

“How many times do I have to forgive him?”

“The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant”



“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.” Matthew 6:12

Peter put his foot in his mouth many times as we like to say. He was a very positive follower of Christ, but he always had questions, and he was always seeking to know more, sometimes more than he needed to know. We are many times like Peter, whether we want to admit it or not. We want to know all the answers, but Christ knew that Peter was not able to handle those answers and would not understand them. We cannot understand them either. Sometimes we have to admit that we can't even understand the simplest of things, let alone things of God's kingdom.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant talks about forgiveness in very powerful terms. The disciples had been with Christ for quite some time. They knew that He was being followed by the authorities. They were having trouble comprehending what was going on and Christ kept talking to them, but they didn't understand what He was saying. Christ knew that His time on earth was nearing an end. The disciples and other followers were still waiting for Christ to rule as an earthly king. The disciples had forgiven the people because Christ had told them to, but they felt they had forgiven enough, so Peter asked “Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?” It seemed like a simple enough question, but Jesus answered, “Not seven times but seventy times seven” Matthew 18:21-22. Well we would all loose count before we reached 490, but that was only a figure for Christ to use to tell Peter and all of us that we cannot count the times we have to forgive. Then He went on to tell about forgiveness through a story about a servant who had been forgiven much. The servant owed his lord a lot of money. According to calculations done by one of the commentaries, the amount he owed was ten thousand talents, which would be equivalent to several millions of dollars today. His lord threatened to sell him and his family to get the debt paid. The servant began to plea for himself and his family.

The lord listened to his pleas “‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.” Matthew 18:26-27. But then the servant went to someone who owed him money and demanded it all. The amount owed to the servant by the one he had lent to was in comparison about a day's wages worth approximately sixteen cents. This was a very small amount. But he showed no forgiveness. Instead, he had the man thrown in prison until he was able to pay the debt.

When his lord heard about his lack of forgiveness, he went to the servant and had him handed over and tortured until he would pay the entire debt.

We are told that is what will happen to us if we do the same kind of thing. But we don't owe anyone that kind of money, or do we. What do we owe to our Lord who forgives our sins daily and offers us eternal life? What do we have to forgive – seventy times seven?

The last verse of this parable tells us “So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” Matthew 18:35

The lesson from this parable is fairly simple. Because God has forgiven us much, we are also to forgive our fellow people, not just Christians, but all people. We are forgiven through grace, amazing grace. Can we show that same grace to others? We cannot repay the debt Christ paid for us. We often pray the Lord's Prayer. Do we really listen to the words and do we really want our sins to be forgiven as we forgive the sins of others? I don't think so. We want our Lord to forgive all our sins, but we want to hold on to forgiveness to some of our fellow man. After all, they have really done something wrong!

In Ephesians 2:8-9, we are told “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” We can do nothing to earn it, but we can live our lives according to God's will as much as possible. God doesn't ask us for miracles. He only wants us to show His love to others through our actions and words. Forgiving our fellow man is one way we can do that.

Forgiving does not mean that we should pretend that nothing ever happened. We also have an obligation to help others to know the path to salvation. We don't go around trying to get even. We have often heard someone say, “My day will come, and I'll get back at that person.” That is not the correct attitude. It means praying for those who have hurt us. It means putting ourselves in their shoes to see it from a different angle. How many times? Seventy times seven? God's mercy lasts forever.

There is an adage attributed to the Cherokee tribe of Native Americans who supposed said “Don't judge a man until you have walked two moons in his moccasins”. This has been paraphrased many times and used in many campaigns for various issues, but the essence is the same. You will note that this isn't just a temporary idea, it is to last two moons! (Approximately two months!) And can we ever really put ourselves in another person's place? Therefore, can we really ever judge another? God doesn't tell us to judge them. He does tell us to forgive unconditionally. Truly, God's grace is unlimited as written by John Newton in “Amazing Grace.” His song has been sung by many over the years, and the message is always the same.

Amazing Grace

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

T'was Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

(The following stanza was written by an anonymous author, often replacing the sixth stanza, or inserted as the fourth.)

When we've been there ten thousand years
Bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we've first begun.

Chorus:

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”

By John Newton (1725-1807)

Prayer: Lord, we often judge and think we are correct. Help us as we pray to our and ask for your love to be showered on us that we will also show Your love to others not

only by our forgiveness, but in the way we treat people every day. Help us to know Your grace and to show that grace to others. Amen

1. How many times should we forgive someone for the same treatment?
2. How can we know how to forgive?
3. In this same chapter, Christ tells about the child who accepts things without questioning. How can we accept God's love without questioning and have the faith of a child?
4. Is there someone you need to forgive today?

"The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant"

"The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn't pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market. The poor wretch threw himself at the king's feet and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt. The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, 'Pay up. Now!' "The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, 'Give me a chance and I'll pay it all back.' But he wouldn't do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king. The king summoned the man and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn't you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?' The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt. And that's exactly what my Father in heaven is going to do to each one of you who doesn't forgive unconditionally anyone who asks for mercy."
Matthew 18:23-35 THE MESSAGE