

A Lesson in Kingdom Forgiveness

Matthew 18:23-35 (NRSVue)



When you say the Lord's Prayer, do you want to skip the part that says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"? It's uncomfortable.

The Christian Church teaches: "To be forgiven your sins, you must forgive the sins of others."

When Peter asks how many times he's to forgive—maybe seven times?—Jesus says, "You must forgive sins 490 times, seventy times seven." You must forgive always.

Jesus concludes his parable of the unforgiving servant, saying, "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Mt. 18:35).

Kingdom forgiveness is a serious matter. If you want God to forgive you when his kingdom comes, you must forgive others each time they sin against you.

The Content of the Parable

Jesus' parable begins: "...the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves" (Mt. 18:23). A time for settling up what we owe God is coming. Judgment Day accompanies Jesus' return. The Almighty's account with you must be settled.

In Scripture, sin is debt—whether against God, yourself, a loved one, or a neighbor. Sin is a debt we handle only by paying it or having it forgiven.

Jesus' parable teaches this.

His death provided payment, yet we're still in the woods.

A king's servants owed him debts. He asked them to pay. A guy owed a million bucks. He didn't have it and pleaded for the king's patience. He'd pay everything soon. The king

was moved with pity, and he wiped the million dollar debt off the books!

The king could collect by selling the debtor along with his family and goods. But he chose forgiveness and mercy.

The guy buzzed out like a bee—but his stinger bit hard when he found someone who owed him a hundred bucks. He threw him into prison. No mercy. No forgiveness.

This action earned him anger from his king, who called him back, and said, “You should’ve had mercy on the man. Your debt is back on your head.”

When the debtor couldn’t pay, the king swatted the bee hard. As Matthew records, “...in anger his lord handed him over *to be tortured* until he would pay his entire debt” (Mt. 18:34, *italics mine*).

Kingdom forgiveness demands the mercy God shows you. Forgiven people forgive. Mercy is gracious, not cheap.

The Lesson of the Parable

Jesus concludes his parable of the unforgiving servant, with a lesson: “So my heavenly Father will also do *to every one of you*, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (Mt. 18:35, *italics mine*). Wow. Will God withhold mercy because I haven’t shown it?

Jesus says, “In your heart you must be forgiving, if you want to be forgiven.”

You can’t just say, “I forgive you,” you must say it *from your heart*. Forgiveness has to be your lifestyle. Care enough to mean what you say, “I forgive you.” This is the 490 times of forgiveness Jesus said Peter owed to his debtors. From the bottom of your heart, forgiveness flows.

God doesn’t smile at our evil deeds, and he does not forgive without reason. His Son died for you. So he asks you to forgive as he forgave you.

“But how can I do this?” you’re asking.

With the Holy Spirit's help. When he draws you to Christ, and you're forgiven, he gives you meekness. You know you don't deserve forgiveness, yet God forgave you! Meekness, humility, grows.

It's a process. You can't forgive others if you aren't comfortable with yourself. Accept God's mercy and grow in gentleness. Then, in meekness, you can forgive as you've been forgiven. Forsake pride, and you'll forgive those who sin against you. Your life honors God with a sweet scent.

Forgiveness doesn't mean you allow harm to continue. Mercy may release the debt, but wisdom sets healthy boundaries. Forgiveness requires improved behavior.

So how sincerely do you treat your sins? And those of others? You could be offhand and light. "I forgive you *this* time." "I forgive you, but I'll carry a grudge."

No, says Jesus, forgive from the depths of your soul every sin anybody ever commits against you. Care enough to mean what you say. In the body of Christ, forgiveness isn't a solo act. It's a rhythm we learn in community, one honest moment at a time.

God treats you with mercy, so share it with others. Or God's forgiveness will be withheld. You'll pay up when judgment day comes. By holding on to pride, your reception of mercy loses its delightful aroma.

Do you see how compassion works?

Kingdom forgiveness requires you to practice the same compassion, mercy, and forgiveness God gives you. It's a serious matter. God's generous, so be generous, too. If you're forgiven, forgive. Mercy is gracious, but it isn't cheap.

You've been forgiven. Why can't you forgive?

Amen

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