

Sunday School Lesson for September 20,2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and feel blessed.

Lesson for September 20, 2020, "Love versus Guilt"

Background Scripture from Genesis 42.

We can define vengeance as "punishment inflicted or retribution exacted in response to an injury or wrong treatment." The lesson for today displays vengeance held back in favor of love and mercy. Many of us would not have blamed Joseph for wanting revenge on his brothers who had sold him into slavery and also contemplated killing him.

In Luke 17:3 we are told to rebuke the one who has sinned against us and if there is repentance, we should forgive them. What should we do if the person doesn't admit they are wrong and doesn't repent?

In the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus taught why we should forgive those who have done something wrong against us. Specifically, if we want God to forgive us our sins against Him, we must forgive others who have sinned / have done wrong to us or against us.

In the Lord prayer we pray saying, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."

Matthew 6:14-15, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you forgive not men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins".

The key is, if we want God to forgive our sins against Him and His commands, we must forgive those who have done something wrong to us. Our forgiveness of others does not hinge on them being sorry for what they did against us.

Jesus showed us what it means to forgive instead of taking vengeance. While nailed to the cross, He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing." (Luke 23:34) He did not say to forgive them if they are sorry. As we know many or most were not sorry.

The Apostle Paul said it is not up to us to take revenge; God has reserved

this for Himself: "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written; It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord." Romans 12:19

We should admit, if given an opportunity, it is very difficult to resist retaliating against someone who has hurt us or treated us wrongly. The Bible teaches us to not retaliate against someone who has wronged us and not to carry a grudge. This is very difficult for us to do.

In our lesson, Joseph struggled with deciding on what to do with his brothers. Otherwise, he would have just told them who he was rather than speaking to them through an interpreter. He had the authority to cause them great harm.

Look at some examples of what the Bible says about hate, vengeance, and retaliation. Jesus taught us in Matthew 5:43-44, "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I tell you to: Love your enemies, and pray for those that persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."

Proverbs 20:22 says this on revenge: "Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you."

Leviticus 19:18 says, "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."

The Bible is clear on revenge and returning hate for hate. Revenge, retaliation, and payback is God's business. Forgiveness is our responsibility if we expect to be forgiven.

In the story of Joseph, his brothers had contemplated killing him but instead settled on selling him into slavery. This act of jealousy and hatred became the avenue God used to bless Joseph and his family. It became the avenue that brought to life the dream he had years before. That dream signified that his brothers would bow to him.

In the lesson text, Joseph was presented with an opportunity for payback against his brothers. Out of revenge, Joseph could have stayed with the narrative that they were spies (Genesis 42:9). He could have had them sold as slaves, or put to death. He could have treated them with the same callousness as they had done to him.

In this case, they wouldn't have even known it was Joseph taking revenge.

He had spoken to them through an interpreter, was dressed as an Egyptian, had an Egyptian name, and had an Egyptian wife. For all the brothers knew, the man they were bowing down to was a high-ranking Egyptian official and not their brother Joseph.

They told him they were part of a family of 12 sons except the youngest was with their father and one other was dead. God caused Joseph to remember his dream of them bowing down to him. He put them all in prison for three days, but the Bible doesn't explain why. Maybe he needed more time to consider what he wanted to do with them and what his plan of action should be? We can see that his plan of action was evolving. He first told them to send one brother back to get the youngest while the rest remained in prison ([Genesis 42:16](#)). But after the three days they spent in prison, the plan was for one brother to stay in prison while the rest went back for the youngest brother (Benjamin).

We are fortunate when we have the luxury of time to decide what we should say or do in response to the hurtful actions of another. Often we react instantaneously with poorly chosen words and out of anger. But, if we have time to consider our response and we still react with poorly chosen words and out of anger, we need to ask God for more help from the Holy Spirit to control our actions and reactions.

After the three day experience in prison, perhaps the brothers were more willing to agree to Joseph's demands. They did not realize he could understand their conversations in Hebrew. Through these conversations, he became aware that the eldest brother, Reuben, had tried to convince the others to not treat Joseph harshly back when he was sold into slavery. They believed their present desperate situation was because of their former treatment of their brother, Joseph.

He overheard Reuben reminding the other brothers that he had told them to leave Joseph alone. The brothers responded to this reminder with anguish and remorse about what they had done to Joseph. Hearing the conversation among the brothers drove Joseph to tears and he had to turn away from them. He still loved his brothers and was encouraged by the conversation he had overheard. It showed they had a repentant heart for what they had done to Joseph.

Is it detrimental if we believe we are being punished or disciplined for a sinful action on our part, even though there is not a way to know for sure? It is a good thing to enforce our belief that God has His eye on us and knows when we are sinning.

Over the years, Joseph had been blessed with wisdom. He was not the same teenager who had angered his brothers with his dream showing them bowing down to him.

He could have immediately said to them that he was Joseph, their brother, and that they were bowing down to him just as his dream had portrayed years ago. But he didn't do that. He could have said that he was Joseph, their brother who they had sold into slavery and now he was going to sell them into slavery in return. But he didn't do that either.

Instead, he sent them back with the grain they had come for. But he also told them that he feared God. This should have been a comforting declaration to the brothers and an indication that perhaps they could trust the word of this "Egyptian official." After having time to consider what he would do with his brothers, love and mercy were victorious over hate and vengeance.

The question is, how did Joseph end up feeling about his ordeal of being sold into slavery and thrown into prison? We will learn about this in the lesson for next week, that he believed it was God's plan: "And now do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance." Genesis 45:5-7.

You know, when someone says something to us, meant to hurt or embarrass us, we should try to remember this lesson. Our responsibility is forgiveness; even if we believe they are not sorry.

From the text section, stepping into the world. There are two issues clearly raised by this passage. The matter of mass incarceration needs careful attention. The United States has the highest percentage of people in prison among all the industrialized nations. Though constituting only about five percent of the world's population, the United States holds twenty-five percent of the world's prisoners. The second concern that arises from Joseph's situation involves how we, as individuals and collectively as a nation, respond when we experience injustice or are confronted with potentially harmful actions by others. For thoughtful Christians, considerate, thoughtful approaches to conflict are called for to help our country and our

neighbors set aside the assumption that vengeance is the requisite response to any affront.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson September 27 2020, "God's Plan Revealed"

Background Scripture from Genesis chapter 43 and 45:1-15.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, Lessons from Bible in Life, South Georgia Advocate Sunday School Lesson, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.