

Forgive from the Heart: Part 2

Matthew 18:32-35 (ESV)

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."

I. Introduction

A. Last week we considered Matthew 18:21-35, in which Jesus shares a parable about an unforgiving servant.

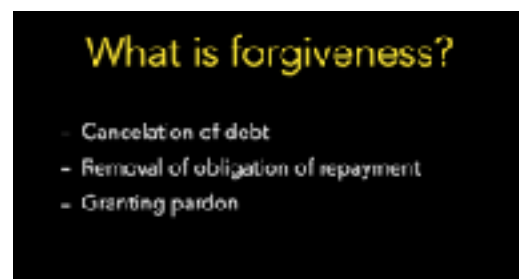
1. Jesus is answering the question of Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? (18:1)
2. Those who are greatest in kingdom of heaven are those who greatly forgive; they are those who "*forgive from the heart*" (v.35).
 - a) Jesus calls his disciples to *unlimited* forgiveness. He teaches Peter to forgive without counting! Why, because that's what God the Father has done towards them. Jesus' disciples should show one another unlimited forgiveness because God has shown them unlimited forgiveness. (v.22)
 - b) This kind of forgiveness is not optional (v.35). Those who refuse to forgive their brothers & sisters (i.e. fellow disciples, believers, Christians) will find God Father refuses to forgive them.
 - (1) **Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)** 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."
 - (2) **Luke 17:3-4 (ESV)** ³ "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴ and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."
 - c) Forgiveness from the heart,



- (1) ... is showing unlimited forgiveness to brothers and sisters, because of the unlimited forgiveness received by God. Unlimited forgiveness of others begins when we ponder the unlimited forgiveness given to us by God (v.24). God the Father has forgiven each of his children an infinitely great sin debt against him (i.e. "ten thousand talents"), thus he expects his children to forgive the lesser sins against one another. When your heart is deeply moved by the forgiveness God has given you, then that same heart will be able to show others similar forgiveness.
 - (2) Comes by faith in the justice of Jesus. When we refuse to be judge, but rather entrust judgment to Jesus, then we can rest in the fact that justice will truly be served—either in hell by justice or in heaven—by the death of Jesus.
 - (3) Willingness to obey the command of Jesus. This kind of forgiveness is what Jesus commands and expects from his children/disciples/followers. The heart of the disciples of Jesus is disposed toward obedience even when he thinks such disobedience may be impossible.
- d) Trump statement: last week I made reference to a comment that Donald Trump made in 2016, wherein he said he needed no forgiveness. That example was in no way whatsoever intended to be a political statement. I did not mean for it to be taken as a signal either for or against either current presidential candidate. I used that example because it was statement about forgiveness that made national news and because he who made it claims to be a Christian but does not appear to understand that one cannot be a disciple of Jesus apart from the daily need for forgiveness.
- e) This world is broken. It is cursed. We have all been sinned against and we have sinned against those around us. We all need daily forgiveness, the Lord's Prayer clearly indicates. The issue of forgiveness is massively significant.

B. This week - unresolved questions

1. How can Christians forgive like this?
2. What happens when we do not forgive?
3. Definition of forgiveness
 - a) From the parable (Mt 18:21-35) we begin to understand the meaning of forgiveness.
 - (1) The cancelation of debt
 - (2) The removal of obligation of repayment
 - (3) The granting of pardon



- b) Greek word: ἀφίημι (*aphiēmi*)
- (1) "to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing—'to pardon, to forgive'"¹
 - (2) "To leave; to allow to leave"²
 - (3) "To send off; to let go; to release from legal obligation or debt; to leave behind"³
 - (4) "let loose; permit."⁴
- c) **Collective definition:** Forgiveness is the cancelation of indebtedness by the removal of the obligation for repayment and the granting of pardon; to release someone from a sense of obligation, whether relational or financial, by allowing them to leave the failure behind and move forward free from the weight of guilt.

4. How can Christians forgive like this?

- a) Is it possible to forgive with unlimited forgiveness? Are there any examples to which we could look for encouragement.
- b) **Jesus** himself modeled such forgiveness towards those who facilitated his death. Recall that he prayed for those who persecuted⁵ him, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*" (Lk 23:34).
- c) **Stephen**, after Jesus, the first Christian martyr, manifested the same forgiveness under similar circumstances. As he was being stoned to death he also prayed for those who were in the very act of taking his life saying, "*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*" (Acts 7:60).
- d) **Corrie ten Boom** (1892 - 1983) was born in the Netherlands, the youngest of four children. Her father was a watchmaker. The family were Christians and students of the Bible. When the Nazis invaded and began sending Jews to concentration camps, her family hid Jews in their house and were actively involved in the underground movement to help Jews find safety. They were eventually discovered and the whole family arrested.⁶ Corrie and her sister

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 502.

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 163.

³ Rudolf Bultmann, "Ἀφίημι, Ἄφεσις, Παρήμι, Πάρεσις," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 509.

⁴ Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020).

⁵ Matthew 5:43-44.

⁶ The arrest took place on 28 February 1944.

Betsie were sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp, where Betsie died about 10 months later. Corrie was unexpectedly released 12 days after her sister's death due to, what she thereafter discovered was, a "clerical error." One week after her release all the women in her age group were sent to the gas chambers. In her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, she tells an amazing story of forgiveness.

(1) After the defeat of Germany, ten Boom traveled from her home in Holland to speak at a church in Munich in 1947. She went to share "the message that God forgives. It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bomb-out land... I gave them my favorite mental picture. ...because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind... 'When we confess our sins,' I said, 'God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever.'"⁷

(2) After the talk was over a man approached her. She writes,

I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin.

Now he stood in front of me, hand thrust out; "A fine message, *fräulein!* How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea! You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk. I was a guard there."

I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze. He did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. *Fräulein,*"—again the hand came out—"will you forgive me?"

And I stood there—I whose sins had every day to be forgiven—and could not. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

⁷ Source: <https://guideposts.org/positive-living/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-forgiveness/> accessed 5 October 2024. This truth is a reference to Micah 7:19.

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. “If you do not forgive men their trespasses,” Jesus says, “neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.

“Jesus, help me!” I prayed silently. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. “I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart!”

(3) Imagine shaking hands with the prison guard whom you had watched beat your frail sister and who had cruelly mocked you and saying to him, “I forgive you with all my heart.” Such is the unlimited forgiveness of the disciples of Jesus.

- e) **Elizabeth Elliot** (1926 - 2015) along with her husband Jim, and four other families in 1953 moved to Ecuador to share the gospel of Jesus with the unreached people called the Quichua. As they were trying to make contact with the Huaorani tribe in 1956, Jim and the four other men were mistaken to be cannibals and were speared to death.

- (1) Elizabeth forgave the men who murdered her husband.
 - (2) Elizabeth and the sister of one of the slain men, returned to live among the Quichua for years, learning their language, being kind to them, sharing the gospel, and eventually seeing some of them become believers in Jesus. Including one of the men who were among those throwing spears at her husband on the day he died.
 - (3) Imagine dedicating two decades of your life struggling to translate and communicate the gospel to the very people who murdered your husband. Such is the unlimited forgiveness of the disciples of Jesus.
- f) **Survivors of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church**, in Charleston, S.C. At a Wednesday evening Bible study and prayer meeting, on 17 June 2015, a 21 year-old white man walked in and sat among those who had gathered. After about an hour the self-avowed⁸ white supremacist began shooting as everyone closed their eyes in prayer⁹, killing nine people and wounding three others. He later explained that his intention was to start "a race war."¹⁰ Two days after the shooting, at his bond hearing, survivors of the dead were allowed to give statements. What happened at that hearing was what CBS News described as, "one of the most extraordinary scenes ever in an American courtroom."¹¹
- (1) Ethel Lance, age 70, was one of the slain. Her daughter, Nadine Collier, faced her mother's murderer and said,

"I forgive you. You took something very precious away from me. I will never get to talk to her ever again. I will never be able to hold her again, but I forgive you, and have mercy on your soul. ... You hurt me. You hurt a lot of people. If God forgives you, I forgive you."¹²
 - (2) Myra Thompson, age 59. Her sister addressed the murderer saying,

"I would just like him to know that, to say the same thing that was just said: I forgive him and my family forgives him. But we would like him to

⁸ Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/05/us/no-regrets-from-dylann-roof-in-jailhouse-manifesto.html> accessed 5 October 2024.

⁹ Source: <https://abcnews4.com/news/emanuel-ame-shooting/forgiveness-compassion-shape-most-messages-to-condemned-shooter-roof-in-sentencing> accessed 5 October 2024.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/families-show-forgiveness-for-alleged-church-shooter/> accessed 5 October 2024.

¹² Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/hate-wont-win-the-powerful-words-delivered-to-dylann-roof-by-victims-relatives/> accessed 5 October 2024.

take this opportunity to repent. Repent. Confess. Give your life to the one who matters most: Christ. So that He can change him and change your ways, so no matter what happens to you, you'll be okay."¹³

(3) Depayne Middleton-Doctor, age 49, was another victim. Her sister said,

"We have no room for hate. We have to forgive. I pray God on your soul."¹⁴

(4) Tywanza Sanders, age 26, was also killed. His mother, Felicia, addressed her son's murderer and said,

"We welcomed you Wednesday night in our Bible study with open arms. You have killed some of the most beautiful people that I know. Tywanza Sanders was my son... As we said in Bible study, we enjoyed you, but may God have mercy on you."¹⁵ "I forgive you."¹⁶

(5) Imagine standing in front of a hate-filled radical racist who murdered nine members of your spiritual family and saying to him,

"I forgive you." Such is the unlimited forgiveness of the disciples of Jesus.

g) **Summary:** How can Christians forgive like this? How can Christians forgive like Christ? Is the answer not found in the fact that the Spirit of Christ dwells within the followers of Christ? After coming out of the courtroom the wife of one of the pastors who was slain was asked by a reporter, "How is it that this community is able to offer forgiveness to this man? She quickly responded, "Only by the grace of God. This forgiveness only comes from God himself."

5. What happens if we do not forgive?

a) You will not be forgiven by God.

¹³ Source: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/19/hate-wont-win-the-powerful-words-delivered-to-dylann-roof-by-victims-relatives/> accessed 5 October 2024.

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/families-show-forgiveness-for-alleged-church-shooter/> accessed 5 October 2024.

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/families-show-forgiveness-for-alleged-church-shooter/> accessed 5 October 2024.

¹⁶ Source: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/charleston-victims-mother-tells-dylann-roof-forgive/story?id=44704096> accessed 5 October 2024.

- (1) **Matthew 6:14-15** (ESV) 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.
- (2) **Matthew 18:35** (ESV) "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."
 (a) If we do not forgive one another, then we will find ourselves locked in an eternal prison.
- b) Your heart will be filled with bitterness and anger. Unforgiveness breeds bitterness and anger. Paul affirms the same forgiveness as Jesus taught.
- (1) **Ephesians 4:32** (ESV) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ Jesus forgave you.
 (a) Notice the connection between forgiveness and being tenderhearted. Jesus made the same connection in saying that forgiveness must be "from the heart" (Mt 18:35).
 (b) Notice also the understanding that forgiving one another is based upon knowing the degree to which God has forgiven you. "...*forgiving one another, as God in Christ Jesus forgave you.*" You will never forgive others of their sins against you if you do not first understand how much God has forgiven you for your sins against him.
 (c) But what if there is no forgiveness? Paul describes this person in the previous verse.
- (2) **Ephesians 4:31** (ESV) Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.
 (a) When forgiveness is absent, bitterness and anger is present. Unforgiveness breeds bitterness. Notice the progression.
 i) **Bitterness** slowly boils into anger,
 ii) **anger** overflows into clamor
 iii) **Clamor** (lit. "A shouting match") includes slander.
 iv) **Slander** flows from malice. Intentional lies about another's character.
 v) **Malice** grows when the mental recordings of the offense and offender get play over and over again.
 (b) The condition of the heart is revealed by the vocabulary on the tongue.
- (3) **Ephesians 4:29** (ESV) Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

- (a) Christians are not to tolerate corrupt talk because we are not to tolerate corrupt hearts. The words we speak reveal the condition of the heart.
 - (b) Jesus addressed these things plainly.
 - i) "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Mt 12:34).
 - ii) "But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart..." (Mt 15:18).
 - iii) "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander" (Mt 15:19).
 - (c) Corrupt and hateful talk can be traced back to unforgiveness and the harboring of grudges.
- (4) **Ephesians 4:26-27** (ESV) ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.
- (a) Anger in itself is not sinful. God gets angry. Jesus got angry. But Paul warns us to be on guard against allowing anger to turn sinful. Thus, he instructs that anger be dealt with quickly. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" deal with it soon. Do not allow anger to linger. Paul is here quoting,
 - (b) **Psalms 4:4-5** (ESV) ⁴ Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*
⁵ Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD.
 - (c) The context in Psalms calls for thoughtful consideration when you are angry. David instructs the angry person to sleep on it. Think about the issue. Ponder the offense. Don't talk about, except to God, in the prayers of the night. Is there a justifiable reason to be angry. Do not let you heart happily harbor angry thoughts. In order to "offer right sacrifices," which happens every day, one must entrust the offense to the Lord. If you need to deal with it, then go and deal with it. Do not allow the anger to fest and boil into bitterness.
 - (d) **Leviticus 19:17-18** (ESV) ¹⁷ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.
- c) Summary: harboring anger in your heart, without properly dealing with that anger, leads to hatred in the heart and then one "incurs sin because of him." Thoughts of vengeance begin to rise up and the grudge gives ground to the devil.

- (1) **Romans 12:19** (ESV) 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."
- (2) Unforgiveness is the devil's playground. Forgiving those who have sinned against you takes that ground away. When we forgive those who have sinned against us, then Satan has no place to stand in our lives. When we refuse to forgive, he has plenty of ground upon which to stand. Unforgiveness becomes a base of operations for Satan. Forgiveness leads to a place of blessing, because Jesus always blesses obedience.

Conclusion

Forgiveness, as Jesus commands, is possible.

Unforgiveness is painful.

Forgiving from the heart is...

- ...deeply moved by the gracious forgiveness received from God the Father
- ...so moved, knowing how much we have been forgiven, that we understand that must forgive others.
- ...choosing to forgive those who sin against us, so that God will forgive us our sins against him.
- ...considering the examples of Christians who have gone before us and believing that the grace to forgive that was given to them will also be given to us.
- ...guarding against all bitterness so that the devil will have no base of operations in our hearts, while praying that the Lord will help us forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us.

There are still questions. It seems that we need one more week.

- Does forgiving mean there are no consequences?
- What is the difference between forgiveness and trust?
- Must we forgive those who do not ask for it?
- Is forgetting a necessary component of forgiveness?

Discussion Questions

1. Read the definition of forgiveness offered (see pg. 3 of sermon manuscript). Summarize this in your own words. Is there anything about the definition that you would change?
2. Consider the story of Corrie ten Boom offering forgiveness to her former captor. Imagine yourself in her shoes as she faced the former guard, now her spiritual brother. What would be going through your mind?
3. Consider Elizabeth Elliot's story. Would you have been able to remain among and work with the tribe of people who killed your spouse?
4. Consider the testimony of the survivors of the church massacre. What might you have said to the murderer if you were in that courtroom?
5. Read Ephesians 4:26-32. How would you describe what happens in the heart when one refuses to forgive?
6. What did Paul mean when he wrote, "do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph 4:26)? Summarize this in your own words.
7. How does failing to deal righty and quickly with anger "give opportunity to the devil" (Eph 4:27)?
8. What questions about forgiveness still linger in your mind?