

## **The Sermon: “How many times should I forgive?”**

As we are trying to use worldly standards of a godly principle, we are losing biblical values Jesus taught His church. In our New Testament reading, Jesus reminds us of God’s standard of forgiveness and its origin in the church.

Peter asked Jesus, “How many times should I forgive my brother... 7 times.” I think Peter was so proud of the number he was willing to reach. However, in the parable of the unforgiving servant, Jesus taught Peter and disciples the meaning of forgiveness in God’s standard.

The parable begins the king’s calling for an audit. One servant was brought before him, who had run up a debt of one hundred thousand dollars. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the king released him and erased all his debt.

That’s an image of God’s forgiveness. It is complete. Undeserved. It looks nothing like the kind of forgiveness of the world. To the world, it is incomprehensible that God can forgive freely. The servant asked for forbearance and volunteered to repay the debt, but the king ignored all of this and freely forgave.

The apostle Paul says in Romans 3:23-25 “since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith.”

This part of the parable is where most people come to church. They see the forgiveness of God and rejoice. But in doing so, we only receive half the lesson Jesus is teaching us because the other half has to do with our response to God’s forgiveness in our relationships. Look at what happens next: “But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him one thousand dollars and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.”

Jesus is comparing our unforgiveness with each other to the man choking the servant. I think many Christians say that they are forgiven, but they continue to harbor bitterness in their hearts.

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Jesus is comparing our unforgiveness with each other to the man choking the servant. I think many Christians say that they are forgiven, but they continue to harbor bitterness in their hearts.

When the king hears of this, he is indignant, and Jesus says he throws the first servant into prison until he can pay back the original debt in full. The point is painfully clear. Many Christians are living in prisons of their own making. Unforgiveness.

Jesus is so strong here. Unless you forgive others in the same way and with the same mercy that God forgave you, then you are not a part of the kingdom of heaven. The true Christian is not just forgiven and enjoying God's forgiveness. The true Christian doesn't forgive by the world's standards. The true Christian freely displays and gives genuine forgiveness from their heart.

I'm not saying the hurt isn't real. I'm not saying that sin against you isn't wrong. I'm not saying we excuse sinful behavior. But a willful, hardened, unforgiving heart may indicate the absence of the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness cannot be done in our own strength and power! We need the Holy Spirit to help us forgive those who hurt us!

Susan Maycinik, in *Discipleship Journal, Plodding Towards Forgiveness*, gives us this advice on learning how to forgive: 1) Resolve not to let the offense cause you to sin. 2) Don't harden your heart against the offender. 3) Remember that God would forgive your offender. 4) Resolve to forgive every day. 5) Seek help from mature believers.

True forgiveness is only possible because of the Cross. Spurgeon said, "Let us go to Calvary to learn how we may be forgiven... and let us linger there to learn how to forgive." We have to remember that Jesus forgave us the greatest debt anyone could ever owe!

We have come through the very challenging times in our history, and there have emerged some deep wounds as a result of what happened in the past and the pain in transformation.

If you are here this morning and have someone in your life that you need to offer forgiveness, I hope you hear what God has been talking to you through this message. What God is burdening you with is something that cannot be ignored. Are we walking in the full understanding of grace? Can't we learn to forgive one another?

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