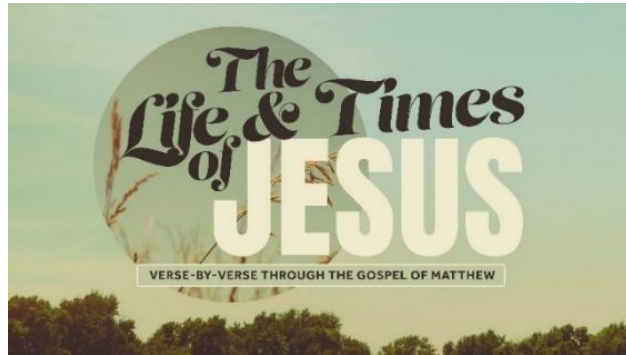


FELLOWSHIP NOTES ~ SUNDAY, AUGUST 17th, 2025



Part 11: “BEWARE of Hypocrisy” (Part 5)

Matthew 6:14-15; Hebrews 12:15

God’s Teaching About Bitterness

1. Bitterness grows quickly like a weed – Heb. 12:15b
2. Bitterness leads to self-destruction – Heb. 12:15c
3. Bitterness impacts everyone around us – Heb. 12:15d

The Path to Freedom

1. Recognize and admit your own sin
2. Embrace God’s sovereignty
3. Release the debt by forgiving
4. Ask God to fill your heart with His love
5. Thank God for the experience
6. Keep continually and instantly forgiving

Pick up the Personal Bible Study Lesson on “Forgiving Others” at the tower in the lobby.



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Answering Common Questions about Forgiveness

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE REPENTANCE AND A MERE APOLOGY?

Genuine repentance always involves a confession of wrongdoing and a willingness to make things right. An apology often takes the form of an excuse. The word *apology* comes from the Greek *apologia*, which literally means “a speech in defense of.” Apologies are often nothing more than self-defense: “I’m sorry if you took offense, but...” Genuine repentance is properly expressed in an admission of wrongdoing and a plea for forgiveness: “It was unthoughtful of me to say that. Will you forgive me?” Be wary of using merely apologetic language in place of genuine repentance.

TO WHOM SHOULD WE CONFESS OUR SIN?

Confession of guilt must always be made to God. Confession is also owed to whomever our sin has injured. The arena of confession should be as large as the audience of the original offense. Public transgressions call for public confession; private sins should be confessed to God alone.

WHAT IF I SIN WITH MY THOUGHTS AGAINST ANOTHER PERSON?

Only actual injuries require confession of a wrong. It would be inappropriate for a man who had a lustful thought to confess that thought to the woman who was the object of his lust. Confession in such cases should be made only to God. That does not, however, rule out confession in every case where the victim is unaware of the offense. If you have quietly slandered someone, that person may be unaware of the offense. Nonetheless, the offense is real. It needs to be made right not only with those who received the original slander, but also with the person who was slandered, even if that person is not yet aware of the offense.

SHOULD I CONFESS MY UNFAITHFULNESS TO MY SPOUSE, EVEN IF TELLING THEM MAY HURT THEM MORE THAN KEEPING IT A SECRET?

There is no doubt that in some cases confessing a sin may cause as much hurt as the offense itself. Nonetheless, it is important in all cases for the unfaithful party in a marriage relationship broken by adultery to confess the sin to his or her spouse. Why? For one thing, it takes two people to commit adultery. The other party in the sin already knows about the offense. It compounds your unfaithfulness to share a secret with your cohort in sin but keep your spouse in the dark. The lack of total openness – the need to hide things and keep secrets – will continue to be a barrier to the proper unity of the marriage. Something as serious as a breach in the marital union cannot be repaired if the truth must be kept from your marriage partner. Failure to confess simply compounds lying and cover-ups. That sort of thing will eventually destroy the relationship, whether or not the adultery is repeated. As difficult as it may be for both you and your spouse, you must deal honestly with a sin like this. If the offended spouse discovers the sin through other means, the hurt that is then caused will be drastically increased. You owe it to him or her to confess.

HOW SHOULD WE HANDLE REPEAT OFFENSES?

We’ve seen how Jesus handled this in Matthew 18 (it’s also repeated in Luke 17). According to Jesus our forgiveness is supposed to be lavish, enthusiastic, eager, freely offered, and unconstrained – even for repeat offenders. After all, we are all repeat offenders against God.

WHEN IS RESTITUTION APPROPRIATE?

Whenever an actual loss has been caused by a wrong, restitution is certainly appropriate. The granting of forgiveness for the guilt of the offense does not automatically nullify the need to make reparations, especially when the injured party's loss is quantifiable. Whether the loss was caused deliberately (as in a theft) or accidentally (through some form of negligence), restitution should be made. In the Old Testament this was taught in Leviticus 24:18-21; Exodus 21:33-34; 22:1; and Numbers 5:6-7. In the New Testament Zaccheus offered fourfold restitution to those he had defrauded, more than the law required (Luke 19:8). That spirit of willingness to make restitution should accompany all true confession of wrongdoing. The purpose of restitution is simply to restore the value of the damages. Under Moses' law, when restitution was required over and above the actual amount of the loss, the purpose of the restitution was both to punish and to deter. The one forgiving is free, of course, to forego restitution and to choose to suffer the wrong without demanding repayment. But that is the offended person's option. The offender, if truly repentant, must be willing to right the wrong as much as is possible (Matthew 18:26,29).

WHAT RESTITUTION CAN BE MADE IF THE OFFENSE WAS A SIN LIKE LYING, SLANDER, DISHONORING ONE'S PARENTS, OR OTHER SINS WHERE NO ACTUAL VALUE CAN BE ATTACHED TO THE DAMAGE?

In some cases tangible restitution is impossible, and yet reparations need to be made. Lies should be confessed, and the truth communicated at least as widely as the lie was. Slander needs to be corrected by a sincere effort to restore the offended person's reputation and honor. Restitution in all such instances begins with a humble confession of the wrongdoing and a willingness to do whatever is reasonable to right the wrong.

WHAT IF I CANNOT FORGIVE MYSELF?

There are some who teach that a kind of self-forgiveness is necessary. However, this is not found in Scripture. Many people claim to be unable to forgive themselves, but on careful examination this usually turns out to be a kind of sinful pride exacerbated by modern self-esteem philosophy. The person who complains about not being self-forgiving is often simply looking for flattering or consoling words from others as a way of salving the hurt that guilt has caused to their pride. Christian counselor, Jay Adams, offers this insight: "The problem is not self-forgiveness. Their expressed agony stems from the very fact that, in the worst way, they want to forgive themselves. They want to put it all behind them, they want to bury it once and for all. The problem is that people who talk this way recognize something more needs to be done. Forgiveness is just the beginning; it clears away the guilt. They also recognize that they are still the same persons who did the wrong – that though they are forgiven, they have not changed. Without being able to articulate it, and using instead the jargon they have heard all around them, they are crying out for the change that will assure them that they will never do anything like it again. When, as a counselor, I help them to deal with the problems in their lives that led to the wrong, in such a way that they lead a more biblical lifestyle, I then ask, 'Are you still having trouble forgiving yourself?' Invariably, they say no."