Part I: Forgiveness: Begin with Self

Forgiveness is man’s greatest need. Without it, there is eternity in hell, and with it there is eternity in heaven. Without it on this earth, there is misery/ Often there is sleepless nights and long days from God-displeasing activities of sinning and being sinned against. Without forgiveness, you are unable to pay the price for your own sins and your sinfulness in Adam, and you are hostile toward God. With it, God draws close to you. By it, He has reconciled Himself to you and you to Him. Therein is the peace which transcends all human understanding.

The term forgiveness is a pregnant one plumbing the depths of the riches of God’s Being. It highlights His love, mercy, righteousness, anger, and justice. It spotlights the Person and work of Jesus Christ – His perfect life and His perfect death.

Today I begin a series of blogs covering the subject of forgiveness. I begin with a familiar passage: Matthew 7:1-6. I begin here because life is relational: vertical and horizontal. Every person relates to God and to others properly or improperly. Matthew 7:1-6 forces the reader to focus first on his own sin (his log) while he addresses the sin of the other person. Notice the focus is twofold but begins with his own sin (his log) including his response to God and the other person. His speck is the other person’s sin because it is the other person’s!

In our passage, Jesus calls for proper judging by putting forth the choice: judge or. not judge. He asks which one is it and answers why. Jesus addresses the subject of proper judging by referring each person to his own sin and the other's sin. Each person has a log and a speck. The log is his own sin and the speck is the other person’s sin. Jesus is teaching that judging must begin with you. Make sure you are as aggressive about your own sin as you are the other person’s sin. It seems so easy to think that being sinned against justifies sinning in return or making it easy for another to sin in the first place. This approach views the other person's sin against you as worse than "your response sin" against God.

Both sin and sinner need to be judged. But, by whom, and how? Since forgiveness is relational, check yourself before God and the other person before you judge. Ask: how have I made it easy for the other person to sin? What do I need to do to correct it? There may be no culpability on your part.

Relationships are key in forgiveness: God to you (1 John 4:18) and you to God and others (Matt. 22:37-40). The vertical controls the horizontal. Sinners sin. Everyone sins against others and is sinned against. In a fallen world you can expect it. Based on the believer’s new capacity (2 Cor. 5:17), there must be a willingness and eagerness to forgive, even unbelievers. However, forgiveness is not “something” an unbeliever has, can do, or accept. He has no indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The believer must relate properly vertically to any person, including the unbeliever with a willingness to forgive. The believer can’t repent to or ask for forgiveness from an unbeliever. The believer can and should express sorrow for sinning against the unbeliever. The believer can’t forgive the unbeliever but he can and must stand ready to forgive (Mark 11:25). As we will discuss in future blogs, willingness to forgive differs from granting forgiveness.

Application:

1. Pick two relationships and read Matthew 7:1-6 in the context of those relationships.

2. Write out your logs – your sins – and the other person’s sins – your specks.

3. Determine how each may be fostering relationships that are less than pleasing to God.

4. Read the future blogs that address what forgiveness is, what it is not, its cost, and the subjects of cover/confront. Be ready to apply what you learned to your relationships.