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RADICAL FORGIVENESS ?

Forgiveness. Everyone wants it. But no one wants to give it. And the Bible presents a radical perspective on forgiveness that makes you think hard about it.

In Matthew 18:21 Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness of someone who sins against you. Jesus surprised him with a story that may make your blood boil. Someone owed their king ten thousand bags of gold - billions of dollars. The king took pity on him and canceled the debt. But then, the forgiven guy threw someone else in jail who owed him a mere hundred silver coins - about a million times less than he owed the king. When the king heard about it, the ungrateful man was sent to prison.

The meaning is unmistakable. If you have received Christ's forgiveness, the punishment you deserve for sin has been paid by Christ. Your debt is wiped clean. You do not get the penalty you deserve. That's God's mercy. But you are also given something you do not deserve - the righteousness of Christ. That's God's grace. And Jesus wants you to pass along His forgiveness to others.

"Radical forgiveness means to forgive in such a way that others might not understand it." says Alan Robertson of the Duck Dynasty clan, in the "Faith Commander" Bible study. "In the Robertson family, forgiving is a choice we make, a *radical* choice. We want and need God's forgiveness every day, so we must be radical in the way we forgive others who wrong us, as quickly as we can."

Forgiveness is simple, and complex. Scripture such as Matthew 6 and 18, Luke 15 and 23, and John 8 help us understand what forgiveness IS and is NOT.

You don't have to be so touchy that you keep score about everything. You can simply overlook many uncomfortable things in your life. But forgiveness is NOT saying that wrong things are okay or no big deal. But it is NOT hurting people to make them pay for their past - though making restitution for wrongs can be appropriate. It is NOT allowing a harmful person to continue to hurt you. You may have to set appropriate boundaries, or get assistance from others. Forgiveness is NOT forgetting, though you never bring it up. You don't forget in the sense of continuing to make the mistakes that enable someone to sin against you.

Robertson says, "Forgiveness is not using someone's sin to hurt them." Forgiveness IS saying no to revenge, though you have been hurt. You choose to let God's righteous final judgment deal with sin. But it can be appropriate for the legal system to deal with crimes. Forgiveness IS canceling the debt, even though it has cost you, because you owe too, perhaps more. So you let the person have a new start, to rebuild trust - which can take a long time, and may require boundaries.

Forgiveness IS something others might not understand. It is trusting God for ultimate justice. It is a witness to your faith. Forgiveness IS refusing to bear a grudge, though the relationship with that person may change considerably, as you seek healing, reconciliation, and restoration.

Forgiveness IS based on understanding how God can forgive you. His mercy in Christ's death withholds the penalty you deserve, because Christ paid for your sins of commission and omission. His grace in Christ's death gives what you don't deserve, the righteousness of Christ credited to your account. Your faith in receiving what Christ has done for you means you no longer try to earn God's favor through your own efforts - because His resurrection life now lives through you

How can YOU forgive others? Because God cancels your debts, and gives you His grace to live. If you harbor unforgiveness like the ungrateful man in Matthew 18, how can you experience God's grace? Someone has well said that *"unforgiveness is taking poison and hoping the other person falls ill."*

Robertson says, "Once you embrace the forgiveness of Christ, it changes you." Colossians 3:12-17 explains that through the power of Christ, you can pass along His compassion, humility, meekness, patience, peace, and forgiveness - as you ***"do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."***

Does that sound radical? Jesus says, in Him, if you get it, you can give it too!