selfish by nature which is against God's law. We want forgiveness for ourselves and not justice. We don't want to be punished. So if we want to enter the kingdom of God we must have a forgiving heart like God and not seek to punish.

Am I saying there should be no prisons or penalties for crimes in this world? No. These can help bring sinners to repentance. Sinners can see the errors of their ways. Murderers should not be released into society. We must protect ourselves. We cannot know if they have changed from the heart or not. God Himself prescribed punishments for crimes in Israel. But these were always to bring sinners to repentance or protect the innocent. God does not punish simply for retaliation or revenge.

If we truly believe God has love toward us then we can receive and impart love and forgiveness to others. But if we think others are sinners and we view ourselves as righteous with no need for repentance then we will be unforgiving of others.

Lillian Dyer said to David one day, "I have forgiven my son-in-law." Those are big words. Lillian Dyer was set free from hatred and anger and revenge. But her forgiveness did not release the sinner from his responsibility toward God. The sinner cannot be forgiven of his sin if he refuses to be changed. No sinner who refuses to confess his sin and forsake it can enter the kingdom of heaven. Those who refuse the forgiveness offered by Jesus will pay the penalty of sin themselves. That penalty is eternal death.

What compensation can there be for Lillian Dyer in this life? She lost her daughter. Love pays a high price to reclaim the sinner. Lillian Dyer paid this price. She entered into the same sufferings that God feels as people lie, cheat, steal, destroy and murder God's children.

How God will reward Lillian for her loss in the resurrection I do not know. But God will reward the righteous in this world with peace and contentment and love in the soul. As God is love, so

they will be in this world and in the world to come. Furthermore God promises to wipe away all tears. He promises to reward the righteous according to their deeds.

Is there bitterness in your soul this morning? Are you angry and want to retaliate and take revenge? Are you wanting God to punish someone because of what they did to you? If that is true, that simply means that you are human like the rest of us. But the kingdom of God is not made up of retaliation and revenge. It is made up of forgiving, reclaiming love. Since this is not natural with mankind, we must ask for a loving and forgiving heart from God.

For your sins to be forgiven you must forgive, whether the other party repents or not. Leave justice in the hands of God. God will do everything in His power to reclaim the sinner. If the sinner refuses, they will receive the reward of their sins. Satan also will answer for his responsibility in all sins. God is just and His law is still in place. It has not changed. What needs to change is us. Let us pray like David when he said,

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

If Jesus sets you free, you will be free indeed.