

Topical Study - The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Read: Mathew 18:21-35.

The previous parables have concentrated mostly on the kingdom of heaven itself, along with a description of those who will be found in the kingdom – both good and bad. However, **the next parable focuses more on the specific character of those who will make up the kingdom – those who display mercy and forgiveness.**

Let's read Mathew 18:21-35.

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. 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.** ²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his **fellobservants**, 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 fellobservant 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.** ³¹ So when his fellobservants 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 fellobservant, 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 everyone his brother their trespasses.**

Peter asked Jesus how many times one should forgive, "Till seven times?" **and Jesus answered, "Not seven times but seventy times seven".**

Q: What was Jesus trying to pass across by this phrase? Is it possible?

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14-15).

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." (Mark 11:25-26).

The verses above were words spoken by Jesus to emphasise the importance of forgiveness in the walk of any Christian. To the extent to which you forgive is the extent to which Father God in heaven will also forgive. This is not the requirement for your initial salvation but a requirement for your continuous walk with Christ.

The principle here is, "the one forgiven much should forgive much." In other words, the principle of forgiveness is that grace of forgiveness to another is without limit. **The disciples are not to count the number of times they forgive. Rather, as the parable teaches, they are to forgive much because God has forgiven much.**

But it does not mean that we are saved by forgiving others but forgiving others is key in our walk-in salvation.

Now, let's analyse and interpret this parable by the leading of the Holy-Spirit.

1. What prompted this parable (Matthew 18:21)? How many people in this parable? Name them. Who do they represent?
2. Describe the events in this parable.
3. Explain Jesus' response (Matthew 18:22).
4. What did the first debtor ask for, what did the king do, and why did he do it? **James 2:13**
5. What did the second debtor ask for, what did the first debtor do, and why did he do it?
6. What was the king's reaction, and what was the first debtor's punishment? **Matthew 18:32-34**
7. **Which of the two debtors best represent us when it comes to our sins against God?**
8. **Which of the two debtors best represent those who sin against us?**
9. **How do we develop a forgiving spirit (See: Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)?**
10. **Is it possible for us to put an offense out of our mind (See: Genesis 41:51; Philippians 3:13; 2 Timothy 4:16).**
11. **How do we apply this to ourselves in the practical sense of things?**

The parable of the forgiven but unforgiving debtor makes three points.

First, there is a judgment coming. Jesus did not pass over that. He spoke of forgiveness, but He also spoke clearly of what happened to the unforgiving man in His story that he was cast into prison until he should pay back all he owed.

"But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." (Romans 14:10)

Second, there is forgiveness. God does forgive. God sent Jesus to be the basis for that forgiveness.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 John 1:8-10)

Third, the only sure proof of a person's having received God's forgiveness through true faith in Jesus is a transformed heart and a changed life.

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." (1 Peter 3:8-9)

How do we get that down into the practical areas of our lives, so that we actually begin to treat others as we have been treated? It is by standing before the thrice holy God and thus seeing ourselves as the vile sinners we were - vile and yet forgiven through the death of God's own beloved Son. That awareness should humble us so that we have simply no other option but to be forgiving to others from our heart.

Let's end this teaching with these words from Jesus Christ to us as we read at the beginning.....

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"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." (Mark 11:25-26).