

MATTHEW 18:18-35
(FORGIVENESS)

“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall 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, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.’

*²¹“Then Peter came and said to Him, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ ²² Jesus *said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. ²³ For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶ The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.’ ²⁷ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ ²⁹ So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ ³⁰ He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹ So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. ³² Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. ³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”*

Introduction

We will look at the subjects of prayer and corporate discipline in the body of Christ (v.20). We also will look at Jesus’ teaching on the subject of forgiveness. To keep this in context, it must be remembered that Jesus was not teaching this section to a large crowd, but to His own disciples (Matthew 18:1).

VERSES 18-20: *“Truly I say to you, whatever you shall 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, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”*

These verses speak to us about the responsibility of the church to discipline its own and the power of prayer. Some misinterpret v.18-19 to mean that a person gets to decide (based on their own ideas) what is right or wrong, or what should be *bound* or *loosed*. The verses should be read in their context. Immediately before verses 18-20, the issue of church discipline is addressed:

Matthew 18:15-19: *“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ And 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-gatherer. ¹⁸ Truly I say*

*to you, whatever you shall 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, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."*

We do not have to determine on our own what is wrong or right; we have the Bible. The church must handle its discipline according to God's Word, and thus we bind and loose based upon what God has spoken, not on our own authority. The authority originates from God in heaven (not man) as Jesus told Peter earlier in

Matthew 16:19: *"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."*

Since any authority we have comes from God, the believers of the church are to function together in properly exercising it. It also must be remembered that they operate in the Lord's presence. **Matthew 18:20:** *"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."* This verse often is cited as one that tells us of the Lord's presence at corporate prayer (i.e. when Christians get together to pray the Lord is present.) Although it is true that the Lord is in the presence of his church, He is also in the constant presence of the lone believer (e.g. Matthew 28:20 "... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."). The accurate context of Matthew 18:20 is not regarding corporate prayer but church discipline. Remember that in Matthew 18:16 Jesus said that when discipline is executed it must be done with two or three witnesses:

Matthew 18:16: *"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED."*

Likewise, verse 20 says, *"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."* When the church witnesses declare either the discipline or the repentance and restoration of one of its members, we are told that this is done in the Lord's presence. This concept of the Lord's presence causes the witnesses to proceed with humility and godly fear. When this is done, there is no place for self-righteousness or hypocrisy.

VERSES 21-22: *"Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'²² Jesus *said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'"*

Here we have the issue of *personal forgiveness*. This is a separate and distinct issue from church discipline or the *government's responsibility to punish wrongdoers*. As set out before, the church is responsible to discipline its own (see comments on Matthew 18:1-17). Likewise, the government is responsible to execute public justice (see Romans 13:1-6, 1 Peter 2:13-15, Titus 3:1). We as *individuals* are responsible to forgive every wrong done to us. Jesus said in **Mathew 6:14-15:**

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

If a crime is committed against me, the government must execute fair judgment and *I must forgive*. These concepts are not mutually exclusive. I must forgive personal offenses to me irrespective of the government executing justice.

Peter thought he *“was being generous here, for the traditional Rabbinic teaching was that an offended person needed to forgive a brother only three times.”*³²⁰ The Lord annihilated Peter’s self-righteous view by telling him *“seventy times seven.”* We should be quick to forgive and not think so well of ourselves for forgiving. Matthew Henry put it this way:

*“There is a proneness in our corrupt nature... [of being concerned about] forgiving too much, though we have so much forgiven us. ...It does not look well for us to keep count of the offences done against us by our brethren. There is something of ill-nature in scoring up the injuries we forgive, as if we would allow ourselves to be revenged when the measure is full.”*³²¹

We are not to seek our own revenge when we suffer unfair or harsh treatment by others:

Romans 12:19: *“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*

1 Peter 2:20: *“... But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.”*

What if I am not quick to forgive? What are the results? Obviously I am actively and knowingly sinning, but on top of that, I will become a bitter and angry person.³²² This bitterness will boil over and cause others to be victims of my unforgiveness.

Hebrews 12:15: *“See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;”*

Bitterness is not the only manifestation of a unforgiving and hateful person. It also manifests a murderous heart of one who is not really converted:

1 John 3:14-15: *“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”*

³²⁰ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, v.2 p.62 (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

³²¹ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Bible*, Matthew 18:21-35 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

³²² Ryle states that *“The quantity of malice, bitterness and party-spirit among Christians is fearfully great. No wonder so many prayers seem to be thrown away and unheard. It is a subject which ought to come home to all classes of Christians. All have not equal gifts of knowledge and speech in their approaches to God. But all can forgive other people. It is a subject which our Lord Jesus Christ has taken special pains to impress on our minds. He has given it a prominent place in that pattern of prayers, the Lord’s prayer. We are all familiar from our infancy with the words, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.’ It would be good for many people if they would consider what those words mean!”* Ryle, J. C. (1993). *Mark*. Crossway Classic Commentaries (p 175). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Some people teach that you need to forgive only if the person repents or only if they are a Christian (i.e. only a *brother*). That is a wrong view of Scripture. First, Jesus defines that we are to love our “neighbor”, who represents all people, whether we like them or not.³²³ Secondly, Jesus tells us that we are to forgive *anyone*.

Mark 11:25-26: *“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions.*

²⁶ *[But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.]”*

One last thought on the distinction between forgiveness and trust. I am required to forgive a person, but that does not require me to immediately put them back into a position of trust. It is an atrocity for churches to have found out that their leaders have greatly violated the trust of their position, and yet leave them in that position. We are to forgive that leader, but that does not mean they are put back in their position of trust (1 Timothy 5:19-21). Forgiveness must be free, but trust in church leadership is earned over time (1 Timothy 3:1-13) (e.g. forgiveness of a bank robber does not require you to hire them as a teller at the bank!).

VERSES 23-35: *“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.²⁴ And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.²⁵ But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.²⁶ The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.’²⁷ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.²⁸ But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’²⁹ “So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’³⁰ He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.³¹ So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all*

³²³ Luke 10:27-37: *“And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And He said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’ Jesus replied and said, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’ Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers’ hands?’ And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy toward him.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do the same.’”*

that had happened.³² Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?'³⁴ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.³⁵ So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

This is a story of a slave who a debt that he could never pay. "[He] owed a large amount, 10,000 talents....a talent was probably a measure of gold...."³²⁴ A talent represents a weight measure of about "75 pounds."³²⁵ (must see this footnote below re: the amount in today's dollars). The slave was granted infinite mercy and forgiveness. Even though he was the recipient of such overwhelming forgiveness, he refused to forgive one who owed him a small amount. We are told that he refused to forgive one who owed him a mere 100 denarius. "A denarius was a Roman silver coin, worth about 16 cents; it represented a laborer's daily wages."³²⁶ As a result of his unforgiveness, he was accountable for his debts and the king "handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." Scripture tells us in **James 2:13**: "For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment."

We must remember that the "smallest sin" is a horrible sin against God himself. **James 2:10**: "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." Since God forgave us to a level that we could never begin to comprehend, we must likewise forgive others. That means we do not wait for them to say they are sorry or something similar. Our forgiveness is not to be a mere external act. Nor should our act of forgiveness serve as an opportunity to get a *whack* on the other person. For example, when one says, "I want you to know that I am forgiving you for all the terrible hurts you have caused me." This statement can be more of a condemning judgment than true forgiveness. Another common pseudo-christian³²⁷ statement is to tell someone that you are *trying hard*

³²⁴ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, v.2 p. 62 (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

³²⁵ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. p. 1298, Tyndale reference library (p 1298). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

NOTE: I am not a math whiz but if my math is right, the slave owed the king (in today's US dollars / July 20, 2012) about **\$18,984,000,000** which is [**18 billion-984 million dollars**]. Below is the formula I used:

- On July 20, 2012 gold closed right around \$1,582 an oz. So if there are 16 ozs. in a pound, a pound of gold is worth about \$25,312; Formula used: (16 ozs. x \$1,582 an oz. = \$25,312 for 1 pound).
- If a talent is about 75 pounds. Each talent is worth in today's dollars = \$1,898,400. Formula used: (75 pounds x \$25,312 per pound = One million, eight hundred & ninety-eight thousand, four hundred dollars).
- Now we know he owed the king 10,000 talents so 10,000 talents x \$1,898,400 (dollars per talent) = \$18,984,000,000 (18 billion-984 million dollars).

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ A *pseudo-christian* is one who goes by the name Christian but has never truly been converted. They distort or deny fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. They are neither saved from the judgment to come nor a Christian.

to forgive them. You do not get to try hard. Forgiveness is a decision. You either forgive or do not. Remember Scripture tells us that we are to “forgive... from your heart” (Matt. 18:35).

There is no sin that anyone could commit that would be as unjust and evil as the murdering of the perfect Son of God. Remember what Jesus’ response to the evil and murderous men was:

Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”

Look also at the response of Stephen when he was stoned in **Acts 7:60:** “And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ And having said this, he fell asleep.”

We must do as it says in **Ephesians 4:32:** “And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Summary and Application

Take a moment and think of a person who you need to forgive *from your heart*. Not only forgive them from your heart but then pray for God to bless them. Pray for them the things you pray for yourself. Now also pray for the Lord to forgive you for all the time you wasted holding on to this unforgiveness.

Luke 6:35-36: “But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.”³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Later on you may be tempted to get angry when you think about that person. I have found that if I immediately change my thoughts and think of the things God has forgiven me and then start again praying blessings for that other person, I will keep from falling back into unforgiveness, bitterness and anger.

Ephesians 4:31-32: “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

³² And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was a German Lutheran pastor who opposed the Nazi party and was eventually killed by them. Bonhoeffer wrote:

“This is the supreme demand. Through the medium of prayer we go to our enemy, stand by his side, and plead for him to God”³²⁸

Finally, it is important to realize that if you think the sin committed against you was bad, it is much worse in God’s eyes. His standard is not man’s, it is much higher.³²⁹ God will hold accountable those who sin against you unless they sincerely seek His forgiveness (Romans 12:19). *You are not God*; you do not have any right to hold *anything* against anyone– no matter how heinous the offense or crime. You are to completely forgive your enemy, pray for them and truly leave it with the Lord, being “*kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*” **Ephesians 4:32.**

³²⁸ *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller [2d rev. ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1960], p. 166).

³²⁹ **Matthew 5:48** “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”