

Spiritual Considerations...



Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.

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It's a Gift

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It's the most wonderful time of year - or so says Andy Williams. Every song of the holiday season reminds us of gifts, blessings and gratitude. Even though the specific date of the birth of Christ will always remain a mystery, the fact that so many, even in the secular world, are focusing on Christ reminds us of the great gift of forgiveness that is to be found in none other than Jesus.

The word forgiveness is an interesting word. There are several words in the Greek language that are translated "forgiveness." One of those words is used twice by the apostle Paul in his letter to the churches of Colossae.

He says...

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions... (Col. 2:13, NASV)

And then...

And 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. 3:13, NASV).

The word in this letter translated forgiveness (chorizamai) comes from the root word for grace (charis). So, a marvelous relationship is accentuated by Paul's choice of words when he shows the connection between the grace of God (God's favor) with the forgiveness of the sins of mankind. In addition to the grammatical significance, there is the explicit instruction that Christians are expected to reflect the grace of God in the way they interact with others.

Admittedly, this is easier said than done.

John Bright, in his book *The Kingdom of God*, points out the varying degrees of difficulty that man has in living this divine mandate. Bright credits the prophets of the Old Testament with a generous knowledge and understanding of theology - perhaps an overly exaggerated amount of knowledge of the will of God. In other words, Bright seems to think that Jeremiah and Isaiah know exactly what God is doing and their words are responsive to their feelings of what God would have them say to the people. This differs slightly from the prophets speaking only what God revealed to them regardless of their full understanding of the implications.

Still, Bright accurately portrays Jeremiah as one who is struggling with forgiveness. He notes that whereas the attitude of Stephen and Jesus is "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," the attitude of Jeremiah is, "Father, remember what they did and punish them."

This may be a harsh indictment of Jeremiah, but read Jeremiah 18:18-23 again and see if his conversation with God doesn't hint at a request for retribution against Jeremiahs enemies.

This is not to license this type of request, but it does give us an indication that the responses of the emotions of man do not always reflect the intended behavior of man. We are not going to be able to consider the Godly response to adversity without first consulting the God of the universe.

Forgiveness is the product of grace. We are forgiven by God because of the bountiful storehouse of grace which resides in Him. The expression of His love was poured out upon all mankind. Man has the choice to reflect and accept this gift or reject it. Once accepted, man's obligation is to express this same type of grace in expression to his fellow man.

Listen again to Jesus. In response to a request for instructions in prayer, Jesus said, "And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us" (Luke 11:4, NASV). In Matthew's account, Jesus is also quoted as saying, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14,15, NASV).

It sounds to me like forgiveness is very important to God. In fact, it was the reason for Jesus coming to earth. It is high priority for us because it is to Him. Forgiveness – a gift of God's grace.

By the way, it is a wonderful time of the year.

First Century Historian Speaks of Siege of Jerusalem

(Reflections on Matthew 24)

(When you read Matthew 24, you read Jesus' prediction of what would happen to the city of Jerusalem. Early Christian historians Eusebius and Epiphanius claim that prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, the Jerusalem Christians fled to the Decapolis city of Pella. The following account of what happened to the inhabitants of Jerusalem emphasizes the need to seriously consider the warnings of the Bible regarding physical and spiritual consequences. –DP)

"When they were going to be taken by the Romans), they were forced to defend themselves, and after they had fought they thought it too late to make any supplications for mercy: so they were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died and were crucified before the wall of the city. Titus felt pity for them, but as their number – given as up to five hundred a day – was too great for him to risk either letting them go or putting them under guard, he allowed his soldiers to have their way, especially as he hoped that the gruesome sight of the countless crosses might move the besieged to surrender: "So the soldiers, out of the rage and hatred they bore the prisoners, nailed those they caught, in different postures, to the crosses, by way of jest, and their number was so great that there was not enough room for the crosses and not enough crosses for the bodies."

(Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book V, Chapter XI)