

# Matthew 18:21 - 35

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, let us turn this evening to the passage we read together, namely Matthew chapter 18 and from verse 21.

And I wanted to look this evening at the matter of forgiveness. Forgiveness. I'm not wanting to keep you overly long.

Just identify two things of great importance. Firstly, we see from this passage that forgiveness is a mark of authentic Christianity.

We really need to see that. Forgiveness is a major characteristic of being a Christian.

Having that inclination to forgive. One of the hardest things in life.

[ 1 : 34 ] I want you also to look at how this parable illustrates for us what forgiveness is.

And show or suggest a few practical steps in order that we might develop as those inclined to forgive.

It's a mark of authentic Christianity. Peter's aware of this. Because this brief passage, this parable, begins with Peter.

Peter. Who comes to Jesus and he asks him a question. And the question is this. Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?

You see, Peter is aware of the fact that to forgive is appropriate to one who follows Christ.

[ 2 : 48 ] He's not saying, Lord, should I forgive? He's asking, how do you measure this?

How do you go about doing this? I know you do it. I know it's to be done. I know I'm to do it. But that's how he comes to Jesus.

You know, I read something recently. I can't remember exactly where it was. And I can't. I never knew who it was that was talking. But I know what this fellow was.

He was a Christian counselor. He had this ministry. And he would meet with Christians who were struggling.

He was talking about how he encountered, as a counselor, dryness in believers. Dryness.

[ 3 : 55 ] That's the way he put it. He was getting at a sort of spiritual aridity in Christians. They were coming to him.

They had problems. Can I talk to you? Yes, of course you can. Sit down. I've got problems. I need to talk them through. I'm dry.

And this fellow disclosed the fact that time and again in his experience, he found the breakthrough in helping these Christian people was to ask them this question.

Is there anyone you can't forgive? And time and again, it seems, this was this chap's testimony.

Time and again, that seemed to be the root of their problem. Their dryness. Their aridity. That which was getting them down.

[ 5 : 09 ] That which was taking the smile off their faces, if you like. That which was taking the zap out of their personal testimony. He would ask them, is there anyone you're not able to forgive in your life?

And many of the time, the response was yes. And it was in the affirmative. Yes, there is. Now I don't know if this fellow went on and talked about things in particular.

Or whether he just introduced them to the fact that this was what was gnawing away at them inside. But it seems people were getting help by facing the fact that this was a feature of their lives.

Now we start off this evening by noticing that Peter comes to Jesus and he says, I acknowledge to follow you needs to be a practitioner of forgiveness.

Hannah Moore, the philanthropist, said this. A Christian will find it cheaper to pardon than to resent.

[ 6 : 28 ] Forgiveness saves us the expense of anger. The cost of hatred. The waste of spirit.

Do you have trouble with this? I know I do. I know I find myself having trouble with it.

It's not that I set out to restrict myself to a certain rationing as regards forgiving others.

I just find it. I find it there in my life. Now I said that Peter, he comes to Jesus identifying the fact that he understands it is to be part of his life.

But he says, how many times? Now he reckons seven times. Now this seemingly would have been quite a step up from that which is expected in his day and age.

[ 7 : 58 ] For rabbinic teaching, I understand, required forgiveness to be exercised three times. Now here's Peter coming to Jesus seven times, Lord. Now we know from Scripture that Peter did have a tendency to see himself as perhaps capable of things that others maybe were not.

You remember on one occasion, even though all of these should forsake you, Lord, I won't. So this is possibly a case of Peter thinking, I can go another step.

I can go beyond what others are capable of. The common teaching is three times. I will take it to seven. And of course, in the Bible, seven seems to be a significant figure.

You remember when Jericho fell, the figure seven appears there. The walking round of the priests and the blowing of the trumpets around the city. You remember the shaking of the blood of the hand at the altar seven times.

The prophet's servant was to go and look for the rain cloud seven times. There are instances such as these in our Scriptures.

[ 9 : 27 ] It's possible Peter took this figure which perhaps represents perfection or completeness.

And he's proposing it to Jesus and he's saying, Do you think this is the right way to go about it? Dealing with this matter that you expect of your disciples. And then Jesus responds.

And he says, Peter, seven times? No.

Seventy times. Seven times. Or seventy-seven times. Whichever one accepts.

Can you see Peter's face? And can you think what the Lord Jesus was thinking when he took that point to Peter?

[ 10 : 35 ] He is saying to Peter, I'm going to teach you some more now, Peter. He wasn't mocking him. He wasn't ridiculing him. Nothing like that. And I'm not encouraging anybody to think that way of Peter.

But Jesus, when Peter must have taken a step back, maybe his eyes were standing out on stalks, that was Jesus' response.

Jesus says, I'm going to take you further, Peter. I'm going to teach you some more, Peter. Let's go another step together down the pathway of discipleship.

Peter. But what he says, Peter, and what Jesus says in response teaches us this first point.

And with that, I'll finish it. That it is a mark of authentic Christianity. Now, if you are having problems in your life at this time, my friend, I can only ask you to hear the Word of God and to identify this fact.

[ 11 : 38 ] As a child of God, the Lord, your God, expects of you to exhibit forgiveness towards others.

Now, let us look at what the parable illustrates forgiveness to be. As we find it here. The parable asks us to see how God himself forgives.

God operates at the 70 times 7 level. That's the point. That's what the kingdom of God is about. You look at Jesus' point, verse 23.

Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And he goes on to speak of the man who owed 10,000 talents.

Now, do you have it in your margin? In mine here, it says that is millions of dollars. It is a vast sum, an unimaginable sum probably to all of us seated here this evening.

[ 12 : 54 ] It's an impossible, an incalculable sum. But this is the way God operates.

This is God and forgiveness. This is where Jesus is taking Peter, his disciple, who thinks maybe he's presenting something really special when he says, let's take it up a level, Jesus.

Let's take it from three to seven times. And Jesus says, let's keep going, Peter, 70 times, seven, for that is the way I work.

You see in verse 26 there, the man who owed this vast amount, having been initially committed, pleads for pardon and forgiveness and for time and for help and he receives it.

The servant fell on his knees before him. Be patient with me, he begged, and I'll pay everything back. Now you see, when we read those words, we are, as we read them, to realize these are, as it were, the words of a child.

[ 14 : 26 ] These are the words of somebody who doesn't really understand the issue here. He owed millions, this vast figure and how's he going to pay it back by pulling in these little hundred denarii debts?

He hasn't got what it takes and neither of you nor I and neither is any sinner in Aberdeen. Neither is the greatest person you know of or have ever heard of.

Collectively, mankind does not have sufficient righteousness to pay the debt. He cannot be forgiven because God is holy.

there is but one way in which you or I or any can know forgiveness and that is when there is suffering allied to that forgiveness and that is the picture we have of the gospel.

That is why we know about the kingdom of God because we have entrance into it through the gospel, through the Christ, through the Savior.

[ 15 : 44 ] There is God operating in forgiveness. There is God from before the foundation of the world in counsel saying go into the world and there is the Son saying I will go and I don't know if we know any more about it than that.

But in that and in the coming of the Son and of His determining to go to the cross and to fulfill the prophecies concerning Him, we see there the integrity of the forgiveness of God.

There we see the millions upon millions paid by himself. The king chose to bear the cost.

You see this fellow he says I'll pay everything back. There he is on his knees begging. What does it say? The servant's master took pity on him.

cancelled the debt and let him go. It doesn't say okay now sign this paper my lawyers have drawn up and this is how you're going to pay it all back.

[ 17 : 07 ] No he says he cancelled the debt and he let him go because he took pity on him. Now Peter comes to Jesus. Lord and maybe I'll include myself with him here.

We come to Jesus. Lord how often should I forgive those who sin against me? Seven times? How often am I like that?

You? Do you share that quality? That characteristic with me? Maybe we see it in Peter here. Lord we think maybe we're doing pretty well.

and then we look at the Lord himself and he's got a lesson to teach us about ourselves and about what the true practice of Christ likeness is all about.

And in this case we're talking about that exceedingly difficult practice of forgiving those whom we take to have offended us.

[ 18 : 14 ] and this passage shows us that my friends I don't like being tough you know.

I don't like being hard. Please believe that. I don't like being like that. I think the Lord puts love into the hearts of his people for his people.

But I think he tells us the truth and I know from my own experience and I know it from others with whom I have closer acquaintance of how we are disinclined to hear it when it really points the finger at us and really challenges us.

And we tend to shy away, we tend to hide, we stick the head in the sand like the ostrich. We'll do anything but listen to what it is that looks at us and says it's you.

And too often I find in my own experience I'm like this fellow here. I beg you be patient. Then he promises what he can't fulfil.

[ 19 : 27 ] And he hears the master take pity on him, cancel his debt and let him go. And what does he do? He's out like a shot and the next thing you see is his hands round this other fellow's throat.

And he's saying give me those two dollars you owe me. He's just been forgiven millions. I've just been saved from the pit. That's what it translates as.

I've just been saved from the pit by my Saviour Jesus Christ. And then I find myself reacting in this manner towards perhaps another sinner saved by that same grace, that glorious and that beautiful Saviour.

And I find myself as it were with my hands around his throat or her throat. And then I realise again, I'm still troubled by sin.

Listen to the word of God. Just a few scriptures. Exodus 23 verse 4. Notice the common denominator here.

[ 20 : 39 ] It is the word enemy. Your enemy. If you come across your enemy's ox wandering off, be sure to take it back to him.

Proverbs 24 verse 17. Do not gloat when your enemy falls. When he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice. Again, Proverbs 25 21.

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. And then finally, Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 44.

Love your enemies. And pray for those who persecute you. Enemies.

My friend, I sometimes find it in myself and in other Christians, treating fellow Christians in this way.

[ 21 : 49 ] The church has always been beset by what can only be described as this exhausting condition. It can exhaust us. You see the tensions that can exist in Christian churches, in the fellowships.

Tensions that exhaust the congregations when there is this, when you can't say inability, disinclination to forgive a perceived insult.

I've seen it. I know it's there. Yeah. but we're getting a lesson here tonight from the Word of God.

When you say, I can't do it, I shan't do it. I won't forgive him. The Word of God is roaring at you.

Expect only iridity of soul. You bear grudges like this, you're contradicting the Lord's law and the Lord's love.

[ 23 : 24 ] This is to undermine within the fellowship of God's people what Christianity declares itself to be all about. And as a denomination in relatively recent years, we have had illustrations of this kind of thing.

And we have to deal with it at the personal level. It's no good thinking, I know, I think, perhaps, what that fellow was talking about. On Sunday evening, I've seen it in others.

Deal with it at the personal level. And when we genuinely do seek the grace of the Lord to deal with it at the personal level, then we will find the congregations of the Lord's people will benefit.

Every one of the Lord's people are precious to Him and vital in His service. And we need to see that. We might not have specific callings that are identifiable, that have titles, but each and every one of us has this calling, likeness to Himself.

Let's look at a couple of things. I don't want to keep you much longer. Let's look at a couple of a few things that might help us to be inclined towards forgiveness.

[ 25 : 11 ] I was talking to Kenny and Margaret today about some folk we knew in common, and I referred to the fact that the first minister I ever knew after my conversion was the Reverend David Patterson.

I was in Perth in those days, and when I joined the church, when I first ever went to church, it was to the free church in Perth, and his ministry.

And time and again, David in his ministry would illustrate things by saying, put it up on your wall.

You can imagine a sort of big poster, a text he would be talking about. Put it up on your wall above your bed. I don't know where he got that one from, but he would use it time and again, so I concluded he never needed wallpaper.

He must have had texts all over his walls of verses that had struck him, hit home, and therefore he would place them up on the wall so as to remember them.

[ 26 : 30 ] Of course, he never did that, but he was trying to make the point to us, this is a big verse. This is one to remember. This is vital for your living out your Christian life.

Well, here's one to put above your wall, or put above your door, whatever. Paul, speaking to the Colossians, chapter 3, verse 8, just these words.

You must rid yourselves of such things as these, anger, rage, malice, etc.

and see the value of actually identifying texts that help our practice.

There are those, perhaps, who could memorise them. I have in fact taken on board David Patterson's advice in measure, and I do tend, at least for a period of time, to put up a verse that really challenges me in being a Christian, and put it on the wall above my desk.

[ 27 : 54 ] Christ. Or putting it in your front of your Bible, or in your handbag, or in your wallet, or on the dashboard, in your car, somewhere prominent, so that the challenge to be like Christ is there, every day.

because it is so very easy, when the Word of God really challenges us to close our Bibles, and that's the end of that day's reading, or that's the end of that sermon, and move on.

When the Word of God speaks to us, let it go on speaking to us. And you know this, Colossians 3, 8, you must rid yourselves of such things as these, anger, rage, and malice.

That is one to take hold of and to pray over, is it not? If that is a weakness in your makeup, if this is a reality that you face in your life, then my friend, hear the Word of God, you must rid yourself of.

Keep the Word of the Lord before you. Another practical aid might be this, focus on anyone who has grieved you.

[ 29 : 31 ] And as you do so, bring alongside you and that person Jesus Christ.

And his words, Matthew 6, 12, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. bring alongside that brother or sister in Christ, whom you are having real problems with.

But bring Christ along too. Don't try and resolve it without Christ. Think of it this way, another practical aid.

Think of your household. Think of all the appliances in your household. Car, washing machine, dishwasher, dishwasher, kettle, stereo.

You know the things you've got in your home. There are hundreds of things. There are some gadgets. Now, when they go wrong, what is your inclination?

[ 31 : 00 ] Well, the car has got a flat tire, I'll throw it out and buy a new one. The television, it's not behaving correctly, I'll throw it out, buy a new one. The washing machine, there's a problem here, I'll throw it out, I'll buy it.

Do you do that? You don't. You attempt wherever possible to get the thing fixed. And that is the way we ought to think about our relationships.

relationships, if they go wrong, if we find ourselves offended by another. We ought to seek the fixing of that problem, not the continuance of it.

We're not to say, oh, I'm just not going to forgive, that was a terrible offence that he or she inflicted upon me. I'm going to make this a bigger problem. You make it a little a problem until it's no problem at all.

That's Christ's way. Jesus, seven times? Seventy times seven, Peter. Listen to Paul.

[ 32 : 17 ] Philippians 4, verse 2, I plead with you, oh dear, and Syntyche, to agree with each other. How? in the Lord.

Side by side. That's the way Paul wanted them to see themselves. They're side by side in the Lord. How then can they perpetuate this conflict?

How can one say, but she said, ah, but she started it? No. we are to love one another. What does that mean?

It means not some slushy kind of feely thing. It means improving the other's state of affairs.

Seeking the other's improvement, betterment. When two Christians are in conflict, they are both diminished.

[ 33 : 23 ] And when one reaches out to the other, remembering the 70 times after, remembering the Savior who went and did all that he did for them, and extends that love to the one who has given offense, the Lord will bring good from it.

But so often we are miserly, the way we deal with one another. So often we exhibit an un-Christ likeness.

forgiveness, when he was so inclined to pour out his forgiveness, to cover the debt that equates to multi-millions, so often we evidence this miserly tendency to grumble over a couple of pounds.

sins. We must look at God's practice, the way God forgives. We must think in terms of our eternity and say that's what it costs.

How then can I be so miserly toward my sister because she snubbed me? Maybe she didn't.

[ 35 : 04 ] Against my brother who belittled me? Maybe he didn't. But even if they did, seventy times seven.

So Peter has this idea. Seven times Lord. And Jesus' response, oh Peter, I'm going to take you to a whole other level.

I'm going to take you to dizzying heights. I'm going to make your head spin what I now reveal to you. Seventy times seven.

Understand this, my friends, forgiveness is to be a mark of our Christian lives. ability to forgive is given to us.

We are by the help, the ongoing, the continuing help of God to practice being those who forgive. What a message that is to the watching world.

[ 36 : 14 ] What a message that is to the church itself. What an encouragement that is. who knows what might be the result of that, of you and of me, really going to town on this weakness that we have.

Oh, we can be so touchy. is there anybody you've got a problem with? My friend, go home tonight and take it to the Lord in prayer.

And lift up these scriptures. Lift up these thoughts. I have a glorious eternity because of what he has done.

How can I betray him now and not show this forgiveness over this small matter to one whom he shed his blood for?

What a child I am being. How immature and yet I like people to think I am mature. I am sophisticated but in fact how immature I am being when I do not display Christ likeness towards my brother or my sister.

[ 37 : 42 ] Jesus says, this is how my heavenly father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart. Jesus is saying in those where disagreements do exist in the church.

Your brother you must forgive your brother. Oh Jesus knows we've got this problem. We have these problems but we've got to deal with them.

We don't let them just go on. We listen to him. We listen to Paul when he pleads with the two ladies in Philippi. And we say ourselves don't we for the sake of the Lord in thankfulness to the Lord in order to praise the Lord with our lives we say I too will practice what I proclaim to be true of me.

I am reborn. I am a child of God and a child of grace. And through him I can do all things. Sister I embrace you.

Brother dear brother in the Lord receive my love. And if offense has been given I might pardon also.

[ 39 : 03 ] And when somebody asks for pardon acknowledge it. Don't let us listen to the evil one who would have us fighting and infighting till we're called home.

Where there are problems in our lives. Let us in the strength of the Lord overcome. For we witness for him with unclosing prayer.