

The Unforgiving Servant Matthew 18:21-35

It seems to be true that a critical, unforgiving person tends also to be a guilt-prone person, and vice versa. People who struggle with guilt feelings are usually critical of others and tend to harbor resentment. The extent to which we judge ourselves out of fear and shame, we will also judge others. On the other hand, the more we take in the full extent of God's grace and forgiveness, the more we are released from our fears and become free to extend grace to others.

Think about it. What are some thoughts, feelings, and beliefs which create barriers to fully forgiving another person?

Personal Reflection. Spend some time in reflection, asking God to show you how completely and freely and compassionately He forgives you. Write about your reflections.

In this parable Jesus teaches us how important it is to respond with gratitude to his abundant love and generous mercy, so that we can let go of our fear and self-judgment and freely extend love and mercy toward others.

Read **Matthew 18:21-35**.

Discussion:

- From what we know about Peter prior to Calvary, we can only imagine that after Jesus finished teaching about being reconciled to a person that trespass against us, he couldn't wait to speak. Peter's question in **vs. 21** could have been a leading question. At the heart of his question, Peter may have been trying to get Jesus to give him a limit on the number of times to forgive a brother (sister) that sins against him.
 - The disciples were known for their squabbles. It is entirely possible that Peter, given his strong, action-oriented personality, had someone in particular in mind.
 - Peter seems to be asking, when is enough enough? There must be a limit to forgiveness, isn't there?
- Peter's question reveals that he had a view of there being limits on forgiveness. The Life Application Study Bible notes that the rabbis taught that people should forgive those who offend them—but only three times. Peter, trying to be especially generous, asked Jesus if seven (the "perfect" number) was enough times to forgive someone.
 - The English Standard Version(ESV) Study Bible gives a cross-reference of **Amos 1:3, 2:6** for **Matthew 18:21-22**. There we see that as Amos was pronouncing the judgment upon the seven neighboring nations and Israel, the poetic expression, "*For three transgression ...and for four*" is used. It is a way of expressing totality: "three" expresses the plural in Hebrew, and by raising it to "four" the idea of multiplicity is conveyed.

- Jesus' answer to Peter of seventy times seven means that there is no limit to forgiveness; forgiveness has to do with love which is abundant and infinitely generous.
- A talent was a unit of weight equaling about 72 pounds. The value would vary if you were weighing gold or silver. One Bible I looked at gave an estimated value of \$3.8 billion dollars if the ten thousand talents were silver in today's currency. With that much debt, the king's intended actions (**v. 25**) would have been considered just. If you were in the place of the servant, how would you have felt before and after the king canceled your debt?
 - There are many different calculations in different bibles and commentaries. Hyperbolically, the "ten thousand talents" represents an in calculable debt.
- Food for thought: (a) how real is our indebtedness to God and (b) the marvel of our escape from justice?
- A hundred silver coins (**v. 28**) is a trivial amount compared to ten thousand talents of silver. In today's USD measurements using the dollar amount just mentioned, it would be like comparing \$3.8 billion to \$3,200. Whether the sum is millions of dollars or a few dollars, forgiveness is costly. But the cost of our forgiving others is nothing compared to God's forgiving us.
 - The comparison should affect our view of the sins of others by helping to realize that sin is sin in God's eyes and that we should not try to compare sins of others to ours.
- As we look at Jesus' parable as a response to Peter's question, at the heart of Jesus' answer to Peter is that forgiveness of sin by God is unlimited. Also, as He has forgiven us, we should out of gratitude forgive others who have wronged us.
- Our spiritual freedom and our fellowship with God are hindered when we are critical and unforgiving. In the parable, the king was angered when he found out that the servant he had forgiven a huge debt did not show kindness and forgiveness to the person that was in debt to the king's servant.
 - **Matthew 6:14-15** reads, *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*
- There are times when each of us has difficulty forgiving others. Problems arise, however, when we persist in being critical and unforgiving. During such times we need a fresh appreciation for God's mercy toward us. Those who continually refuse to forgive others demonstrate that they are strangers to God's forgiveness.
- A transformed heart must result in a changed life that offers the same mercy and forgiveness as has been received from God. Someone who does not grant forgiveness to others shows that his own heart has not experienced God's forgiveness. Throughout Scripture, the heart refers to the center of one's being, including one's reason, emotions, and will.

Other Points:

- There are times when we can be forgiven of our sins, yet still have to deal with the consequences of our actions.
- In Judaism it was considered honorable to forgive three times; the disciples, as part of the new covenant community, were to exceed that standard. Disciples of Jesus are to forgive without keeping count.
- During biblical times, if a person was unable to pay a debt the consequences could be: 1) the person and his family could be sold into slavery and work to pay off the debt or 2) the person that owed the debt could be placed in prison and his or her family would sell landholdings to pay the debt.
- The forgiveness of such a massive debt is a dramatic illustration of:
 - The massive debt that we owe, because of our sins, to a holy righteous God.
 - Our complete inability ever to pay such a debt.
 - God's great mercy and patience in withholding his immediate righteous judgment that we all deserve for our sins.
 - God's gracious provision of Christ's death and resurrection to pay the debt for sins and to break the power of sin.
- **Compassion**—sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others.
- **Pity**—a feeling of distress through the ills of others, to be moved as to one's inward feelings or heart.
- **Mercy**—compassion or forgiveness shown toward someone whom it is within one's power to punish or harm; an outward manifestation of pity.

Prayer: *Take time to thank God for his forgiveness. Ask His help in forgiving those who have hurt or mistreated you.*

Now or Later

Put yourself in this story. See yourself standing before God, see his generous mercy toward you, and see Him forgiving you completely. Allow yourself to experience genuine gratitude toward God.

Now change the ending of the story. See yourself meeting people who have hurt you in some way. Feel the joy in sharing with them what just happened to you letting go of your anger and hurt, forgiving them with compassion and in gratitude for God's mercies toward you.

What feelings do you have in response to this reflection?

Homework: Read about The Wheat & The Weeds. **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**