

How Much Must I Forgive
Matthew 18:21-35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Can you hear the conversation on the playground as the teacher stands between two boys. “Now you two forgive one another and shake hands.” “Seriously Mrs. Schmedlap, do I have to? He does this every day! Do I have to forgive him?”

But let us be honest here, this isn’t just a playground thing, is it? How many times have you said something similar. Or maybe like Peter, you want to know just exactly how many times you need to forgive someone, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”

We have our reasons for not wanting to forgive. Sometimes we have our omniscient moments, we are like God, “I will forgive them when I know they are sincere and are truly repentant, until then, no way.”

And of course, you have a good reason, “If you only knew what they did to me, then you would understand, I just cannot forgive that.”

Or maybe we want our ounce of blood, “When they’ve suffered like I have, then I’ll forgive.”

Or we’ll place conditions on our forgiveness, “I will forgive as long as they do not let it happen again.”

Or maybe we will forgive as long as we have some obligation of a debt to them. Maybe we have done something to them needing their forgiveness, so we are willing to forgive them in the hopes that they also will forgive us.

So, how much must I forgive? Seven times? Jesus replies, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” And then He proceeds to tell the parable of out text.

There are two ways we could look at this parable. First, we could look at it according to the Law and our works righteousness. In that manner, Jesus concludes the sermon by declaring the severity of God’s Law. “And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

This is nothing more than saying what Jesus said when He taught them the Lord’s Prayer, “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Mt. 6:14-15)

Simply put dear friends, if you cannot forgive, then you will not be forgiven. That is the Law! It is not suggestion! It is not a request! If you cannot forgive other their trespasses, neither with your heavenly Father forgive yours.

Repent! Repent of your sinful unwillingness to forgive.

Now look at this parable again. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants, one was brought who owed him ten thousand talents. Let me put that in perspective for you – in today's currency, that is 12.5 trillion dollars. Yes, you heard me correctly, 12.5 trillion dollars.

You are probably thinking, who could amass such a huge debt? Exactly the point! Jesus' audience understood the point that this debt the servant had accumulated was so far beyond his ability to pay that it was ludicrous to even beg for mercy. Furthermore, what king could afford to lose such an enormous amount. This is a wealthy nation's debt, and it would terrify a country as to how they could ever afford to pay it – what king could ever lose out on collecting that debt?

Out of pity for him... Out of the sheer mercy and grace of his heart, the king forgave the debt! He forgave the debt! Did you hear what I said, ***He forgave the debt!*** He did not say, "Pay it as you are able," or "pay it when you are able." He released him and forgave the debt. There is no bartering, only forgiveness.

Dear friends, that is our plight before God! We owe a debt for sin that we could never pay, it is so overwhelming, it is beyond us!

Pity, flowing from the heart of the King, moves Him to forgive. It is out of the mercy of God that we are forgiven. It is the king who pays the debt we owe for sin Himself.

It is out of the heart of God, out of the tender mercy of our God, that our King gave His only begotten Son to pay the debt we owe for sin. It is out of this mercy from God that we are forgiven, and the source for our own forgiveness.

God forgives by grace, and it is that forgiveness which empowers the forgiven sinner to forgive as he or she has been forgiven.

Even Jesus warning at the end of the parable points to the source of our forgiving, the heart. But it is not from our heart that we forgive, but from God's heart – from the mercy of God. God's heart is given to us, changing our hearts, so that we have the heart of God.

We stand in the grace of God each, and every day, for we stand in Christ Jesus. We stand in the very forgiveness that comes from God's grace in the cross of Jesus Christ. And it is the cross of Christ that points to the power for our forgiving hearts, the grace of God in which we stand.

This forgiveness we possess by God's grace is as vast as our sinfulness. It is the only resource by which we are forgiving to others.

Today we have been given something incredibly practical, something to practice every single day of our lives. As we live in the grace of God's forgiveness, we forgive. This blessed power to forgive is the only thing that can dispel the bitterness that often clings to us, and restores our joy.

This power is not our, but it is given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord by whose sacrifice God richly and daily forgives all our sins. Let us therefore forgive, just as God, in Christ Jesus, forgives us.
Amen.