

Forgiveness: Absorbing Our Sin

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. 23 "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 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.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

"ONE ANOTHERS" I CAN'T FIND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: "Humble one another, scrutinize one another, pressure one another, embarrass one another, corner one another, interrupt one another, defeat one another, disapprove of one another, run one another's lives, confess one another's sins, intensify one another's sufferings, point out one another's failings . . ."
— Ray Ortlund Jr.

Big Idea: Our sin absorption will never match God's sin absorption.

I. The Proposal

Matthew 18:21 Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"

- the other side of Matthew 18 – the church discipline process of confronting those who sin against us:

Matthew 18:15-20 If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

- Peter's question arises out of the topic that Jesus brings up – "If your brother sins against you" (vs.15)

- the rabbi's of the day taught that 3 times were sufficient

II. The Counterproposal

Matthew 18:22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

- Jesus number is reminiscent of Lamech in the book of Genesis:

Genesis 4:14-15 Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." 15 Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Genesis 4:23-24 Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. 24 If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

- the goal of Jesus' number is not to put a limit on forgiveness (as though someone would actually count to 490 or someone could even get close to it), but is to show limitless forgiveness

III. The Illustration

Matthew 18:22-34 the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. 24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. 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.' 29 So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 31 When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. 32 Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt.

King = God, settle = final judgment, servants = God's covenant people, debt = sin, prison = hell, sold = slavery to Satan

- the King forgives his servant a breath-taking fortune:

- 10,000 talents = 16 times the taxes of all of Palestine in 4BC according to Josephus; in the billions of dollars
- this servant squandered or misinvested the equivalent of billions of dollars (Bernie Madoff kind of stuff)
- this debt speaks to the insurmountable sin of even one of us
- compassion moves the king to forgiveness given the seeming genuineness of the servant

- the servant refuses to forgive a fellow servant a very small sum of money

- 100 denarii = about a day's wage in the ancient world; 600,000 times the debt he was forgiven
- notice there is no appreciation or time of reflection/celebration
- Jesus gives us a window into a very familiar cycle – Wrong leads to Anger which brews long term into Bitterness which becomes Malice and displays itself in Wrath: *we go from being wronged to being wrathful*

Anger is a typical response when we don't get our way, our expectations have not been met

We can be angry and not sin when we are angry about legitimate injustices and our anger is short-lived

Hastiness is the essence of anger, whereas waiting is the essence of patience

Patience trusts that things will be taken care of – all wrongs will be dealt with

Bitterness = Anger + Time

Bitterness is spiteful, vengeful, relational cancer. It is the bad side of memory when we can't let go of what someone else has done to us or others.

It is the antithesis of forgiveness. If you are bitter toward someone, you haven't forgiven them.

Forgiveness releases and frees others up without expecting anything in return – wrongs are no longer held over them

Malice is deep-seated, categorical hatred

Just as malice is emotional, so also is love – malice and love are not just actions

Malice is the end result of anger not being dealt with. Anger leads to bitterness which transforms into hatred.

Hatred hopes for the worst for others, love hopes for the best for others

Wrath = Anger with hands and feet. It is anger on display in outbursts and can result in fighting or violence. Road rage, rants, and temper tantrums are all examples.

The purpose of wrath is to hurt others whereas the purpose of kindness is to help others. Wrath inflicts pain on others whereas kindness instills hope in others.

Harshness is the hallmark of wrath, tenderness is the hallmark of kindness

- the King hears about the injustice and throws the first servant in prison

- the other servants were so blown away by this injustice that they have to tell the king
- when the king hears this, he realizes he has been swindled by the servant – he was never genuine, he just wanted a get-out-of-jail-card

- notice the difference in the plea of each servant: "Have patience with me, and I will pay you **everything**" (vs.26) and "Have patience with me, and I will pay you" (vs.29)
- "should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (vs.33) – the servant had lost his right to ever hold a debt over anyone else (chances are that he lent his master's money, not his own anyway)

IV. The Comparison

Matthew 18:35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

- Jesus is trying to build this into us as a daily impulse:

Matthew 6:11-15 Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

- Paul reiterates what Jesus teaches us by exhorting us to respond to evil with kindness:

Romans 12:17-21 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Ephesian 4:31-32 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:12-13 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- the first occurrence of the word "forgive" in the Bible provide one of the most amazing examples for us:

Genesis 50:15-21 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, 17 'Say to Joseph, Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, **for am I in the place of God?** 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

- forgiveness is incredibly costly

- your forgiving of others is directly linked with God's forgiveness of you – your attitudes and actions toward others reveal your true belief in God's attitudes and actions toward you: "Our forgiving of others will not procure forgiveness for ourselves; but our not forgiving others proves that we ourselves are not forgiven." - John Owen

What do you think you are "owed" by God or by others? What is your first impulse when you are wronged? Is it love, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, understanding, and grace? Or is it incredulity, anger, frustration, vengeance, and resolve to make them pay?

What does your attitude when you are wronged reveal what is inside of you?

Who in your life, when you think about them, makes you want to scream? Who, just thinking about them, gives you the creeps because of what they have done to you? Do you realize you are looking in the mirror?

How often do you forget that you are forgiven in Christ? How often do you forget the innumerable transgressions that you have committed and God always absorbs?

Our sin absorption will never match God's sin absorption.