

## God's Call To Forgiveness

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Scriptural Text: Matthew 18:21-35, ESV

There is a practical call to each of us to forgive one another, but there is also a doctrinal element. Why is that? It is because God is a merciful, forgiving God. Every practical matter of life relates back to the person of God. How wonderful that is because we have an awesome and wonderful God to learn about and to continue to enjoy.

This is a parable which relates to hardly any of us. It relates to people who have had other people hurt them through their sin. No one ever has that happen. Of course, I am being a bit facetious. This is an issue all of us must deal with and often times it is in very deep ways regarding people close to us, family, and people who may not be so close to us and those who are more distant, employers, people we work with, or people we do not hardly know. Yet, for some reason they decide to sin against us and hurt us. What do we do? Jesus gives to us a very clear lesson.

### The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

<sup>23</sup> "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. <sup>26</sup> So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' <sup>27</sup> And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' <sup>30</sup> He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. <sup>32</sup> Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

A dozen or so students huddled in the hallway in Heath High School in Paducah, Kentucky. This group huddled in prayer almost everyday before school and they closed with an, "Amen." They were about to move to their classes when, "Pop! Pop! Pop!" A fourteen-year old classmate walked up and began to unload a .22 caliber pistol into their prayer circle. He took careful aim at each one before firing.

When it was over, three teens lay dead and five were seriously wounded. As this story unfolded, it was discovered these victims had done nothing to provoke this particular student. In fact, several of them had reached out to him in love to befriend him.

We can imagine how incensed the families of these precious teens might have been over this act of senseless murder and violence. Yet, what amazed the media as they reported the story was forgiveness of the survivors and their families toward the shooter and toward the shooter's family. No one spoke of bitterness and no one spoke of vengeance in their voice. One of the injured girls was Melissa Jenkins and she laid in a hospital bed with full knowledge that her spinal cord had been hit and she would be a paraplegic for the rest of her life. Yet, within days she sent a message from her hospital bed, through a friend, to the boy who had taken aim at her and who had shot her. This was her message, "Tell him I forgive him."

I wondered, as I read this story again, would I do that to someone who took away my ability to walk? I believe on the Holy Spirit can create such a heart. In offering forgiveness to this malicious young man, Melissa stands in the

shadows in the saints of old. She stands with Joseph who forgave his brothers in their murderous contempt for him.<sup>1</sup> She stands with Moses who forgave the people in their rebellion against his leadership.<sup>2</sup> She stands with David who forgave Shimei as he cursed him in David's hour of distress.<sup>3</sup> She stands with Stephen who forgave those who were stoning him to death.<sup>4</sup>

Forgiving painful wrongs suffered is what God's people do. That is who we are. We forgive, not because we are intrinsically kinder or more generous or more merciful than others. No, we forgive because God has forgiven us so very much. We know God has removed an infinite debt of ours, borne by our sin, and He has removed it from our record and we cannot get over this amazing truth.

The bullet that sped through Melissa's spinal cord paralyzed her legs, but it would not paralyze her soul. The gunman could pierce Melissa's body with a lead bullet, but he could not pierce Melissa's soul with his steely anger and bitterness. Melissa chose to forgive because she had been forgiven.

Have we suffered hurtful wrong on the account of others? Of course, we have in various degrees and various ways. We know forgiveness is not easy. C.S. Lewis wrote, regarding forgiveness, "Forgiveness is a beautiful word until you have something to forgive." Isn't that true? It is a great concept until, suddenly, we come face-to-face with our need for it and then there is a fight that rages within our soul.

Forgiveness is a great principle, but doesn't our flesh give to us a thousand reasons why our particular circumstance causes us to be excluded from its duty? Doesn't our flesh begin to narrow the meaning of forgiveness so that forgiveness becomes little more than a commitment not to take vengeance?

In our text, Jesus prods us with a simple message of forgiveness: forgiven people forgive others. That is what we do. The application Jesus draws, for those of us who have been forgiven through the cross of Jesus is simple: we are to forgive others when they sin against us because God, in His mercy, has forgiven us when we sinned against Him.

**First, we consider the duty of forgiveness: must we forgive others?** Is that our duty as Christians? Our flesh, of course, shouts, "No!" I do not have any obligation to forgive others who have hurt me. That would not be just. Justice is good. Justice is right. Justice is true. They do not deserve my kindness and it would only encourage them to hurt me more if I did forgive them. No, I will not forgive."

Yet, though that is what our flesh cries out to us, few Christian duties are pressed more often and more forcefully upon us in the New Testament than the duty God lays at our feet to forgive. So central is forgiveness to the Christian life that Jesus taught His model prayer, that every prayer of ours, ought to include a commitment to forgive others. He taught us to pray to others, "Forgive us our sins in the same way, God that I forgive others, so You, please, forgive me."<sup>5</sup>

If we refuse to forgive others, do you know what we are praying? We are praying God to forgive us in the same way we forgive others. If we refuse to forgive others we are asking God not to forgive us. This is a frightening prayer to pray for a bitter soul. It is a terrifying prayer. Jesus, after teaching the Disciples that prayer, in Matthew 6, makes a comment on that particular part of the prayer because it is so important we understand it. He says,

*<sup>14</sup> "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup> but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*

I understand how our flesh revolts against the idea of forgiveness toward someone who has hurt us deeply. Our own flesh is such a powerful enemy which hardens at the very thought of forgiving one who wounded us. In fact, in the past two years I have learned much about the strength of my flesh in this regard. My flesh, in its forcefulness in its pursuit and its push toward resentment, frightens me at times with regard to its power, its continual presence, and in its persistence.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 45:1-5

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 32:15-32

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 16:5-14, 19:16-23

<sup>4</sup> Acts 7:54-60

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 6:12

Keep in mind, Matthew 18 is a chapter in which Jesus is teaching His Disciples, and us, because He is not teaching the masses in this message, the redeemed ones, those who have been forgiven. This truth He teaches is a truth particularly applied to those who have been rescued by His atoning work upon the cross. Matthew 18 begins this way,

<sup>1</sup> At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” <sup>2</sup> And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, <sup>3</sup> and said, “*Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*” <sup>4</sup> *Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*”<sup>6</sup>

The whole of Chapter 18 is a message to the Disciples about the Kingdom and about what Kingdom life looks like. Jesus’ statement about what the entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven looks like and requires is an amazing statement. We must become humble like a child and we must be converted, we must turn, and we must change. It all begins with receiving God’s forgiveness for the greatness of our sin.

When does this duty to forgive others begin? It begins at our conversion, when we become part of God’s family. When we turn and become like this child and believe in Jesus as our Messiah, God adopts us into His family, He becomes our Father and as our Father He sets the tone of the household and His tone is one of forgiveness. We know that because that is how we entered into this family to begin with. At our conversion everything and every relationship changes for us.

This change God brings into our life places upon us some very specific duties and responsibilities. God places His DNA inside of us at our conversion. There is a regeneration. We obtain His life inside of our soul and when we receive His life we receive His DNA. We begin to look like Him and live like Him.

Babies, born into a family, take on the DNA of their parents. They begin to look like them and live like them. That is true of God’s family as well. When others who are outside the family look at children who are in this family they see a family resemblance to the Father. That is the point of the Kingdom and the point of the church.

It is reasonable those who are still living in darkness, those who have not been forgiven, would not extend forgiveness. Unbelievers’ DNA is still connected to Adam and still connected to sin and death. It is a DNA filled with selfishness and pride. Bitterness still enslaves the soul that is alienated from the life of God. Resentment overpowers the one who is devoid of God’s Spirit.

But, conversion, when we turn and we are changed, it changes us from inside out. These sins of bitterness, anger, resentment no longer find a home in a life washed clean by Jesus. These are all a part of our old life and the old corruption. We have a new identity to live out in this broken world. Sons and daughters of God are people who have been forgiven and people who forgive.

The Apostle Paul describes this change, or this responsibility, so perfectly in Ephesians 5,

<sup>1</sup> Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The idea is: since God loved us so much first we ought to love one another.

So, what do sons and daughters do regarding sin? Matthew 18 answers that question. Jesus teaches us,

<sup>6</sup> “...but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

<sup>7</sup> “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!” <sup>8</sup> And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal

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<sup>6</sup> New American Standard Bible (NASB)

*fire.* <sup>9</sup> *And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.*

<sup>10</sup> *“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in Heaven.* <sup>11</sup> *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*<sup>7</sup>

Jesus teaches us we ought to rightly become concerned about sin in our own life because we do not want to damage others. We recognize there are severe consequences if we damage others through our own sin. What do we do about sin? We are very careful about sin taking root in our own heart. Then Jesus teaches us,

<sup>12</sup> *“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup> And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup> In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.”*

When we see other brothers and sisters sinning, we do not just let them go into sin, but we go after them in love and we seek to rescue the “straying lambs” in God’s flock. Then we are taught we have a duty to forgive and restore brothers who have sinned against us and hurt us,

<sup>15</sup> *“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. <sup>16</sup> But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ <sup>17</sup> If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

<sup>18</sup> *“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.*

<sup>19</sup> *“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.”*

This is difficult to do because our flesh does not want to be restored. It wants to diminish the idea of forgiveness. We may say, “I forgive you, but I do not want to see you again. I do not want to hang out with you.” That is not forgiveness because forgiveness means restoration. Jesus tells us the Kingdom living means we restore to a family relationship even those who have hurt us deeply.

The natural question arises and it is one Peter answers, “I will accept that. It is a heavy and hard truth. But, Jesus, how many times? How many times might a brother or sister sin against me before I am free from this duty and responsibility to forgive them?”

## **Secondly, in the extent of our forgiveness, how often must we forgive others,**

<sup>21b</sup> *“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”*

The implication here is that we “have” to forgive him. Peter does not wait for Jesus to answer; he fills in the blank. He wants to impress Jesus that he understands Jesus’ words and Peter was going to be overly generous with the answer to the question just posed.

This is not Peter’s question. It is a question, I believe, when we live in long-term relationships with people over a course of many years, “How many times do I have to forgive? It seems as though this person continues to sin against me. How many times, Lord?”

Peter makes two assumptions which I believe are his failings in the beginning. First, Peter assumes the major problem in the family will be his brother sinning against him and not him sinning against his brothers. Peter does not, first, ask

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<sup>7</sup> Verse 11 is from Luke 19:10 and is included here by some manuscripts. It is omitted in the ESV and other versions.

the question, “Lord, how many times can I expect my brother to forgive me when I sin against them?” That assumption gets Peter off kilter.

We do not think of our own sin very often, and we do think of others’ sins quite a bit. As we think of this subject, let us, first, not make this assumption and let us consider deeply our own need for mercy from God and also from others.

The second assumption Peter makes that gets this question a little off of center is: Peter assumes God sets some kind of limit on our duty to forgive others in the family. It is so strong, Peter answers and suggests a very magnanimous answer to his own question. In essence, Peter is saying, “Lord, I want to do my duty, but I do not want to become a doormat. Is seven times the limit?”

To appreciate Peter’s answer to his own question, we must understand the cultural context. Many teachers of Jesus’ day taught this issue of forgiveness, but they said one only had to forgive twice and the third time one would be quite in line with God’s will to refuse forgiveness. Isn’t that what our flesh desires to believe, “Surely, Lord, there is some limit to the emotional pain I must bear in forgiving others. Lord, there must be a limit because I do not believe I can forgive one more time. There has to be a limit.”

The 1st Century rabbi, Joseph ben Judah writes, “If a brother sins against you once, forgive him. If he sins against you twice, forgive him. If he sins against you three times, forgive him.” This rabbi is particularly gracious, “And, if he sins against you a fourth time, do not forgive him.” That was the official teaching from the Jewish religious leaders of that time.

Peter is being very magnanimous in his answer, “Lord, seven times!” He took the most generous rabbi’s answer, doubled it, and he added one. Peter expected Jesus to have this big smile on His face and say, “Peter, you are the greatest in the Kingdom because you get it! You understand mercy. You understand grace. Peter, you are awesome.” I would have loved to have seen Peter’s face when Jesus answers this question. I believe he was stunned and shocked because Jesus’ answer was quite a bit different from what he was expecting,

<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “*I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.*”<sup>8</sup>

Jesus blows the lid off of the idea of limits of grace regarding forgiveness. Again, right away we begin to struggle with this when we have real-life situations in which we are called to forgive, “I am going to be taken advantage of if I do this. Where is my protection? I need to set boundaries to protect me.”

The spiritual danger to our own soul comes when we do set boundaries on our forgiveness. Forgiveness actually is our spiritual protection from those who do evil against us. Forgiveness protects us from being infected by the sin which someone else used to hurt us, so that the very sin that hurts us does not find a way into our own soul and come out in a form of bitterness and anger and rage and malice and resentment and revenge. That is the real spiritual danger: the log in another person’s sin to plant seeds of sin in our own soul. Forgiveness uproots all of that.

Jesus is not saying we should wait for that four hundred and ninety-first incident to finally not have to forgive. He is giving an answer in which He is saying, “There are no limits to the duty God places upon us when He forgives us.” How much does God forgive us? To the measure we are forgiven, that is the measure we use to determine how much we should forgive others. In Luke 17, Jesus says,

<sup>3</sup> “*Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, <sup>4</sup> and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.*”

Jesus argues God’s grace is given to us to transform our heart, a heart that originally enjoyed resentment and revenge into a heart that enjoys mercy. Forgiveness moves from being a duty into the realm of becoming a delightful heart trained by God and transformed by God. But, there is still a fight inside of us. Our flesh says to us, “But, you do not understand this circumstance and how deeply I am hurt. It is impossible for me to forgive this man or this woman.”

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<sup>8</sup> Some manuscripts read, “seventy times seven”.

Let us listen to Jesus' words and His teaching that we might be free. Jesus, of all people, knows the cost. Jesus, of all people, knows the depth of pain of being sinned against. Remember, as those who mocked Him and spit upon Him and beat Him and, ultimately, nailed Him to the cross were casting lots for His clothes at the foot of the cross upon which He was dying, Jesus said,

<sup>34b</sup> *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

That is the heart of mercy. Forgiveness, indeed is costly. Jesus likens it to a huge, unpaid debt paid by the one abused.

Forgiveness happens when the forgiver pays what the forgiven owes. Forgiveness releases the debtor from his obligation to pay another penny of their debt. That is what this story of Jesus teaches us. Of course, the debt must be born by someone. Debts do not simply disappear. Someone must pay the debt, and in forgiveness, the debt is paid by the one who is taken advantage of. In our text, it is the king who had a servant who had incurred such a huge debt, yet the king said, “I will pay it for you.” It is incredibly costly to the king to pay it, yet he does so that the debtor can be fully released. Forgiveness requires suffering to be sure and Jesus suffered on the cross to forgive us.

The suffering and horizontal forgiveness we offer to others may come in the form of emotional pain, financial pain, physical pain, relational pain, but forgiveness requires we suffer the payment of the debt so the debtor can be free. How often must we forgive? Jesus tells seventy times seven.

When Jesus said that He recognized Peter is going to need some convincing because this is radical teaching and this is why He gives to us this parable. This parable really answers the question: Why must we forgive seventy times seven?

**Third, what is the motivation of our forgiveness: Why must we forgive others?** The king, in this parable, has a right to do that. The king is just to settle the accounts. This recalls a future day when the King, the Lord, is going to settle the accounts with us,

<sup>24</sup> *“When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.”*

That is an absurd figure. It is hard for us, in modern times, to get our arms around this. This debt is so large it would require a person to work 165,000 years in order to pay it. In fact, the total annual revenue of the Province of Galilee, which is a wealthy province where Jesus is teaching, in Jesus' day was only 300 talents. Jesus is teaching us our motivation for forgiving others their small debts they owe us comes from the joy of being such an infinitely large debt we owe to God.

As we read this story it is important to ask the question: Who does Jesus want me to identify with? The challenge for us, in reading Scripture, is to always read ourselves into the pages. Who do we identify with as we read this story? We often identify with the fellow servants who are looking on and saying, “Man, that guy should be forgiving.” That is who we are because those people seem to be morally righteous. But, as God calls us to enter into the story, where does Jesus place us? He places us, and He places Peter, right squarely of being this person who owed the 10,000 talents, the absurd figure of money.

This is the kind of debt one gets simply by ordering the extra-value meal at McDonald's. One does not get this kind of debt by watching QBC one day. This is an absurd amount of debt. It is the kind of debt one can only enter into through fraud, theft, and complete dereliction of duty. It is an unimaginable debt this man owes his king and one for which he cost his king and his realm.

Why did Jesus use this crazy number? Jesus uses this absurd monetary figure to illustrate the very real debt we owe toward God as a result of our sin. Jesus is teaching us His view of our heart. The rebellion of our heart is so great against God, we have incurred this astronomical debt. Day-after-day and night-after-night we do not do what the King asks us to do and day-after-day an night-after-night we do that which the King asks us not to do. That is the description of man Jesus is painting.

We underestimate the debt our sin amasses and we overestimate the worth of our own good works. This is a damning error. Consider the man's statement when it came time for him to pay this debt to the king,

<sup>26b</sup> *“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”*

What a ridiculous statement. He would never, ever, not in 100,000 years ever be able to pay this debt, yet in crying out for mercy he actually believes he can repay it. Do you see your sin the way Jesus does? The psalmist writes, in Psalm 130,

<sup>3</sup> If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.

From our text we read,

<sup>27</sup> *“And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.”*

There was no repayment plan. The man asked for a repayment plan, but instead what he received was a complete cancellation of the debt. Isn't that awesome? That is the amazing grace of God. He takes our sins, the debt we have incurred as a result of our rebellion against Him and He cancels it completely,

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity...

Are you that blessed man or that blessed woman? Has your debt been completely cancelled, because that is what God offers to us in Christ. Jesus point is: the king came to this man and he said, "I forgive you." Are your sins forgiven by God? I urge you, beloved, if you do not know the answer to that question, and it is the only question that really matters, because there will be a day when we are called to give an account of our debts before the King. If we are not forgiven we are in a world of trouble. Jesus offers forgiveness to everyone who would come to Him, seek Him and humble themselves before Him like a child and receive mercy.

The man is forgiven and there should have been a life change, but there was no life change. I believe that because I do not believe he understood the gift given to him.

There is another fellow and he owes 100 denarii. That is a significant amount of money and it is payable. It is about one hundred days worth of wages. Interestingly, this servant says the exact same thing the forgiven servant said to the king,

<sup>26b</sup> *“Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.”*

The difference is, he actually could repay the debt, whereas the servant who had been forgiven could not have repaid his debt. Yet, instead of showing mercy, as he hears the exact same words he had just cried out to the king, there was no remembrance, no sense, of depth and joy for the wonderful gift of forgiveness. Instead, he grabs this debtor by the neck and he began to choke him. He throws him into debtor's prison until he would pay the last penny he owed.

The Greek word used in this story is imperfect. It means this man's plea was continual. He continued to plea all the way to prison, "Please be merciful to me. I will repay," "No," "Please be merciful to me. I will repay," "No," "Please be merciful to me. I will repay," "No!" There was a hardness of heart, "No, I will not!"

<sup>31</sup> *“When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed...”*

What damage does a lack of forgiveness do? What is the harm? There are at least three things. First, it unnecessarily harms the one who sins against us. It is unloving to them. Our resentment will do their soul no good. Our anger toward them will not lead them to God, it will not lead them to joy, it will not lead to life. It unnecessarily harms them. Life is hard already. The Devil in this world and our flesh has already done enough damage. Why should we contribute more to it in the lives of others.

Secondly, it unnecessarily harms our own soul. It poisons us and it corrupts us.

Third, it unnecessarily harms the community of faith, God's family. Who was greatly distressed when they saw this? The family, the community, the fellow servants.

We believe we can contain our own bitterness, "Okay, harm is done. I wanted to harm them. Harm is made and we will all suffer through it." No, it will affect the children, brothers and sisters, and the church. That is why forgiveness is so important. That is why the King has forgiven us so much that we might extend that forgiveness and have a different kind of community. Our failure to forgive a brother or sister pulls the family of God into distress and misery. Haven't you seen that to be true?

#### **The fourth lesson is about the consequence of refusal: What happens if I do not forgive others?**

<sup>32</sup> "Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. <sup>33</sup> And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' <sup>34</sup> And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. <sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Jesus is teaching us two sides will say of God's nature. We often believe these two sides are in conflict with one another, but they are in tremendous harmony with one another. We see the side of God Who is abundantly merciful, ready and willing to release 10,000 talents of debt at a humble request. That is His mercy. But, we also see the King Who is right and just to say, "You wicked servant. This is justice!" and He meets out justice.

The consequences of the lack of forgiveness are to ourselves, our community and there is a consequence to our eternal future. Our eternal future is impacted as we invite God's displeasure upon our life.

Is this person in Hell? Is that is what is being describes? Great Bible teachers land in two different places on this question. I land in both and I am non-committal about this. There are two possible interpretations and I believe they are both right. I believe the point is either of these could be the case. First, there is eternal punishment for such a one. The failure to forgive a fellow servant reflects we have not been truly forgiven. If we had been forgiven our nature would have been changed. If there is no evidence of a changed nature, we must ask: How do I know I have been forgiven. If we have no gratitude and no joy in my forgiveness, how do we know?

Jesus may be pointing to eternal punishment. At the very minimum, though, He is pointing to severe discipline. We know God chastens harshly the one who acts so wickedly, the one who receives forgiveness and then turns and refuses to give mercy.

As we read this story we become like this fellow servant. We scratch our head in outrage and say, "Who could possibly ever act this way?" You and I do all of the time! That is what Jesus wants us to understand about this story. Every time we have allowed little roots of bitterness, little roots of resentment, toward another who has wronged us, we are acting exactly like this ungrateful, unforgiving servant. Let us be careful.

Forgiveness is hard. It is impossible apart from God's Spirit. Let me share two words of counsel regarding our forgiveness. First, if we find it hard to forgive, and we do, the first step of action I believe we must take is to enter deeper into the joy of the completeness of God's forgiveness to us. It is not beating our soul over the head with the Law – this is my duty and this is what I must do. I believe we need to enter deeper into God's forgiveness of us. As we understand the depth of God's forgiveness, it is there we will find power and joy to forgive others. All of our horizontal problems find their answer in the vertical relationship with God and in the Gospel. Whenever we are having a horizontal issue of living out God's will, God calls us to enter deeper into the Gospel of His grace, that we would kneel at the foot of the cross and wash ourselves afresh in His blood through a confession of our own sin, through a pursuit of the Holy Spirit to help us to see the darkness of our own heart, and with joyful thanksgiving to God for the great pardon He offers to us in Christ.

Second, let us yield our will to God each day and obey His call to forgive. Forgiveness is a matter of our will and not of our emotion. We do not have to feel "like" forgiving in order to forgive and cancel a debt. I believe as we bend our will to the Father's and humble ourselves before Him and say, "Father, I will forgive," the Father will strengthen us.



Whatever the Father commands us to do, the Father supplies for us. God is the One who is at work in us to give to us the power to will and to do His good pleasure. Our emotions may fool us, but we are not lead by our emotions. Instead, we are lead by God's Spirit as we humble ourselves before the Father.

Is there anyone God is calling you to forgive? Are you aware of any resentment or any hurt you are still holding onto and have not completely released that debt over to God and willing to say, "God, I am willing to pay the debt for this person so they can be completely free." Is there anyone? This is a serious matter. Our forgiveness of others is grounded in God's forgiveness of us. I encourage you to talk with the Lord and make application of this great in which Jesus challenges us to forgive just as we have been forgiven. Let us seek the Lord and enter deeply into the grace of God regarding our own sin so that we might pour out mercy upon others, all for the glory of His name.