



SUNDAY CLASS

7/05/09

Matthew 18:21-35 (New International Version)

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

²²Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."²³"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.²⁴As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.²⁵Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.²⁶"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'²⁷The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.²⁸"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.²⁹"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'³⁰"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.³¹When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.³²"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'³⁴In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

"This part of the discourse concerning offences is certainly to be understood of personal wrongs, **which is in our power to forgive.**"

Now observe, I. Peter's question concerning this matter (v. 21); Lord, how oft shall my brother trespass against me, and I forgive him? Will it suffice to do it seven times?

1. He takes it for granted that he must forgive; Christ had before taught his disciples this lesson (Matthew 6:14), and Peter has not forgotten it. He knows that he must not only not bear a grudge against his brother, or meditate revenge, but be as good a friend as ever, and forget the injury. "

***MATTHEW HENRY COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE



[The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant](#)
[Matthew 6:14 \(New International Version\)](#)

¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

"2. He thinks it is a great matter to forgive till seven times; he means not seven times a day, as Christ said (Luke 17:4), but seven times in his life; supposing that if a man had any way abused him seven times, though he were ever so desirous to be reconciled, he might then abandon his society, and have no more to do with him.

[Luke 17:4 \(New International Version\)](#)

⁴If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

Perhaps Peter had an eye to Proverbs 24:16. A just man falleth seven times; or to the mention of three transgressions, and four, which God would no more pass by, Amos 2:1.

Proverbs 24:16 (New International Version)

¹⁶ for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.

Amos 2:1 (New International Version)

¹ This is what the LORD says: "For three sins of Moab, even for four, I will not turn back {my wrath}. Because he burned, as if to lime, the bones of Edom's king,

*****Note, There is a proneness in our corrupt nature to stint ourselves in that which is good, and to be afraid of doing too much in religion, particularly of forgiving too much, though we have so much forgiven us.**

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"II. Christ's direct answer to Peter's question; I say not unto thee, Until seven times (he never intended to set up any such bounds), but, Until seventy times seven; a certain number for an indefinite one, but a great one.

Matthew 18:22 (New International Version)

²²Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Matthew 18:22 (King James Version)

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

*****Note, It does not look well for us to keep count of the offences done against us by our brethren.**

There is something of ill-nature in scoring up the injuries we forgive, as if we would allow ourselves to be revenged when the measure is full. God keeps an account (Deuteronomy 32:34), because he is the Judge, and vengeance is his; but we must not, lest we be found stepping into his throne.

Deuteronomy 32:34 (New International Version)

³⁴ "Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults?"

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"It is necessary to the preservation of peace, both within and without, to pass by injuries, without reckoning how often; to forgive, and forget. God multiplies his pardons, and so should we. It intimates that we should make it our constant practice to forgive offences and should accustom ourselves to it till it becomes habitual.

III. A further discourse of our Savior's, by way of parable, to show the necessity of forgiving the injuries that are done to us.

Parables are of use, not only for the pressing of Christian duties; for they make and leave an impression. The parable is a comment upon the fifth petition of the Lord's prayer, Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. Those, and those only, may expect to be forgiven of God, who forgive their brethren.

The parable represents the kingdom of heaven, that is, the church, and the administration of the gospel dispensation in it. **The church is God's family, it is his court; there he dwells, there he rules. God is our master; his servants we are, at least in profession and obligation.** In general, the parable intimates how much provocation God has from his family on earth, and how untoward his servants are."

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"There are three things in the parable.

1. The master's wonderful clemency to his servant who was indebted to him; he forgave him ten thousand talents, out of pure compassion to him, v. 23-27.

(1.) Every sin we commit is a debt to God; not like a debt to an equal, contracted by buying or borrowing, **but to a superior;** like a debt to a prince when a recognizance is forfeited, or a penalty incurred by a breach of the law or a breach of the peace; like the debt of a servant to his master, **by withholding his service, wasting his lord's goods, breaking his indentures, and incurring the penalty.** We are all debtors; **we owe satisfaction, and are liable to the process of the law.**

(2.) There is an account kept of these debts, and we must shortly be reckoned with for them. **This king would take account of his servants.** God now reckons with us by our own consciences; **conscience is an auditor for God in the soul, to call us to account, and to account with us.**

One of the first questions that an awakened Christian asks, is, How much owest thou unto my Lord? And unless it be bribed, it will tell the truth, and not write fifty for a hundred. There is another day of reckoning coming, **when these accounts will be called over,** and either passed or disallowed, and nothing but the blood of Christ will balance the account.

(3.) *The debt of sin is a very great debt; and some are more in debt, by reason of sin, than others. When he began to reckon, one of the first defaulters appeared to owe ten thousand talents. There is no evading the enquiries of divine justice; **your sin will be sure to find you out. The debt was ten thousand talents, a vast sum, amounting by computation to one million eight hundred and seventy-five thousand pounds sterling; a king's ransom or a kingdom's subsidy, more likely than a servant's debt; see what our sins are, "***

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"[1.] *For the heinousness of their nature; they are talents, the greatest denomination that ever was used in the account of money or weight. Every sin is the load of a talent, a talent of lead, this is wickedness, Zechariah 5:7-8.*

Zechariah 5:7-8 (New International Version)

⁷ Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! ⁸ He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth.

The trusts committed to us, as stewards of the grace of God, are each of them a talent (Matthew 25:15), a talent of gold, and for every one of them buried, much more for every one of them wasted, we are a talent in debt, and this raises the account.

Matthew 25:15 (New International Version)

¹⁵To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey.

[2.] For the vastness of their number; they are ten thousand, a myriad, more than the hairs on our head, Psalms 40:12.

Psalms 40:12 (New International Version)

¹² For troubles without number surround me; my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see. They are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart fails within me.

Who can understand the number of his errors, or tell how oft he offends? Psalms 19:12.

Psalms 19:12 (New International Version)

¹² Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

(4.) *The debt of sin is so great, that we are not able to pay it; He had not to pay. **Sinners are insolvent debtors; the scripture, which concludes all under sin, is a statute of bankruptcy against us all.** Silver and gold would not pay our debt, Psalms 49:6-7.*

Psalm 49:6-7 (New International Version)

⁶ those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? ⁷ No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him-

Sacrifice and offering would not do it; our good works are but God's work in us, and cannot make satisfaction; we are without strength, and cannot help ourselves.

(5.) *If God should deal with us in strict justice; we should be condemned as insolvent debtors, and God might exact the debt by glorifying himself in our utter ruin. **Justice demands satisfaction, Let the sentence of the law be executed.** The servant had contracted this debt by his wastefulness and willfulness, and therefore might justly be left to lie by it. His lord commanded him to be sold, as a bond-slave into the galleys, sold to grind in the prison-house; his wife and children to be sold, and all that he had, and payment to be made. **See here what every sin deserves; this is the wages of sin.** "*

Romans 6:23 (New International Version)

²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in^[a] Christ Jesus our Lord.

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******Note, By the damnation of sinners divine justice will be to eternity in the satisfying, but never satisfied.***

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*"(6.) Convinced sinners cannot but humble themselves before God, **and pray for mercy.** The servant, under this charge, and this doom, fell down at the feet of his royal master, and worshipped him; his address was very submissive; Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all, v. 26. **The servant knew before that he was so much in debt, and yet was under no concern about it, till he was called to an account.** Sinners are commonly careless about the pardon of their sins, till they come under the arrests of some awakening word, some startling providence, or approaching death, and then, Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? Micah 6:6.*

Micah 6:6 (New International Version)

⁶ With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?

How easily, how quickly, can God bring the proudest sinner to his feet; Ahab to his sackcloth, Manasseh to his prayers, Pharaoh to his confessions, Judas to his restitution, Simon Magus to his supplication, Belshazzar and Felix to their tremblings.

The stoutest heart will fail, when God sets the sins in order before it. This servant doth not deny the debt, nor seek evasions, nor go about to abscond.

But, [1.] He begs time; Have patience with me. Patience and forbearance are a great favor, but it is folly to think that these alone will save us; **reprieves are not pardons.** Many are borne with, who are not thereby brought to repentance (Romans 2:4), and then their being borne with does them no kindness.

Romans 2:4 (New International Version)

⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

[2.] **He promises payment;** Have patience awhile, and I will pay thee all.

*****Note, It is the folly of many who are under convictions of sin, to imagine that they can make God satisfaction for the wrong they have done him; as those who, like a compounding bankrupt, would discharge the debt, by giving their first-born for their transgressions Micah 6:7, who go about to establish their own righteousness, Romans 10:3.**

Micah 6:7 (New International Version)

⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

Romans 10:3 (New International Version)

³Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

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"He that had nothing to pay with (v. 25) fancied he could pay all. **See how close pride sticks, even to awakened sinners; they are convinced, but not humbled.**

(7.) The God of infinite mercy is very ready, out of pure compassion, **to forgive the sins of those that humble themselves before him** (v. 27); The lord of that servant, when he might justly have ruined him, mercifully released him; and, since he could not be satisfied by the payment of the debt, **he would be glorified by the pardon of it.** The servant's prayer was, Have patience with me; the master's grant is a discharge in full.

*****Note, [1.] The pardon of sin is owing to the mercy of God, to his tender mercy (Luke 1:77-78); He was moved with compassion.**

Luke 1:77-78 (New International Version)

⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

God's reasons of mercy are fetched from within himself; he has mercy because he will have mercy. God looked with pity on mankind in general, because mankind is miserable, and sent his Son to be a Surety for them; he looks with pity on particular penitents, because sensible of their misery (their hearts broken and contrite), and accepts them in the Beloved.

[2.] There is forgiveness with God for the greatest sins, if they be repented of. Though the debt was vastly great, he forgave it all, v. 32. Though our sins be very numerous and very heinous, yet, upon gospel terms, they may be pardoned.

[3.] The forgiving of the debt is the loosing of the debtor; He loosed him. The obligation is cancelled, the judgment vacated; we never walk at liberty till our sins are forgiven.

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"2. The servant's unreasonable severity toward his fellow-servant, notwithstanding his lord's clemency toward him, v. 28-30. **This represents the sin of those who, though they are not unjust in demanding that which is not their own, yet are rigorous and unmerciful in demanding that which is their own, to the utmost of right, which sometimes proves a real wrong.** Push a claim to an extremity, and it becomes a wrong.

To exact satisfaction for debts of offences, which tends neither to reparation nor to the public good, but purely for revenge, though the law may allow it, in order to strike terror, and for the hardness of men's hearts, yet savors not of a Christian spirit. To sue for money-debts, when the debtor cannot possibly pay them, and so let him perish in prison, argues a greater love of money, and a less love of our neighbor, than we ought to have, Nehemiah 5:7.

Nehemiah 5:7 (New International Version)

⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them

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"See here, (1.) How small the debt was, how very small, compared with the ten thousand talents which his lord forgave him; He owed him a hundred pence, about three pounds and half a crown of our money.

Dishonors done to a man like ourselves are but as pease, motes, gnats; but dishonors done to God are as talents, beams, camels. Not that therefore we may make light of wronging our neighbor, for that is also a sin against God; but therefore we should make light of our neighbor's wronging us, and not aggravate it, or study revenge.

(2.) How severe the demand was; He laid hands on him, and took him by the throat. Proud and angry men think, if the matter of their demand be just, that will bear them out, though the manner of it be ever so cruel and unmerciful; but it will not hold. What needed all this violence? The debt might have been demanded without taking the debtor by the throat; without sending for a writ, or setting the bailiff upon him. How lordly is this man's carriage, and yet how base and servile is his spirit! If he had been himself going to prison for his debt to his lord, his occasions would have been so pressing, that he might have had some pretence for going to this extremity in requiring his own; but frequently pride and malice prevail more to make men severe than the most urgent necessity would do.

(3.) How submissive the debtor was; His fellow servant, though his equal, yet knowing how much he lay at his mercy, fell down at his feet, and humbled himself to him for this trifling debt, as much as he did to his lord for that great debt; for the borrower is servant to the lender, Proverbs 22:7.

Proverbs 22:7 (New International Version)

⁷ The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.

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"The poor man's request is, Have patience with me; he honestly confesses the debt, and puts not his creditor to the charge of proving it, only begs time.

As we must not be hard, so we must not be hasty, in our demands, but think how long God bears with us.

(4.) *How implacable and furious the creditor was (v. 30); He would not have patience with him, would not hearken to his fair promise, but without mercy cast him into prison. How insolently did he trample upon one as good as himself, that submitted to him! How cruelly did he use one that had done him no harm, and though it would be no advantage to himself! In this, as in a glass, unmerciful creditors may see their own faces, who take pleasure in nothing more than to swallow up and destroy 2 Samuel 20:19, and glory in having their poor debtors' bones.*

2 Samuel 20:19 (New International Version)

19 We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the LORD's inheritance?"

(5.) *How much concerned the rest of the servants were; They were very sorry (v. 31), sorry for the creditor's cruelty, and for the debtor's calamity.*

******Note, The sins and sufferings of our fellow-servants should be a matter of grief and trouble to us.***

*It is sad that any of our brethren should either make themselves beast of prey, by cruelty and barbarity; or be made beasts of slavery, by the inhuman usage of those who have power over them. **To see a fellow-servant, either raging like a bear or trampled on like a worm, cannot but occasion great regret to all that have any jealousy for the honor either of their nature or their religion.***

See with what eye Solomon looked both upon the tears of the oppressed, and the power of the oppressors, Ecclesiastes 4:1.

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (New International Version)

Oppression, Toil, Friendlessness

1 Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed—and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors—and they have no comforter.

(6.) *How notice of it was brought to the master; They came, and told their lord. They durst not reprove their fellow-servant for it, he was so unreasonable and outrageous (let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than such a fool in his folly); but they went to their lord, and besought him to appear for the oppressed against the oppressor.*

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*****Note, That which gives us occasion for sorrow, should give us occasion for prayer.**

*****Note, Let our complaints both of the wickedness of the wicked and of the afflictions of the afflicted, be brought to God, and left with him."**

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"3. The master's just resentment of the cruelty his servant was guilty of. If the servants took it so ill, much more would the master, whose compassions are infinitely above ours.

Now observe here, (1.) How he reprov'd his servant's cruelty (v. 32, 33); O thou wicked servant.

[1.] He upbraids him with the mercy he had found with his master; I forgive thee all that debt. Those that will use God's favors, shall never be upbraided with them, but those that abuse them, may expect it, Matthew 11:20. Consider, It was all that debt, that great debt.

Matthew 11:20 (New International Version)

Woe on Unrepentant Cities

²⁰Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.

*****Note, The greatness of sin magnifies the riches of pardoning mercy: we should think how much has been forgiven us, Luke 7:47.**

Luke 7:47 (New International Version)

⁴⁷Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

[2.] **He thence shows him the obligation he was under to be merciful to his fellow-servant;** Should not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? "

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"He shows him, **First**, That he should have been more compassionate to the distress of his fellow servant, because he had himself experienced the same distress. **What we have had**

the feeling of ourselves, we can the better have the fellow feeling of with our brethren.

The Israelites knew the heart of a stranger, for they were strangers; *and this servant should have better known the heart of an arrested debtor, than to have been thus hard upon such a one.*

Secondly, *That he should have been more conformable to the example of his master's tenderness, having himself experienced it, so much to his advantage.*

It was at the close of the day of atonement *that the jubilee trumpet sounded a release of debts Leviticus 25:9; for we must have compassion on our brethren, as God has on us.*

Leviticus 25:9 (New International Version)

⁹ Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.

*(2.) How he revoked his pardon and cancelled the acquaintance, so that the judgment against him revived (v. 34); **He delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.** Though the wickedness was very great, his lord laid upon him no other punishment than the payment of his own debt.*

*****Note, Those that will not come up to the terms of the gospel need be no more miserable than to be left open to the law, and to let that have its course against them.**

See how the punishment answers the sin; he that would not forgive shall not be forgiven; He delivered him to the tormentors; the utmost he could do to his fellow servant was but to cast him into prison, but he was himself delivered to the tormentors.

*****Note, The power of God's wrath to ruin us, goes far beyond the utmost extent of any creature's strength and wrath.**

The reproaches and terrors of his own conscience would be his tormentors, for that is a worm that dies not; devils, the executioners of God's wrath, that are sinners' tempters now, will be their tormentors for ever. He was sent to prison till he should pay all.

*The offence done to God by sin is in point of honor, which cannot be compounded for without such a diminution as the case will by no means admit, and therefore, some way or other, by the sinner or by his surety, **it must be satisfied.***



"Our debts to God are never compounded; either all is forgiven or all is exacted; glorified saints in heaven are pardoned all, through Christ's complete satisfaction; damned sinners in hell are paying all, that is, are punished for all."

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"Lastly, Here is the application of the whole parable, (v. 35); So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you.

The title Christ here gives to God was made use of, v. 19, in a comfortable promise; It shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; *here it is made use of in a terrible threatening.* If God's governing be fatherly, it follows thence, that it is righteous, but it does not therefore follow that it is not rigorous, *or that under his government we must not be kept in awe by the fear of the divine wrath.* When we pray to God as our Father in heaven, we are taught to ask for the forgiveness of sins, as we forgive our debtors.

1. The duty of forgiving; we must from our hearts forgive.

No malice must be harbored there, nor ill will to any person, one or another; no projects of revenge must be hatched there, nor desires of it, as there are in many who outwardly appear peaceable and reconciled. Yet this is not enough; we must from the heart desire and seek the welfare even of those that have offended us.

2. The danger of not forgiving.

(1.) **This is not intended to teach us that God reverses his pardons to any, but that he denies them to those that are unqualified for them, according to the tenor of the gospel**; though having seemed to be humbled, like Ahab, they thought themselves, and others thought them, in a pardoned state, and they made bold with the comfort of it.

Intimations enough we have in scripture of the forfeiture of pardons, for caution to the presumptuous; and yet we have security enough of the continuance of them, for comfort to those that are sincere, but timorous; that the one may fear, and the other may hope. **Those that do not forgive their brother's trespasses, did never truly repent of their own, nor ever truly believe the gospel; and therefore that which is taken away is only what they seemed to have,** Luke 8:18.

Luke 8:18 (New International Version)

¹⁸Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."

(2.) This is intended to teach us, that they shall have judgment without mercy, that have showed no mercy, James 2:13.

James 2:13 (New International Version)

¹³because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

It is indispensably necessary to pardon, that we not only do justly, but love mercy. It is an essential part of that religion which is pure and undefiled before God and the Father, of that wisdom from above, which is gentle, and easy to be entreated.

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"Look how they will answer it another day, who, though they bear the Christian name, persist in the most rigorous and unmerciful treatment of their brethren, as if the strictest laws of Christ might be dispensed with for the gratifying of their unbridled passions; and so they curse themselves every time they say the Lord's prayer."

Matthew 6:9-15 (New International Version)

⁹"This, then, is how you should pray:

" 'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰your kingdom come,
your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us today our daily bread.

**¹²Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

**¹⁴For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your
heavenly Father will also forgive you.**

**¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will
not forgive your sins.**