

The Parables of Jesus
The Unforgiving Servant
 Matthew 18

One of the great measures of Christian character is how we deal with those who hurt us.

Ephesians 4:26 *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.”*

Matthew 18:21-22 *Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.”*

CONTEXT: In **Matthew 18**, prior to Peter’s question and Jesus answer, Jesus confronts three community killers antithetical to God’s Kingdom.

1st Community Killer: Pride

Kingdom of God = Humility

vv. 2-4 *It’s like a little child.*

2nd Community Killer: Individualism

Kingdom of God = Accountability

vv. 5-9 Do not cause a child to sin.

vv. 10-14 (The Parable of the Lost Lamb) Do not allow a brother/sister who has strayed to remain in peril.

vv. 15-17 Follow a step-by-step disciplinary process to restore an errant believer.

As members of God’s family, we are responsible for one another’s spiritual walk. We are accountable to Christ to have an unreserved commitment to protect and restore one another (**Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25; 13:17; Galatians 6:1-2**).

vv. 18-20 Jesus is in our midst guiding the process.

What the local church decides about “binding” or “loosing” in the discipline of an errant believer has its *source* and *confirmation* in heaven. Through biblical discipline, God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. As God’s people, we have the capacity to make these difficult determinations. (cp. **1 Corinthians 5-6**)

3rd Community Killer: Retribution

Kingdom of God = Lavish Mercy

vv. 23-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

v. 35 *So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.*

THREE LESSONS ON FORGIVING

1. AT HIS OWN EXPENSE, KING JESUS HAS LAVISHED MERCY ON US BY PAYING IN FULL AND FORGIVING OUR MASSIVE SIN DEBT, WHICH WE COULD NEVER REPAY.

This parable calls us to consider the extent of our sin problem. We have violated the eternal will of God.

Biblical Penitence: **Matthew 5:3-4** *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

Penitence is coming to grips with the reality of our depravity in view of God’s mercy and grace. A penitent spirit is vital, because it is the spiritual frame of mind from which we extend to others the same mercy God has shown to us.

Our temptation is to justify ourselves, to minimize or trivialize our sin. We rationalize it as something someone made us do. We call it a mistake, poor judgment, anything but what it is—sin. This short-circuits our capacity to show mercy to other sinners.

2. AFTER BEING TREATED SO MAGNANIMOUSLY BY GOD IN FORGIVING OUR MASSIVE SIN-DEBT, WE CAN FORGIVE THOSE WHO HAVE WRONGED US.

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you* (cp. **Colossians 3:12-13**)

Jesus: **John 15:12** *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.* **13:35** *You prove you are Jesus’ disciples if you love one another.*

Having a merciful heart is not THE BASIS of our relationship with God, but it is THE BYPRODUCT, and it is necessary for God’s daily mercies to be enjoyed, now that we are saved.

What Forgiveness Looks Like

- We surrender our right to get even.
- We discover the humanity of the one who wronged us.

- We wish our wrongdoer well.

3. TO REFUSE OR TO AVOID FORGIVING OTHERS, AFTER BEING FORGIVEN BY GOD, CAN RESULT IN SEVERE DISCIPLINE FROM OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.

Jesus saw no incongruity between the actions of a magnanimous Heavenly Father mercifully forgiving us, and a majestic Holy Father severely disciplining us.

Hebrews 12:4-11 Our Father disciplines us out of love, which can be very tough - "*shedding our blood*"; e.g., Israel; Ananias and Saphira; the sin unto death for believers in **1 John 5:16**.

We can fail to forgive those who hurt us in many different and self-deceiving ways, all of which end up *torturing* us, just as Jesus warned in his parable.

Refuse to Forgive: We choose to harbor bitterness or get revenge. Bitterness does nothing but torture us and harm others.

Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19 *Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says Yahweh.*

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 *Forgive....so that we are not outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

Avoid Forgiving: We stuff our anger or blame ourselves for what happened, or deny it and pretend it never happened.

Whether refusing, stuffing, or denying, we fail to properly face what was done to us and to do the sacred work of forgiving the person who hurt us. Our life, then, becomes a living hell, *tortured* spiritually, emotionally, and physically (a.k.a. ulcers, insomnia, etc.), just as Jesus warned.

Matthew 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.* Having received infinite mercy in receiving God's gift of eternal life, enjoying his daily mercies in our walk with him require we show mercy to others.

Matthew 6:12-14 *And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into hard trials, but deliver us from the evil one. For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

NOTE: Jesus sandwiches the threat of hard trials and satanic influence in our lives, between two statements about the importance of forgiving those who sin against us. This was precisely Paul's concern in **2 Corinthians 2:10-11**. If we refuse or

avoid forgiving others, our Father in heaven will not forgive us; that is, as his children, our ongoing fellowship with him will be broken, and our lives will be open to the "*torture*" of hard trials (discipline) and the devil's schemes—just as Jesus warned in his parable.

Three Points of Clarification

- It's normal for even the most godly to struggle with forgiving. We're not God.
- For us, to fully forgive someone takes time.
- Although, ideally, forgiveness leads to reconciliation, it does not require reconciliation.

When we reconcile: We must remember; when we forgive and reconcile, we often have to put up with less than the ideal. God certainly does with us.

When we cannot reconciliation: Sometimes, we forgive people who do not change at all and are not interested in a healthy, mutual relationship with us. There can be no reconciliation without forgiving, but there can be forgiving without reconciliation.

Forgiveness is free. It's a gift we give to ourselves and to the one who hurt us. It liberates us from being controlled by that person and the memory of what s/he did to us.

Trust, on the other hand, which is crucial to warm, healthy relationships, is earned.

Parallel Passage in Restoring Broken Relationships: Luke 17:3-4 Jesus said, "*Watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.*" **v. 5** The Apostles' response: "*Increase our faith!*"

Jesus' concern, here, is withholding mercy when there has been sincere repentance on the part of the offender. Note the context of **Matthew 18**, esp., **vv. 15-20**. Repentance is required for reconciliation to be granted and fellowship maintained.

Warm, healthy relationships are not unconditional. That's true in our fellowship with God. A close walk with God requires, on a regular basis, that we confess (honestly acknowledge) our sins and God faithfully forgiving our daily sins and cleansing us of unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**).

To "*repent*" means a complete change of mind,

We can forgive freely and often as a gift to the offender and to us, but to trust and reconcile without true repentance is a terrible abuse of biblical teaching. (cf. **Romans 12:18** *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*)

In Christ, by the Spirit, we can imitate God's love (**Eph 5:1-3**).

He who has an ear, let him hear.