

A CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDE OF FORGIVENESS

BIBLE TEXT : Matthew 18:21-35

LESSON 126 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32)..

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

²² Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

²³ Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

²⁴ And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

²⁵ But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

²⁶ The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

²⁷ Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

²⁹ And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

³⁰ And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should

BIBLE REFERENCES:

I Unlimited Forgiveness

1 Peter questioned Jesus regarding the number of times that he should forgive his offending brother, Matthew 18:21;

Luke 17:3-4

³ Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

⁴ And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

2 Peter's opinion was that seven times would be sufficient to forgive, but Jesus answered, "Until seventy times seven," Matthew 18:22;

Micah 7:18-19

¹⁸ Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.

¹⁹ He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

Romans 12:18-20

¹⁸ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

¹⁹ Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

²⁰ Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Ephesians 4:32

³² And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

II The King and His Indebted Servant

1 The king, reckoning with his servants, found one who owed him 10,000 talents, Matthew 18:23, 24;

Romans 14:12

¹² So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

2 Corinthians 5:10

¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in his body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad.

2 The servant had nothing with which to pay, so the king commanded him to be sold, Matthew 18:25;

2 Kings 4:1

¹ Now there cried a certain woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets unto Elisha, saying, Thy servant my husband is dead; and thou knowest that thy servant did fear the LORD: and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen.

3 The servant asked for mercy, promising to pay all the debt in due time, Matthew 18:26

4 The king had compassion on his servant and forgave the debt completely, Matthew 18:27;

pay the debt.

³¹ So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

³² Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

³³ Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

³⁴ And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

³⁵ So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Psalm 32:1-2

¹ Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit *there is* no guile.

Psalm 40:1-2

¹ I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

² He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings.

Psalm 86:5

⁵ For thou, Lord, *art* good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

III The Unmerciful Servant

1 This same man, still a servant, finding a fellow servant who owed him 100 pence, demanded immediate repayment, Matthew 18:28;

Ezekiel 45:9

⁹ Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice, take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD.

2 The fellow servant asked for the same mercy the servant had just received, but mercy was denied, Matthew 18:29, 30;

Philemon 1:18-19

¹⁸ If he hath wronged thee, or oweth *thee* ought, put that on mine account;

¹⁹ I Paul have written *it* with mine own hand, I will repay *it*: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

3 The unmerciful attitude of the forgiven servant grieved all who beheld it, Matthew 18:31;

Psalm 119:158

¹⁵⁸ I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.

Luke 19:41

⁴¹ And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,

Hebrews 13:3

³ Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; *and* them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

4 The king, hearing what had been done, called the servant to account and delivered him to the tormentors till all should be paid, Matthew 18:32-34;

Luke 19:20-24

²⁰ And another came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is* thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:

²¹ For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

²² And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, *thou* wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:

²³ Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?

²⁴ And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds.

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

⁸ In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

IV Forgiveness Enjoined

1 We must thus forgive our brother if we expect any forgiveness from our Heavenly Father, Matthew 18:35;

Matthew 6:14-15

¹⁴ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Proverbs 21:13

¹³ Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.

James 2:13

¹³ For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

NOTES:

To be forgiven is wonderful, but to have a forgiving heart is the greater grace. Consider what God has done for us. When we are permitted to enter Heaven and enjoy the manifold blessings of that Celestial City, it will be the result of God's love for our souls and His forgiveness of our sins. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1). No sin shall enter Heaven, "for sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Christian Forgiveness

When Peter came to Jesus with the question, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Peter knew it was imperative to forgive. Jesus had already instructed His disciples on this lesson and they had not quickly forgotten. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples to pray with that model, all-comprehensive prayer known the world over by Christian people. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12), is one of the principal themes of that prayer. At that time Jesus emphasized the importance of forgiveness: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14, 15).

Old and New

It was a maxim among the Jews never to forgive more than three times. As Jesus revealed how to treat an offending brother (**Matthew 18:15** ¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother), Peter realized that a law of more tender dealing was to prevail in the church than existed in the synagogue. Perhaps he felt that his compassion and charity were very great when he expressed willingness to forgive seven times.

The act of forgiving does not come easily to the average man, especially when the trespass has caused much inconvenience, a terrible injury, or great distress. To seek

forgiveness is difficult, too, for the sinful man. Even when he knows that he has done wrong, how seldom will he admit the guilt; but how quickly will he speak to defend his actions and go to any length to cover his fault! It seems that by nature man is a vindictive being. Revenge is the natural motive of a sinner, but it has no place in the heart of God's children. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Peter learned this lesson thoroughly, for he wrote in his epistle, "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (I Peter 3:9).

Another Lesson

Jesus' answer to the question was, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." The Lord gives a number so great that in all likelihood it would never be reached by one person, to show that there could be no limit to the number of times we must forgive, and that there is no limit to the extent of forgiveness we are to have in our hearts. Jesus did not intend that we should in any wise keep a record of our brother's trespasses against us, but He intimated that we should make a constant practice of forgiving injuries until it is natural and absolutely sincere. There is something of ill will in scoring up the trespasses we forgive, as if we would allow ourselves to be revenged when the measure is full. Peace is preserved, both within and without, by passing over injuries without reckoning how often, forgiving and forgetting them, as God forgives and forgets our trespasses against Him when we repent of them. God multiplies His pardons (**Psalm 78:38** ³⁸ *But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath*); and so must we, if we expect any mercy in the Judgment.

Jesus Illustrates

To illustrate further how important forgiveness is and how little men forgive, at most, in comparison with what they are forgiven, Jesus gave this parable of the unmerciful servant. It enforces the rule just laid down to Peter, and draws the contrast between God's patient forgiveness and man's unpitiful cruelty.

The king in this parable refers to none other than God, and the servants are the inhabitants of the earth. One servant who owed 10,000 talents was brought before the king. A talent of silver is valued at more than \$1,000, which would make this servant's debt at least \$10,000,000. How did he ever get into debt so far? Every sin committed is a debt to God, not like a debt to an equal but to a superior. It is like the debt of a servant to his master by withholding his service or by wasting his master's goods. All of us are debtors. The debt must be paid. We are subject to the demands of the law of God. Calvary's Ransom, the Blood of the Lamb, applied to our hearts and lives is the only thing that will balance our accounts.

An account is kept of these debts, and God reckons with us concerning them. He constantly reminds us through our conscience, to call us to account; but some men continue in their own way without heeding. Occasionally they are brought face to face with judgment while they still live; such seems to be the case of this servant. He realized his great debt, and he realized, too,

that he had nothing with which to pay.

Justice's Demands

If God should deal in strict justice, we would all be condemned as insolvent debtors. Justice demands satisfaction. The servant had contracted this debt by his willful and wasteful ways, therefore he might justly be left to suffer its consequences. "His lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made" (Matthew 18:25). That is, something toward a payment should be made, for it is impossible that the sale of one so worthless should amount to the payment of so great a debt.

All Forgiven

There is only one path of hope for the convicted sinner: that is humbling himself before God and seeking forgiveness. This way of escape was proved by this servant who besought his lord and asked his mercy. He acknowledged the debt and sought for patience and time, but it is folly to expect that these alone will save. Reprieve is not pardon. He who had nothing to pay fancied he could pay all; but his lord in wisdom and mercy, and out of pure compassion, forgave all because the servant humbled himself and sought mercy. He went out of the king's presence absolutely free! Though the debt was vastly great, the king forgave it all. Thus may our sins, though flagrant and very numerous, be pardoned on Gospel terms. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10).

Mercy Forgotten

Now the parable drives the lesson of forgiveness home to our hearts. The servant who had been so freely forgiven the \$10,000,000 debt took his fellow servant, who owed him 100 pence (about \$15), by the throat and demanded immediate repayment. The fellow servant humbled himself, fell down at the servant's feet and sought for patience and time in which to pay the debt. The cruel servant would grant none of these, but went and cast him into prison until the debt should be paid, however small and insignificant it was.

All the fellow servants, when they saw what was done, being very sorry, told their lord all that had taken place. If men's sins grieve the servants of God, how much more do they grieve the Spirit of God, for His omniscience takes note of all sin. The Christian may often find occasions for sorrow because of sinners, but these should also be occasions for prayer. The Christian's complaints of the wicked should be brought to God and left with Him, for in so doing he will find a measure of relief from those burdens.

"Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?" (Matthew 18:32, 33). He that will not forgive shall not be forgiven. The utmost that the servant could do was to cast his fellow servant into prison, but he was himself delivered by the king to the tormentors.

Our Duty

Thus can the duty of forgiving be seen, and one must forgive from the heart. No malice can be harbored there, nor ill will to any person. No projects of revenge are to be sheltered there, or desires of revenge, as there are in some who outwardly

appear peaceable and reconciled. "The LORD looketh on the heart" (I Samuel 16:7), and if any of these things are present His all-seeing eye will surely' detect it.

If one finds himself insufficient for these things, he can pray for more grace. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6). The importance of having this grace of forgiveness is readily understood when one realizes that it is necessary in order to maintain the oneness of the Gospel, the oneness of faith and purpose in the body of believers. At times things come up which would bring a cross or discord between two members of the church; and unless there is a spirit of repentance on the one hand and forgiveness on the other hand, there is no possibility of restoring unity. Unity in the body of Christ is necessary for the maintenance of the high standards of the Word of God.

The absolute need of forgiveness is revealed again when it is observed in the light of prayer. A man cannot get a prayer through to God, and an answer back from Him, unless forgiveness is exercised. "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses" (Mark 11:25, 26). Jesus reiterated this thought of essential forgiveness when He said, "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24). Gifts and prayers to God are accepted only when forgiveness is manifest in the heart and life of the man who is coming to God.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Peter felt that he should forgive his brother how often?
- 2 Had Jesus said anything to His disciples about forgiveness before this time?
- 3 How often were the Jews in the synagogue willing to forgive?
- 4 What was Jesus' answer to Peter's question? What does Jesus expect of us today in this respect?
- 5 In the parable of the two servants, how much money did the first servant owe his lord?
- 6 How much money did the fellow servant owe the servant?
- 7 What did the servant's master do for him? Why?
- 8 How did the servant treat his fellow servant?
- 9 What lesson are we to learn from this parable?