

Learning to Forgive, Part 3

Matthew 18:28-35

2335

Let's open our Bibles again this morning to Matthew chapter 18. And this is our continuing study of Matthew's Gospel, and particularly the 18th chapter, which we've entitled the "Childlikeness of the Believer." "The Childlikeness of the Believer." And one thing that we've learned about in this chapter is that believers need to be forgiven like children. One of the great elements of teaching in this passage is the teaching on forgiveness. You remember that we've seen that we enter the kingdom like children. We are to be cared for like children. We are to be protected like children. We are to be disciplined like children. And then the passage concludes with a great lesson on the fact that we are to be forgiven like children. And so the Lord is instructing us in the matter of forgiveness.

Now there is a key verse that you perhaps ought to write in the margin of your Bible right at the point of Matthew 18:21 and following, and that verse is Ephesians 4:32, because that one verse sums up the intent of this passage. It says, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." A great injunction to forgiveness, since God has forgiven us so much. That is the intent of the teaching of the passage we'll be looking at this morning.

But before we look at the passage, I want to just give you a couple of illustrations to set your thinking along the lines of forgiveness. This week I got ahold of a letter that was sent to Dr. James Dobson recently from a little girl. This is what the letter said: "Dear Dr. Dobson, I am ten years old. I have a problem. There is a man who is trying to split the church. He happens to be my best friend's dad. Now because of him, my mom won't let me talk to Faith. I've talked to Faith about it. She and I are puzzled why we can't get together. We're upset. Why are they fighting? Their answers aren't good enough. Just because they're fighting doesn't mean we have to, or does it? I'm totally confused. All I know is, Faith and I are friends and our parents aren't. Please find an answer. Love, Karen." Christians who can't forgive each other and are devastating the lives of their little children.

Sometime back, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an interesting article with a headline that said, "Couple Meet, Forgive Slayer of Daughter." The article says, "'We love this special person from the bottom of our heart,' said Mrs. Bristol of the man who murdered her daughter. The tiny housewife from Dearborn, Michigan, confessed to a little nervousness as she spoke to a group of inmates in the prison chapel of the California Men's Colony. She and her husband Bob had driven 2,000 miles to see this special person, Michael Keys, who was convicted of murdering their daughter, Diane. The body of Diane, then 20, was found in San Diego's North Park area. She had been selling encyclopedias door to door when she was kidnapped and strangled.

"The Bristols said God led them on a mission of forgiveness, which prompted their friends and loved ones to shake their heads because they couldn't understand. 'We harbor no hatred and no revenge,' Mrs. Bristol told the 60 prisoners Saturday night. 'We know God can make something good out of

this pain.’ Mrs. Bristol said that when she and her husband received the devastating news that our daughter had been raped and brutally murdered, it was like a knife into the depths of our souls. We have the normal human reaction of grief and anguish.

“Keys, who had first admitted to the Bristols that he didn’t quite understand their act, told his fellow convicts that people like the Bristols give meaning to the word ‘forgiveness.’ Then choked by emotional tears, Keys turned to the Bristols and said, ‘God bless you folks,’ and threw his arms around them both. ‘What would make us happiest,’ Mrs. Bristol said, ‘is when he accepts Jesus Christ.’

“The San Diego judge who sentenced Keys to life imprisonment said, ‘Keys was cunning, calculating, and callous, the most vicious killer I have encountered in my career.’ Mrs. Bristol said, ‘We view this man as one of value and worth. We are interested in him as a person not for what he did, but for what he can become.’”

Quite a story of forgiveness, isn’t it? And why is that there are such extremes of the capability of forgiveness? On the one hand, a mother forgiving a godless criminal for the rape and murder of her daughter. On the other hand, two Christians in a church unable to forgive each other petty differences. Forgiveness sometimes comes so hard for us if we live in the flesh. Now, our Lord in this passage is going to help us to understand the importance of forgiveness. It shouldn’t split churches.

All of us ought to be like Mrs. Bristol. There should never be the kind of unforgiveness in a church that shatters relationships and families and church unity. And we’re going to find out the instruction of our Lord in that regard as we look again at this important passage.

Let me review very quickly that the inquiry about forgiveness appeared in verse 21. This introduced the subject. Peter says, “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?” That’s the inquiry. The extent of forgiveness comes in verse 22. And the Lord says 490 times, and by that means unlimited amounts - endlessly, continuously.

And so we saw the inquiry about forgiveness, and we saw the extent of forgiveness, and then we also discussed the effect of forgiveness. And we looked at Matthew 6, verses 12-15, where the Lord says that if you don’t forgive each other, He won’t forgive you. So we saw the inquiry about forgiveness, the extent of forgiveness, the effect of forgiveness. And then we came to the example of forgiveness, beginning in verse 23. And the example of forgiveness is a parable, and a masterful parable, loaded with great truth. It is spoken to the disciples, and it warns them and us of the sin of unforgiveness. Look at verse 23 and let me remind you of how the parable begins.

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants.” The kingdom of heaven, the sphere of God’s rule, the kingdom of grace. In the kingdom of grace, where God is the ruler, He calls men to account. He calls men to show Him where they stand with the privileges that they have been given by Him. And we saw that this king is God and this servant is a man who has been given privilege. He would be in the terms of the time of our Lord, a satrap, a provincial governor. And he was given a whole territory of responsibility in which he collected taxes, which then were to be given to the king for the operation of the kingdom.

And periodically the king takes an accounting of those who have been given this responsibility, and

he is illustrative of every man who has been given divine privilege, who has from God life and breath, who has from God all of his faculties, who has from God truth in his heart and truth around him. Every man, in a sense then, is a steward of what God has bestowed upon him. And every man will be drawn at a time and times before God to give an account of that stewardship. And we pointed out that this is a time of conviction. It's not the time of the great white throne judgment or something. It's the time when God calls men to give an account of their life.

It would be very much parallel to Romans 7:7-13 as Paul was brought face to face with the reality of the law of God and convicted of his falling short and drawn then to the Savior. It is the time of conviction. It is the time of John 16 when the Spirit convicts of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.

And so God, the king, then calls men into account. He brings them before Him by conviction through the preaching of the Word, the reading of the Bible, the testimony of Christians, or a combination of any or all of those. Men are brought to face the reality of the fact that they have debt they owe to God. They are brought to conviction.

Now, verse 24 tells us about one particular individual. "And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought to him, who owed him myriad talents." And the term here is to speak of an uncountable sum, an unpayable amount. We've talked about that amount last time. And I won't go back into it again. Suffice it to say, it is a myriad, and that is the highest term in the Greek language to speak of numeration.

I suggested at the time we studied that verse that it would be like saying "a zillion talents." It's an unlimited amount, beyond expression, beyond paying. Here is a man brought before God, convicted of a debt. And by the way, the debt is sin and it is unpayable, uncountable. And verse 25 says, "Forasmuch as he had nothing with which to pay." That is man before God, facing his sin and knowing he has no resource to pay it. It is an unpayable sum to begin with, and he has got anything to even begin to pay.

And so it says that the king said he was to be sold, his wife sold, his children sold, all they possessed sold, and payment to be made. The total sum could never be paid. It was far too much. The man had no resources for paying the full amount, but all that could be paid would be paid, and this was a pagan custom, selling everybody in the family into slavery, and selling everything they had, so that whatever could be realized from that sale could be set to offset the debt.

Now the principle is clear, then. Men are brought before a holy God. And they must give an account for the stewardship of life, and breath, and truth that they have been given. And they will be convicted at that point of a sin debt that could never be paid - too much to be paid - and they have no resource to pay it. And frankly, God has the power to deliver them over to judgment in hell. And although men cannot pay the full amount, they will spend forever in hell paying what they can pay. And I pointed out to you that men will not be able to pay off the debt in hell. That's why hell is forever, but they'll stay there forever paying all they could pay. And so it is a terrible, but righteous sentence, for the debt is real and the man has defrauded the king.

And then the man follows the only course left to him. Notice verse 26, "The servant therefore fell down." Now here is a prostrate man. Here is a humbled man. Here is a broken man. Here is a man who knows he's on the edge of judgment. And he worships, and he says, "Lord" - and he affirms the

sovereignty of the king over him – “have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.” He recognizes the debt. He recognizes it’s a legitimately incurred debt in the sense that he really does owe it. He recognizes the justice of his sentence. He does not argue for justice. He does not say it’s unfair. He simply says, “Please be patience and I will pay thee all.”

Now, I believe this is presalvation conviction. And just as a note - we pointed this out last time - the reason the man says, “I’ll pay all,” is because he really doesn’t understand the enormity of his sin. And I don’t think any man really does. It is not uncommon for people who are brought to moments of great conviction about their sin, who are brought face to face with God and the fact that they have come short of His glory, to want to say, “God, just be patient. Just let me get over this thing and I promise I’ll be better. I’ll do better. I’ll go to church. I’ll give you my life. I’ll do whatever I can.” That’s a very common kind of reaction.

For example, life goes on seemingly without incident and then a very, very severe issue happens in the family. Maybe one of the children takes on a terminal illness, or is killed in an accident, or whatever. Or maybe a spouse dies, or gets terminal cancer, or heart disease, or perhaps a job is lost, or perhaps a terrible accident is incurred, or maybe a person is in a place of great distress in a war, or in a dangerous situation, lost in the woods, or whatever. And in the midst of that extremity of circumstance, people see the bankruptcy of their own life. They are brought face to face with conviction. God may allow the gospel to come into their mind. There may be a confrontation with God’s law or God’s truth from memory, bringing it up from in the past.

And at that moment it is not uncommon for people to say, “If you’ll just get me through this, if you’ll just help me, I’ll do anything you want, God.” And they’re really saying, “Just be patient and I’ll pay it all.” And they really don’t yet understand either the enormity of their sin or its inability to be paid by them. But there’s true contrition, and there’s true sorrow, and there’s genuine brokenness. And I see that in this man.

And the reason I see it is because of verse 27. And that is the key to the entire parable. “Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.” Now that is the key to interpreting the parable. The man was loosed. What does that mean? He had no responsibility to pay that debt. None. He would never have to pay that debt. He was loosed from that debt. Now, that means the man would never go to hell to work off whatever could be worked off in eternity. The man was loosed from the obligation.

And then secondly, he was forgiven. He was freed from having to do anything, and then the king did everything. He just forgave him. Now, I believe that has to describe the saving grace of God. The man is loosed from any obligation, and he is utterly forgiven. Whatever other things in the parable may be unclear, that appears to me to be very clear. I cannot see how you can interpret that any other way than to say the man was freed from the debt and forgiven. And that’s the essence of salvation.

The king himself absorbs the loss, and that is exactly as it was on the cross of Christ. Because it was on the cross of Christ that Jesus in His own flesh absorbed the loss. He Himself paid the price for your sin and mine. And so God absorbs the loss. God suffers the consequence. God pays the price Himself that could never be paid. And so I see in this man, then, the stuff of real repentance, and genuine contrition, and even though he doesn’t understand the enormity of his sin and he really doesn’t understand how it’s all completely by grace, God sees in his brokenness legitimate

repentance, and gives him what he so desperately needs. He frees him from any responsibility to pay the debt on his own, and forgives him of his sin.

Now you may be, as I said, confused about other parts of the parable, but you don't need to be confused about that. And once you set that in motion, you've got the rest of the parable interpreted. So if you want to take your pencil or pen and just circle the word "forgave," this is the essence of what the Lord is teaching here. Now, we saw all of that as the initial understanding of the parable, and now we move to verse 28 and the main message. That was all just foundation.

Watch verse 28. "But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him an hundred denarii: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what thou owest." That's incredible. That's absolutely absurd. You say to yourself, "How soon did this guy forget what he had been forgiven? How soon did he forget his Lord's compassion?" "The same servant" - and it emphasizes "the same servant who had just been" - What? - "forgiven." The same one, the forgiven one, "Went out and found" - in other words, the idea is that he was looking for somebody. This was not an incident that he didn't expect. He didn't inadvertently run into the guy. He was out there searching for this fellow. And who was it? Notice, "one of his fellow servants." And here we're introduced to a word that I think has meaning in the parable, *sundoulon*, "fellow servant." And I think this identifies this one as another who has been forgiven, another in the family.

And so the Lord then takes the parable into the family of those who are fellows in Christ, who are in the fellowship. It describes, I believe, in the parable a Christian brother. It is used consistently that way in the rest of the parable in the four times that it appears. So he finds another fellow servant, not just another servant somewhere in the world, but one who serves the same king, one who is a fellow servant. And I think that can be seen as a term to identify believers in this parable.

Now, this other servant was not necessarily the same rank. He perhaps worked under this first servant. It may have been that he was a provincial governor and this guy was one of his local tax collectors, but they both served the same king. And what happens is really absurd. It is just beyond belief. He goes, finds the guy, lays his hands on him, takes him by the throat, literally the Greek says "he went about choking him," and saying, "Pay me what you owe me."

Now, let me just give you a little interpretive thought here for a moment. If the man is not a true Christian - as some would have us believe in this parable - if the man is not a true Christian, then the whole parable in its context breaks down because the impact of the entire parable is that here was a man who was fully forgiven, right? And went out and wouldn't forgive.

Now, if you remove the initial forgiveness, and it wasn't really legitimate, and he wasn't really forgiven, then the whole parable makes no sense. It loses entirely its significance. We don't expect him to forgive if he wasn't forgiven. We don't expect him to act like God acts if he doesn't have God in his heart. We don't expect him to do what God did if he doesn't know God did that or if God didn't do that.

And the judgment that came to the guy at the end of the parable should have come in verse 27, because there was nothing more to say to him. If his forgiveness wasn't genuine, the rest of the parable means nothing. It is not a parable about genuine salvation. It is a parable about forgiveness, and the validity of forgiveness, and one believer forgiving another. And what makes the parable so

powerful, so dramatic, is that the guy was really forgiven. He was really saved. And he gets his hands on this guy and starts to choke him.

Roman writers, secular writers, often speak about men going to their debtors and wrenching their neck until blood ran out of their nose and mouth. That's the old collection agency approach. Just find some big strong-arm guy to strangle them to death if he doesn't pay. And he says, "Pay me what you owe me."

Now I see the context here as a Christian going to another one in the family and demanding payment. This one has been offended. Maybe the debt is real. Maybe this really was a sin against this person. Maybe he really was defrauded in some manner. And he won't forgive. You say, "Well, this can't be a Christian." Oh? You mean to tell me you don't think Christians have problems forgiving each other? I think they do. I'm one. I've experienced that.

Christians struggle with this. The flesh works its way into the picture, doesn't it, in our redeemed lives? Do you have anybody that owes you money? Do you think of them? Can you think of them? And how many times have you choked them in your mind? We have problems with that, even sometimes in the church of Jesus Christ. You know, somebody says something you don't like, and for the rest of the time in the church you avoid that person. Every time you see that person, the anger comes up in your heart. You hold bitterness. You hold a grudge. It throws back all the garbage of what happened years and years ago, because you just can't let go of that. You, as a Christian, are not immune from that problem. So the people who get nervous because this guy is so unforgiving and say, "How could a Christian be like this?" maybe you haven't really thought about what Christians can be like, because they can sure be like that.

There are people in this church right now who are unforgiving toward each other and causing all kinds of anxiety, pain, and friction here, and they're Christians. But they can't forgive, because they won't forgive. The flesh rises to seek its vengeance. And that's what you have here. It's a perfect illustration of that. It's just like 1 Corinthians 6, where the Christians were suing each other. Listen, Christians can really get it on when it comes to warfare with each other. They can really hold grudges, retain bitteresses. And that's what you have, I believe, here.

And so he says, "Pay me what you owe me." We shouldn't be startled that this is a Christian. Somewhat common. And look at the response in verse 29. "And his fellowservant fell down at his feet and besought him saying, Have patience with me and I'll pay thee all." Does that sound familiar? That's the same speech in verse 26. The guy got the same speech back that he gave the lord, just as if that might jog his mind a little. Didn't those words sound familiar? Isn't that the same thing you were pleading when you were pleading your case for an insurmountable, unpayable sum? And you were begging the king to let you off the hook, and now a guy owes you 18 bucks and you're strangling him?

Even the familiar words echoing in his ears can't find a response from his heart. And the guy is begging. He besought him. He's begging. This isn't worship. He doesn't say he fell down and worshiped him. This is no sovereign. This is a servant to a servant. And he says, "Look, just be patient and I'll pay you all," and he could have paid. There was possibility in that.

But the application is obvious. Compared with our sins against God, our sins against each other - our

trifles - our debt is unpayable. The other debts we incur with people are easily payable. But the point is when we have received forgiveness so vast, so far-reaching, so comprehensive, how can we be so small as not to forgive another?

And frankly, folks, we ought to get used to forgiving. We're going to need it, right? And we may want it from the very person we won't give it to. It's unimaginable, but Christians do this. It's the reason churches split. It's the reason there's friction. You get people in a church, you know, maybe somebody does something they don't like in their class, and instead of being able to give it to the Lord and forgive and embrace that person in love, they just get bitter and that bitterness just becomes divisive and projected on out. That's what splits churches. That's what devastates God's family.

It's unimaginable, but it's more common than we like to admit. And it may well be that the disciples were in the midst of doing it themselves. They were, you know, fighting to see who would be the greatest in the kingdom, and in order to sort of keep their supremacy, they may have cultivated in their hearts certain attitudes towards the others, which in their mind demeaned the others, put them down lower than they were so they could feel good about their self by exaltation. And they may well have been holding grudges.

Well, look at the response in verse 30. The guy says, "Have patience with me and I'll pay thee all. And he would not" – "He would not!" – "but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt." It's unimaginable. They have no compassion. This is an impossible reaction. Himself pitied, he should have pitied. Himself forgiven, he should have forgiven. Himself loved, he should have loved. Himself having received mercy, he should have dispensed it.

The greatest sins that a man commits against a man are nothing. They're change, pocket change, compared to the sins committed against God. And God forgives them all. And who is man not to forgive lesser? The whole point of the verse is that he wouldn't forgive. And what gives the parable its power is that he was forgiven. That's the strength of the argument. That how can those truly forgiven not forgive? When God has forgiven an infinitely greater debt, how easily we forget.

In Titus I'm drawn to the 3rd chapter. Listen to what Paul says. "Speak evil of no man, be no brawlers" - Don't get into fights – "but gentle, showing all meekness unto men" - unto all men. In other words, you're to be forgiving. "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hatred, hating one another." I mean, we used to be like that. "But after the kindness and love God our Saviour toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour."

In other words, he says, "Don't treat people like you used to. Look at what Christ has done for you." It's the same idea. And so, sadly, the church has been riddled all its lifelong by the tragic sin of unforgiveness, and the consequent bitterness and hostility and discord. And I really believe that this is to go against your new nature, because I believe that if you're in the kingdom, you're a merciful person. "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy." I think we're marked as merciful people. That's our newness. And it's only the flesh that rises up and makes us merciless.

So consider the source. If you're not forgiving, that isn't the new you; that's your sin, your flesh, vaulting itself into prominence. And when you do that, you will cut yourself off from that relational forgiveness with God that makes the communion sweet. And if you looked at your life and you see a lack of power, and you see a lack of depth in your spiritual life, you see a lack of hunger for God's Word, a lack of love for the private place of prayer and communion, if you have not seen what you would like to see in your life of the richness of your relationship with God, it may be that you'll never have that because there's a blockage there, and the Lord isn't giving you that forgiveness that brings sweet relationship with Him because you've got it blocked somewhere else with somebody else.

And until you forgive that other one, the Lord isn't going to open up the flow of communion with Him. So verse 31, look what happens. "So when his fellow servants" - there's that term again, and here's a group of Christians, believers, who saw what was done. They saw the whole thing. Now, at the risk of sort of reading into the parable a little bit, let me suggest to you that if this parable were a true story, these fellow servants would have no doubt followed the sequence of Matthew chapter 18, verses 15-20.

They would have seen this unforgiving servant, they would have gone to him. Then they would have taken two or three with them. Then they would have told it to the whole assembly, and then they would have put him out if he didn't respond. Let's assume that if we put the whole chapter in the context and this were a real story, that these fellow servants would have done all they could to get the guy to do what was right and forgive the debt, whether or not the fellow paid it back.

But apparently they have exhausted that capacity, and this servant who is determined to get his due out of this guy is resistant to all their efforts. "So when his fellow servants saw what was done" - apparently, they've seen it firsthand there. They're witnesses to it. They've been involved in the process. They did the only thing they had left. "They were very sorry." I love that.

There's two things in here that stand out and I just want to mention them to you. One, there was one servant who was unforgiving, and there were servants who were sorry about that. May I suggest to you that these people are acting in accord with the new creation? This is the majority kind of attitude of those who have been forgiven. They are forgivers. The other is sort of an isolated case from here to there, but the normality, the commonness of God's forgiven people is that they are concerned to be forgivers. And so here you have the rest of the believing people who are sorry about this because they know what they have been forgiven, and they know the standard God has established, and they know how God longs for forgiveness, and they understand the holiness of His law, and they understand the unity of His family, and they understand the richness of fellowship, and so they are sorry.

It's a strong word for "sorry." *Sphodra* means "excessively grieved, violently grieved." They are very distressed, and this is a beautiful thing when Christians become concerned about another Christian's sin. They are violently, excessively grieved about this, because there's a lack of response to the law of God, and the will of God, and the way of God that's disrupting the fellowship. And what do they do? This group in their sorrow "came and told unto their lord all that was done."

What do you do when you've done all the steps of discipline and the person hasn't responded? Then where do you go? You go to the Lord, don't you? I see this as these people coming before God with a broken heart. It's a beautiful picture. If believers would be this concerned about each other's sinfulness, oh, what a healing thing there would be in the fellowship. They go to the presence of the

king. It assumes in my mind they've already been to the servant and been unsuccessful in getting him to respond. And it says that they "came and told their Lord." And the word there is a strong word for "told." They gave him a careful, detailed outline of everything. They must have gone through the whole process. It's not just a simple word for "told," but a complex one.

They told him everything that had gone on. No doubt they recited the whole process to the king and said, "We've tried everything we can to settle this thing, and we just come to you as a last resort. We are so sad about this unforgiving servant." That's God's people going to the Lord in prayer about a sinning brother or sister. And I really believe we have the same responsibility to take that to the Lord that they did.

Well, their response was grief. What was the response of the king? Verse 32, "Then his lord, after he had called him, and said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me." Stop there. What's God's attitude? He comes to him and says, "O you wicked servant."

Now some people get nervous here and they say, "Ooh, can't be a Christian. Can't be a Christian. God would never say that to a Christian." Oh? What is wickedness? Sin. Do Christians sin? Could God say to a Christian, "Oh, you sinful person?" Yes, there's no problem to hear that. You're acting in a wicked manner. One sin is constituted wickedness. In Romans 7, as we shall see tonight, Paul affirms his sinfulness, even as a believer. And so the Lord is simply affirming what is true about the guy. You are a sinful person.

All unrighteousness is sin. "You wicked servant," and then he affirms the basic principle of the whole parable again. "I forgave you all that debt." And you can underline that again. That is the interpretive key to the whole thing. "I forgave you all that debt." He doesn't back off and say, "Boy, it must not have worked," or, "Maybe the transaction never was made," or whatever. No. He reaffirms the reality of that full forgiveness. "Because you begged me." And that adds another ingredient.

Back in verse 26, "he fell down, he worshiped, he said, Have patience, I'll do my best," and here we find added to that, that at the same time he begged. Here is a broken person aware of his sin, brought to conviction, pleading for God to be merciful, and it was out of that pleading that he was saved, and forgiven, and loosed from the debt, and I think it was a real forgiveness. And that is the heart of the whole thing.

He says, "I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me." And then in the next verse we find, "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant?" The point is if the first forgiveness wasn't legitimate, the second point is meaningless. Is he saying to him, "If my forgiveness didn't work for you, then maybe yours doesn't need to work for somebody else?" No, he has to be legitimate in the first forgiveness, and that's the substance on which the second forgiveness is built.

"Shouldn't you have forgiven your fellowservant or had compassion on him as I had pity on you?" Lenski calls this a moral monstrosity, that anybody should be so forgiven and unable to forgive someone else. Look at verse 33 for a moment. "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion?" And then he uses the word "pity." This is a beautiful thought. It isn't that he said to him, "Now you should have given the guy the opportunity to pay back the debt. I mean, you should have let him work it off

in freedom without going into prison. I mean, you should have sought out justice some other way and gotten your justice.” No, he didn’t say that. He said, “You should have had compassion and pity just like I did.” And how did he have compassion? He had compassion, loosed him from the debt, and - What? - wrote it off, absorbed the loss, forgave him.

That is the most liberating thing there is. It is utterly liberating. Somebody owes you something. They’ve done something to hurt you. They’ve done something to irritate you. They’ve offended you, said something about you that wasn’t true, said something about your wife that wasn’t true, or your husband, or your kids, or whatever, and they’ve done something to hurt you and offend you. And they’ve maybe done something to defraud you economically, or property wise, or whatever, and you’re going to let the thing burn in you or you’re going to get your due. No. Just have compassion. They’re weak.

Galatians 6:1. “Consider yourself, lest you also should be” - What? – “tempted.” Just consider their weakness, and when they plead, be compassionate. That’s what you should have done because that’s what was done for you when you pled for forgiveness.

Verse 34, and now we’re really getting down to the nitty gritty folks. “And his lord was angry.” And here people get nervous again. They say, “Oh, this can’t be a Christian.” Is the Lord angry with a Christian? Sure. The Lord gets angry every time you sin, don’t you think so? What makes Him angry? Sin makes Him angry. And if He wasn’t angry, there’s something wrong with His holy nature. He always gets angry about sin. That’s a built-in response. The Lord has holy indignation against evil, even in your life and mine.

“And he was angry, and he delivered him to the tormentors” - to the jailers, to the inquisitors – “till he should pay all that was due unto him.” Now this can’t be a Christian. What are we doing with this Christian turning him over to the inquisitors, the tormentors? You don’t think that could be a Christian? Look at Hebrews chapter 12 for a minute.

Hebrews chapter 12, verse 5. “Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks unto you as unto sons?” This is to children now of God - sons, believers, Christians. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked by him: for whom the Lord loves He chastens” - Now get this one – “and scourges every son whom He receives.” Every Christian feels the tormentors. Every Christian feels the scourging. Every Christian at some point in time is going to feel the inquisitors putting the pressure until we confess and repent. Right?

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. “For what son is he whom the Father chastens not? And if ye be without chastisement, of which all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.” The Christian will be turned over to the inquisitor. You say, now what is the point here? The point is that the inquisitor sort of puts you under the gun, under the stress, under the difficulty, under the pressure, under the chastening until you confess your sin, right? Until you confess your evil.

And that’s exactly what the Lord’s chastening is to do. If you’re not forgiving someone, the Lord will put you under chastening and, in a sense, He’ll put the screws to you. He’ll apply the pressure to you until your response is right. And I think that’s what he means at the end of verse 34 when it says, “till he should pay all that was due.” He could never pay the whole debt; even an unbeliever couldn’t pay

the whole debt.

So at that point, the physical parable cannot convey the full understanding of the spiritual truth. I think the intent of the parable is simply to say you put him under chastening pressure until he pays what should be paid, in light of what he's done. And I believe that's all that's saying is that the Lord delivers us to chastening.

And all of us have experienced it. In 1 Corinthians it said among the Corinthians that some of them were weak. They'd literally lost their physical strength because of illness. Some of them were sick, which seems perhaps even more severe, and some of them were dead. First John 5 says it's a sin unto death. First Corinthians 5, I believe, is referring to a believer who is literally put out of the church. Satan destroys his flesh. His spirit will be saved.

I believe there is discipline and chastening to every son that God loves, and that's when he puts us in the hands of the inquisitors, or the jailers, or the tormentors, parabolically speaking, who apply the pressure to us until we admit our sin, and confess our sin. And in this case, it is the sin of unforgiveness.

If you wonder why there's trouble in your life, and you wonder why things aren't going well, and you feel the inquisitors or the tormentors in your life, you feel the pressure being applied, and the chastening being applied, and you don't have the liberty, and the joy, and the freedom that you think you ought to have as a child of God, maybe you ought to look around in your life and find some unforgiving spirit. And as long as it's there and you're not forgiving the way you were forgiven by God, magnanimously, and compassionately, and totally, you're not going to experience relief from these inquisitors.

Now, I think that's what the parable is saying, plain and simple. The sinner will satisfy God. He'll pay what can be paid. He'll satisfy the debt when he is broken, repentant, contrite in heart, and steps into the sphere of obedience. Fellowship is restored. Chastening in a sense, then, makes us pay; that's what it does. Chastening makes us pay with a view, not just to punishment as such, but to refinement as a goal. You don't punish your child just with that in mind. When your child does something bad, you don't just whack them around so that you can deliver the punishment. You do that with a view to changing their behavior, right? To modifying their behavior so they'll do right next time. God is doing the very same thing.

So as Christians this is a strong, strong word to us. It is a powerful passage, and its summation is drawn in verse 35. "So likewise" - just as in the parable - "shall my heavenly Father do also unto you" - and again the "you" is the group of disciples who are believers, genuine ones - "if you from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother his trespasses." And I promise you one thing. He's not saying this to unbelievers because there's one thing unbelievers can't do, and that's they can't act like God toward each other and forgive.

These are Christians, and he's simply saying, just like in that story, when a guy was forgiven and wouldn't forgive and he was punished, you've been forgiven and you better forgive or you're going to be chastened.

Two things stand out in this parable. One, we ought to forgive - positive reason - because we have

been - What? - forgiven so much. Negative reason, we ought to forgive, because if we don't we're going to be chastened. It's a very strong word. And it's to us.

Lord Herbert said, "He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he himself must pass." One old saint of long ago said, "Revenge, indeed, seems often sweet to men, but, oh, it is only sugared poison, only sweetened gall, and its after taste is better as hell. Forgiving, enduring love alone is sweet and blissful. It enjoys peace and the consciousness of God's favor. By forgiving it gives away and annihilates the injury.

"It treats the injurer as if he had not injured, and therefore feels no more the smart and sting that he had inflicted. Forgiveness is a shield from which all the fiery darts of the wicked one harmlessly rebound. Forgiveness brings heaven to earth and heaven's peace into the sinful heart. Forgiveness is the image of God the forgiving Father and an advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world. Your unalterable duty is clear. As surely as we are Christians, men who have experienced great compassion, who see in every man a brother in Christ, and are going forward to God's righteous judgment so surely must we forgive," end quote.

A great commentator on the parable is William Arnot; wrote this, "A traveler in Burma, after fording a certain river, found his body covered all over by a swarm of small leeches busily sucking his blood. His first impulse was to tear the tormentors from his flesh, but his servant warned him that to pull them off by mechanical violence would expose his life to danger. They must not be torn off, lest portions remain in the wounds and become a poison. They must drop off spontaneously and so they will be harmless.

"The native prepared a bath for his master by the concoction of some herbs and directed him to lie down in it. As soon as he had bathed in the balsam bath, the leeches dropped off. Each unforgiven injury," says Arnot, "rankling in the heart is like a leech sucking the life blood. Mere human determination to have done with it will not cast the evil thing away. You must bathe your whole being in God's pardoning mercy and these venomous creatures will instantly let go their hold and you will stand up free. You must bathe your whole being in God's pardoning love."

That's the parable. You must see how much you have been forgiven. We can stand around praying for the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, but we'll experience it when we learn to forgive, won't we?

Three stages in forgiveness. Stage one, suffering. Suffering creates the condition that brings the need for forgiveness. Somebody does something to hurt you, you suffer, you're offended, you're hurt. Second, surgery. Surgery. Here is the inner response where their forgiver performs spiritual surgery in his memory, just like God did, who remembers our sins no more. Sure you suffered, and now you're going to do surgery and you're going to cut out of your mind all of those things. And you do that by the power of God and the meditation on His forgiveness. Thirdly, starting over. Forgiveness is complete when alienated people are fully reconciled.

Now, when you forgive it doesn't mean that you forget. Our minds hang on a long time, don't they? It doesn't mean that you excuse the sin or the wrong. It does mean that you end the cycle of pain and you restore the relationship. That's what our Lord is after. We're children in the family, beloved. We came in like children, we have to be cared for like children, protected like children, disciplined like

children, and we need to forgive each other, because we're just human. And if we are a society of forgiving people, we'll be so unlike the world, won't we?

I close with this. In 1976, Simon Wiesenthal wrote a book called *The Sunflower*. He was a Jew under the Germans during Hitler's time. Here's his story. Wiesenthal was a prisoner in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Poland. One day he was assigned to clean out rubbish from a barn the Germans had improvised into a hospital for their wounded soldiers. Toward evening, a nurse took Wiesenthal by the hand and led him to a young SS trooper who was in one of the beds. His face was bandaged with puss-soaked rags, and his eyes were tucked behind the gauze. Perhaps he was 21 years old.

He grabbed Wiesenthal's hand and he clutched it with all the strength he had left and he said that he had to talk to a Jew. He could not die before he confessed the sins he had committed against helpless Jews, and he had to be forgiven by a Jew before he died. And so he told Wiesenthal a horrible tale of how his battalion had gunned down Jews - parents and children who were trying to escape from the house set afire by SS troopers.

And then he pleaded with Wiesenthal, a Jew, to forgive him. Well, Wiesenthal listened to the man's story, first the story of his innocent youth, and then the story of his participation in the evil murders. And at the end, Wiesenthal jerked his hand away and walked out in silence. No word was spoken. No forgiveness was given. Wiesenthal would not, could not, forgive. He ended his story in the book with this question: "What would you have done?"

Thirty-two eminent persons, mostly Jewish, contributed their answers to his hard question. They said Wiesenthal was right. He should not have forgiven the SS trooper. It would not have been fair. Why should a man who gave his will to the doing of monumental evil expect a quick word of forgiveness on his deathbed. And what right had Wiesenthal to forgive the man for evil he had done to other Jews?

If Wiesenthal forgave the soldier, he would be saying that the Holocaust was not so evil. "Let the SS trooper go to hell," said one respondent. That's how it is out there in the world. But that's not how it is in God's family. We are forgiven and we are to forgive. Let's bow in prayer.

You may search your own heart for a moment in the close of our service. And ask God if there's unforgiveness in your heart. You've suffered. Have you performed by His power that surgery? And then have you started over with that relationship? Maybe you need to back up even before that. Have you come to Jesus Christ and faced an unpayable debt and fallen down and worshiped, admitted the debt, begged for His forgiveness? He'll forgive you today, and He'll make you into a forgiver if you ask Him.

And those of us who are Christians, who are forgivers, who are the merciful of the world, how ugly it is when the flesh rises up to overpower the good that is in us and make us unforgiving. Anything that irritates or bothers you, anything that stays in your mind, anything that causes you not to have full freedom to love a person, whatever they did, is unforgiving, and that's a barrier between you and your fellowship with the Lord, and could be the cause of the absence of joy and power in your life. Very practical truth.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2017 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).