

## The Unmerciful Servant | Matthew 18:21-35

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” <sup>22</sup>Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. <sup>23</sup>“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup>As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. <sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ <sup>27</sup>The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. <sup>28</sup>But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. <sup>29</sup>His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ <sup>30</sup>But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup>When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. <sup>32</sup>“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup>Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ <sup>34</sup>In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured until he should pay back all he owed. <sup>35</sup>“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart.”

1. Behind Peter’s question was

- an understanding that God wants us to forgive others.
- an understanding that God wants us to be generous with forgiveness.
- an understanding that there will be limits to our forgiveness.
- All of the above.
- None of the above.

2. A possible translation of verse 22 (found, for instance, in the King James Version) is “seventy times seven.” What is Jesus teaching in this verse about forgiveness in the kingdom of God?

3. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, whom does the king represent? Whom does the servant represent? What is the debt of ten thousand talents? Who is the fellow servant? What is the debt of a hundred denarii?

4. Why did the king cancel the servant’s debt?

- The servant had promised to repay it.
- He was a merciful king.
- The heart of the king was filled with undeserved pity for the servant.
- The king knew his servant had learned his lesson and would never do it again.

5. In the end, why did the king change his mind about canceling the servant's debt?

6. What is the main point of Jesus' parable?

7. What do we expect from others when we need their forgiveness? Do we hold ourselves to the same standard when others need our forgiveness? Why or why not?

8. Where can we find the desire and power to forgive without any limits or conditions?

9. Agree or disagree with the following statements:

- Verse 35 teaches us that we need to forgive others in order to earn God's forgiveness.
- Verse 35 says that one of the sins that God will not forgive is our refusal to forgive others.
- If a person does not apologize after sinning against us, we are not obligated to forgive.

10. How can we forgive, yet not encourage, sin?

**Helps:** (1) Peter understood that God wants us to forgive others and to be generous with our forgiveness. He also had the wrong understanding that there will be limits to forgiveness. (2) Jesus teaches that we are to forgive indefinitely without keeping score. (3) The king is God. We are the servant whose huge debt of sin is represented by the 10,000 talents. The fellow servant is our fellowman, whose sins against us are represented by the hundred denarii. Note: The denarius was the average wage for a day's work. Commentators suggest that the talent was worth 3,000, 6,000, or even more denarii, and that the 10,000 talents might be worth \$825 million today—a staggering amount that could not possibly be repaid. (4) The king canceled the debt, not because of promises or anything in the servant but because of his own undeserved mercy and pity for the servant. In Christ, God has done the same with our debt of sin. (5) The servant showed that he did not appreciate the forgiveness he had received, nor did he truly believe in mercy. He felt that people should be held accountable for their actions. The king, merciful yet just, simply dealt with the servant according to the servant's own standards. An unwillingness to forgive one's fellowman is a sign of unbelief—that one does not believe in mercy and forgiveness. If that is what one believes, then that is how the King will deal with that person. (6) In God's kingdom, forgiveness is to be like that of God: without limits or conditions. (7) While we want others to forgive us freely and without limits, we often do not want to do the same. We want to hold others to a higher standard. We will often keep a record of sins and withhold forgiveness. (8) The awareness of the forgiveness that is ours in Christ—the undeserved forgiveness that saved us from an eternity in hell—fills us with a growing desire and ability to forgive others in the same way. (9) We can do nothing to earn God's forgiveness; it is freely and graciously given to us. Our refusal to forgive others is a sign of unbelief and of a rejection of God's forgiveness. The Fifth Petition may very well strike fear in our unforgiving hearts. Yet, the remembrance of God's forgiveness in Christ dispels our fear, comforts our hearts, and empowers us to forgive the trespasses of others as God has forgiven us. The lack of an apology is not necessarily a sign of impenitence, and our forgiving others will not be dependent on our receiving an apology. (10) Forgiveness is to be pronounced to those in whom the law has worked penitence. Without the working of the law, the gospel becomes a license to sin.