

THE WORDS AND WORKS OF KING JESUS

PART 13: THE ROLE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE KINGDOM

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Matthew Chapters 18-20

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Matt. 18:21

Forgiveness is God's solution for bitterness, resentment, and hostility. As members of Jesus' kingdom, we need close loving relationships that are found only through sincerely and completely forgiving each other. But the question arises, "how many times should I forgive someone who keeps offending me?"

This fourth discourse in Matthew 18-20 is often called the *Discourse on the Church*. It includes the parables of the lost sheep and the unforgiving servant. The general theme of the discourse is the anticipation of a future kingdom community of followers and the role of his apostles in leading it. Addressing his apostles in 18:18, Jesus states: "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." This discourse emphasizes the importance of humility and self-sacrifice as the high virtues within the anticipated community. It teaches that in the Kingdom of God, it is childlike humility that matters, not social prominence and clout.

I. COMMENTS

A. Definitions

1. Forgiveness is giving up resentment against someone else, along with your right to get even, no matter what has been done to you.
2. Unforgiveness is the deliberate, willful refusal to give up one's resentment and right to get even, based on the attitude that someone must pay for the wrong done.

B. Eight Obstacles to Forgiveness

1. Lack of desire: You don't want to forgive.
2. Rehearsing what happened: Continuing to dwell on the hurtful experience without taking action.
3. Fear: Being fearful of looking weak, misunderstood, or being rejected.
4. Poor advice: Acting on poor advice from well-meaning friends.
5. Partial forgiveness: Picking and choosing which offenses can be pardoned.
6. Relying on emotions: Waiting until you feel like forgiving.
7. Expecting quick results: Forgiveness can take time.
8. Justifying the offense: Rationalizing what happened so that you don't have to forgive.

II. DISCUSSING THE TEXT

1. Do you suppose Peter had a special reason for asking how many times he needed to forgive his brother in the Lord, and if so, what was it?
 - a) He may have felt there was a limit to how many times you should forgive a fellow believer.
2. If someone offends you, who should take the initiative to resolve the issue. You or the other person? Explain your answer.
 - a) Matthew 18:15 (NIV) ""If your brother or sister sins, (YOU) go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over."
3. How can you know that you have genuinely forgiven someone who has offended you?
 - a) The harsh emotions you've had towards others will be replaced by compassion.

- b) You'll be able to accept others without feeling bitter, even if they never change. You will try to understand why they acted as they did.
- c) You will feel thankful that God allowed the difficult experience to teach you more about the riches of His grace.

III. CHALLENGE FOR NEXT WEEK



Read Matthew Chapters 21-23. What is the main point of the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:1-14?

IV. ADDENDUM: CHURCH DISCIPLINE (18:10-35)

A. The parable of the lost sheep (18:10-14)

"¹⁰ See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹¹ For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." (Matt. 18:11 KJV)¹ ¹² "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish." (Matt. 18:10-14 NIV)

1. This passage is describing a pattern for restoring a penitent believer into the fellowship of the church if they sinned against another believer.
2. It is not about going around pointing out the sinfulness of others since we all sin from time to time.
3. The aim: to recover our "lost sheep" (18:15)
4. Issue: a sin which has led to a breach of fellowship with a fellow believer.
5. Examples:
 - a) Spreading harmful rumors about a fellow believer.
 - b) Stealing from a fellow believer.
 - c) Physically harming a fellow believer.

¹ Matthew 18:11. The verse is missing from some of the Bibles because the passage does not actually appear in the best early Greek manuscripts which contain Matthew.

B. If a fellow believer sins against you (18:15-20)

1. Stage 1: The offended should go to the offender (18:15)

¹⁵ "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."

2. Stage 2: Two or three are to confront the impenitent offender (18:16)

¹⁶ "But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"

3. Stage 3: The entire church body is to be informed the impenitent sinner's refusal (18:17a)

¹⁷ "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church (18:17a)"

4. Stage 4: The impenitent sinner is to be excluded from communion or fellowship of the church (18:17b-20)

" and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (18:17b)

- a) The overall goal is still to bring the individual to his senses so they can be forgiven and restored back into fellowship.
 - b) This is the main point of the parable of the unforgiving servant (see also 18:35)
5. " Authority in church discipline (18:18-20)

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (18:18-20)

- a) The context is church discipline. Jesus is saying that his authority is with the two or three witnesses who are attempting to bring the offensive brother back into fellowship with the offended brother if it is done properly.
- b) Misinterpreting: This is not to be interpreted as saying God will give anyone anything they ask for if it is requested by two or three others. When we ask for things from God they must be in accordance with his will (1 John 5:14-15).

C. The parable of the unforgiving servant (18:21-35)

" Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. The Rabbis taught that a repentant offender should be given three chances. Peter suggested seven times.

1. Peter thought he was being generous but most likely thought there was a limit to how many times an offending brother should be forgiven.
2. Jesus said 77 times (KJV/NKJ: 70 x 7). Not literally 70 times, but always forgiving an offender.
3. Jesus illustrates this with the parable of the unforgiving servant (18:23-35)

²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ "At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' ²⁷ The 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 silver coins. 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 it back.' ³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged 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. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master handed 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 or sister from your heart" (Matt. 18:21-35 NIV)