

And done what is evil in your sight.
So that You are justified when you speak
And blameless when You judge,” (Ps 50: 1-4)

“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in loving kindness to all who call upon You.” (Ps. 86:5)

It is only when we realize our own sinfulness and God's great love for us—His forgiveness of all our sins—His acceptance of us in Christ—that we will be able to forgive others from our hearts—hearts that will have become soft and compassionate in the warm embrace of God's love. St. Paul put it this way:

“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” (Col. 3:12-13)

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Eph. 4:32)

St. Peter wrote:

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.” (1 Pet. 4:8)

Some very wise men of recent history who knew the value of forgiveness have put it very well:

“Forgiveness is the giving, and so the receiving, of life.”
George MacDonald (19th Century Scottish author, theologian, who greatly influenced C. S. Lewis)

“Forgiveness is the final form of love.”
Reinhold Niebuhr (American theologian who wrote and spoke especially during the Cold War period of the 20th century)

“Forgiveness is the answer to the child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is made clean again.”
Dag Hammarskjöld (Swedish diplomat of the 20th century and second Secretary-General of the United Nations)

The choice is ours. Do we choose to forgive from our hearts and thereby choose life and love and wholeness or do we choose to be unforgiving?

“Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

Amen!



Unforgiven!

**“The consequences of not
forgiving those who hurt or
offend us are eternally deadly.”**

Homily given at All Saints Orthodox Church on
the 11th Sunday after Pentecost and the After-
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The Lord spoke this parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Introduction

Our text is a familiar one—the parable of the unforgiving, wicked servant. It teaches us two great truths of Orthodox Christianity. First, that God forgives us of our monumental debt of sin against Him and second, that as a result we must be forgiving of our brothers and sisters and even our enemies. In fact, the only way that we can be truly forgiving of others who sin against us, is when we realize that we have been forgiven by God for much greater sins. These truths we have discussed many times in homilies and in adult studies.

However, there is a negative side to this parable. Looking at it closely, we see that the **lack of forgiveness** and **its consequences** are emphasized as well. Let's consider the Unforgiving and the Unforgiven.

The Unforgiving

It is fairly easy to detect the lack of forgiveness in a person whom we have hurt or offended in some way. We may have asked them to forgive us and they may even have said that they do forgive us, but . . . we know that it is all just a polite ritual. There is a look and there are actions that belie the words.

If we are unforgiving, we will avoid physical, verbal, and emotional contact with that person who has offended us. Our behavior toward the offending person will be stilted and mechanical, laughter and joy will be absent when offended and offender are present. There will be a lack of trust and the desire to have nothing to do with the person who has sinned against us. Gradually a sense of moral superiority will develop in our hearts—after all, we were the offended not the offender—and eventually our hearts will turn to stone.

Even the most intimate relationships, such as marriages, explode when there

is a lack of forgiveness. Our attitude—the attitude of the unforgiving—is to get as far away from the person who has hurt us as possible or alternately to retaliate and hurt the person who has hurt us.

Look at the actions of the wicked servant in our parable. He would not forgive his fellow servant; instead he grabbed him by the throat and threw him into prison. The wicked servant's heart was made of stone.

The Unforgiven

And the consequences for the wicked servant for his lack of forgiveness was to have the forgiveness that the king had given him withdrawn and to be thrown into prison himself. The wicked servant was no longer forgiven, and he would suffer an even worse punishment than he had inflicted on his fellow servant.

All of us better pay attention to this. The consequences of not forgiving those who hurt or offend us are eternally deadly. Jesus taught:

“For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. “But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.” (Matt. 6:14-15)

“Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. [‘But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.’]” (Mark 11:25-26)

The extremely disturbing implication of our text is that the unforgiven sinners in hell are those who did not forgive their brothers and sisters—and enemies—in this life. Every time we pray the Lord's Prayer we affirm this very truth:

“And forgive us our trespasses, **as** we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Verse from the Lord's prayer-Matt 6:12)

These are very difficult words and I hope that they make each of us very uncomfortable and ultimately result in the softening of our hearts.

Conclusion

You and I have been graciously and lovingly forgiven by God for our sins against Him—sins which are greater than any hurt or offense that we have ever suffered or will ever suffer from our brothers or sisters. We must continually turn to God and pray:

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity
And cleanse me from my sin,
For I know my transgressions.
And my sin is ever before me.
Against You, You only, I have sinned