

Forgive As You've Been Forgiven

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[0:00] It's great to be with you guys. I was worried it's going to feel really weird with all the men gone,! But I'm glad some of you are here. So it's not too weird.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 18. If you don't have a Bible, please raise your hand. We'd love to give you a copy that you can have. And you can take it home with you and use it. We're in Matthew 18, verse 21 to 35.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's Word. Father, again, Lord, we come to a topic where we hear so many contradicting, clamors from the world that make it harder for us to see with clarity and to stand with conviction on what you teach us here about forgiveness.

So we ask God that your light, the light of your Word, would scatter all the fog that we live in.

And that you would truly impress on us the heavy weight of our own sins that has been lifted by Jesus Christ, our Savior.

[1:59] So that in all our relations with one another and even the way we relate to our enemies would be shaped by that forgiveness we've received from you.

Speak to us, God. We need you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please stand if you are able. Let us honor God by standing as we read from His Word and are addressed by Him.

Matthew 18, 21 to 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? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 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.

[3:17] So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

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.

So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

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. Then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also, my heavenly father, will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

[4:33] This is God's holy and authoritative word. Please be seated. There's a 5th century tragedy, 5th century BC, tragedy written by Aeschylus called Oresteia.

It means the tale of Oresteia. And it's a foundational Western text on revenge. It begins with King Agamemnon offering his daughter as a sacrifice to the Greek gods in hopes that he could secure the favor and help of the Greek gods in the Trojan War that he is fighting.

And then the programmatic line that kind of sets the trajectory for the rest of the trilogy is this line, blood once shed cries out for more blood.

And you see that over and over again. And King Agamemnon's wife, the queen, the Clytemnestra, then murders her husband, Agamemnon, to avenge her daughter.

And then after that, his Agamemnon's son kills his mother, Clytemnestra, to avenge the death of his father.

[5:49] And then the furies, the Greek gods of vengeance, then start pursuing Orestes. It illustrates, helpfully, the endless cycle of revenge.

But in our sinful world where we often wrong others and are often wronged by others, what can put an end to all this anger and bitterness and resentment and hatred and revenge?

Even in a society like ours that's governed by the rule of law, revenge has happened. Personal vendetta has infused continue in gang violence and mass shooting by gunmen with grudges and ethnic violence and genocide throughout the world.

After the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks killed Armenians and Greeks, and they in turn killed Turks and vice versa. In the Rwandan genocide, the Tutsis killed Hutus and then the Hutus killed Tutsis and on and on and on.

And after the breakup of the Yugoslavia, the Serbs killed Albanians saying, you must understand, it's just our revenge. And then the Albanians killed the Serbs saying this is their understandable desire for revenge.

[7:05] And this cycle plays out in the church as well. Not in murder per se, but in hatred. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer says 1 John 3.15.

Of course, we are quick to justify ourselves. Oh, I don't hate my brother. I don't hate him. I'm just shutting it out of my life completely and then never speaking to him and acting like he doesn't exist. But Jesus says in Matthew 5.21.26 that whoever is angry with his brother or insults his brother has committed murder of the heart. There are no laws against hating someone in the heart.

So what solution is there for that? There's only one thing that ends this endless cycle of anger, hatred, offense, and violence and Jesus' answer is forgiveness.

Sitting in church on a Sunday morning that might not sound like a radical idea to you, but forgiveness has been and remains to this day a very countercultural idea. How many times have you had thoughts along these lines?

[8:17] Oh, but you have no idea what she has done to me. If you only knew, you would not expect me to forgive this person.

It's a popular sentiment nowadays. Why should the injured, the still bleeding, bear the onus of forgiveness? Thinks the main character Kaya Clark in Deliah Owens' novel Where the Crawdads Sing.

How many times have you thought something like this? Forgiveness dispenses with accountability. It lets the offender off the hook, the perpetrator, the abuser off the hook, leaving them to keep hurting others with impunity.

If you forgive someone who hurt your family, well, that means you just didn't love your family member enough. In a cruder way, one famous blogger says, to hell with forgiveness.

Forgiveness culture. Calling for forgiveness is tantamount to another Abrahamic culturally ingrained guilt trip. In short, it is victim blaming. You see, forgiveness is not popular in some circles.

[9:35] In fact, it has always had its naysayers. In his book, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis suggests that this terrible duty of forgiving even our enemies might be the most unpopular of the Christian virtues.

He continues, everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive. And then, to mention the subject at all is to be greeted with howls of anger.

It is not that people think this too high and difficult of virtue, it is that they think it hateful and contemptible. That sort of talk makes them sick, they say. And half of you already want to ask me, I wonder how you'd feel about forgiving the Gestapo if you were a Pole or a Jew.

Should we always forgive? If yes, how? Where do we find the emotional resources for such a Herculean task?

How do we forge a character strong enough to dispense such forgiveness? In a brilliant, simple parable, Jesus answers these questions and more and commands us to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.

[10:51] First, we're going to talk about the crushing debt. Secondly, about the compassionate master. And then thirdly, we'll talk about the callous servant. As is often the case, Peter is the one who first poses the question to Jesus in verse 21.

Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? If you remember last week's passage, I mentioned to you that some translations like the NIV and the NASB omit the phrase against you in verse 15.

And I sided with that translation. There in verses 15 to 20, the concern was for the brother or sister's welfare. Trying to care for them by confronting them and bringing them to repentance from sin.

When fellow church members sin and refuse to repent, it is our responsibility to bring loving correction. And if they don't listen, you bring one or two others with you and do the same. If they still don't listen, you tell the church. And if they still don't listen, then you disfellowship.

You declare them an unbeliever. It's church discipline. In hope that that severe mercy would bring that erring member to repentance. That's how we are to love and pursue brothers and sisters in Christ who sin and stray from the truth.

[12:02] But now, in verses 21 to 26, Peter raises the question, what about me? What if a brother or sister's sin is against me in particular?

What am I supposed to do with that personal grievance and hurt? This is a different question from verse 15, which is why Jesus' prescription is different. The former question is about how the church as a community keeps one another accountable.

the present question is how we personally keep our own hearts toward those who sin against us.

The former question is about corporate accountability.

The latter is about personal forgiveness. Regardless of the corporate response of the church to an erring member, to an unrepentant sinner, if the sin that was directed against us, it is our personal responsibility to forgive.

forgive. The same distinction applies in the civil court. Personal forgiveness does not obviate institutional justice.

[13:07] If someone murders your family member, yes, it is your responsibility to forgive that murderer personally for the wrong that he or she has done, but it is still right and just for that person to be punished to the full extent of the law in the civil court.

Personal forgiveness and institutional justice are not mutually exclusive, nor is our personal forgiveness inconsistent with divine justice. Romans 12, 9 says, 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.

It is God who will ultimately avenge us for all the evil done to us so that we don't have to take vengeance ourselves, because God, the sovereign judge, will finally execute justice.

We don't need to become vigilantes who take matters into our own hands. Romans 13, 1-4 echoes the same principle, applying it to the delegated authority of civil authorities.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God, for rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad.

[14:19] If you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. So divine justice and civil justice are biblical realities, and the call to personal forgiveness that we see in this passage does not nullify either of those things.

So Peter's question deals with personal forgiveness, and Jesus' answer does not speak to what courts should do or what God will ultimately do in his final judgment. He's asking, Peter is asking about the relationships within the community of God's people.

He asks, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him as many as seven times? Peter's understanding of forgiving one's brother comes from the Old Testament, Leviticus 19, 17 to 18.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 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. Not taking vengeance or bearing a grudge against our neighbor or a brother in our community is an expression of our love for neighbor. It's an entailment of the second greatest commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

[15:45] But remember, earlier in chapter 5, Jesus elevated this command to love your neighbor. He said, you have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. For if you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what reward will you get?

Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Love for brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus says, is not enough. We must love even our enemies. And since love entails not taking vengeance and not holding a grudge, it includes forgiveness.

So we are to forgive our enemies as well, even though what's primarily in view in this context is forgiving our brothers and sisters in the context of the church. This is helpful to remember when a fellow Christian sins against us repeatedly.

When your brother or sister sins against you seven times or 77 times and they don't feel sorry about it, I could assure you that person no longer feels like a brother or a sister or a friend or even a neighbor.

[17:03] That person starts to feel like an enemy. But we are called to love and forgive even our enemies. Let's look at Peter's question again.

Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times? The Jewish rabbinical teaching regarded three times as a sufficient number of times to forgive someone, which seems pretty reasonable, right?

So if Peter was aware of that, he is upping the ante, right? Not three, not four, not five, not six, seven.

The number of perfection. If I say this to Jesus, surely I'm going to get a pat on the back. Simon Bar-Jonah, flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. My father who is in heaven.

But Jesus says in verse 22, I do not say to you seven times, but 77 times. If the number seven symbolizes perfection and completeness, then 77 is a hyperbolic escalation of the number seven.

[18:10] And it's an allusion to Genesis 4, 24. If you remember when Cain, after murdering his brother Abel, is exiled further east of Eden, he is afraid that anyone who finds him will kill him. And so God offers him protection.

He says, if anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And then later, Cain's descendant, to Lamech, kills a man. And then he boasts, saying this, if Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is 77-fold.

That's the vengeful heart of a sinful man. Don't you tread on me, because you'll have it coming to you. Not seven times, 77 times.

And then Jesus, alluding to that, flips it on his head. He says, I do not say to you, forgive seven times, but 77 times. It's easy to gloss over this familiar teaching, but don't let it, don't gloss over it. Please let it sink in. Jesus is not saying, literally, forgive 77 times, and then 78th time, oh, that's it. Game over.

[19:24] He's saying, forgive without limit. If you are keeping count, if you are keeping score, you know, this is the second time you did this to me.

You always do this. Then we are missing the mark. 1 Corinthians 13, 5 says that love is not resentful.

Literally, literally, in the Greek, that means love does not count up wrongdoing. The NIV renders it as love keeps no record of wrongs.

And if you understand this command rightly, in our cultural climate, this is an outrageous command. Sure, if that person wrongs me once or twice, okay, maybe on a good day if I'm feeling especially gracious, maybe I'll forgive even three times.

But what do you mean 77 times? What do you mean forgive without limit? This person is an incorrigible repeat offender.

[20:32] Are you guilt tripping me as the victim? You would have me let the offender off the hook? Do you know how damaging that kind of teaching is? If you can't see the scandal of this command, then you have yet to wrestle with it enough.

Jesus knows that this radical command requires an explanation and so he tells this parable of the unforgiving servant. He says in verses 23-24, therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. Since this is a metaphor, it's a parable for the kingdom of heaven, the king here represents God.

And a servant of this king owes him 10,000 talents. One talent was about 6,000 denarii and one denarius was a common laborer's day's wage, a full day's wage.

And so this servant owes the king 60 million denarii. So even if he works seven days a week for 365 days a year without ever taking a day off, he would need to work for 164,383 years to repay this as a common laborer.

[22:00] Now let me adjust that for inflation for you. A living wage in Boston, Cambridge, Newton area is estimated at \$32.46 an hour.

That's the minimum hourly pay that a full-time worker needs in order to care for his need and his family's need. If we count for an eight-hour workday, that's \$260 per day.

That's a day's wage for a common laborer in our area. So \$260 is the modern equivalent of one denarius and since one talent is 6,000 denarii, let's multiply 260 by 6,000 and you get \$1,560,000. That's the equivalent of one talent. And this servant owes the king 10,000 talents. So multiply 1.56 million to 10,000 and you get \$15.6 billion.

It's an unimaginably large sum of money. And even trying to quantify and calculate it like this actually misses the point because a talent was the largest monetary unit used in that day and age.

[23:08] It's the largest sum of money, amount of money you could use. And 10,000 is the largest number that the Greek language had a name for, had a specific name for.

It's the largest monetary unit, largest number, 10,000. It's basically infinity. A money you could never hope to pay back what we would call gazillions of dollars.

A crushing debt. Even \$200,000 of school loans is crippling for most people. It's the kind of debt that stresses people out and alters their life choices.

But this is not even a fraction of that, what the servant owes the king. Imagine being weighed down with something like that.

And that's the debt of sin that we all owe to God. Remember the prayer that Jesus taught us in Matthew 6, 12. Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[24:12] And then two verses later, Jesus explains, and this is the only line in that prayer that Jesus explains further. For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Our debts are a metaphor for our trespasses and sins against God.

Do you know that our sins are so grave that we owe an infinite debt to God? So many people in the world fail to recognize this because they suffer from PGPS, pretty good person syndrome.

It's endemic. Oh, I don't think I'm super or anything, but you know, I'm just as good as the next guy or the next gal. I'm a pretty good person. Of course, I've done some bad things, but you know, that guy's so much worse.

that's what most people in their prideful delusion think, but that's not the case according to Jesus. Our debt of sin is 10,000 talents, an infinite debt.

[25:28] Law-breaking offenses in our society get classified into three broad categories, right? An infraction is the least serious, smallest offense, five days in prison and or up to \$5,000 fine.

Next is a misdemeanor, which is punishable by up to one year in prison and or \$100,000 fine. The worst, most serious crime is a felony, which is punishable by up to lifetime in prison or death and or by a \$250,000 fine.

I hope that's accurate. The lawyers in the room can correct me if it's not. Sometimes we can think that our sins are like these minor infractions. Ah, not that bad.

But think about it this way. God is our creator and ruler, but all of us at some point in our lives have denied him, we have rebelled against his rule, and we have sought to be masters of our own fate. And in living like we are the captains of our own ships, we have sought to usurp God's throne and be God. Romans 5.10 describes unrepentant humanity as God's enemies.

[26:40] According to Ephesians 2.2, we were all once following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. In other words, all sinners have levied war against God as his enemies, and we have adhered to and followed Satan, the prince of the power of the air, his enemy.

In our world, we call that treason. treason against the U.S. government is not an infraction or a misdemeanor, it's a felony punishable by the severest sentence.

In our court, there are mitigating factors to consider, things that can lessen the severity of a sentence for a crime committed.

for example, if it was a person's first time offense, if they have a clean prior record, that's a mitigating factor. Another one is if the victim of the crime is also culpable, worthy of blame in some way.

But what mitigating factor do we have in our treason against God? God has been nothing but good and generous and gracious to all of us.

[28:04] Everything that we know to be good, it comes from him. He has no, he deserves no blame. Not only that, this is not our, we are not people with a clean record.

We have a lengthy record of sin. We're not first time offenders. I can say still more about the gravity of our own sin. If you swat a fly, no one cares.

If you slap a person and that person files a police report, then you can go to jail for physical assault or battery. The difference in punishment is not because the two acts, swatting and slapping, are all that different.

They're basically the same thing. The difference in punishment lies in the dignity, the difference in the value and the dignity between a fly and a person. the gravity of the offense and the severity of the punishment depends not only on the nature of the act itself, but on the worth of the object of that offense.

So how much more then does this principle apply to God? God is infinitely worthy of our faith and obedience and worship. And for that reason, to sin against him merits infinite punishment.

[29:22] As we sometimes read in one of our confessions of sins, let us never forget that we have an eternal duty to love, honor, and obey you, that you are infinitely worthy of such, that if we fail to glorify you, we are guilty of infinite evil that merits infinite punishment for sin is the violation of an infinite obligation.

Our sin deserves eternal punishment, not merely because of what we have done, but especially because of whom we have sinned against. Even in our society, there are criminals who get sentenced to punishment that goes well beyond their lifetime.

For example, Dylan Roof, the racist neo-Nazi gunman who shot and killed nine African Americans while they were doing Bible study in a church in Charleston, South Carolina in 2015.

He received a death penalty in federal court, but that wasn't it. That wasn't all. He also received nine consecutive life sentences, life without parole.

How does one man pay nine life sentences? Obviously, he can't pay for it. The point is that his guilt, his punishment, what he deserves is greater than what he can himself pay with his one life.

[30:46] That's what all our sins are like. I imagine like, I don't think I've seen this movie, but I think I've seen a trailer.

I think there's a movie called Edge of Tomorrow or something where a guy gets stuck in a time loop, and then he somehow gets stuck in a time loop, and then he dies, he gets killed, and then he goes back and starts over, and he dies again, and he dies again.

And that's what we deserve. We can't pay for it with our lifetime. We must pay infinitely. That's why hell is described earlier in verse eight as an eternal fire where torment goes up forever and ever.

I know this is a harsh reality, but it is the reality that we must reckon with because if the weight of the crushing debt, does not sink in, we cannot rightly appreciate the forgiveness of God in Christ. And therefore, we also cannot forgive others as Christ commends us if we don't get this truth first. Given this crushing debt, the servant could not possibly pay it back.

[32:03] So what happens in verses 25 to 26 is expected. 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.

So the servant fell on his knees imploring him, have patience with me and I will pay you everything. This was a common way to deal with unpaid debt in the ancient world to the debtor together with his family and all his belongings would be sold to slavery to their master.

But even that would not go far enough to pay this astronomical debt. And given this reality, the servant's assurance to the master is laughable.

Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. Imagine the master's person, oh yeah, really? You're going to pay everything? How do you exactly intend to do that?

Can you live for 164,383 years? This betrays the servant's delusion. And that brings us to the master's response, the second point, the compassionate master.

[33:08] He says in verse 27, and out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. The master knows better than the servant. He knows that the servant could never pay it back.

And knowing this, instead of despising the servant, the master has pity for him. The translation out of pity is a rendering of a Greek word that literally means the viscera or the bowels, the inward parts of the person that went out toward that servant.

We might say in English that his heart leapt out for the servant. This is what we observe about Jesus time and time again throughout the Gospel of Matthew.

In Matthew 9,36, when he saw the crowds, he says he had compassion, it's the same word for them. Why? Because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

This is the remarkable thing about our God and about our Savior Jesus, that when he sees people who are morally repulsive, the kind of people that society holds in contempt, the inexcusable debtors with crushing debts, instead of seeing them and having contempt for them, our God has pity.

[34:25] He has compassion. God has compassion. And out of that pity, the master and servant released him and forgave him the debt. Consider the staggering generosity of this master.

He doesn't opt for helping him out with the budget or creating a debt management plan or offering debt consolidation. No, he simply forgives the debt, all of it, all 10,000 talents.

And that's not an easy feat. When you forgive someone of their debt, where does all the debt go? It doesn't just vanish into thin air and then you get the money back from the federal government, no. Someone has to absorb the debt. And if you forgive someone the debt that they owe you, you are absorbing that debt, that loss.

when someone wrecks your car, the offender could apologize to you and say, I'm really sorry. And maybe you will tell that person, oh, it happens to the best of us, don't sweat it.

[35:34] But then what happens to the wrecked car? That car is still wrecked and somebody has to pay for it, it's either going to be you or them. Our debt of sin doesn't just vanish into thin air, it has to be paid by somebody.

And in this case, it's the master, God himself, who absorbs our debt of sin, and that's what we see on the cross. Sometimes I think we're so familiar with the idea of divine forgiveness that we almost think that God's forgiveness is easy or cheap.

But do you know how frequently God says in God's word that he will not let the guilty go unpunished? When God reveals his name and his character in Exodus 34 verse 7, he says that he will by no means clear the guilty.

Concerning the angel of the Lord who represents him, God says in Exodus 23, 21, pay careful attention to him and obey his voice. Do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression.

Why? Because my name is in him. When the Israelites claim that they will serve the Lord, Joshua tells them off in Joshua 24, 19, you are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God.

[36:55] He is a jealous God and he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. God is not an appeaser. He is not a people pleaser. He understands the gravity of sin.

He doesn't make light of sin and say, oh, that's okay, no big deal. He is holy like nobody else and he understands gravity of sin like nobody else and he, by his very nature and his character, does not clear the guilty because he is just.

If anything, it should be harder and more unnatural for God to forgive sins than for us to forgive sins. the sins committed against him are greater than the sins that are ever committed against us and he is more holy than the best of humanity could ever hope to be.

Don't you personally find it easier to forgive people or to relate to people who struggle with sins that you struggle with? And then, likewise, don't you find it harder to have compassion on people who struggle with sin, things that you don't struggle with at all?

Well then, shouldn't it be easier as fellow sinners for us to have compassion on other sinners? And yet, this parable teaches us that it is God who does not sin.

[38:28] He is the one who has compassion on us. And in Psalm 130, verse 3 to 4, if you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?

But with you there is forgiveness that you may be feared. God chooses not to keep a record of our sins. He chooses not to count it against us when we come to Christ for forgiveness.

And it's that forgiveness that makes us fear him, to want to obey him, want to please him. in the master's forgiveness in this parable, we learn what it means to forgive, and we can break it down into four main steps.

The first step of forgiveness is an accounting. He says in verse 24 that when the master began to settle accounts with his servants, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

In order to forgive, we must first grapple with the gravity of the offense. If we skip this step, then we end up offering cheap grace to people. Oh, your sin is not a big deal.

[39:37] If we flippantly tell people who have been gravely wronged to forgive their offender without a true accounting for the damage done, then we become like Job's friends who are miserable comforters.

Yes, it is true that their unforgiveness is crippling their own spiritual life, but that doesn't mean that the victim should just forgive for her for their own sake without a serious accounting of sin, without confronting the offender.

It's like telling a girl who has been raped to forgive her rapist without giving any attention to whether the rapist is brought to justice or not. The perpetrator must be confronted.

justice must be pursued through legal means where appropriate, and the deep pain caused by that offense to the victim must be acknowledged and accounted for.

Before forgiveness can be offered, the truth must be told and all excuses exposed. The second step is to have pity on the debtor.

[40:41] That's what we see in verse 27. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. We must labor to have pity or compassion for the offender.

Instead of one-dimensionalizing them and caricaturing them and defining them solely by their offense or by their worst attributes, we give them the best possible construction, we give them the benefit of the doubt, and we labor to see ourselves in their shoes.

We try to remember that we too are sinners, that we also have wronged others, and more importantly, we have wronged God. In this way, we humanize the offender.

We see ourselves in them, a flawed human being just like us, and then we have pity. The third step is to forgive the debt.

And I said before, forgiving a debt involves absorbing that loss to yourself. That means refusing personally to make the person who wronged you and who hurt you suffer and pay for their wrongdoing.

[41:49] That means we refuse to demand penance. Show me that you've suffered enough and are sorry enough for what you've done. Show me that you've done something to change.

Grovel before me until I'm satisfied with the pain that I've inflicted on you. And then I'll think about forgiving you. That's not Christian forgiveness.

If the failure to account for the sin offers cheap grace, then this is the failure to absorb the debt. It offers little grace. The fourth step is to release the debtor, verse 27.

It says the master of that servant released him. That means the servant is released from the consequences of his debt, at least in the personal sense, even if not in the institutional sense. He's no longer considered a debtor to you. He's no longer a slave. Sometimes when we say that we have forgiven people, we nevertheless hold them hostage to ourselves by giving them the cold shoulder or staring at them with those steely eyes.

[42:57] We hold their guilt over their heads. He says, you sinned against me and now you are a marked man. I've got this power over you and trust me, I am not relinquishing this leverage until I'm happy about it.

We, because we're sinful, find that satisfying. But as someone has said, resentment is like drinking poison and then waiting for the other person to die.

Ephesians 4, 26 to 27 says, be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Harboring anger and bitterness gives, it might make you feel that you have a hold over someone else, but in reality it gives devil a hold in your life.

Theologian and ethicist Lewis Smedes once said, to forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you. Now let's look at how this servant responds to the gracious forgiveness of the master in verses 28 to 31.

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. So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, have patience with me and I will pay you.

[44:33] He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. This servant has just been forgiven 60 million denarii. And then he comes to his fellow servant who owes him 100 denarii.

And refuses to forgive his debt. And he's far more aggressive and violent. He seizes him, chokes him, pay what you owe. A hundred denarii isn't nothing.

It's several months wages. And likewise, the way people sin against us and hurt us and wrong us, it's not nothing.

There's real suffering there. There's real pain there. There's real loss there. The damage is there. But still, the ratio is 600,000 to one.

One. And incalculable debt and the highest number that they had a number for. That's what we've been forgiven. And this fellow servant pleads in much the same way that this first servant pleaded with the master.

[45:38] He had patience with me and I will pay you. This servant is actually more realistic. He says, I will pay you. He doesn't say I'll pay you everything. I don't know how long it's going to take.

I might have to do it in increments. Maybe I won't get quite to all of it, but I'll pay you something.

Unlike the first servant who said, I'll pay you everything. But this callous servant has no pity on his fellow servant.

He puts him in prison until he should pay the debt. Please note that he has the right to do this. This fellow servant really does owe him 100 denarii.

He's insisting on his right, which is not what love does. And isn't this what our culture increasingly clamors for? Get your rights.

Punish the person who wronged you. In our increasingly angry, retaliatory, internet shaming, outing, doxing, canceling, criminal culture, the idea of forgiveness can appear quaint and outdated.

[46:53] I mentioned Dylann Roof earlier, the neo-Nazi gunman who killed nine African-American believers in Charleston, South Carolina. At his bond hearing, some of the relatives of the victims got a chance to look at Dylann Roof in the eye and address him.

And one of those relatives was Nadine Collier, whose mom, Ethel Lance, was shot and killed by Dylann Roof. And you can hear the lump in Nadine Collier's throat and how pained she is and how raw her emotions are.

And she says this, I just want everybody to know, to you, I forgive you. You took something really precious, okay, from me.

I will never 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. But may God forgive you. And I forgive you. A courageous, noble act.

[48:06] An expression of forgiveness. But guess what? It caused an uproar. In the Washington Post opinion piece, the 30-something Stacey Patton wrote an article entitled, Black America Should Stop Forgiving White Racists.

She argued that such forgiveness only enables white denial about the harms that racist violence creates. Our constant forgiveness only perpetuates the cycle of attacks and abuse.

Contrast that with a response by Barbara Reynolds, a woman in her 70s at the time, older and wiser, who had previously marched in the civil rights protests of the 1960s.

She contends, in response to Stacey Patton, that the civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela were successful because they claimed the moral high ground by their ethics of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

And because by, quote, the power of the spiritual approach, they disarmed the oppressors and won over the majority. Reynolds critiqued the Black Lives Matters movement, saying that love and forgiveness are missing from this movement, and that a movement like this might make short-term gains but will only worsen the hatred and anger and division long-term.

[49:30] And isn't that exactly what has happened? Martin Luther King Jr. would concur with Barbara Reynolds. He once said, darkness cannot drive out darkness.

Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that. Barbara Reynolds' perspective is informed by the forgiveness culture and love of neighbor taught by Christianity.

Stacey Patton's perspective is informed by the honor and shame culture and the love of self taught by the therapeutic expressive individualism. When we follow the example of this callous servant and refuse to forgive those who sin against us, God says that we will not be forgiven our sins.

Jesus says in verses 32 to 34, then his master summoned him and said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?

And in anger, his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. The word jailer here translates more literally as torments. It's the same word that was used in Matthew 8, 29 when the demons cried out to Jesus saying, what have you to do with us, son of God?

[50:51] Have you come here to torment us before the time? Jesus is speaking of the eternal fire of hell. And this is the consistent and clear teaching of scripture.

Only those who show mercy to others will receive mercy from God. That's what we saw in the prayer that the Lord taught us to his children in Matthew 6, to God's children in Matthew 6.

Luke 11, 4 says, and forgive us our sins for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

Mark 11, 25, whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone so that your father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Luke 6, 37, 38, forgive and you will be forgiven for with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. But wait a minute. I thought salvation was by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Doesn't this sound like we are earning God's forgiveness without our own forgiveness of others?

Isn't that salvation by works and not by grace? It's a great question.

[52:02] This is in fact the same tension that you see elsewhere in scripture. We are saved by grace through faith alone. But on judgment day we are judged by our works.

How can both of those things be true? It's paradoxical because those who are saved by grace through faith always bear fruit in keeping with their repentance. Because true faith is always accompanied by good works.

Our forgiveness of other people's sins against us is a true test of whether or not we really believed in and grasped God's forgiveness of our sins. Our forgiveness of others is the evidence, the proof, the fruit of our faith in Jesus Christ.

Because forgiven people forgive. We love because he first loved us. We forgive because he first forgave us. That's why Ephesians 4.32 says, Forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you. Remember who first forgives in the parable? The king first forgives the servant's debt. It's God's initiative in his love and his forgiveness that prompts us and enables us to forgive others.

[53:14] So why then was this servant so unmerciful toward his fellow servant? Why is he so impatient to get his money back? Remember what he said to the king earlier.

Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. This servant is still living like he needs to repay the king everything.

He's not really received the debt forgiveness that the king has generously and freely given. This is the case for all unbelievers.

But I think even as Christians, sometimes we fail to live in the fullness of this gift that God's given to us. And let me just give you a personal example. When I first came to know God's grace and I became very zealous for him around high school time, middle school, high school.

And I became very, very legalistic. You know, I strictly controlled my diet. I limited all outside time hanging out with my friends because I thought it was a waste of time because they were interested in things that were not heavenly enough for me.

[54:20] And then I ran everywhere instead of walking because I thought walking is a waste of time. And running is good for my body. Exercises, it's an exercise. And I get to save time and be more dedicated to the Lord.

That's how legalistic I was. I still struggle with sin. I went to college. And then there was a sin that I was particularly struggling with. So I came to my pastor.

I was studying abroad in England at the time. And as I'm confessing and pouring on my heart to him and I'm like, I'm crying, you know, before this pastor and making myself really vulnerable. And then you know what he says? He said, hey, hey, stop, stop, stop.

Why are you doing that? They go, what do you mean? Like, I'm confessing my sins. He's like, no, no, no, why are you doing that? Like, why are you like crying? Like, you know, why are you trying to, like, oh my goodness, this heartless pastor, what's going on?

Like, but he was on to something. And I'll be forever grateful for this. He saw, insightfully, he discerned that I was trying to work up some kind of penance by feeling sorry enough for my sin.

[55:33] I feel really bad about this. And look at my tears. I feel like I really, really do feel bad about this. I don't want to do this thinking that, you know, I could pay something back to God.

If I just work hard enough, if I run hard enough, if I obey well enough, if I serve him enough, then I can maybe pay something back to God.

And God says, I won't have any of it. Your debt's gone. I paid for it. My son Jesus has paid for it on the cross. So stop living like you're still a debtor.

And when we haven't forgiven so much, why is it so hard for us to forgive others who sin against us?

Look at the passage again. See how many times the word fellow servant is repeated. Verse 28, verse 29, verse 33. Again and again.

[56:34] Fellow servant, fellow servant, fellow servant. And here's what this servant is doing wrong. The king has forgiven the servant.

The king who has every right and authority over the servant has forgiven the servant. But the servant acts like he's the king when he's treating a fellow servant.

Isn't that what we do? That's what James 4, 12 talks about. There's only one lawgiver and judge. He was able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge?

Your neighbor. We who are on the dock in court act like we're sitting on the bench, the judge's bench. You, you sinned against me.

Rather than seeing that we ourselves are also at the dock. That we are sinners. Fellow sinners. The only solution to this, the only thing that breaks this cycle of vengeance, the only thing that crashes

the system, so to speak, is when the innocent one, the righteous one, the blameless one dies for the sins of many.

[58:01] When the king becomes a servant, takes the form of a servant, and becomes obedient to death, even death on a cross. When the judge who has that claim and judgment over all of us, instead comes down to the dock and says, let that punishment fall on me.

And then Jesus dies on the cross and bears, all of it absorbs the fullness of the wrath of God upon himself, so that there's not an ounce, not a drop of judgment left for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ.

That's what's happened to us. Though he was rich, yet for our sake, Jesus became poor so that we, by his poverty, might become rich.

Because God in his infinite wealth, and Jesus Christ in his righteousness has satisfied it. That's what enables us to forgive others who wrong us, sin against us.

Let's just pray that God would help us to do that. Father, Father, oh, help us to see that we are fellow servants, fellow sinners, fellow debtors, so that we treat one another with humility rather than pride.

[59:49] with compassion rather than self-righteous judgment. Lord, for anyone who's carrying that burden of sin themselves right now, won't you please grant them that joyous freedom of forgiveness that's found in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In his precious name we pray. Amen.