

There's a song out now by 38 special called, "The Heart Needs a Second Chance." It's sung by a man as an apology to the woman he loves. She has caught him with another woman. "Please forgive me," he sings, "and forget it. I was wrong and I admit it. Why can't we think it over? Why can't we forget about the past?" The song freezes for us that painful moment of sorrow before we know if forgiveness will follow.

Ordinarily when we've hurt someone, we get over it more quickly than they do. We expect forgiveness to come quickly. We are like Lucy promising Charlie Brown we'll never again remove the football before he has a chance to kick it. It's hard to appreciate the pain we cause in others over and over again. No one wants to give forgiveness too easily till we know the offender has learned a lesson.

Perhaps this is why Simon the Pharisee judges so harshly. He sees the sinful woman's sensual gestures. She bathes the feet of Jesus with her tears. She dries them with her hair. She kisses them with her lips. She anoints them with perfume from an alabaster jar. <sup>Simon</sup> He judges those actions as gestures of sin. Jesus judges them as actions of repentance.

What's more, Simon sees Jesus receive her, and he thinks Jesus is a fraud. But Jesus is a forgiver.

Actually Jesus forgives the woman more easily than he forgives Simon. It's not because her sin is less. <sup>that's hard</sup> (We don't know what the sin was but you get the feeling it's prostitution.) It's not because prostitution is less offensive than prejudice. No, Jesus forgives the woman more easily because her repentance is more pure. She offers gestures of love because she sincerely repents. Simon offers no gestures of love because he has never been forgiven.

Forgiveness doesn't come cheap. It's not something we get over in a hurry. The price of forgiveness is the responsibility to love. When we say, "I'm sorry," to someone else or to God, if we expect to hear, "I forgive you," we can expect to be held bound to love.

011 June 18, 1989