



## **The Blessing of Forgiveness: Matthew 18:21-35** by Sellers S Crain

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

- A. In this text, we have some of the greatest teaching of Christ.
  - 1. Humbling one's self as a child is required to enter heaven. (vs. **1-4**)
  - 2. A warning against causing "one of the little ones who believe in Me to sin." (vs. **6-14**)
  - 3. How to handle problems between brethren. (vs. **15-20**)
  - 4. The lesson about forgiveness. (vs. **21-35**)
- B. The meaning of forgiveness.
  - 1. The Hebrew word originally meant the releasing of a prisoner or remitting of a debt, but it came to mean pardon or forgiveness.
  - 2. The Greek word in the New Testament literally means to "send away, or to put apart." The New Testament contains 142 references to this word, with 129 being in the gospel accounts leaving only 13 for the rest of the books.
  - 3. This means the word forgiveness is closely related to the life of Christ.
- C. Jesus taught much on forgiveness.
  - 1. "If you bring your gift to the altar, and remember" (**Matthew 5:23-24**).
  - 2. In His prayer of example, He urged us to pray, "Our Father ... Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (**Matthew 6:9, 12-15**)
  - 3. "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive your trespasses." (**Mark 11:25-26**)
  - 4. "Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven." (**Luke 6:37**)
  - 5. "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." (**Luke 17:3-4**)

### **I. THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS. (Matthew 18:21-35)**

- A. How to handle problems among brethren. (**Mathew 18:15-17**)
  - 6. The text clearly refers to this problem as one brother sinning against another. It is not just a simple misunderstanding or disagreement. A sin has been committed.
  - 7. Steps in trying to resolve the problem.
    - a. Go to see the offending person and tell him he has sinned against you in definite terms. "If he hears you, you have have gained your brother." (v. **15**)
    - b. If the offending person does not repent, take one or two more with you, giving the person a second chance to make things right. (v. **16**).

c. What began as a personal problem between two people, now become a church problem. If the offending person does not repent after being given a third opportunity to repent, the sinful person is to be disfellowshipped from the church. (v. **17**) He should be treated like an erring brother and not as an enemy. (**2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15**)

B. This discussion must have gotten Peter to thinking about forgiveness.

1. He asked Jesus how many times he should forgive a brother who has sinned against him, "Up to seven times?" (v. **21**) He thought he was being generous. The rabbis taught that three times was enough to forgive anyone.
2. Peter had doubled that number and added one more for good measure. He may have remembered Jesus' statement earlier. (**Luke 17:3-4**)
3. Instead of the praise he might have expected from the Lord for his generosity, he received a mild rebuke. Jesus said "Not seven times, but seventy times seven." (v. **22**) The number seven is one of those perfect or complete numbers in Hebrew literature. It or any multiple of it refers to a whole or complete number. Jesus was not just saying forgive someone 490 times and no more, but this figure stands for an unlimited number of times.
4. After setting forth this principle of forgiveness, Jesus gave the parable that follows. (vs. **23-34**) as an illustration of that principle, and then gave an application of the truth presented.

## **II. THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.**

A. Forgiveness is God's gift to us.

1. The wicked servant begged for and received forgiveness for the debt of ten thousand talents. It was an unpayable debt.
2. Some scholars say that compared to today's wages it was 12 million dollars or more. They also say 165 to 200 years wages.

B. The unmerciful servant.

1. Facing an insurmountable debt and debtor's prison, this man threw himself on the mercy of the king who ruled over him. (v. **25**) He fell on his face to the ground and begged for patience from the king and to be given time to repay the debt. (v. **26**) The king was moved with compassion "released him and forgave him the debt." (v. **27**)
2. You would think the natural reaction for such generosity would be gratitude and producing compassion for others in a similar situation. However, that was not the case with this man.
3. No sooner than he had left the king's presence, he found another servant who owed him a hundred denarii ("a hundred shillings" ASV). (v. **28**) The denarii was the average daily wage for a laborer in that day and time. 100 denarii would be almost four months wages. Some say a denarii would be worth about 75 cents in today's currency. The point is that compared to the first man this man's debt was a paltry sum.
4. The unjust steward laid hands on the debtor and choked him, demanding to be paid. The servant fell down at his feet and begged him for patience to repay the debt. (v. **29**) The forgiven servant was unforgiving and had the man thrown into the debtor's prison until the debt was paid. (v. **30**)
5. Other servants observing what had happened, being grieved, immediately went and told the king what had happened. (v. **31**) The king called the first man to him and ask him why after he had been so generous by forgiving him of his unpayable debt he was unwilling to show compassion on a fellow servant. He

had the wicked man turned over immediately to the tormentors until his unpayable debt was paid. (v. **34**)

### **III. FORGIVENESS SHOULD BE COMPLETE.**

A. The parable is about God's forgiveness compared to ours.

1. We are all sinners forgiven by God and saved by His grace. Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God.
2. The message of Calvary is about the enormous debt of sin that we owed to God which we could never repay. It is important to see the cross as the perfect representation of God's forgiveness, by turning an instrument of torture into a blessing.
3. "He paid a debt He did not owe. I owed a debt I could not pay. I needed someone to wash my sins away. Now I sing a brand new song, Amazing Grace all day long. Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay."
4. When God forgives, He forgives completely.
  - a. "As far as the east is from the west, so far He removed our transgressions from us." (**Psalm 103:12**)
  - b. "For with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption." (**Psalm 130:7**)
  - c. "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." (**Romans 4:7-8; Psalm 32:1-2**)
  - d. "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (**Romans 8:1-2**)
  - e. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (**Hebrews 8:12; 10:17**)
5. "When God forgives, He forgets. "What does that mean? Can God actually forget anything? After all He is omniscient and knows all things. (**1 John 3:20**) What it means is that He voluntarily releases an individual from the legitimate claims He has upon him for sin. He never collects the debt we owe for those sins, and He releases us from the death penalty due us. "The wages of sin is death..." (**Romans 6:23**)

B. The application Jesus made teaches us that we must completely forgive others who sin against us.

1. As we have seen, our forgiveness from God is dependent on our forgiveness of others.
2. Paul said the reason we are to forgive is because we are forgiven. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ Jesus forgave you." (**Ephesians 4:32**)
3. Stop thinking that unless we have completely forgotten the sin or wrong done to us that we have not really forgiven it.
4. We may have a difficult time forgetting some sin committed against us, but if we forgive that person, we have cancelled the debt. By releasing them, we refuse to punish them or try to get even, and we treat them as if it never happened and never hold that against them again.
5. If the thought enters our minds, as it sometimes will, we can push it out of our consciousness. The blessing of forgiveness is that we fail to seek revenge in the face of any recollection.

6. This principle also works in our forgiveness of ourselves. Many times in my ministry, I have encountered people who can't seem to forgive themselves. When we ask God for forgiveness, we must believe He has given it to us, and will no longer hold it against us.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- A. On the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (**Luke 23:34**) That prayer was answered on the Day of Pentecost when three thousand of them responded to Peter's sermon, repented and were baptized for the remission of their sins. (**Acts 2:36-41**)
- B. Are you forgiven? All sinners must do as they did to be forgiven.
- C. If we are Christians and continue to "walk in the light "of God's word and continue to confess our sins depending on Christ for our forgiveness, His blood continues to cleanse us of our sins. (**1 John 1:7-10**)