

# "In a Broken World - Forgive"

Romans 14:1-12 & Matthew 18:21-35

September 11, 2005

It is difficult to come before you with these scripture texts today. The texts ask us to consider 'forgiveness' and 'withholding judgement' as a way of life. Neither of these things are our strong suits. Passing judgements on others seems to be so natural and forgiveness - no matter how often and how easily we use the word, is still among the most difficult things we try to do. I believe that these are especially difficult in our post-'911' world. And it is even more difficult in a world that has seen too much devastation of late and the emotions and fears associated with the aftermath of hurricanes and tsunamis continue to touch our lives. In such a world it would be so much easier to simply have a little party to celebrate Rally Day and forget about all of that stuff out there. Yet - here we are. It is Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> once again and the text is 'Forgive!' and leave the judgement to God.

I know that you all have your own lives with many things going on in them. I know that events in New York City, or New Orleans, or far away places in our world seem like they are just that - far away, not really a part of our lives. Yet I have sensed a general sadness and tension as people have talked and reflected on the events of our times. I read an article recently in which the author reflected on the fact that he had always believed that once in every persons life time there is an event that reshapes how we think about life. But he went on to say that we have had 3 such events in the last 4 years. I do not doubt that he is right. Terrorist attacks on our home soil which killed thousands, a tsunamis that did so much property destruction and killed 280,000 and now hurricane Katrina with all of its devastation. We have watched as each of these events have changed the lives of individuals and, I believe, effected all of us to some degree. I believe that, as a whole, we feel less safe - less secure, than we did 4 years ago. And with that new insecurity comes a feeling of unrest and a desire to set it all right by blaming someone and fixing the situation so that we can return to life as it one was.

In articles that dealt with the events of September 11, 2001, I read that immediately after 9/11 a full 94 % of Americans [according to polls taken] supported military action against nations or organizations responsible for the attacks. Some {21 %} did not even care if you rightly identified who was responsible - any organization identified as "terrorist" was ok.

It really is easy to understand - when our world is shaken - when we experience fear and anger, it is easy to understand the desire to pass judgement on the one's we judge to be at fault and just as quickly, lash out against the guilty. It doesn't even have to be a world shaping events. Just daily encounters can leave us judging and unwilling to forgive. I love the story of the man who was driving down an interstate

**highway one morning. He reported the following:** This morning on the Interstate, I looked over to my left and there was a woman in a brand new Cadillac doing 65 mph with her face up next to her rear view mirror putting on her eyeliner. I looked away for a couple seconds and when I looked back she was halfway over in my lane, still working on that makeup. As a man, I don't scare easily. But she scared me so much; I dropped my cordless shaver, which knocked the donut out of my other hand. In all the confusion of trying to straighten out the car using my knees against the steering wheel, it knocked my cell phone away from my ear which fell into the coffee between my legs, splashed, ruined the phone, soaked my trousers, and disconnected an important call. **Darn women drivers**

**Well, welcome to a new Sunday School season – welcome to another Rally Day when we celebrate gathering again around God's Word to worship and pray together. Welcome to this day when we renew our commitment to God and His Word. Unfortunately, that Word of God is not always easy. But it is Good News - it is life producing. That word of God tells us of the extent of God love as Jesus tells this parable of a man who is forgiven of a debt that is beyond anyone's ability to repay. That is how God in His gracious love has forgiven us. It is so easy to forget that when we have been hurt or wronged by someone else. When those 'darned women drivers' are messing with their make up - of course we want to lash out and the last thing we want to do is forgive. But that is the call God places on us. Forgive and do not judge.**

**It truly is not easy. When terrorist actions take the lives of 3000 + and destroy landmarks at the heart of one of America great cities - it is much easier to pass judgement against anyone of the wrong nationality or religious affiliation. When storms rage and kill, as yet, an undetermined number of people and devastate some 90,000 square miles of beautiful Gulf Coast land and cities - when people suffer and the help they need seems too slow in the coming - it is easy to pass judgements and not want to forgive. And when we encounter those rocky roads in our live - even though those things may seem so insignificant in comparison to the floods of sorrow that have visited so many - still, forgiveness is hard to come to.**

**One of my favorite stories is of a couple who lived in Switzerland. They were rich by almost anyone's standards. But that hardly mattered when the husband had to cancel yet another vacation because of business. As the story goes, the wife had had enough and was not about to forgive this latest hurt of her husband choosing business over her so she poured bicarbonate of soda into the husbands prized rare tropical fish tank - wiping out all of the rare fish. The resulting discussion did not lead to forgiveness. Instead, he grabbed a handful of her diamond jewelry, threw them in the garbage disposal and turned it on. Her response was to throw his stereo into their pool. This was followed by his throwing bleach on her \$200,000 wardrobe, her pouring a gallon of paint all over his \$70,000 Ferrari, he kicked a hole in an original Picasso that his wife loved and that was valued at \$180,000, she responded by opening the sea cock on his 38 foot yacht which sunk it. It only stopped when the**

**daughter came home, called the police (who could do nothing about them destroying their own personal property), and then their lawyer who finally arranged a truce.**

**Oh, forgiveness is such a glorious gift. God showers it to us as a life giving gift. And when we walk in His footsteps and forgive one another the war can stop, the prisoner is set free, and the sun can shine once more. Husbands and wives – parents and children – brothers and sisters – friends and neighbors – nations and religious - - - forgive! God will take care of the judging. Forgive as you have been forgiven.**

**AMEN**