

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-31 Jesus and Unforgiveness

When a believer sins, it is important they see their sin and confess it. God is concerned that we live a holy life. This however, is not God's only concern. God desires we see him as our loving Father. He repeatedly reminds us of his desire for a relationship with us. In the same way, members of the church body who sin need to be brought back. God is always seeking restoration of relationships. Reconciliation happens between people when they treat each other not with condemnation, but with love and forgiveness. We all need a strong relationship with God and with our earthly family, the body of Christ.

Jesus said to the disciples, "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over." Jesus explained further how we should give such a person two more chances to change their actions. The purpose of discipline is to restore people to fellowship with God and others. They need to repent and thus be reclaimed for God's purposes. Jesus' teaching about church discipline will be covered in another course. But as a result of Peter hearing his teaching on this subject, he asked a question, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Should I forgive as many as seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times." Some translations say "seventy times seven." We need to forgive like God forgives—times without number!

Apparently Peter suggested that he forgive someone seven times because he thought that was being very generous. Jesus, however, was making the point that the number of times one forgives is unimportant, because God's forgiveness has no limits. What is important, is that we forgive completely, from our hearts. That is the kind of forgiveness God extends to us.

Jesus said, "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents of gold was brought to him. Since 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" (Matt 18:22-25).

The debtor was a servant of the king. The size of his debt was unimaginable. The gold talent was equal to a person's common daily wage for 20 years. This man owed 10,000 of these talents. The point Jesus made was there was no way he could ever repay the king. Such is our debt to God; we can never satisfy it. Our sin makes us bankrupt and lost before God.

At hearing the judgment against him, the servant fell on his knees before the king. "Be patient with me," he begged, "and I will pay back everything." The king took pity on him, canceled the debt, and let him go.

As with many people, this man thought he could bargain with God. The servant only wanted time; he did not ask for forgiveness. He still believed that in his own strength or ability he could satisfy the king's demands on him. In truth, his only hope for escape was to receive mercy! And that was what he received, when the king had compassion on him and cancelled his debt. The king saw him not as a debtor, but as a person with a greater value than the lost money. This is a perfect picture of how God sees the sinner.

Jesus continued, "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, "Be patient with me, and I will pay it back." But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

This same servant was owed only about 100 days' pay by his fellow servant. When he brutally attacked this second servant, the man repeated the same words the first one had used earlier with the king. But the servant refused to show mercy and put his fellow servant in prison. The difference was that this second man could have easily paid the debt, given enough time. The message was that the first servant had not changed his heart after experiencing the king's mercy. He saw no value in his fellow servant. He was just an object to be used, not a fellow servant of the king.

The great contrast between the king's response to a plea for mercy and the servant's response to a similar plea is a powerful part of this parable. All the servants belonged to the same king. The other servants were outraged because they knew the whole story. They now believed the first servant was truly a bad person. So they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

After hearing the report, the king called the first servant in a second time. "You are a wicked servant," he said, "I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had mercy on you?" In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed (Matt 18:26-34).

The king, when informed of this injustice, responded with the same evaluation the other servants had: This man was wicked. The nature of the cancelled debt was twofold. First, forgiveness was granted because the servant begged for mercy concerning his debt. But second, the requirement to remain forgiven was that he had to show that same mercy to his fellow servant. God looks for believers to have a transformed view of those who are lost; that we will show them the same mercy we have received from God. In fact the Bible says that "if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matt 6:14-16).

Jesus concluded, "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Jesus wants believers to know that if we fail to forgive others from our heart, we can lose the forgiveness God has granted us. This is the complete answer that Jesus wants Peter to understand. God is looking for a change in our attitude both toward those who are fellow believers and those unbelievers who torment us. Unlimited forgiveness is a strong indicator that a person is really a believer in Jesus.

This story is **important** because it shows the contrast between the unlimited forgiveness of God extended toward us and the limited, conditional forgiveness human beings often extend.

The **main truth** of this story is that followers of Jesus must offer unlimited forgiveness to all who offend them, including those who are in the family of God.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. How did Jesus respond to Peter's question about how many times he should forgive a brother or sister?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said Jesus told Peter he should forgive completely, just as God generously forgives him, you are correct.
2. Why did the king forgive the servant with the great debt he could not repay?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the king cancelled all the debt because the servant begged for mercy, you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say was the reason the unmerciful servant was sent to be tormented?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered "because his heart did not change after experiencing the king's mercy," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of the unmerciful servant and tell it to another person. Then discuss this question, "Why did Jesus tell this story about the merciful king, willing forgive the great debt?" It was because Jesus wanted to illustrate the high value God places on people, unlike the world which values money and things more than people. He also wanted to teach his followers how important it is for believers to forgive one another and those who mistreat them.