

Matthew 18:21-35 Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

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

Peter asks a question of Christ and adds to it a proposed answer. He knows he is supposed to forgive others even if they are the ones who are wrong. He knows that even though they have worked against him, that he is still required to do this forgiveness thing. The question is how many times or when is enough enough? He assumes there must be some limit and offers the number seven which is the spiritual number of completion. All of this seems quite logical. It would also appear that Peter doesn't have a major issue forgiving someone 7 times, which in itself is a very commendable feat.

It is noted that many Jewish rabbis taught that three times was the limit.

The good thing is Peter doesn't assume that his logic is the truth so he checks to make sure.

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

Jesus' response is to him, not until 7 times but 490 times. So, no one is going to count out 490 instances of forgiveness so Christ must be saying there is not limit if you want to be perfect in the Lord. While Peter is looking to draw a line in the sand, Jesus tells him your logic is a little off. There is no expiration date for forgiving others.

As a result, Jesus will provide a natural example in the form of a parable to better explain to Peter and to us, why this should be so.

Note: We shouldn't be keeping track any way. I certainly don't want Jesus to keep track of my offenses.

²³ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. 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.

"Therefore", this connects the parable to Peter's question and Jesus' answer about forgiveness. The Kingdom of Heaven is like this king in the story. This means God having dominion and rule over our lives and His Kingdom being manifested in the earth, in our lives, and in the church, in the country, in the world looks like this story. Notice the elements of the story:

- There is a king who has servants working for him.

- The king does an audit or assessment on the performance of his servants. For example, are they good servants or bad performers?
 - There is a reckoning process where things are accredited to a servants account either good or bad.
 - One servant owes a large debt to the king that he doesn't have the means to pay. Overdrawn account I guess.
 - As result of his account not being in good standing, there is a judgement that has to be paid. Someone has to pay for this mistake and poor performance on this account.
 - Notice this debt and judgement impacts more than just this servant; the whole family or others are also impacted and go into bondage because of the mistake of this servant. All that he has is not enough to pay this bill.
 - The servant as a result of the judgement, "therefore", goes through the following steps:
 - Humbles himself, recognizes his need and comes to the king for help.
 - Repents, puts down his pride and self and falls down before the king. No longer trying to work this out the old way.
 - Worshipped the king, or in other words, places his hopes in what the king can do for him and extend mercy. His hope is in his worship to the king.
 - Changed focus, instead of working for himself, he is working and asking for the king to be patient so he can get back right and correct what is wrong.
 - The king is moved with compassion. What caused him to change his mind?
 - The servant going through these four steps caused the following response from the king:
 - Compassion
 - Freedom and release from bondage
 - Forgiveness
 - Hope, new season
 - This is a wonderful picture of the Gospel and forgiveness and restoration.
- Let's see how the elements of the parable relate to us and the process of salvation.

Observations:

- This servant probably would not have received this compassion and mercy had he not been found in error and gotten busted. His mistake and repentance were for his good.
- Important....the proper response (first three steps) will always generate a Godly response and good news.
- Worship and praise are part of the recovery process.

Just like the parable:

- God is the King and we are the servants good or bad working for him.
- There will be an assessment of our performance to determine if we were good servants or evil servants. Everyone will be assessed and reviewed by the King.

- There is a reckoning process for all of us where good servants will have a good report credited to their account and evil servants will have bad things associated with and attached to their account. What does your account look like before God?
- Judgement is made and God is the judge. He will pass sentence on all those evil servants whose accounts are poorly performing and bad. There is a price to pay for poor judgement and loss.
- We all will face His judgement and receive a sentence.
- There is a huge price to pay for our poor management and mistakes that we are not able to pay so we are doomed. Our mistakes can also contribute and result in others close to us suffering through judgement too. We should not be so selfish as to overlook the impact our actions and decisions has on others.
- We have two options, either be prideful and try to serve out the sentence or pay back the debt we owe in our own strength, or surrender to the King, repent of our mistakes and humbly ask the King for forgiveness. I worship the King because I have received and still require forgiveness.
- When we pick up our cross, acknowledge our sins, turn from trusting in ourselves and others to bail us out, and worship the King, it will move God to forgive and restore us with new life and new hope. Just like the servant in the story, we can now live our new lives debt free.
 - This is the good news of the Gospel contained in this parable.
 - What a great hope we have, and He is faithful to keep His promises. That is why we should praise Him. O' worship the King!

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.

The servant is looking for a problem rather than a ministry opportunity, the purpose of the search was not a kingdom purpose.

Wait, what have we here? Another servant, the same guy as a fellow servant under the same King who owed him only a fraction of what he owed the King. The King had just forgiven him of so much more than what this fellow owed him. Instead of mercy, he attacks the other servant. Why?

What is now missing? The grace, forgiveness, and mercy he had just received has been forgotten. Why?

- He is missing step #4 and #5, no leading of the Spirit and cannot promote the Kingdom like this.
- When what others have done to you becomes the focus and greater than our offenses and forgiveness from God.....we will miss the Kingdom.

What has happened to cause him to miss this ministry moment and repay in appreciation the great mercy and compassion he had received?

Application and lesson for today:

- We get comfortable after the blessing and forget His goodness to us.
- Rather than focusing on serving the King, we make our concerns and wants a greater priority than the Kingdom.

- After receiving God’s mercy, we become self-righteous and as Christians we lack love and instead incite violence instead of sharing the mercy of God with those we feel owe us something.
- This is still happening today, in politics, government, churches, family, relationships, etc. Don’t be an ingrate!
- Not saying the fellow servant was right or even good, but we can’t let that cause us to sin. We have very little justification for being cruel to others because of their sins against us unless the Spirit of God has directed you to put your hands on someone’s neck.
- Notice also that this servant went out....so he was looking for this other guy on purpose to take back what he feels was owed. Still happens today, Jan 6th riot, etc.

²⁹ And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ³⁰ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

Notice what steps the fellow servant took.

- Humbles himself; recognizes he needs help for a debt he can’t readily pay.
- Repents, falls down at his feet.
- Acts for mercy and patience. He places his hope on the mercy of this servant looking for compassion.

Notice, these are basically the same steps the unforgiving servant displayed with the King in receiving his mercy. But no mercy here even though he is seeing the same steps played out.

We must be careful that after we have enjoyed so marvelous a salvation, that we share the mercies we have received from God with others who are in need.

Notice, the same judgement that he was able to avoid, prison time, is the same judgement he now places on his fellow servant.

³¹ So when his fellowservants 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 Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

Notice the sequence of events. The Lord finds out and calls him. He calls his actions wicked. Unforgiveness must be a form of wickedness, so we really need to be careful with this. His Lord never said the other servant was correct, instead the focus is on the behavior and response of the servant who had received mercy.

The Lord’s perspective. Because I forgave you all that debt you had because you asked me, shouldn’t you likewise have had the same compassion on your fellow servant, just like I had compassion on you? Notice he addresses this servant in the form of a question....this is key!



Our Lord now asks us the same question. How will you answer? Because someone else has had compassion on you and your offense is so much more greater and yet you received mercy and forgiveness, should you also have pity on those who have offended you and owe you so much less?

³⁴And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

His lack of compassion leads to the judgement catching up to him. Instead of being free, now he must again pay the price. He will be tormented until the debt is paid.

Note: Not everyone who receives forgiveness stays the course.

Important Observation: Could this servant who had unforgiveness recover and be delivered from this judgment of torment? Yes! Just follow those first three steps again from the heart and use the Holy Spirit (step #4) to extend mercy (step #5) to his fellow-servants.

There is your parable, now Christ explains the comparison in real life application:

- The Kingdom of God works like this.
- We will receive judgement and not mercy if we don't forgive from the heart.
- This rule is applicable to everyone, we can't pick and choose who it is that we forgive.
- I think I want to go back and ensure that I have forgiven everyone who owes me from my heart.

Has God forgiven us of so much more? Has anyone offended us more than we have offended God? Has He forgiven us when we asked? If so, as His disciples, we should be forgiving others. If you are having trouble doing this, perhaps we need to all go back and remember what the king our Lord has done for us. I'm very scared for those folks who have suffered crime and loss, say to another person, I can never forgive you for what you've done.

When we recognize the goodness of God to us, it comes easier to do the impossible and forgive others.....always.

See also, James 2:13.

What David Guzik says:

Jesus taught an important and often neglected principle regarding forgiveness. There are many sincere Christians who withhold forgiveness from others for mistaken reasons – and they feel entirely justified in doing so.

I stand as one who has been forgiven and needs continual forgiveness.

We have *an even greater obligation to forgive than God does*. Since we have been forgiven so much, we have no right to withhold forgiveness from others. We are the debtor forgiven almost an infinite debt; will we hold on to the small debts others owe to us? If anyone had the right to withhold forgiveness it is



God – and He forgives more freely and more completely than anyone we know. What possible right do we have to hold on to our unforgiveness?

It is also important to understand that a distinction can and should be made between *forgiveness* and *reconciliation*. True reconciliation of relationship can only happen when both parties are agreeable to it, and this may require repentance on one or both of the parties in the conflict. Yet forgiveness can be one-sided.

Instead, *Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful* ([Luke 6:36](#)).

From his heart: This makes the command all the stronger. “If we forgive in words only, but *not from our hearts*, we remain under the same condemnation.” (Spurgeon)

Matthew Henry:

This represents the sin of those who, though they are not unjust in demanding that which is not their own, yet are rigorous and unmerciful in demanding that which is their own...argues a greater love of money, and less love for our neighbor, than we ought to have.

Seek justice, have mercy, walk humbly with our God.