

Session 5

August 21, 2022

FORGIVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

Matthew 18:21-35

“Though we live wholly on mercy and forgiveness, we are backward to forgive the offences of our brethren.” Matthew Henry (c. 1700) certainly had it right. How quick we are to accept God’s compassion for ourselves...and how woefully slow to extend it to others!

Jesus had just explained how to resolve disputes among the brethren when Peter asked for some clarification. Forgiveness and restoration were all well and good, but exactly how long should one have to forebear the offenses of another before cutting him off?

Clarification (vv. 21-22). Peter’s inquiry was done in private, but the context seems to indicate that Jesus answered for all the disciples to hear. Note three principles that emerge. First, Peter was not at all against forgiveness. Rather, he understood and agreed with the basic concept. Hence, (unlike some other instances!), he was not being contrary. Second, the question he posed makes sense. Jesus already laid out the steps to forgiveness and restoration (vv. 18-20). Peter was jumping ahead a bit, wondering what limitations were in place to avoid continued—and perhaps even intentional—abuses of one’s grace. Third, Peter was being generous. Seven was the number of completion; and Amos 1:3 hinted that even God placed the limit of forgivable transgressions at three. Whatever Peter was thinking, his heart seemed to be in the right place, suggesting multiple opportunities should be given to get things resolved among brothers. For reflection: *Romans 6:1-2 says, “What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” How do these verses relate to the principles Jesus is teaching in our text?*

Illustration (vv. 23-31). Jesus’ reply of “seventy times seven” (v. 22) was rhetorical. It repeats the number of completion and hearkens back to Genesis 4:24. The point is that just as God’s grace places no limit on the number of pardons offered to the repentant sinner, so the forgiven sinner must place no limits on others either. Indeed, genuine forgiveness requires genuine repentance (see Luke 17:4); but genuine repentance *must* receive genuine forgiveness. The parable that followed (vv.23-31) illustrates clearly all of these principles, while highlighting the particular unfairness—and inherent selfishness—so abundant in human nature. Those who have been forgiven much (and that’s all of us!) are, in the words of Matthew Henry above, “backward to forgive the offences of our brethren.” For reflection: *As Christ-followers, what steps can we take to ensure that we don’t revert to placing selfish demands on errant believers?*

Admonition (vv. 32-35). The lesson of the parable is the *motive* for forgiveness, which is *mercy*. Grace and mercy go hand in hand. While grace is God giving that which we *do not* deserve (His favor), mercy is God withholding that which we *do* deserve (His judgment). Notice that nothing in the parable condemns the debt, just as nothing condones it. Rather the emphasis is on the *selfish attitude* of the forgiven servant even after he had been almost miraculously delivered from his very desperate situation. Notice the difference in the amounts owed as well. Ten-thousand talents (v. 24) was an amount impossible to repay. Such a debt required more compassion, more grace, and more mercy to forgive than the mere one hundred denarii he demanded to collect from his debtor (v. 28). Taken together—the selfish attitude and the amount forgiven—justifies the

master's rebuke and his subsequent wrath. The Lord's admonition? "So My heavenly Father will also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart." For reflection: *Read Matthew 6:14-15. How does Jesus' teaching there relate to our discussion here?*