

# Parable Of The Unforgiving Servant

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Conflict between brethren can easily turn into offense, causing the spiritual life of both parties to falter. Offenses often result when one or both individuals fail to forgive or extend mercy. Christians understand that Jesus Christ commends the forgiving attitude and condemns the unmerciful because in the gospels He is precise in explaining how we should forgive others.

In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus elucidates the principle of a person forgiving another by illustrating God's example of forgiveness toward His human creation. This principle develops as a response to Peter's question, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" This study will explain Jesus' reply, the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

1. How much responsibility do we have to forgive offenses against us? Matthew 18:21-22; Luke 17:4; Colossians 3:13; II Corinthians 2:5-11.

**Comment:** Forgiveness is a matter of mercy and conduct. The Jews taught that a man was to forgive another three times but not four. Peter more than doubles this, asking if forgiveness should be extended so far. Jesus' answer tells us we should not limit our forgiveness to any fixed number. As often as a brother injures us and asks forgiveness, we should forgive him. It is his duty to ask forgiveness. If he does this, we have a duty to declare that we forgive him and to treat him accordingly. Even if he does not ask for forgiveness, we are still not at liberty to take revenge, but we should treat him kindly and do him good. It is a Christian's duty to forgive others.

2. How much does sin put us in debt? Matthew 18:23-24; Job 22:5; Isaiah 64:6; Romans 3:23; I John 5:17.

**Comment:** "The kingdom of heaven" represents God's government, including His church, so God deals with church members as this king with his servants. The debt of the king's servant was an enormous sum. A talent was a denomination of money, or weight of silver or gold, equaling three thousand shekels. By Roman calculation, if this talent were of silver, then ten thousand talents would be equivalent to several million of today's dollars. By Jewish calculation, ten thousand talents would equal three times more, probably over ten million dollars. If this talent were of gold, ten thousand talents would amount to about fifty times more than the silver talent! Nevertheless, Jesus uses this amount to show that the debt—sin—was immense and humanly unpayable. To us, and those we touch, the impact of our sins is immeasurable, but Jesus' sacrifice is greater, covering all sins.

3. Are we called to emulate God's compassion? Matthew 18:25-27; Zechariah 7:9-10; I Peter 3:8; Ephesians 4:32.

**Comment:** The indebted servant has no assets, so his master commands all that he has to be sold, including his wife and children. By ancient custom, a creditor could sell a debtor, with his family, into servitude for a time sufficient to pay a debt. Hearing this,

the servant falls down before him in a seemingly humble and earnest manner, entreating him to have patience with him. The king sees his distressed condition and has compassion on his family, forgiving him of the whole debt. God's forgiveness of humble, repentant human beings is an act of mercy and compassion that we are to emulate. Like this servant, we owe God more than we can ever repay.

4. Does receiving forgiveness always produce good fruit in a person? Matthew 18:28-30; 6:15; Romans 1:21-22, 31-32; James 2:13.

**Comment:** The heartlessness of the forgiven man—along with his utter disregard of his obligation to emulate the gracious example of his king—is sin. Compared to our offenses against God, the offenses that our brethren commit against us are small and insignificant. Since God has forgiven us so much, we ought to forgive each other of anything, large or small. Grace bestowed puts the receiver under obligation to manifest the same grace to others. Even though a person receives forgiveness, it does not guarantee that he will be a better person, as this deceived world generally believes today (as seen in how ineffective leniency on murderers, rapists, and thieves is.)

5. Can we be forgiven if we do not forgive the offenses of others? Matthew 18:31-35; Luke 7:41-43; Matthew 5:7; 6:14-15.

**Comment:** Ultimately, receiving God's mercy and compassion is contingent upon our forgiving treatment of others. The word "torturers" or "tormentors" (KJV) probably means "keepers of the prison." Torture by various cruel and painful methods was usually inflicted on criminals, not on debtors. Jesus probably does not intend to suggest torture but only that the servant would be imprisoned until he paid his debt.

We can learn several principles from this parable:

1. Our sins are great.
2. God abundantly forgives.
3. Offenses committed against us are comparatively small.
4. We should abundantly forgive as our Master does.
5. If we do not, God will be justly angry and punish us.

We have nothing to pay toward our indebtedness. Therefore, God's forgiveness of our sins is nothing less than a gift, one that rests on the foundation of the finished work of Jesus Christ. Because Christ died to pay the penalty for sin, God can wipe clean the record of our spiritual indebtedness and establish a relationship with us.