

# A CHRISTIAN'S ATTITUDE OF FORGIVENESS

**BIBLE TEXT** : Matthew 18:21-35

LESSON 126 **Junior Course**

**MEMORY VERSE:** "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14).

## **BIBLE TEXT in King James Version**

### **Matthew 18:21-35**

<sup>21</sup> Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

<sup>22</sup> Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

<sup>23</sup> Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

<sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

<sup>25</sup> But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

<sup>26</sup> The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

<sup>27</sup> Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

<sup>28</sup> But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took *him* by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

<sup>29</sup> And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

<sup>30</sup> And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

## **BIBLE REFERENCES:**

### **NOTES:**

#### **A Fisher of Men**

Peter had left his nets, his occupation as a fisherman, to become a fisher of men. He had been chosen by Jesus to be one of His twelve disciples, and had had the opportunity of being one of the three closest to Jesus. He had heard the many sermons Jesus had preached about loving one another and being merciful to the oppressed, giving help to the poor and widows, and becoming as little children in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

One day Peter asked Jesus how many times he was expected to forgive his brother who wronged him — seven times? Perhaps he thought he had learned a great deal of the love of Jesus to be able to forgive someone who had wronged him seven times. Perhaps he even thought Jesus would commend him for being able to forgive the same person that often. He was quite surprised when Jesus answered, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Four hundred ninety times!

It is not likely that one person would wrong another that many times, but Jesus wanted to show Peter that there could be no limit to the number of times he must forgive. If that love of God was in his heart he would always forgive, regardless of how much wrong he suffered. Had not God forgiven Peter's sins? And more than that, had He not given him power to go and sin no more? Peter should be grateful for heavenly forgiveness, and show the same mercy to his fellow men.

#### **Plain Parables**

Jesus made His lessons very plain, so everyone could understand. He often began His stories with such words as, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully"; or, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow"; or, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind." They all planted their crops and reaped the harvest. They lived close to the soil, and could understand such examples. And those who had been fishermen had countless times cast their nets into the sea and gathered in all kinds of fish. Jesus could explain eternal things to them through the things they knew about in their daily life.

#### **Sold for Debts**

The story Jesus now told was easy for them to understand. In days of old, people who could not pay their debts were often put into prison; or they might even be sold as slaves to make up the amount they owed. Jesus taught through this parable the boundless love of God who could forgive all our sins, and compared His mercy with the little grace we need to forgive others.

A certain rich man had many servants, and when he looked over his accounts one day he found that one of them owed him a great amount of money, and had nothing with which to repay it. The master commanded that the servant and his wife and even his

<sup>31</sup> So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

<sup>32</sup> Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

<sup>33</sup> Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

<sup>34</sup> And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

<sup>35</sup> So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

little children all be sold as slaves so that he could get back at least part of what was owed him. It seemed cruel to send the family away from their home, but the servant had sinned, and the law said this punishment was just.

You can imagine how heartbroken the servant would be. Perhaps he had served the same master since he was a boy, and this had been home to him all his life. It might be that he would never return, and he might never see his family again. One of the children might have been sold to a man in Judea, and another one in Samaria. Or one might even be taken to Egypt, as Joseph was by the Midianite merchantmen. Indeed, the servant was brokenhearted, and he cried out to the master, "Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." If he could only have a little time, he would make everything right.

### **Mercy**

And his lord had mercy! He gave the servant more than time to pay — he forgave the debt entirely, and no money had to be paid back. It was not because the servant deserved forgiveness, but it was the compassion of his master that spared him from the tragedy of the penalty for his crime. How happy his family was that everything was forgiven!

Was the servant grateful? Had he learned a lesson from his master's generosity? After the huge sum of money he had been forgiven he could have afforded to have forgiven anyone who might have owed him something.

### **No Mercy**

Instead, the next time he met one of his fellow servants who owed him a few dollars, he not only asked payment but threatened to choke his debtor if he did not pay. That man pled with him just as he had pled with the master, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." But the servant would not wait. He had not learned the lesson of forgiveness and mercy. He sent his fellow servant to prison to stay until he could in some way get the money to pay the debt.

That is not the end of the story. The master heard what had happened. He was shocked at the cruelty of the servant he had so recently forgiven the great debt, and he called for him and said: "I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" The servant had no excuse, and did not offer to make amends, so he was heavily punished, and had to pay the debt, too.

We agree that this ungrateful servant got what he deserved. Surely, we would have forgiven a little debt like that after we had had so much forgiven us. Or would we? How do we feel toward the person who has slighted us? Do we love the person who received the honor we thought we deserved? What if someone has grievously wronged us, said evil things about us? Can we forgive?

### **Our Debt**

All who are saved have had that great debt forgiven. When we were sinners we had wronged God, and we had nothing with which to make it right. Nothing we could do would cover our sins so that God would be pleased with our lives and spare us from eternal punishment. But when we were sorry for our sins and asked Him to forgive us (with nothing in our hands to buy our redemption) He freely forgave us all, and forgot our sins.

Now we must forgive our debtors. The wrongs we suffer are

really quite small compared with our sin against God. Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If we want God to forgive us we must forgive our fellow men. At the time we were saved we promised to do that; and when the love of Jesus came in we forgave everybody. The people we used to hate, looked different to us. God's love in our hearts covered their sins.

### **The Oil of the Spirit**

That love comes by the Spirit of God, and in the Scriptures that Spirit is often likened to oil. We must keep replenishing that Oil by prayer after we are saved if we want to keep that love and forgiving spirit in our hearts. When a car leaves the factory it is oiled and ready to travel. After a certain number of miles it will need more oil, or the bearings will become dry and the motor will get hot and parts of it will melt, and it will be ruined. New oil put in periodically will keep the motor humming smoothly for many thousands of miles.

If we keep the Oil of the Spirit in our lives, our lives will run smoothly, without any friction between us and our brothers and sisters. We will even forgive our enemies. Jesus said to His people, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you" (Luke 6:27). "If ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them" (Luke 6:32). "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). A Spanish proverb states: To return evil for good is devilish; to return good for good is human; but to return good for evil is divine

### **Humility of a Christian**

The spirit of the world is haughtiness, independence, self-assurance, self-will: you do me a favor and I will do you a favor. The child of God is humble, submissive, willing' to suffer wrongfully, if necessary. He wants to be like Jesus, who said, "I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29). That did not mean that He was weak. Neither is the humble Christian weak. The Apostle Paul said, "When I am weak, then am I strong" (II Corinthians 12:10). When we realize that we can do nothing in ourselves, then we lean hard on Jesus and He gives us heavenly strength.

When Paul wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus, he told the congregation to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called. That meant that they had been called of God and had answered the call; now they must prove by their lives that they were Christians. Paul told them what he meant by walking worthily: "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2, 3). To live like that, the Christian must have that forgiving spirit in his heart. Our love will cover the wrong that has been done us. We will forgive our enemies as well as forgive our friends.

"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (James 3:17, 18). We can make peace by forgiving those who have wronged us.

If we do not forgive, neither will God forgive us. He will not answer our prayers. Jesus said, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall "have

them"; but He added, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any" (Mark 11:24, 25). Another time Jesus said that if we came to the altar to pray and remembered that our brother had something against us, we must first go and make peace with our brother, and then He would bless us. Not only must we make outward restitution, but we must forgive from the heart.

The greatness of our relationship with God is shown by the amount of the grace of forgiveness we have.

"How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

### **QUESTIONS**

- 1 What did Jesus want to teach His disciples by this parable?
- 2 What did the master find wrong with his servant?
- 3 What was the punishment decreed?
- 4** What did the servant do to escape punishment?
- 5 How did the servant prove that he did not learn the lesson of forgiveness?
- 6 Whom are we to forgive? How many times?
- 7 What must we do before we can expect God to answer our prayers?
- 8 How much has God forgiven us, as compared with the debt of the two servants?