

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: FORGIVE ALL MEN

Scripture: Doctrine and Covenants 64:2

I, the Lord, forgiveth sins unto those who confess their sins before me, and ask forgiveness, who have not sinned unto death. My disciples in days of old sought occasion against one another, and forgave not one another in their hearts, and for this evil they were afflicted, and sorely chastened; wherefore I say unto you that ye ought to forgive one another, for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses, standeth condemned before the Lord, for there remaineth in him the greater sin. I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to FORGIVE ALL MEN, and ye ought to say in your hearts, Let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those
who trespass against us.

Every one of us needs forgiveness. Every one of us has at some time and in some way transgressed God's laws and given him offense. Every one of us at some time or other and in some way or other has wittingly or unwittingly given offense or trespassed against someone else. Every one of us has been wronged at some time or other and in some way or other by someone else. What if all these offenses could never be forgiven? What if God refused to forgive, to forget, to wipe out the memory of our sins? What kind of world would this world be if every one of us remembered perpetually and unerringly every offense, however slight, and nourished a never ending hatred, resentment, and ill will against him who gave it? Without forgiveness, the world would be an intolerable place in which to live.

Because we are all sinners who need forgiveness, we should all be willing to grant to others the forgiveness which we need to claim for ourselves. Therefore, God's forgiveness is contingent upon two things which are closely related to each other: first our confession of our own sins and repentance from them; and second, our willingness to forgive others as we expect God to forgive us.

Forgiveness does not benefit an unrepentant man. To forgive an unrepentant man is merely to excuse him so that he may be free to go and sin some more. There is no reclamation, no restoration, no redemption in that kind of forgiveness.

But if forgiveness is granted to a repentant man, forgiveness becomes a means of strength to overcome future temptation. The forgiven man does not have to bear the burden of guilt and remorse for past sin while striving against temptations, but is free to devote his whole strength of mind and spirit to choosing right and rejecting evil. Forgiveness to a repentant man is a means of grace and redemption.

God cannot look upon sin with the least degree of allowance. He cannot condone or excuse sin. But he can be and is merciful to the sinner, when the sinner admits that his actions have been wrong and sinful and rebellious, and earnestly strives to do better. God's capacity for forgiveness under these conditions is infinite. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9)

One of the most ungenerous, ungrateful sins we can commit is to hold grudges against others -- to be unforgiving while we ask God to forgive us and overlook or excuse or condone our own more serious sins and mistakes. That sin makes all forgiveness impossible. Jesus' parable of the unforgiving debtor was told to illustrate this principle. When the debtor who was forgiven a debt of ten thousand talents would not be merciful to another who owed him only a hundred pence, the old debt was reinstated, and the unfor-

giving one was required to pay all.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," and added: "If ye forgive men their trespasses, who trespass against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses." Luke reports another saying: "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." In today's reading from the Doctrine and Covenants is this statement: "He that forgiveth not his brother their trespasses, standeth condemned before the Lord, for there remaineth in him the greater sin." God cannot and will not forgive an unrepentant, unforgiving sinner.

If forgiveness of those who trespass against us is so important, who should make the first move towards reconciliation? The law is clear and unequivocal. The one who first becomes aware of the offense is obligated to begin the processes of reconciliation, in order that men may forgive each other, and all may be forgiven by their heavenly Father. Jesus laid down a dual law of reconciliation. If you come to the altar with a gift and remember that any man has aught against you, you are required to leave your gift, go and be reconciled to your offended brother, and then return to offer your gift. You cannot repent of your own sins and find reconciliation with God unless you have first confessed to your brother the wrongs done to him, and made restitution and reconciliation insofar as possible. Even if the complaint against you is untrue or unjust, you are obligated under Jesus' rule of reconciliation to take the initiative and to make every effort to win back the offended one to full fellowship.

The second half of this dual law of reconciliation is: "If thy brother trespass, go and tell him between him and thee alone." Don't broadcast his sin to other people so that he is embarrassed, his reputation is damaged, or others are drawn into the quarrel. Give the offender opportunity to know how he has given offense. Perhaps he offended unwittingly, with no malicious intent at all. Perhaps his words were mis-quoted to you. By going to him alone, you give him every opportunity to repent and to receive your forgiveness, if he is guilty. Only if he refuses to acknowledge his fault should others be taken as witnesses; or as last resort the offending member may have to

be presented to the church for such discipline as the church courts provide.

Suppose that you do go to someone you have offended, or to someone who has offended you, and he refuses to repent, or to be reconciled, and keeps on doing what caused the offense in the first place. Our scripture reading says, "Of you it is required to forgive all men." It may not be possible, nor is it expected that the unrepentant sinner should be restored to full trust, confidence, and fellowship. Even God will not do that for an unrepentant sinner. But it is required of us that we forgive in the sense that we will harbor no resentments, no grudges, no hatreds. The will to forgive should always be there. Jesus told Peter to forgive until seventy times seven -- or in Jewish terminology, indefinitely.

God forgives whom he will. Only he knows the heart of the sinner. Sometimes he may see repentance where we see only habitual sin -- he may see weakness where we see only willfulness. Sometimes he sees sin where we see only sanctity. Our human judgments are too often bound up in personal resentments, or in a sense of injured innocence. We tend to be most severe upon others for the faults we are most ashamed of in ourselves. Only God can be perfectly just, perfectly dispassionate and perfectly objective, and yet at the same time be perfectly merciful, loving the sinner as he hates and deplors the sin. All too often we judge to destroy. God is ever eager to reclaim, to restore, to redeem.

We are required to forgive all men -- to love our enemies -- to do good to them that hate us and persecute us and despitefully use us, even if they do not repent. We are required to bear no ill will, hold no grudges, work no evil, even upon our enemies and those who refuse to repent. In the case of willful, persistent offenders, we have the right of self-defense, and the obligation of defending those who naturally look to us for protection. In case of violation of the laws of the state, we have an obligation to see the offender brought to justice. But all this can be done in a spirit of love and forgiveness, lifting up an ensign of peace to all men.

Only if we keep open the channels of forgiveness between ourselves and our fellow men, can we keep open the channel of forgiveness between ourselves and God, who requires that we forgive all men.