The Burden and the Blessing of Forgiveness

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Scriptures:
Matthew 18:21-35
Luke 17:3-4
Matthew 4:44
Romans 12:18
Micah 7:18-19
Matthew 11:28-30

Researching "forgiveness" has led me through a maze of varying interpretations, opinions and confusion of ideas as to what exactly it means in the life of us as followers of Christ. And it has taught me a huge lesson.

There is only one plumb line that all doctrines and theological debates can be held against – the Word Who became flesh and lived among us. The One Who was God yet Who was also man. The One Who knew exactly what we face, what emotions we feel, what conflict there is between our human nature and the nature of God Who lives within us.

Jesus, our Saviour and Redeemer, is the only One who has lived a sinless, pure life on earth. He faced the same temptations, the same frustrations and irritations that we all face during our lives, but, instead of giving in to those emotions, He laid it all down and didn't succumb to them. It is clear, though, from the pattern of His life that we see in the Gospels, that it wasn't, in the vernacular, a breeze for Him. We see Him rising early to spend time alone with His Father, spending nights in prayer and, in the Garden of Gethsemane, agonising over what He knew was coming that was terrifying to His human mind.

So, what has this got to do with forgiveness?

In His parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus holds up a picture of the chasm that exists between the undeserved forgiveness that we receive from God and the unwillingness we show to extend even a small glimpse of that forgiveness to those who have offended us. The command is clear, our obligation as a child of God is to forgive as we have been forgiven. And it is a command, not an option we can ignore if we choose.

We can argue that Jesus speaks about forgiving our brother, so the obligation to forgive those who offend us who are not fellow believers does not exist. Yet Jesus also tells us to bless those who curse us, to do good to those who hate us and pray for those who use us despicably. Paul tells us to do all we can to live peaceably with those around us, not to reward evil with evil.

As He hung on the cross at Calvary, Jesus cried out to His Father to forgive those who were party to the torture, murder and spectacle of His crucifixion.

In His agony, He clung to the reason He was there, going through that horror and degradation. Without His sacrifice we never could be forgiven; He is the propitiation for our sins, His death bought the remission of our debt, His blood was poured out in our place.

As we look at the enormity of what Christ did for us, the brutality and filth of it all, and that He burst the bonds of death for us, it must put into perspective what our obligation is.

Christ carried the burden of our forgiveness that we might live in the blessing of it. To bless those who curse us, to pray for those who are treating us cruelly, speaking evil of us, lying about us and making our lives miserable, pales into comparison with what Christ did. Jesus told us to lay our burdens upon Him, to learn from Him, to take His yoke on ourselves because He has already laid down that heaviest of burdens – the sins of the whole world. His yoke is easy to bear, His burden is light.

Prayer: Father, as we take Your yoke upon our shoulders, we feel the lightness, the joy of knowing Your forgiveness. Remind us of the beauty of Your blessing that we can pour out to all around us, through the Life of Christ within us. Amen.