

Title: Forgive without Limit
Text: Matthew 18: 21-35
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In the King James translation of the Bible, there are headings at the top of the page to tell us what the page is about. Those headings are not the inspired word of God. They are put there by the translators. But they are sometimes helpful.

The heading for Matthew 18 is, “How we are to treat our offending brethren.” Does anyone here ever have a brother or sister that offends you? How do you treat them? This is a word for how believers are to treat our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, in the family of God, who offend us.

A peaceful, forgiving house—whether it be the Lord’s house or our own house—is more conducive for seeking the Lord and his righteousness than a house full of brawling.

Proverbs 21:9: It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

The woman represents the church: better to be in a small house where the bride is faithful, merciful and forgiving; than in a wide house with lots of people, where the so-called church, is full of brawling. A hard, contentious heart points the finger and places blame; a broken and contrite heart, who knows what great debt God has forgiven us, is forgiving.

The Lord Jesus had just taught us to be very careful not to offend our brethren—**Matthew 18: 6: But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.**

Then the Lord taught us the careful steps we are to take with a brother who offends us.

Then Peter asks a question. **Matthew 18:21: 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.**

What if a brother or sister is repeatedly offensive toward me? Am I to continue forgiving them? Or do I put a limit on forgiveness? Christ says, “No.” Seventy times seven means without limit.

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Proposition: A believer, who has been forgiven by God, for the sake of Christ, should be ready to forgive, and to put no limit on forgiving our offending brethren.

In Chapter 6, Christ taught us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (v. 12). Now he teaches us that our sins are debts. And that they are debts cancelled and forgiven by God. Therefore, we who have been forgiven by God, ought to forgive one another his brethren. Christ gives a parable—an earthly story to illustrate heavenly truth.

Matthew 18: 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 fellowservants, 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 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. 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: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, 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 every one his brother their trespasses.

Divisions: We will look at 3 contrasts in this parable.

I. FIRST, LET'S CONTRAST THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD & HIS SERVANTS & THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FELLOW SERVANTS.

The Relationship between God and His Servants

First, we have an illustration of God our Savior and true believers—**v23: Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.**

The kingdom of heaven is like this. God our Father is represented by the king—**v35: So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you.** Also, Christ is the King of his kingdom. Christ is the one instructing us in this parable, the one who instructs all his saints in the heart. The kingdom of heaven—the church and household of God—belongs to God our Father and Christ our King.

Every believer is a servant of God our Father and Christ our King—all of grace: by God the Father's electing grace, by God the Son's redeeming grace, by God the Holy Spirit's regenerating grace. Every believer is a servant of God our Savior by the grace of God!

Notice also who we must give account to—**v23: Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.** It is to God our Father and Christ our Master that we shall give account and he has every right to take account—he is the Judge. First, the king took account of his servant toward him. Then later the king took account of how his servant treated a fellow-servant. God our Savior has every right to take account of us, we are his servants subject to him, and we must give account to him.

The Relationship between Fellow Believers

Then we have an example of fellow believers--**v28: But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him.** Do you notice the difference? The first case is of the Master, who is greater, taking account of his servant who is below him. This case is of a servant taking account of his fellow servant—yet one is not above the other, they both are equal.

Application: Peter's question was "how many times shall I forgive my brother." First, it is not the place of one believer to keep account of the offences done against us by our fellow brethren—we are equal. If we do so we will be in the mindset that when a fellow believer reaches a certain limit then we are justified to take

revenge or to reject them. Secondly, it is to God alone that his servants must give account. He is the Judge. Our fellow brethren are Christ's servants.

Romans 14: 4: Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand...9: For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. 10: But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. 11: For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12: So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. 13: Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way

So the first reason we have for putting no limit on forgiveness toward our brethren is that we need to remember our place. God our Father and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ is King of his kingdom. We, who are saved by his grace and called into his kingdom in the new birth, are servants of him and fellow servants of one another. It is not our place to keep account of how many times we have forgiven a brother. God our Father and Christ our Master is the Judge. We are his servants the same as our fellow brethren.

II. CONTRAST THE ENORMOUS DEBT TO THE LITTLE DEBT

The Enormous Debt

The question we are answering is, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? " Do we won't for God to keep score?

Christ begins with a king reckoning with his servant who owed him—**v24: one was brought unto him, which owed HIM!** And notice how great the debt was—**ten thousand talents**. The writers do not agree on how much this sum would be in today's American dollars—the range was from 300 million to a trillion dollars. One writer said in Christ's day it would equal to 150,000 years wages.

Application: Our Lord sets forth this man who owed an extravagant, unfathomable amount to his king to remind us of what we, his servants, owe to him both, if God were to take account of us outside of Christ and to remind us of what we owe being in Christ.

First, as our Creator and Benefactor, God demands of every sinner two things. His law is not extreme. His demands are not unreasonable. They are perfectly righteous demands (**Matt. 22:37-39**).

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"
(Read Exodus 20:3-11 to see this is the first table of the law).

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Read Exodus 20:12-17 to see this is the second table of the law).

We owe the Lord God a life of perfect righteousness, a life of perfect obedience. Failure to render such a life unto him is the incurrance of a debt impossible for us to calculate. And we have failed!

Secondly, not only have we failed to obey him, we have further indebted ourselves by sin, by the willful transgression of God's law. Sin is a debt! It is a debt beyond calculation. For the sinner outside of Christ, this debt increases every minute of every day until the second we die.

Sin is such a vast debt because: it is going against God's will, it is a violation of God's law, it is a contemning God's authority, it is despising God's sovereignty and dominion, it is defacing God's image, it is resisting God's spirit, it is abusing God's patience, it is slighting of all God's love, mercy, and goodness. It exposes the sinner to eternal wrath and vengeance.

Thirdly, for you and I who have been forgiven freely by God's grace in Christ, we owe a debt of gratitude that cannot be calculated.

1 Corinthians 6: 20: For ye are bought with a price:

God our Father gave his only begotten Son. And Christ Jesus put himself in the place of God's elect. He took all our debts upon himself. He paid all the debt his people owed.

Complete Atonement Christ has made
And to the very last penny paid
All that His people owed!
How then can wrath on me take place
If sheltered in Thy righteousness,
And sprinkled with Thy blood
Since Jesus my discharge procured
And freely in my room endured
The whole of wrath divine,
Payment God cannot twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

The price he paid was his precious blood.

1 Peter 1: 18: Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as* silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; 19: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

“When I stand before the throne,
dressed in beauty not my own
When I see thee as thou art,
love Thee with unsinning heart,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,
not till then, how much I owe”

Application: Brethren, let this incredible debt remind us of the greatness of mercy and grace freely given us in Christ Jesus! Therefore, brethren, let us forgive one another without limit.

The Little Debt

Now, contrast that enourmous debt with this little debt—**v28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence.** Notice this debt was owed to a fellowservant—this represents a fellow believer's offense toward me. Notice this debt was but an hundred pence. 100 pence equaled 1 talent. The great offense was 10,000 talents; this was but one talent. One writer said, “the other debt was 150,000 years wages; this was 100 days wages.”

Application: Believer sins committed against us by our fellow brethren, or fellow sinners, are small, when compared with those which we have committed against God. So our Lord teaches us not only are we not to keep account of our brother's offenses—God alone is Judge of his people. Also the offense of our brother toward us is nothing in comparison to our offense against him.

III. CONTRAST COMPASSION AND FORGIVENESS WITH HARDHEARTEDNESS AND AN UNWILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE.

Compassion and Forgiveness of God

First, it was impossible for the first servant to pay his lord—**v25: 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**—he had no ability whatsoever. The fellow servant could have paid the servant what he owed. But this man could not pay his lord what he owed.

Application: Brethren, we had nothing to pay our God the debt we owed. Notice this servant represented his wife and children—Adam represented us. We sinned in our first father Adam. We were conceived in sin from Adam so we came forth sinning because it was our sin nature to do so. So there was no way we could pay God the life of obedience we owed him and no way could we pay the sin-debt we owed him.

Still, God must be paid!—**v24:...[so] his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.** We were sold under sin. We lost all we had in Adam. Repentance could not satisfy our debt. Good works could not erase our debt. Even if God put us in hell we would have never been able to pay the debt we owed.

Yet, God in mercy to our souls gave us life and ears to hear his law like the king did this man—he made us see our need. Thus the Lord made us willing in the day of his power to ask for mercy—**v26: The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.**

In our ignorance, some of us made such foolish promises to God—I will pay thee all.

Illustration: The accountant's story: an accountant said that he could see on paper when his client was bankrupt. Yet, from the time the accountant told the merchants that they were bankrupt until the merchant declared bankruptcy averaged a year. The accountant said, "The very last thing that a merchant will admit is that he is hopelessly insolvent." So it is with a sinner.

Yet, because Christ made intercession for us and God taught us what his law said. God brought us to cry for mercy. And when we cried for pure mercy, he forgave us purely according to his sovereign grace and love given us before the foundation of the world in Christ—**v27: Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.**

God's mercy to us was not because of us like as the king's mercy in this parable was not due to the servant. It was God who called us to himself as this king did his servant; it was God who made us know our sin and inability; it was God who made us cry for mercy; it was God who was moved with compassion; it was God who loosed us; it was God who forgave us all our debt! The basis of our forgiveness is the justice of God satisfied by Christ our Redeemer! The cause is God's mercy and compassion toward sinners. All who sue for mercy receive forgiveness!

Furthermore, what our Lord represents here as one act of forgiveness represents a continual flow of forgiveness from our God toward us for Christ's sake.

1 John 1:9: If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness....2: 1: My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: 2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of* the whole world.

Application: The point our Lord is making is if he were to call us to account he would find us like this servant. Every hour, we are the subjects of continual forgiveness by his free grace for Christ's sake. "How often shall my brother offend and I forgive him?" The answer of the Lord in this parable is "as often as God forgives us."

Hardness of Heart and Unwillingness to Forgive

Now, contrast this picture of God's compassion and forgiveness toward us with the hardness of heart and unwillingness to forgive in this wicked servant—**v28: But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.** [That is not how his king dealt with him—that is not how God dealt with us who believe either.] **29: And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.** [same words he had just used to his king] **30: And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.**

Application: Brethren, will we be hard-hearted and unforgiving of our fellowbrethren when we have been forgiven so much so continually? We are exhorted to forgive those who trespass against us more than anything else in scripture.

Ephesians 4: 32: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. 5: 1: Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2: And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

Matthew 18: 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: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, 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. [Now here is our Savior's warning] **35: So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.**

Application: Brethren, our exercise of forgiveness is in no way the cause of God's forgiveness toward us. But the only one who will inherit the kingdom of heaven are those who God has given a heart to forgive. Also, when we do not forgive our brethren, though God has forgiven his people and will never revoke his forgiveness due to Christ's blood, God does chasten us. Often the cause of torment in our consciences is from holding grudges rather than freely forgiving our brethren. When God brings us to cry out once again for mercy he makes us willing once again to forgive our brethren. Then God's chastening hand yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in our hearts.

All who are renewed into His image by the power of the Holy Spirit; all who know the greatness of our sin and the greatness of his forgiveness, all who see what great price Christ paid to make God just to forgive us—each walk as dear children, seeking to be merciful unto others as He has been to them. Gratitude for forgiveness forgives! Brethren, forgive your brethren freely as God has forgiven you freely because Christ paid it all. Forgive sincerely – "From your heart"—as God has fully forgiven us and remembers our sins no

more for Christ's sake. And forgive without limit as God continues to forgive us without limit for Christ's sake.

Amen!