

Parable of the Unmerciful Servant - Matthew 18:21-35

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In Matthew 18 Jesus was teaching on church discipline and how to resolve sin. It led to a very pertinent question by Peter: what about someone who keeps sinning and keeps asking to be forgiven? Beneath this is a more profound question: HOW do we forgive? What is the motivation and meaning behind the heart of forgiveness?

In this parable Jesus taught about the HOW of forgiveness. There are three ideas beneath this:

- (1) Seeing a bigger picture - Forgiveness requires understanding
- (2) Loving others - Forgiveness requires compassion
- (3) Loving God - Forgiveness requires piety

Seeing a Bigger Picture

In Scriptures, forgiveness is also called mercy (James 2:13). It is spoke of as a type of wisdom from above (James 3:17). Therefore, we ought to be wise and forgive, as we are considering our own forgiveness when we do so (Matthew 6:14-15, 1 Corinthians 6:11).

Loving Others

When trying to forgive it helps if we consider the mind of those who wronged you. Paul was a man who wronged many Christians, yet he tells us that his mind in doing so was to be right with God (1 Timothy 1:13). Those who needed to forgive Paul could more easily do so if they understood why he sinned against them. If we want to forgive others, putting ourselves in their shoes, understanding what tempted them, and considering their weakness will help.

Loving Your Father

We all know of God's desire for unity (Philippians 2:1-2). We must consider that our forgiving others is the means by which God's desire is achieved. We may struggle to forgive others by seeing a bigger picture or putting ourselves in their mind, but can we ever deny the commandment of our loving Father?

What about our own joy?

We see all of these motivations in forgiveness, but we might also see the bitterness and evil heart of the unmerciful servant as itself a reason to forgive. Who wants to keep such bitterness within them? We have only so much room in our lives; if holding grudges is part of that, it takes the place of things that can fill us with joy.

The Quality of Mercy

*The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.*
Portia, Merchant of Venice.