



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

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Matthew 18:27 “And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.”

Forgiveness is hard. Forgiveness is a choice. Forgiveness is the most Christ-like characteristic that we can imitate. One other thought that needs to be expressed is that forgiveness involves grace. It has to. If a debt is paid, then there is no forgiveness necessary. Nothing more is owed. When you pay off a car loan, the lender has not given you any grace. You worked and paid what was owed in full. The debt is canceled and you owe nothing. There was no forgiveness in that transaction.

Our passage today comes from a setting about forgiveness. Jesus was asked by Peter how many times someone ought to forgive another. Peter suggested up to seven times. That number was more than the Jews required and it seemed extreme. Peter probably thought that he was going to get a gold star that day for suggesting that huge number. Jesus didn't pass out any gold stars. He raised the number to seven times seventy. Then Jesus emphasized the forgiveness principle by telling a parable of two different men who owed a debt. One man owed it to his master. The other owed it to a fellow servant. The first man owed a huge amount, 10,000 talents. That number is huge. If you have 10,000 of anything, that's a lot. If you have 10,000 baseball cards in your collection, that's a huge collection. If you have 10,000 CD's, you have more than the record stores. 10,000 books would be a vast library. This man owed 10,000 talents.

How much is that? Is it like \$10,000? No. It's much more. A common servant, which he was, earned a denarius a day. That comes from Matthew 20 and the laborers in the vineyard. The first man chosen worked twelve hours, all day, and received one denarius. That was the agreed settlement prior to working.

It took 600 denarius to make one talent. That's 600 days of work. That's two years. This man owed 10,000 talents. 10,000 x 600 comes out to 6 million denarius or 6 million days of work. Figure out how many years that would take to pay off. This debt shows the magnitude of what sin is. Sin is more than having an off day, more than a mistake, more than not being yourself. Sin is a debt that must be paid if you want to go to Heaven. You owe God 6 million days of work!

This slave fell to the ground and begged the master to be patient with him. That's funny. Patient? Patient for 6 million days? Whose he kidding. He can't live long enough nor can the master. This debt isn't going to be paid. It's impossible to pay. That's where sin has put us. We are in an impossible situation.

Our verse shows what happens. The master, moved by compassion, forgave and released the debt owed. That's forgiveness. That's grace. The servant didn't start paying it back. The servant didn't sell stuff to get the process rolling. He paid nothing. The master lost 6 million days worth of work. The master was owed a lot of money. It cost the master. Why did he do it? Grace. Love. Compassion. Did he have to? No. Was it that there were no other options? Sure there were. He could have worked that man until he dropped. He didn't. He could have imprisoned him. He didn't. He could have sold him as a slave. He didn't. He received not one single payment. The entire 10,000 talent note was written off.

Grace is what fuels forgiveness. Without grace, there is no forgiveness. Grace is what's hard to embrace and understand. Some on one hand believe that grace is a free ride. Grace means sitting back and enjoying the ride. If that were true, then all would be saved and none would be lost. That's not the Biblical message. On the other hand, some give lip service to grace but expect perfection, especially from others. Miss a step and some have you destined for the fires of hell.

Grace doesn't make sense. When we try to figure it out, we can't. Grace is not getting off on good behavior, but bad behavior. Romans 5:8 reminds us that Christ died WHILE we were yet sinners. Not after we were quit sinning. Not after we promised to never, ever do it again. Not after we started paying the debt back. WHILE sinners, Christ died for us.

Grace is God's choice and God's terms. Without grace, there can be no forgiveness. Grace is releasing the debt. Grace is saying it is all taken care of. Grace and forgiveness go together. When we say, "I'll forgive you, but I'll never forget it," we haven't really forgiven. When we

demand, "I'll forgive, but you owe me an apology," then we haven't really forgiven. To release the debt means NOTHING is owed. NOTHING. Forgiveness is not the same as restored trust or reconciliation of broken relationships. Forgiveness is the first step towards that.

Grace is based upon love and compassion. Grace costs. Grace isn't fair. Grace isn't deserved. Grace doesn't make much sense. We love, 'you do the crime, you do the time.' That's not the language of grace.

- The servant in this passage was given grace and then forgiveness by his master.
- The prodigal son was given grace and then forgiveness by his father. The ring, sandals, robe and celebration meal all were signs that he was not a slave, but a son. He was forgiven. Did he pay back the money he wasted? No. Why was he accepted back? Grace, love and forgiveness. It didn't make sense to his older brother who remained outside angry. Grace can do that. It doesn't make sense. Those who want blood and a beating for punishment will explode because of grace and forgiveness. They want a trial period. They want probation. Grace is neither. Grace is pardon, not probation.
- The woman caught in the act of adultery and thrown at Jesus' feet in the temple was extended grace and forgiveness by Jesus. She was guilty. He knew that. She had trashed God's commands. He knew that. She was also being used by the Pharisees to trap Jesus. He knew that, as well. So He released her. He gave her a second chance. She never begged for mercy. She never promised to be a good girl after that. Based on compassion, fueled by grace, Jesus forgave her.
- Jonah was given a second chance. Compassion, grace and forgiveness-that's what leads to those choices.
- Compassion, grace and forgiveness is extended to those who believe in Christ. God doesn't save us because He can't bear to part with us. He doesn't save us because we are top shelf material. We owe. We are in massive debt to God. We have trashed His laws and ignored His ways. Why then save us? Compassion, grace and forgiveness.

It is those same three components that God expects from His people. We are to be a people of compassion, grace and forgiveness. When hurt, we forgive. We don't squeeze every ounce out of a person and then forgive. That's not what we find in our Bibles. This doesn't seem fair. That's right. It's not easy. That's right. It means they got away with things. Right. Shouldn't they at least pay some back? Not if they are forgiven by you. Forgiving also means that you let it go. You don't tell others. You don't remind the offender. You don't keep picking the scab on the wound. You let it heal. You let it go. You have released it.

Forgiveness is hard. We'd rather pound someone's head. That makes us feel good and just. That's not God's way. The lack of forgiveness is killing families, congregations, and our relationship with the Lord. We live with bitterness because we cannot forgive. We have ruined relationships because we cannot forgive.

Get busy being like Jesus. Surrender the ill feelings. Forgiveness is a choice. It must be YOUR choice. Forgiveness is hard, but not impossible.

Roger Shouse

