



[Matthew 18:28-35](#)

(28) "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' (29) So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' (30) And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. (31) So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. (32) Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. (33) Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' (34) And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. (35) "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

New King James Version

Is it not odd that this man could have his fellow servant thrown into prison for a relatively small debt (as little as \$20 in today's money)? We should be thankful to live in a more forgiving culture!

Today, however, there is another way that a fellow-servant can be cast into prison regardless of the laws of the culture. We can easily incarcerate someone within the confines of our own hearts and even throw away the key. It is likely that each of us has someone confined within our own heart's prison even today.

The late Lewis B. Smedes, a professor of theology at Fuller Seminary, is credited with saying: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

When we imprison someone in this manner, we subject ourselves to the burdensome duty of keeping him there. So instead of one, we now have two prisoners that keep each other imprisoned day in and day out, but only one of them has the key.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Matthew 18:28-35 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

We have the *offender* as well as the *offended*. Assuming that most people do not purposefully look to offend, particularly within the church, the offender was probably clumsy or foolishly inconsiderate in his approach to the offended. Or perhaps he possesses, or has displayed, a character flaw that the offended feels is completely unacceptable (e.g., a betrayal of some sort).

Or maybe the offender disregarded the direction given in [Galatians 6:1](#): “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a *spirit of gentleness*, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (emphasis ours).

To avoid offense, we must remember our humility and our place whenever we are inclined to point out a fault to a brother or sister. The same advice holds for the giver as well as the receiver of a rebuke. Criticism is always difficult to give without offending or to receive without taking offense. Be always mindful that our Creator received rebuke without retaliating. No one has ever been imprisoned in *His* heart!

When we do offend a brother, we are tempted to approach him and immediately ask for forgiveness because we dislike being regarded unfavorably. Remember, our godly purpose is to restore the relationship, if possible, because that is what [God](#) wants to see. If we pressure our friend into forgiveness, have we accomplished God's will? Consider well the adage: “A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

This is why God should be the very first from whom we ask forgiveness. We can ask Him to help us understand the severity of the damage we have caused and for the proper level of contrition, humility, and patience to help repair and restore the relationship. We can ask God to open the heart of our offended brother so that he willingly accept our apology and readily extend his forgiveness.

We can liken this request for the opening of our brother's heart to a request for the opening of his heart's prison doors, too easily slammed shut by an unforgiving attitude. Instead of having two (or even more) persons confined behind the doors of an intractable grudge, we experience the [joy](#) and the freedom of reconciliation. The relationship is restored, a good witness has been made, growth has occurred, and God is glorified.

On the other hand, if we have been offended, instead of giving into the temptation to strike immediately back—to seek vindication—we should also begin by going to God in prayer for humility, empathy, and mercy. We can ask God to help us understand why the unfortunate deed was done and how we can find a pathway to forgiveness. We can ask for clarity of thought, which is so often missing when anger and offense are present.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Matthew 18:28-35 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

If a rebuke was the cause of offense, we should consider Solomon's words in [Proverbs 27:5-6](#): “Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.” We should always ask God to enable us to give our offending brother the benefit of the doubt at a time when it would be easy to doubt his loyalty. Chances are, the offender feels as pained as the offended.

In these troubled and emotionally charged times, a true friend may feel a need to risk a special friendship for the good of the other. We should always be mindful that God may send us a vital message of correction or rebuke through someone other than our minister or someone we regard as having legitimate authority. We should be prepared to accept criticism, legitimate or not, from any person that God sends across our path. And perhaps, only a true friend would, could, or should point out to us a weakness or fault that no one else might even see or care about.

Whenever we are wronged, especially by a brother, we should strive to avoid becoming so inflexible that we slam shut the doors of animosity against him. The consequences of such a decision—to withhold forgiveness—particularly from a brother who sincerely asks for absolution and reconciliation, can be both devastating and eternal in scope for us. The wrong mindset can lead to a sinful attitude that is in opposition to God, keeping us locked inside a bitter prison of enmity and preventing our entrance into His Kingdom.

Therefore, regardless of whether we are the offender or the offended, let us never forget our constant need to first be forgiven and reconciled with God.

— Austin Del Castillo

To learn more, see:
[The Prisoner](#)

Related Topics:
[Acts of Forgiveness](#)
[Forgiveness](#)
[Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#)
[Reconciliation with Brother](#)

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Matthew 18:28-35 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

Commentary copyright © 1992-2018 [Church of the Great God](#)
New King James Version copyright © 1982 by [Thomas Nelson, Inc.](#)