

Lessons from the Unforgiving Servant

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We live in an absolutely horrendous and evil time and every week it seems like we're heading faster and faster towards the culmination of what the Bible talks about as the end of this age. Turn to Matthew 24, it's the Olivet Prophecy, and we've gone here many times in the past, but it's just to set the tone for what I want to talk about today.

Matthew 24:3. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? ... (KJV)*

So then Jesus proceeded to give a brief, yet very scary scenario of what life would be like before He would return to this earth to rule for the millennial thousand year rule, and to set the stage. Then He goes on in verses 4-8:

- 4) *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.*
- 5) *For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*
- 6) *And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*
- 7) *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.*
- 8) *All these are the beginning of sorrows. (KJV)*

We've seen many of these things taking place with the fires out in California, the hurricanes that have hit Houston, Texas and Florida. Many things are beginning to take place. Plus all the calamity and evil events taking place around the world.

John also addressed these same events in the book of Revelation in a much more graphic way, the world and human-crushing events that would take place and how the trumpet and bowl plagues would be God's judgment upon a world that is filled with sin in an attempt to get them to change their ways. We talk about that a lot during the Feast of Trumpets but that's not my point that I will be focusing on today.

We know evil will continue to grow worse and worse in so many different ways. This past Sunday in Sutherland Springs, Texas in what they called domestic violence, 26 men, women and children are shot dead in a church and 20 more are wounded. In Las Vegas in early October of this year, 58 are dead, 546 wounded. Shootings are happening all over the world, all over this country. It's unbelievable. Every time you open the newspaper or turn on the news, there is some horrendous event that is taking place and people are scared. Even in small, rural areas things are happening. Terrorist attacks, senseless, just pure demonic evil.

It almost feels like Satan has had some of the restrictions removed. I don't know how much longer things will go on, but I can only imagine how bad things could get – as it says *in the days of Noah* and we know in those days *every thought was continually evil* of men in Noah's time.

And then you have the nuclear threats of crazy people; North Korea, Iran. We know the Bible talks about the fact that the nations were angry and eventually there is quite possibly – one of the seals is that in a short period of time, billions of people are going to die.

Just by the process of osmosis, just living in this society, consciously or unconsciously, we assimilate the ideas, the values, the attitudes and lifestyles that are all around us. And it affects the way we think. God says *come out of her my people*. But you can't be a hermit in this day and age. You have to brush shoulders with and interact with society. As bad as all of this is, there is an even greater effect of what has been happening to the church.

If any group of people on the face of this earth should be able to get along with one another and care for one another, it should be the Church of God. But notice what Christ said would be the condition of the Church of God in the end of the age.

Matthew 24:9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. (KJV)*

Verse 10 is an astounding admission as to what is going to be taking place in the church and probably is already.

10) *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

11) *And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.*

12) *And because iniquity [lawlessness or sin] shall abound, the love [agape] of many shall wax cold.*

13) *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. (KJV)*

So words such as offended, betrayal, hate, hatred and deception – words like this shouldn't even be used to define how church members interrelate with one another. And the result is division, more and more scattering of the Church of God. Some of it is caused, as we read in verse 11, by false teachers and false teachings.

Turn to 2 Peter 2 and we'll read what he says about what will take place in the end of the age.

2 Peter 2:1. *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies,*

even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

2) And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

3) And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (KJV)

Any number of things can cause division. Some of the issues are salvational, some are non-salvational. The church is being divided and scattered more and more and more.

All of it is leading up to what the Bible calls agape, or love, waxing cold, which is just the opposite of what God has intended for His church. Unfortunately, a lot of division that takes place in the church has very little to do with what scripture says we truly will be judge upon, such as:

1. Overcoming character flaws – we will be judged upon that. Revelation 3:21 says *he that overcomes will I grant to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and am sat on my Father's throne.*
2. Another thing we will be judged upon is growing in the fruit of the spirit. We know the fruits are listed in Galatians 5 – love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. Those are things that we are supposed to be inculcating into our character as we grow spiritually.
3. Another thing we will be judged upon is learning how to love or agape the brethren. You'll see in the gospel of John that he talks a lot about it. You'll see that in the epistles that he writes (1, 2 and 3 John).
4. Another thing we will be judged upon is taking on the mind of Christ. Philippians 2.
5. Another thing is submitting to the lead of the spirit. Romans 8 talks about those that follow the lead of the spirit.
6. Another thing we will be judged upon is to allow God and Christ to mold and shape us into their image, not fighting against it. Genesis 1:26 – that was their ultimate goal.
7. Allowing God and Christ to write their laws – whether it be the letter of the law or the spiritual intent of the law – upon our hearts. Jeremiah 31:33. This is something that will be happening ultimately to people that God will deal with in the future.

Jeremiah 31:33. *But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (KJV)*

Another prophetic, future teaching as to what's going to happen:

Ezekiel 36:26. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.
27) And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (KJV)*

This is something that is going to happen to people in the future but it should be happening now in the Church of God. Our hearts should be turning from stone to flesh. But is it happening? It is with some. But you wouldn't have all the division if it was happening all over the Church of God on the entire globe.

It's kind of amazing that in the Old Testament there is 613 commands to do or not to do. In the New Testament there is 1050; that's more than enough dos and don'ts to keep us active, growing. I have never yet received a paper or a study on how to serve the widows better, or how to love the brethren better, or ways of overcoming faults and ways of dealing with character flaws that we have. I have never received a paper on any of that, but I sure have received discussions on who is the king of the north, who is the king of the south, who is the beast, when is Germany going to attack us, and just on and on and on. I've received all kinds of papers like that, but never on anything that we are going to be judged upon.

All the laws of God, from now until the time Christ returns, you could fill all that time with studying the laws of God which would affect basically how we think, how we act, how we feel about things, how we speak, and things that we will be judged upon. But that doesn't seem to be the major focus of the Church of God.

But there is one underlying cause of division that if not dealt with, can cause us to lose out on eternal life. That cause is extant in many, if not most of the Church of God corporations that have any history. As we talk to people, brethren from different groups, this underlying cause quickly rises to the surface and namely, it is the inability to forgive.

Turn to Matthew 18. Here we have what Jesus Christ would call the conflict resolution formula in verses 15-18. And Christ and the Father knew that we would have problems as physical human beings and He gave us a way to resolve those issues.

Matthew 18:21. *Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?*

22) *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (KJV)*

The Greek word there for forgiveness is #863, *aphiemi*. It means *to send forth, to forsake, to lay aside, to put or send away or to let alone*. That's what forgive means. The American Heritage College Dictionary defines it this way: *to excuse for a fault or an offense; to pardon; to renounce anger or resentment against; to resolve from payment or a debt for example*.

So forgiveness plays a big part in our being spirit-born members of the God family.

I'm only going to touch upon a few scriptures regarding forgiveness, but the principle is there throughout all scripture.

Psalm 86:5. *For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee. (KJV)*

Micah 6:8. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (KJV)*

Again, forgiveness fits right in there with the concept of mercy.

Micah 7:18. *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. (KJV)*

Many scriptures, Old and New Testament, talk about this character trait of God. God is love and in that concept of love is the concept of forgiveness. God is a forgiving God and He is training us to be forgiving also. As we start the Millennium, we're going to have to have a great amount of patience and a great amount of forgiveness because it's going to take a long time to begin to teach people God's way of life where they begin to absorb it. In the Great White Throne Judgment period of time when multiple billions of people will come up, forgiveness and mercy are going to be a big part of how we deal with people.

Go back to Matthew 18 if you would. We're going to read the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

Matthew 18:23. *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. (KJV)*

Notice that: *take account of his servants*. We know in Luke 21:36 it says: *Watch you therefore and pray always that you may be accounted worthy* (He's taking an account of our lives) *to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the*

son of man. So there is an accounting in this parable that takes place and how it plays out in their life. This is what the parable is talking about. Now we're going to continue verses 24-35.

24) *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. (That was a lot of money.)*

25) *But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.*

26) *The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*

27) *Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.*

28) *But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.*

29) *And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. (The very same thing he said to the king.)*

30) *And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.*

31) *So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.*

32) *Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:*

33) *Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?*

34) *And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

35) *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (KJV)*

The Greek word here for tormentors is #928 *basanizo*. It means *to torture or to inflict pain; to torment; to vex*. The unforgiving servant was sentenced to *basanizo*, torment by the king. We will re-read verse 35:

35) *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (KJV)*

That's a powerful statement. Both physical and spiritual implications come from that statement. We'll address this in a little bit. So how long was the sentence that was given to the servant? Until he had paid back all the debt. God's decree of torment remains in effect until we forgive from the heart. When we forgive, God causes our torment to go away.

When we hold a grudge against someone, we are in torment. Let me give you an example. Someone has committed an offense or a sin against us. They were clearly in the wrong. We were innocent and they hurt us. They go on their merry way, many times probably not even knowing what they've done or remembering what they did to us down the road. But based upon the offense, we won't or we can't forgive. Based upon the severity of it and how deep it goes into our psyche, every time we think about the offense, we're tormented. We relive the offense against us over and over. And the torment begins to grow and it may remain with us for years. I've seen people go to their graves as bitter, unforgiving people, both in and out of the church. I see it in the church between people; I see it in the church between church organizations.

The order of torment: First of all with unforgiveness, you harbor ill feelings toward a person for their hurtful actions against you. You replay the event in your mind.

Then you go to step two and begin to get angry about it. You begin to feel antagonistic toward that person and the infection is now spreading like a cancer. Your anger toward that person continues to grow. Ephesians 4:26-27:

Ephesians 4:26. *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*

27) Neither give place to the devil.(KJV)

Uncontrolled anger and anger that is not dealt with opens up our mind to a wavelength of Satan. He is an angry being. Your mental torment continues to grow and it can turn into physical torment, not just emotional. I've seen people develop cancers because they can't forgive; develop different types of phobias and neuroses because they can't forgive.

With step three you have bitterness. You begin to have sharp, negative feelings toward the person who hurt you. You become callous and untrusting of that person. Your heart and emotions begin to close toward that person. You begin to build emotional walls around your heart to keep the person who hurt you out of your life.

Then you go to step four in the order of torment: slander. The infection spreads to your tongue. You begin to gossip about the person in an attempt to hurt them for hurting you. In your heart, you are glad they are suffering. If you are still in a relationship with the person, you constantly misread their motives and you can't trust what they're saying and doing. You want other people to feel your anger and you want them to punish the offender so you begin to slander them.

Step five is deep resentment. You develop a deep, cynical attitude toward the person who hurt you. And again, this is all based upon the severity of the offense. You rehearsed in your mind the offense, you relive the offense over and over and it begins to envelop you. Your mental torment grows deeper and deeper.

Step six is hatred. You avoid the person who wronged you. You can't stand the person. You look for ways to hurt the person back. Again, this is over the process of time. Even though scripture says in 1 Thessalonians 5:15:

1 Thessalonians 5:15. *See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. (KJV)*

Step seven is vengeance. You wish evil to happen to the person. You take steps to try to hurt the offender. You are not satisfied until they are suffering greater than you are suffering, even though Romans 12:19 says:

Romans 12:19. *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (KJV)*

The nature of the offense oftentimes determines the severity of the forgiving process, or might I say the unforgiving process. But the bottom line is because we can't forgive, we are imprisoned in basanizo, torment. We can be imprisoned in our own heart and mind.

Remember what we read in Matthew 18? Let's reread verses 34 and 35.

Matthew 18:34. *And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

35) *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. (KJV)*

If we are honest with ourselves, and it's likely that each and every one of us at some time or another and maybe even now, have someone confined in our own heart's prison today. I heard a quote that was a very interesting quote and I think there is a lot of truth to this:

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you.

Now I'm not saying that forgiveness is an easy process because it isn't. It can be very, very hard. Some people have been deeply scarred from great offenses both in and out of the church. I know of church members and I know of people in and out of the church that have been raped, incest was involved, infidelity and what that does to a person's mind, they've been lied to, defrauded, you name it – things have happened, painful things have happened that have scarred our hearts. Mental and physical abuse as children, as mates. I've seen situations where mates have been treated like garbage, walked on and basically treated as slaves, just unbelievable some of the things.

But God understands these traumas that we have gone through and the fears and phobias that we all have and He says He will give us help to deal with this through His

holy spirit. Even the command to forgive as found in Matthew 6, will give us direction as to how to deal with this.

Matthew 6:9. *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.*

10) *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

11) *Give us this day our daily bread.*

12) *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*

13) *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

14) *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:*

15) *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (KJV)*

This is a command that is oftentimes viewed from the perspective of if we don't forgive, we're going into the lake of fire – kind of a negative perspective, and there can be some truth to that. But think it through. When we forgive from the heart, we are released from our own prison of torment. Forgiveness is actually a blessing that we give to ourselves, and oftentimes it can lead to the healing of a broken relationship. Not all the time, but in our minds, it can heal us.

Also, it can restore what could lead to even more rifts and more division in physical families, among friends, among church organizations. We are supposed to be trying to restore peace and if possible live at peace with everyone. But the big question is: How do we forgive when we've been so deeply offended and hurt? How do we do that?

We're going to talk about a few things now.

Matthew 5:48. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (KJV)*

This is a litmus test that you can apply to yourself that will tell you where you are on this path of heading toward perfection. Notice what it says in verses 43-47.

43) *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.*

44) *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

45) *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

46) *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?*

47) And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? (KJV)

The point that He is making here is if you are going to set a goal towards perfection, and if you want to know where you are at in your standing as far as heading towards perfection, can you pray for your enemies?

Vince Lombardi, the famous coach of the Green Bay Packers, once said, “We’ll never become perfect. But if we chase perfection, we will attain excellence.” And there is a lot of truth to that. But actually, if we are in the process, if we set a goal of perfection, we can reach that perfection with God’s help. It will be the first resurrection. We will become perfect as God in heaven is perfect, through His help.

Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Pray for those who have offended you. Start the process of forgiving and the process of healing. I remember Mr. Armstrong once said during a Friday night Bible study at Pasadena, sitting at his desk on the stage, “Yes, I pray for my enemies. I pray that God would bless them. But before He will bless them, He has to correct them.” And then he chuckled.

Turn to Job 42. I’m sure you know where I’m going here. After all Job went through and all this justification that he was doing, and all the things that he was being accused of:

Job 42:10. *And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. (KJV)*

Job was released from his captivity, from his torment, when he prayed for his friends who were falsely accusing him. Eliphaz, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite were all falsely accusing him, saying that he must have done something greatly wrong.

Lack of forgiveness is a huge issue in this society. We know world events will lead up to the events in Revelation 11:18 where it says that the nations were angry. We are heading towards that. I don’t know how much longer it will be but it rubs off on us in the church – division after division after division. Personal relationships, friends, parting ways; church members parting ways; family life torn apart; because we cannot forgive. And it has eternal consequences.

But our purpose in our calling is to be molded and shaped into the image and likeness of God. We saw that in Genesis 1:26. That is what God is doing to the firstfruits. We are being shaped into the image of God. Turn to Luke 4:18.

Luke 4:18. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,*

19) *To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (KJV)*

Forgiveness sets people free that are enslaved and tormented. It restores relationships. God had to command us to do a number of things when He called us because most of us were not doing those things. He did this so that we could receive blessings because God's laws and His ways are living laws. He knew we would not naturally do those things out of the goodness of our heart. He gave us the Sabbath and look at the blessings that come when you keep the Sabbath in an appropriate way. When you keep the ten commandments which obviously includes the Sabbath, look at how much better your life is. When you keep the holy days you now have an understanding of the plan of God which very few people on this earth understand and now we have the ability and the opportunity to become part of that plan.

Look at the dietary laws and how much better our health is because of the dietary laws which without a calling we would not have observed. What about overcoming? We overcome character flaws that get us in trouble all the time. All reap blessings when they are practiced and we find ways to inculcate them into our lives and yes, learning how to forgive falls into that same category. So rather than looking at it from the perspective of "If I don't forgive I'm going into the lake of fire," look at it as a blessing from God that will offer physical and spiritual blessings. It will free you from torment and give you a sounder mind, it will improve your relationships with people and there is a good chance you will receive eternal life as a result of it.

Now there is one final point that I would like to briefly discuss which has eternal consequences and it falls in directly with the concept of learning how to forgive. What do we do? What will help us to forgive, especially the deep hurts that have come upon us?

It has a lot to do with how we restore relationships and all of us have been in situations where our relationships have fallen apart and it hurts deeply. We desire for those relationships to be restored.

I know we've been here so many times, but go the Matthew 25 just to set the stage for what I want to talk about here. It has a lot to do with how we can be healed from deep scars that we have because of offenses that have taken place with us or even the scars that we have from things that we've done to ourselves or the pain that we've caused other people because of what we've done to them. In Matthew 25 there are stern admonitions to the church.

Matthew 25:7. *Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*

8) *And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*

9) *But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.*

10) And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. (KJV)

So this has salvational consequences here. The concept is that of the holy spirit. And as we go forward here, you're going to understand why this is so important in the process of learning how to forgive, how to heal and how to restore relationships and bring peace back into a family unit, or between friends, or between churches. Notice in verse 8 it says *our lamps are gone out*. It's the Greek word #4570, sbennumi, and it means *to extinguish, literally or figuratively; to quench*.

Now turn to 1 Thessalonians. I know I've gone here before but this is so important in our walk as Christians.

1 Thessalonians 5:19. *Quench not the Spirit. (KJV)*

Four simple words. That word, quench, is the same Greek word #4570 that is in Matthew 25. So as I read through this whole chapter, it just seems like that verse is out of place. It doesn't seem to fit in here. But it really does fit in when you understand the concept that Paul was trying to get across to all the church members that he talked to.

For years I wondered: How were the lamps of the five unwise virgins going out? What was causing that? And this relates directly to the concept of forgiveness. Was it neglect? Possibly. Was it lack of prayer and fasting? Probably. Was it the cares of the world? Probably. Was it getting wrapped up in all the things that are happening around us in the world which is involved with the cares of the world? Probably. Was it that they became tired of overcoming and enduring? Probably. Was it that they lost their first love of the truth? Probably.

I found people that in order to feel good about themselves, they get tired of overcoming so they then begin to do studies, biblical studies into subjects that have nothing to do with what we are going to be judged upon. But they feel good about themselves because they're studying scripture. They have their pet subjects and they feel good about that and spread it out to all kinds of people. The problem is that it has nothing to do with what we are going to be judged upon according to scripture. So they get into that because they are tired of overcoming, tired of facing themselves and looking at the reality of who they really are.

There seems to be, in what Paul is talking about here, a direct connection with our actions, our lifestyles, and our thoughts, to whether we are either quenching the holy spirit or strengthening it. Paul tells exactly how to strengthen the holy spirit and what to do so as not to quench it. It's been right in front of us. Some people feel that all they need to do is just have lots of Bible study and lots of prayer and that is important. But actually putting that knowledge to use into our actions, our thoughts and the way we treat people is very important.

Just knowledge, in and of itself, just giving lip service to scripture, isn't going to cut it with God. There are people that can have biblical discussions until the cows come home. They can talk religion a mile a minute. They can talk about all different types of prophetic fulfillments, etc., but then they go back home and their life is a wreck. They are not putting this stuff into use; they feel simply because they have all this knowledge, they're going to be accounted worthy by God. If we are not practicing what scripture is telling us to do, we will quench the spirit. It's not just through lack of Bible study. It is putting into practice what this book says. Doing what scripture says to do, and not doing what scripture says not to do. That's how we fill our lamps. This includes the concepts of forgiveness and love of the brethren.

Turn to 1 John 3:14.

1 John 3:14. *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. (KJV)*

How can we forgive someone if we're not trying to love them initially? I want to make a clarification here: notice it does not say we have to love everything that they do. There are scriptures like Romans 16. We have to find a way, if at all possible, to love them.

Romans 16:1. *I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: (KJV)*

He then goes on to greet different people in the churches.

3) *Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:*

...

5) *Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.*

6) *Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.*

7) *Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me. (KJV)*

He goes on to greet people.

9) *Salute Urbane, ...*

10) *Salute Apelles ...*

11) *Salute Herodion ... (KJV)*

He says hello to everyone. In verse 16:

16) *Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. (KJV)*

So he is saying all these positive things. Now to these people he goes right into verse 17.

17) Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (KJV)

So the principle is that there are things that people say and do that we don't have to love but we have to somehow love the brethren and try not to be offended by what they're doing. That's not an easy process. God is the one that looks upon the heart.

So the issue here is forgiving from the heart. It takes one to forgive but it takes two or more to reconcile. But we are talking about forgiveness here initially.

Then go to John 13:34. There is a tremendous amount of humility here that is being discussed by Christ.

John 13:34. *A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (KJV)*

How can you love someone if you are harboring ill thoughts towards them, if you won't forgive or you can't forgive?

35) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (KJV)

Is there enough evidence in the court of heaven, as God is taking an accounting of our lives, for God to say that He wants this person in His family? Remember, that is what this whole thing with the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant is all about. He took an account of what he had. God is taking an account of what we have, what we are doing with our life. Forgiveness is a huge part of that. Can you imagine living for eternity with people fighting all the time because they couldn't forgive? It would be maddening. Fortunately it won't happen because people that absolutely refuse to forgive probably won't be in the first resurrection. Again, how do you love the brethren by harboring grudges?

The Bible was written to the Church of God. Judgement is now upon the church. 1 Peter 4. The plan of God is going to start out with the firstfruits. We know that. That's nothing new for us.

1 Peter 4:17. *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?*

18) And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? (KJV)

This book, even though people have gleaned a lot of good principles from it, this book really was written to the church. A very good friend of mine used to say this often and over the years he grew to understand the importance of this. He said, that some people use the Bible and scriptures as a club to argue religion, to promote their pet ideas, their speculations. Others use the Bible as a mirror to see how they compare to the Father and the Son. And I thought that was awfully wise advice because Paul made it very clear to not compare yourselves among yourselves because if you do that, you are not wise. Our comparison should always be looking in the mirror and how do we reflect the nature of Christ and when people see us and interact with us, do they actually see Christ in our actions and our words? This is all part of what is taking place in the court of heaven as to whether or not we are going to be accounted worthy.

The key to what measure of God's holy spirit that we have in our life which is the key to forgiving, which is the key to growing and developing godly character and the key to everything we need to be doing, is found in the fact of how much of the holy spirit do we have flowing in our life. Not just having the holy spirit because it makes it very clear in Romans that you must be led by the spirit. Romans 8:14.

Romans 8:14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (KJV)*

Let's go to Hebrews 5:9.

Hebrews 5:9. *And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; (KJV)*

Obedience is important. Critically important. Not just saying the words and giving the lip service, but actually is there enough evidence in the court of heaven to show that we are obeying? Again, the 613 laws in the Old Testament and 1050 in the New Testament should keep us busy, busy, busy, just trying to inculcate that into our lives, obeying those scriptures, trying to find a way to change the way we are living and to come into compliance with those things.

Acts 5:32. *And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him. (KJV)*

It's not just obeying the ten commandments, it's obeying the huge number of dos and don'ts that God says to do and not do. It will reap physical blessings and reap spiritually blessings and it has eternal consequences. We become better people.

I was talking the other day to some people and I said that if I never receive another blessing from God, I still am a better person now than I would have been had I not been called, simply because I've spared myself from a lot of anguish and misery because I made decisions based upon what I could find in scripture. Have I done it perfectly? No way. But I'm trying, just like all of you are trying. But the key is as you search scripture,

you should be looking for ways that God says He wants you to be living and then putting it into practice.

And sometimes it really requires swallowing your pride. Pride is a huge stumbling block to spiritual growth. We all have pasts that have affected the way we think and the way we feel about things. And sometimes it's hard to say, "I was wrong. I need to change here." And develop a plan of action, a way of going about it and when you see your ways don't match up with scripture, then develop some type of a plan to begin to change that. It's a slow process – like the old proverb: a thousand mile journey begins with the first step. And sometimes with some of the things that we're dealing with, it is like a thousand mile journey, especially with forgiveness with some of the deep-seated scars that we have in our psyche or on our hearts because of what's been done to us or because of what we have done to other people. But you have to start someplace, if nothing more than just admitting that you have a problem and then moving forward with that.

Our entire Christian race is dependent upon the holy spirit in our lives. It determines how much we are going to grow spiritually or is there a road block to spiritual growth? It brings about the godly character development in our lives. Becoming more and more sound-minded both emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

The holy spirit will help us do that. The holy spirit will help us become the temple that is pleasing for God to live in, where he wants to live. Is our temple filled with things that are offensive to God? Little hidden sins that we have? Little hidden habits that we absolutely refuse to let go of? He doesn't want to live in that type of a temple. God is a pure God, he says to *come out of her my people; ... touch not the unclean thing*. Are there unclean things in our life and we know pretty much what they are? Are there things we are doing that God doesn't want to be part of? Is His presence in our temple pleasing to Him? Those are things we need to look at.

Yes, learning to forgive; God is a forgiving God. We read what Jesus Christ said about forgiving others. How can we deal with the people in the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment if we refuse to forgive things they might have done and there will be some pretty horrendous things that we are going to deal with because people are involved in all different types of perversions.

Being accounted worthy by God to be part of the first resurrection has a lot to do with are we following the lead of the spirit. Is the holy spirit active in us or are our actions quenching the holy spirit? We know it and God knows it better than we do. It's quite evident from scripture that five unwise virgins are not going into the marriage supper which is the first resurrection. I'm not sure if those numbers are accurate and I'm not about to set amounts like 50/50 but that scripture is very clear that there are some people in the Church of God that will not be in the first resurrection because the holy spirit in their life has gone out or they have quenched it. And maybe it's going out now for any one of us. We need to turn that process around. Stop and turn it around and

begin to do the things that actually enrich the holy spirit in our life because as we read, God gives the holy spirit to those people that obey Him, who obey everything in this book, not just a-la-cart Christianity; "I'll obey this part and maybe this part over here." You must obey all of it. Find out what it says and develop a plan that will cause you to begin to change.

All of our thoughts, all of our actions have a direct correlation as to whether or not we tear down the new man or we renew the new man. Increasing the power of the holy spirit is directly related to our actions. Quenching or grieving of the holy spirit can also relate to our actions. We are the temple of God and the temple of God is made more and more pure as we obey all of scripture. We find out what it says and then we obey it.

What is in our heart, what is in our head, what comes out of our mouth, directly affects whether we tear down or build up the holy spirit in our life. If you want to narrow it down to simplistic things, our entire future spiritual existence is reliant upon how much of the holy spirit is in us and how much it is leading us and guiding us. You can boil it down to that – two words: holy spirit.

Remember, the holy spirit determines whether or not we are going to be in the first resurrection and we all want to hear these words. And I'll close with this.

Matthew 5:21. *His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. (KJV)*

What we view as small things include: What type of husband are we? What type of wives are we? What type of parents are we? What type of employees or employers are we? What type of a neighbor are we? How do we treat people in the church? It is all related to that because if God sees that we can be faithful in those little things, He views them as huge things. We think they're little things, but if we can be faithful in that, God, in His accounting of us in the court of heaven will say, "I am pleased with this person. Well done, good and faithful servant."