

Forgiveness is one of the most powerful concepts in the Bible.

In Matthew 18, the apostle Peter asks Jesus for some guidance with regards to forgiving a brother who seems to have offended him frequently.

Within the church family, there will always be people who offend or hurt one another, hence there will be opportunities for forgiveness to be practiced.

While it is hard, forgiveness is powerful because it removes the authority of the enemy over our relationships in our church. It cuts to the very root of unforgiveness, which is pride.

Peter was looking for a statute of limitations on forgiveness, a number that he could attain and thereafter, he would no longer have to practice forgiveness. But Jesus responds with an answer that suggests we should not be counting the times we are called to forgive our brother or sister in the Church. We have no right to count the number of times we forgive.

Jesus proceeds to tell the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Insurmountable Debt

The story is about a king who discovers that one of his servants owes him a debt of ten thousand talents. In the Roman empire that was the equivalent of two hundred thousand years of wages! Jesus made the sum practically inconceivable.

When it comes to debts, we underappreciate the gift of salvation we have been given. We don't grasp the astronomical debt we owe because of our sin in comparison to the holiness of God. When we get a glimpse of how much we have been forgiven, we can't help but praise God and thank Him for the great gift of grace that we have received through the Gospel.

Getting back to the parable, the servant begs for mercy. The king doesn't simply extend mercy; he wipes the slate clean, forgiving the entire debt. This level of grace is hard for us to grasp; it even offends us.

But, I am that servant, and so are you. We who have been washed by the blood of Jesus have been forgiven much.

Miniscule Debt

The parable continues in verse 28, *"But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.'"*

The much-forgiven servant finds someone who owes him the equivalent of one hundred days' wages. He grabs him and throws him into debtor's prison.

The same one who had received incredible grace is the one who now shows anger without any mercy at all.

Soon the report of what the servant has done gets back to the King. He is furious. The king goes back to the original punishment and has the unforgiving servant thrown in prison for what would seem like eternity.

Jesus delivers the punchline in verse 35, *“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

God despises unforgiveness. If we hold unforgiveness in our hearts, we are willfully stepping outside of the grace of God, and it is painful. When we don't forgive someone, we are bound by our unforgiveness (see Matthew 16:19).

Unforgiving Debtor

Why do we harbor unforgiveness, holding on to the offense and putting the person into “prison” until they can pay off their debt? The primary reason is pride. At the root of our prideful unforgiveness is a failure to understand that we have been forgiven much. There is no offense that someone can commit against us that will come close to the offense of our sin against the all-holy God. It takes humility to admit this.

When Jesus taught what we know as the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6, he added an addendum on this very subject (see Matthew 6:14-15). Jesus expanded on the sentence, *“...as we forgive our debtors”*. The Lord's prayer is so familiar that sometimes we need to be reminded of the meaning of what we are reciting.

Jesus is not saying that to earn God's forgiveness, we must forgive others. Rather, he is saying that if you have truly experienced the grace and forgiveness of God, you will have a readiness and willingness to forgive others. Our relationship and connectedness with our heavenly Father translate to our relationship with one another; this is where the power for forgiveness lies (see 1 John 4).

When we withhold forgiveness towards another brother or sister, we are hindering our relationship with God. As a result, our prayers are hindered.

“Fellowship with my brother helps to determine my fellowship with God; hence, forgiveness is important to prayer.”

Warren Wiersbe

God desires that we live in a peaceful and healthy community within the church. Let us do everything we can to keep short accounts with one another. May our prayers be powerful and effective as a result.

Who do you need to forgive today?