

Title: How Oft Should I Forgive?

Text: Matthew 18: 21-35

Date: July 25, 2019

Place: SGBC, NJ

I awoke one day this week with the subject of forgiveness on my mind—it remained on my mind all day. That evening I received an email from Pastor Joe Terrel—he too had been thinking on the same subject all day. He drafted an essay on forgiveness which he sent out in that email. I was blessed by it and told him that if the Lord enabled me I planned to preach on the subject soon.

**So tonight our subject is:** How Often Should I Forgive my Brother?

**Matthew 18:21: Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?**

Offenses will come: from the world, from our brethren and from us. We will cause offenses because we are sinners and we dwell in a world of sinners.

This is one of those all-wise reasons it pleased God to save by the foolishness of preaching. He cements us together as his church so that we experience being offended and we also offend. We experience God's grace which causes us to repent and ask forgiveness when we offend. Also, his grace causes us to show mercy and forgive when we are offended. By this we learn that the word of God truly does live and abide forever in our hearts and in the hearts of our brethren. We learn God's grace is truly sufficient. We learn that Christ truly is in our midst.

Now, we are talking about a brother, a sister, sinning against me personally, offending me personally—"How oft shall I forgive him?" Be sure to hear this as what "I" should do to my brother—not what my brother should do to me—"how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?"

The scribes and Pharisee's misinterpreted Amos 1:3 and Amos 2: 1, "*Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.*" So they taught men to forgive their brethren three times, but no more. So Peter probably thought he was being nearer the spirit of Christ when he said, "*Seven times.*" But Christ's answer shows that he was very far off.

**Matthew 18: 22: Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.**

This is not a specific number; it means forgive without limit. I should put no limit on how many times I forgive a brother who has sinned against me; I should forgive as many times as I have occasion to forgive. The apostle Paul had the spirit of our Master when he wrote, "*Forgiving one another, even as God...for Christ's sake...hath forgiven you*" (Eph\_4:32). "*Even as God*"—How has God forgiven us? How often? How much? I cannot put a limit on how often or how much God has forgiven me! So I am to forgive my brethren as often as God hath forgiven me! "*For Christ's sake*"—What did it take for God to forgive us justly? It took the precious blood of his dear Son. The blood of our dear Substitute is our chief motive to forgive our brethren. Then our Lord gave a parable—an earthly story to illustrate heavenly truth.

**Matthew 18: 23: Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.**

Christ is King of his kingdom; his people his servants. God's salvation begins with God calling us and making us give account to our Lord. He reveals to us how much we owe.

**Matthew 18: 24: And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.**

This is a sum that could never be paid; millions or trillions; it represents every sinners sin-debt to God.

**Matthew 18: 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.**

We have nothing with which to pay God. We owe eternal death and perfect obedience. We cannot pay.

**Matthew 18: 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.**

God, for Christ's sake—by the blood of Christ—has compassion on every sinner who falls down at Christ's feet begging for mercy; God sets us free from the bondage of the law; by forgiving us our sin-debt because Christ made his elect the righteousness of God in him.

**Matthew 18: 28: But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him a hundred pence:**

This was a very small debt; 1 to 1 million in comparison to the debt his lord forgave him. No matter what our fellow believer does to us it is nothing in comparison to what we have done to God and to the great forgiveness God has shown us.

**Matthew 18: 28...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 pay the debt.**

This fellowservant said to him almost the same words he said to the lord of the kingdom. His lord had just shown him forgiveness of a far greater debt. Yet, he would not forgive his fellowservant of a debt so small that it was nothing in comparison. This is the hard, unmerciful, unregenerate heart we reveal within us if put a limit on forgiveness of our brethren.

**Matthew 18: 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?**

Paul said, *“forgive one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.”*

**Matthew 18: 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.**

**Subject:** How Oft Should I Forgive my Brother?

**Proposition:** The true child of God has been forgiven so great a debt by God for Christ’s sake, that we should *from our hearts forgive every one his brother their trespasses without limit.*

**Divine:** I want to show you three motives for forgiveness from this parable: 1) The greatness of God’s mercy 2) The smallness of my brother’s sins 3) The consequences of an unforgiving spirit

## THE GREATNESS OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS

Those born again of God are motivated to forgive by the greatness of God’s forgiveness of our sins. The servant owed his lord v24: *“ten thousand talents.”* It was a great sum. The servant could never pay what he owed. We owed God a debt which cannot be calculated. We have personally not given God the glory due his holy name; we personally owe God perfect, righteous obedience from a holy heart. Instead, we have personally sinned against holy God himself—all sinners have personally *“sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom\_3:22-23). We personally owe God perfect, righteous obedience from a holy heart, and due to our sins, we personally owe God the eternal second death which the reprobate suffers in hell.

So we are like the servant—we cannot pay—v25: *“He had not to pay.”* We were conceived in sin so we came forth with an unholy heart with no ability to pay God the righteous obedience we owe. And we cannot pay God eternal death and yet live.

But God quickened us and brought us to Christ to beg for mercy and God did us like he did this servant v27: *“God was moved with compassion and loosed us and forgave us all our debt.”* How was God just to forgive us all our sins? How is God just to forgive us? On behalf of his people, Christ paid our debt in full; our Substitute gave God and his law perfect *obedience even unto the death of the cross*—perfect life and perfect death—holiness and righteousness!

Therefore, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 Jn 1: 9). This is so, not just one time, but every hour of our life.

Not only that—consider this—when a brother offends us and they have asked forgiveness and we have forgiven them then we usually expect them to show us love in order to restore our relationship since they are the one who did the offending. But Christ not only redeemed us by laying down his life and God our Father not only forgives us for Christ’s sake, also, though God is the one we offended, the Holy Spirit came and comforted us—the one offended came to the offender and loved us into being reconciled to him.

Not only that—God not only forgives, God forgets our sins against him.

Hebrews 8:12: For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Isaiah 43:25: I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

So our motive to forgive is the greatness of God’s forgiveness of our sins. Therefore, it is not a matter of calculation or limiting forgiveness to a certain number in the new heart God creates. Suppose I asked, “How often must I *admire* God’s beautiful creation? how often must I *love* my wife and children? How often must I *sympathize* with the poor who are treated unjustly?” You would have to say, *“Until seventy times seven.”* Numbers have nothing to do with it, it is natural to do. Well, in the new heart God gives in which is no guile, love and forgiveness are the fruit of the Spirit so that love and forgiveness

are natural to the new nature. Our new man only needs to be moved for forgiveness to come forth. As the lord was “*moved with compassion*” by the servant begging mercy so those who are partakers of the divine nature are moved to compassion by the Holy Spirit reminding us of the greatness of God’s forgiveness toward us and by the great need of our brethren beseeching us for forgiveness. Numbers have nothing to do with forgiveness because we cannot calculate the greatness of God’s forgiveness toward us! How oft has God forgiven you your sins against him? How many sins has God forgiven you? If God commands us to forgive without limit, it is because there is an infinite ocean of forgiveness in his own heart toward us! How can we behold the great forgiveness we have received from God yet be unforgiving to our brethren?

### THE SMALLNESS OF MY BROTHER’S SIN

True believers are motivated to forgive by the smallness of my brother’s sin against me. The servant’s fellowservant only owed him v28 “*a hundred pence.*” Someone said ten thousand talents was like 20 trillion dollars and a hundred pence like 20 dollars. Whatever my brother does to me, in comparison to my sin against God, it is 20 dollars compared to 20 trillion.

Also, my brother offended me in one thing. But my offenses to God is a continued flow of acts coming from my sin-nature; every hour God is forgiving me.

If all you owned was a few acres of land and a neighbor’s fence crossed onto your property line for a few feet then you would likely show him the property line. But if you owned 3,000 acres, you would not care. If a sinner’s only portion is in this world, he is ready to fight if he is offended. But when he becomes heir of an incorruptible inheritance—when he beholds all his sins past, present and future are forgiven by God—he is ready to forgive and forget his brothers’ offenses which are small and insignificant in comparison to God’s great forgiveness. The more we see the greatness of God’s forgiveness toward us, the smaller our brother’s offenses will become.

So I am moved to forgiveness when the Holy Spirit makes me consider the smallness of my brother’s offense which is nothing compared to the great debt God has forgiven me. Do I need God to daily forgive me of my great offenses? And will I not forgive my brother whose offense is nothing? How oft should I forgive my brother’s small offense against me? As often as God forgives me!

### REVERENCE FOR GOD

The child of God is motivated to forgive because we reverence God who says we should forgive as God has forgiven us.

**Matthew 18: 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.**

A parable and a picture or type never stands on four legs. We know that no sinner forgiven by God will be cast out into hell. The end of the unmerciful servant declares mercy uncommunicated to others is mercy that has not truly been given from God in the first place.

*"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."* But absence of love proves a man to have never been the object of God’s mercy in the first place. If the servant had been created anew within in regeneration he would have had the Spirit of Christ within him which is merciful and forgiving. God’s mercy makes sinners merciful.

Knowing that God the Father never casts into hell one for whom Christ died, we conclude that those who refuse to forgive from the heart have made a false profession of Christ and have not been given a new heart by God and have not been forgiven by God. A man proves himself to still possess only a hard, unregenerate heart. So Christ says,

Mark 11:26: But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

God’s children are made willing by Christ’s power, by God’s all-sufficient grace to forgive our brethren because *we reverence God*. God’s forgiveness makes us reverence God.

Psalms 130:4: But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Reverencing God, we want to obey God—v33: *Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?* I do not want to dishonor God by not forgiving my brethren when they sin against me—because I have been forgiven and I fear God! My motive to forgive is the respect and reverence for God who has forgiven me justly for Christ’s sake. He commands me to forgive as he has forgiven me and I want to!

God graciously makes his children receivers that we may be givers—v35” *that ye from your hearts forgive every one his brother their trespasses*. Christ does not set my hand free that I might take my brother “*by the throat?*” And Christ does not command us to make bricks without straw—what he commands he gives strength to perform. Everything that we need to forgive our brethren, Christ provides. He creates in us a new, forgiving heart so that we forgive from the heart. The Holy Spirit makes us merciful like our Master. We are still sinners and sometimes have great difficulty forgiving our brethren. But when God would have us forgive, he gives more grace to make us forgive.

Notice v31 the other “*fellow servants saw and were very sorry and came and told their lord.*” Those in whom Christ dwells are sorry when they see oppression and wrong. It is because we know that the same sin-nature is in us. Apart from God’s grace, we will not forgive as we ought but will be unmerciful. It is the only thing our sin-nature is. And we see what believers do when we behold oppression. We flee to the Judge of the whole earth and trust Christ our King to take care of oppression and wrongs like these fellowservants went to their lord.

Now, finally, who gets the glory for making us forgive our brethren? God gets all the glory when we forgive our brethren the same as he does for all other fruit produced in us.

James 3: 17: But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. 18: And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Philippians 1:11: Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

**Amen!**