

“THE CHALLENGE OF FORGIVING”

Text: Matthew 18:21-35

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INTRODUCTION:

1) The forgiveness of God: After being discharged from the Royal Navy for insubordination, John Newton turned to a career of slave trafficking. He became notorious for cursing and blasphemy during the cruelest days of trans-Atlantic slavery and later became a captain of a slave transport ship. Then a dramatic conversion on the high sea set him on the path of God's grace and forgiveness. Besides his vigorous appeal before the Parliament for abolition of slavery, Newton was well known for his writing of many hymns to express his gratitude of the forgiveness of God, and the best-loved hymn of all time, “Amazing Grace,” in which he described his undeserved condition to be forgiven by God.

2) The forgiveness of man: To understand and receive forgiveness of God is much easier than to give or receive forgiveness of man. That is why there is a lot of teaching in the Bible on this topic. To forgive others does more than the fact that we have been forgiven by God, it provides us the basis to improve our relationship with others at home, at work, in school and church. Being forgiving is a tremendous power of witnessing to others that sets us apart from the unforgiving world. From the parable of Jesus in this passage, let us explore some of the teachings and applications we all may learn on this important topic of forgiving.

FORGIVING IS A HUGE CHALLENGE: (18:21-22)

1) To sin against is part of human: “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked: Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? (18:21) Being human, we all are guilty of sinning against each other from the day we were able to make decision to the day we take our last breath. We see that Peter was so bias that he could only see “my brother sins against me,” but not “I have sinned against my brother.” It is unfair or even hypocritical only to see others had sinned against us but to ignore the fact that we also had sinned against them. We sin against each other because we are sinners and live in a world of sinners. (Isaiah 6:5)

2) To forgive isn't part of human: “How many time shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven time?” (18:21) The fact Peter asked on how many times he should forgive up to seven times, means there is a limit in

his heart when forgiving isn't part of the law. We all were born with a selfish nature: We want or demand other to forgive us without any limit, but we can't do the same to others. To forgive isn't part of human nature, to retaliate is. We all know how hard it is to forgive others particularly those who sinned against us repeatedly or those who inflicted terrible pain or loss on us.

3) There isn't a limit to forgive: “Jesus answered: I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (18:22) Here Jesus gives us a command “I tell you” on the number of times we should forgive our offenders: 77 times or 70 times seven, 490 times, in some other translations. It means there is no limit we should forgive those who have sinned against us. We certainly feel that is impossible or even ridiculous to forgive that same sinner 77 times or 490 times, but that is exactly what Jesus wants us to do. We will talk about why Jesus wanted us to do that later.

BEING FORGIVEN IS AMAZING: (18:23-27)

1) We all have to settle our account: “The kingdom of God is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.” (18:23) Our God is the king, we all are his servants and someday we all have to face him to settle our accounts. This is an important teaching most Christians don't want to know: We will face God someday to settle our account . “For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or evil.” (2 Corinth. 5:10) This is a very serious fact we should never ignore: we have sinned against God and we will face Him to settle that account someday. Whether you believe this or not, it is in the Bible and none of us may escape from it that day.

2) Our debt is insurmountable: “As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.” (18:24) Ten thousand talents is an astronomical number at that time. Remember in another parable of Jesus, the servants were given one, two or five talents, the max, to do investment. (Matt 25:14-15) In this parable, Jesus wants us to see how deeply we are in debt to God that we can do nothing to settle our accounts. As humans, it is easy for us to see how bad others are and how terrible their lives had become. But Jesus doesn't want us to see how much others may have sinned, he wants us to see how bad we are and how much we are in debt to God. Most of us are fair enough to admit that we all are sinners, but we would never imagine or admit that we really are terrible sinners, that we have sinned so much more

than we could every imagine or realize or admit. It doesn't matter how much others have sinned against God, but it is very important we need to know we are terrible sinners that there is nothing we could feel better than others.

3) We are forgiven on God's mercy: “The servant's master took pity (had mercy) on him, canceled the debt and let him go.” (18:27) Took pity or had mercy is the kind of attitude God has on us, helpless sinners who couldn't stop sinning and can do nothing to pay for the penalty of our sins. We have nothing in us, nothing we have done, could make us worthy before God to be forgiven. It is in that kind of undeserved spirit John Newton wrote that hymn “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saves a wretch like me.” We all need to admit, realize and confess our worthlessness before God because of our insurmountable debt of sin against him and man, and be humble to receive forgiveness of God for all the sins and wrongs we have done.

GOD'S PURPOSE OF FORGIVING US: (18:28-30)

1) Don't exaggerate the debts of others: “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred pence.” (18:28) A talents is about \$1,000; 10,000 talents is about \$10M, while 100 pence is about 1/150 of a dollars, according to Holman Bible Dictionary. Often times we exaggerate the sins others had committed against us as humongous and therefore they don't deserve our forgiveness. The fact is our sins against God and others are truly humongous and we don't deserve forgiveness of God and others. The way we see our sins and the sins of others is so faulty all the time and we feel we deserve God and others to forgive us but we just can't forgive them. The dramatic comparison Jesus used is to show us the humongous sins we committed against God compares to the tiny, smidgen offense of others to show us the proper way we need to see and to forgive. If God can forgive us so much, we certainly can forgive others so little.

2) Don't push so hard on our offenders: “He grabbed him by his throat and began to choke him: 'Pay back what you own me,' he demanded.” (18:28b) It is obvious this man has no mercy on his debtor, even though the debt was so small. Coming hard on those who have offended us is not what God wants to see in his children. This man didn't just demanded payment of the debt, he abused the debtor both in emotional and physical force. This reminds us how we used to treat those who have sinned against in ways that don't reflect the nature of God which is being merciful. If God could forgive us so much without doing anything hurting us, why can't we do the same to our debtors?

3) Don't forget how we seek God's mercy: “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him: Be patient with me and I will pay you back.” (18:29) This is exactly how this man begged his master to be patient with him and his promise to pay back. (18:26) Everyone knows, including this man, that he can never pay back what he owed the master, 10,000 talents. It is possible his fellow servant may be able to pay back 100 pence. The fact that the Bible used exactly the same plead by both debtors allows us to see the similar pitiful condition we all are in: no matter how much we own God or others, we need to be humble and sincere to plead for mercy and leniency. Any other way of prideful word or action, denial or arrogance will never bring us any mercy of forgiveness both from God or people.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF UNFORGIVING: (18:31-35)

1) You will lose respect of your peers: “When the other servants what had happened, they were greatly distressed (very sorry), they went and told their master everything that had happened.” (18:31) When you are unforgiving, you may think that is your personal business and it doesn't affect anyone else, but that is not true. Or you may think you are justified to exact debts from the debtor, but your hush and unforgiving way certainly will cause others to see the evil side of you, and they will grieve, distress and feeling sorrowful. Don't forget: the way we treat others, even our debtors will affect how others may treat you later. In this case, the fellow servants despised this man and reported his ill treatment of others to their master which brought immediate repercussion to himself.

2) You will trigger God's displeasure: “Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said. I canceled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?” (18:32-33) When we don't forgive others, it hurts more than our relationship with others, it hurts our relationship with God. Imagine how bad the master must feel of this unforgiving servant whom he had just forgiven a moment ago. God wants to see us learn from him, follow his word and deed in our daily life, so he will feel happy and be glorified. Anytime we violated his way, we bring shame and sorrow to his heart, just as a father will feel on his wayward children. How dare we do anything that hurts God's heart.

3) You will reap what you have sown: “In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my Heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother

from your heart.” (18:34-35) This parable is not meant to dispute the mercy of God to forgive our sins and to give us eternal life. The only condition to receive forgiveness of our sins and eternal life is our sincere confession of sin and our faith in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:9; Romans 10:9-10) This parable is given to encourage unlimited practice of forgiving one another between fellow human beings anywhere, anytime. It also stresses the consequences of unforgiving: we will be punished for what we do and will suffer the consequences of our deeds.

APPLICATION OF TRUTH:

- 1) We can't afford not to forgive: “When you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25-26) Our attitude on forgiving others has so much to do with how God is going to forgive us. If we truly believe in God, we should follow his teaching in forgiving others. We can't afford not to do that.
- 2) We can't afford not to be forgiven: If you have not believed in Jesus, have not asked God to forgive your sins, today is the best day to do so. This is very important because it has to do with the salvation of your soul and God's gift of eternal life to you. Nothing you may do or not do may qualify you to receive eternal life from God except your faith in Jesus Christ. God has a purpose to bring you here to listen to this message today.