

**Introduction**

1. One of life's hardest tasks is forgiving those who have hurt us.
2. Jesus knew that it would not be *if* we were hurt by another believer but *when* we would be hurt.
  - a. Jesus indicated in His teaching in our last lesson that other believers would offend us and may even cause us to stumble in our faith due to their sinful/selfish actions (cf., Mt 18:7).
  - b. So, shall we tie a millstone around the neck of those who hurt us or make us stumble (cf., Mt 18:6)? NO! In this lesson Jesus radically proposes that we must forgive them.
  - c. The hurt that we experience at the hands of others can quickly lead to disunity and uproar not only in our lives but also in the life of the church through gossip, back-biting, and factions.
3. In our last lesson, Jesus taught His disciples that an essential attitude necessary to achieve unity and harmony among God's people was humility.
4. In this lesson, Jesus taught His disciples that forgiving those who hurt us in the body is necessary for unity and harmony among God's people.
5. Today's scripture reading is all unique material found only in Matthew's gospel.
6. **Read Matthew 18:15-35.**

**A. The Three Steps of Forgiveness/Reconciliation (15-20)**

1. Step 1: Keep the matter private. (15)
  - a. Note that the initiative of forgiveness is given to the one who has been hurt.
    - 1) Remember that the one who has wronged you may not even know that s/he has wronged you.
    - 2) If you know that you have wronged another person, don't wait for them to come to you. Go to them and ask for forgiveness.
    - 3) We are not to hold a grudge, plot revenge, or tell others about our hurt. We are to go to the one who has hurt us and reconcile the matter.
  - b. Wiersbe notes, "...if he did it deliberately, our own attitude of submission and love will help him to repent and apologize. Above all else, go to him with the idea of winning your brother, not winning an argument. It is possible to win the argument and lose your brother" (Wiersbe, *Be Loyal*, 162).
2. Step 2: Ask for help from others. (16)
  - a. Unfortunately, many people make this the first step instead of the second step.
    - 1) The matter becomes gossip and divisiveness grows as battlelines are drawn between sides.
    - 2) Jesus equated sin with leaven since a little bit of leaven can spread into a large lump of dough (cf., Mt 13:33; 16:6).
    - 3) A little bit of gossip or back-biting goes a long way in destroying a church. It spreads rapidly.
  - b. Wiersbe writes, "If the offender refuses to make things right, then we may feel free to share the burden with one or two dependable believers. We should share the facts as we see them and ask the brethren for their prayerful counsel. After all, it may be that *we* are wrong. If the brethren feel the cause is right, then together we can go to the offender and try once again to win him" (Wiersbe, 162).
3. Step 3: Ask the church for help. (17-18)
  - a. Wiersbe writes, "What started as a private problem between two people is now out in the open for the whole church to see. Church discipline is a neglected ministry these days, yet it is taught here and in the Epistles (see 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6-16; 2 Tim 2:23-26; Titus 3:10). Just as children in the home need discipline, so God's children in the church need discipline. If by the time the matter comes to the whole church, the offender has not yet changed his mind and repented, then he must be disciplined. He cannot be treated as a spiritual brother, for he has forfeited that position. He can only be treated as one outside the church, not hated, but not held in close fellowship" (Wiersbe, 163)
  - b. The offender is not put outside the community as punishment as much as to make the offender aware of what s/he has lost.
  - c. Remember the call of Christ to the church is to seek that which is lost (cf., Mt 18:12-14 – seeking the lost sheep).

d. The Power of Community (18)

- 1) Jesus then said, “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.” (18)
  - a) Jesus used these same words in Mt 16:19 when speaking to Peter after his confession of Jesus as the Christ, the son of the living God.
  - b) Wiersbe writes, “This was a very familiar phrase to the Jews, for their rabbis often spoke of ‘binding and loosing,’ that is, forbidding or permitting. Our Lord’s statement in Matthew 16:19 referred to Peter. But His statement later in Matthew 18:18 included all of the apostles. As the representatives of their Lord, they would exercise authority according to His Word....Jesus did not say that God would obey what they did on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God had already willed. The church does not get man’s will done in heaven; it obeys God’s will on earth” (Wiersbe, 145-46).
  - c) Here these words are applied to all the Apostles/church leaders. The church must first determine what the will of God is and then do it.
- 2) The Power of Agreeing Together in Jesus’ Name (19-20)
  - a) Jesus added, “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.” (19)
  - b) We must only agree together in faith about things worthy of asking from Jesus in His name.
  - c) Sometimes we must agree together to do hard things when it comes to church life and discipline.
  - d) Jesus concluded, “For where two or three gathered in my name, there am I with them.” (20) – We do not act alone as the church, but under the direction of our head, Jesus Christ. He is with us in all that we face. We must look for His wisdom and guidance as well as His power to do what is needed and right according to His word.
- 3) Wiersbe concludes, “The church must be under the authority of God’s Word....Not only must there be the authority of the Word, but there must also be prayer (Matt. 18:19)...It is through prayer and the Word that we ascertain the will of the Father in the matter. Finally, there must be fellowship (Matt. 18:20). The local church must be a worshipping community, recognizing the presence of the Lord in their midst” (Wiersbe, 164-65).

**B. Forgive! (21-35)**

1. Peter had a question about this instruction on forgiveness, and Jesus had an answer for him. (21-22)
  - a. “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” (21)
    - 1) Peter wanted to know how forgiving of others we are to be. Is it once and done; a few times; seven times; or something else?
    - 2) Peter may have picked the number seven since it represents perfection or completion.
    - 3) Wiersbe notes, “Peter thought he was showing great faith and love when he offered to forgive at least seven times. After all, the rabbis taught that three times was sufficient” (Wiersbe, 165).
  - b. Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” (22)
    - 1) Some translations have Jesus saying “seventy times seven.”
    - 2) The correct translation is difficult to discern, but don’t get too wrapped up in the exact number and thereby completely miss Jesus’ point.
    - 3) Whether it’s 77 or  $7 \times 70 = 490$ , did Jesus mean that on the 78<sup>th</sup> or 491<sup>st</sup> time that we are hurt by a person that we can stop forgiving them? NO! Jesus was pointing Peter toward continual, unending forgiveness.
    - 4) Wiersbe notes, “By the time we have forgiven a brother that many times, we are in the habit of forgiving” (Wiersbe, 165).
  - c. How do we forgive those who don’t think that they’ve done wrong or who keep doing us wrong?
    - 1) Our part is to grant forgiveness. Their part is to receive it. We are only responsible for our part.
    - 2) God has forgiven every human being of his/her sins. However, some human beings refuse to receive the forgiveness that He gives by His grace through Jesus Christ. They miss out on receiving His forgiveness.

- 3) Never allow yourself to be a doormat for someone who is abusing you—physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually—in any way!
    - a) Protect yourself but with an attitude of forgiveness.
    - b) Having forgiveness in your heart is good for you! It protects you from the dark places of hatred, revenge, and grudges.
    - c) The one who has wronged you may be living life free of guilt while you are caught in the darkness of hatred and revenge that lead to bitterness and sin.
  - 4) Wiersbe concludes, "...Jesus was not advising careless or shallow forgiveness. Christian love is not blind (Phil. 1:9-10). The forgiveness Christ requires is on the basis of the instructions He gave in Matthew 19:15-20. If a brother is guilty of a repeated sin, no doubt he would find strength and power to conquer that sin through the encouragement of his loving and forgiving brethren. If we condemn a brother, we bring out the worst in him. But if we create an atmosphere of love and forgiveness, we can help God bring out the best in him" (Wiersbe, 165).
2. The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (23-35)
- a. The Parable: Jesus loved to teach through stories, parables. Here he tells a parable that reveals the heart of forgiveness.
    - 1) A Debtor: A servant owed the king 10,000 bags of gold that he could not pay back. (23-27)
      - a) The king justly commanded that the man, his wife, and children be sold into slavery to pay the debt. (25)
      - b) It was a huge debt that he had no hope of repaying. It would be something like \$10M to us.
      - c) The servant begged for his master to "be patient" (Gk., *makrothumeson* "long suffering"). The king "took pity" (Gk., *splagchnistheis* – "was moved inwardly with compassion") on him and showed him mercy by canceling (Gk., *apelusen*) the debt and letting him and his family go free. (26-27)
      - d) Wiersbe writes, "His case was hopeless, except for one thing: The king was a man of compassion. He assumed the loss and forgave the servant....The servant did not deserve this forgiveness; it was purely an act of love and mercy on the part of the master" (Wiersbe, 166).
      - e) God has forgiven us our sin debt by grace through His son Jesus Christ.
    - 2) A Creditor: The servant who had been forgiven found a servant who owed him 100 silver coins, which is an extremely small amount compared to 10,000 bags of gold. (28-31)
      - a) The servant who owed the 100 silver coins begged him for more time just as he had done. (29)
      - b) The servant who had been forgiven the huge debt did not show forgiveness but had the man who owed him this smaller debt thrown into debtors' prison. (30)
      - c) Wiersbe writes, "Perhaps he had the *legal* right to throw the man in prison, but he did not have the *moral* right. He had been forgiven himself—should he not forgive his fellow servant? He and his family had been spared the shame and suffering of prison. Should he not spare his friend?" (Wiersbe, 166)
      - d) We must be forgiving of others just as God has forgiven us all of our sin debt in Christ Jesus.
    - 3) A Prisoner:
      - a) The other servants saw the first servant's unforgiveness and reported it to the king.
      - b) The king called this unmerciful servant to account for failing to show mercy in the same way that he had received mercy from the king. The king had him thrown into prison where he was to be "tortured" (Gk., *tois basanistais*) (32-33)
      - c) Wiersbe concludes, "The world's worst prison is the prison of the unforgiving heart. If we refuse to forgive others, then we are only imprisoning ourselves and causing our own torment. Some of the most miserable people I have met in my ministry have been people who would not forgive others. They lived only to imagine ways to punish these people who had wronged them. But they were really only punishing themselves....If we live only according to justice, always seeking to get what is ours, we will put ourselves into prison. But if we live according to forgiveness, sharing with others what God has shared with us, then we will enjoy freedom and joy. Peter asked for a just measuring rod; Jesus told him to practice forgiveness and forget the measuring rod" (Wiersbe, 166-67).

b. The Lesson: Forgive others as you have been forgiven by God.

- 1) Jesus said, “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (35).
- 2) This parable is not focused on eternal salvation but upon forgiving others.
- 3) However, our inability to forgive another may indicate that we have not truly experienced God’s forgiveness toward us in Christ Jesus. Our actions reveal the true condition of our heart.
- 4) Wiersbe states, “...it is not enough to *receive* God’s forgiveness, or even the forgiveness of others. We must *experience* that forgiveness in our hearts so that it humbles us and makes us gentle and forgiving toward others” (Wiersbe, 167).

### C. Reflections

1. Forgiving others who hurt you will be a necessary action for the rest of your life.
2. Sometimes, you are the one giving forgiveness and sometimes you are the one receiving it. Do both well.
3. Don’t be a door mat for an abuser, but always be willing to grant forgiveness.
  - a. Having forgiveness in your heart keeps hatred, revenge, and grudges out of your heart.
  - b. Forgiving does not mean submitting to more abuse.
4. Remember how much God has forgiven you in Christ Jesus. That reality helps you forgive others as He has forgiven you.
5. Don’t be unmerciful by not forgiving others since it belies your lack of gratitude to God for all that He has forgiven you.
6. We are all ultimately accountable to God for everything—whether we have forgiven others or not; whether we have received forgiveness from others or not. We are all accountable to God in everything.
7. Let’s be forgiving and merciful toward others because that is the response that God has made toward us. It is a godly thing to do.