

"I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."...'So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.'" (Matthew 18:22,35).

Introduction

Forgiveness is primarily a favor done to oneself. This is because you may forgive while the opponent does not care if you do or you do not. Those who crucified the Lord Jesus did not care whether He would forgive them or not. However, He did so that healing to His emotions may take place and to set a precedence for us. Holding a grudge entails loss of peace whereas forgiveness accelerates healing.

Forgiveness is Unconditional

The question often asked "does one forgive just like that" is answered by our Lord's extensively comprehensive teaching on forgiveness:

"Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Seventy Times Seven

St. Peter must have found the Lord's reply

impossible if not absurd. Knowing the dilemma our Lord, sure of what He had just said, reiterated with a parable "*Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents*" (Matthew 18:23-24). The king is God and we are the servants. This parable is best understood when the monetary figures presented are calculated. The amount the servant owed his master and wanted to settle account for was ten thousand talents. One talent is worth six thousand dinars. A worker's wages per day was one dinar. To pay back ten thousand talents in dinars that would amount to $10,000 \times 600 = 6,000,000$ dinars i.e. 6,000,000 working days equal to 16,438 years of work including working on weekends. Since that amount was incredibly big and impossible to pay back, something drastic had to have happened, "*But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made*" (Matthew 18:25). That was exactly humanity's plight after Adam's sin. We were bound and sold to Satan on account of our sins and had neither way nor chance to ransom ourselves. "*The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'*" (Matthew 18-26). In reality the servant did not

know what he was talking about not realizing how many centuries he would have to live and work to pay his master the debt. *"Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt"* (Matthew 18:27). That is what our Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross having been moved with compassion for us. He tore the arrears that bound us and set us free.

Different Attitude

"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt" (Matthew 18:28-30). What a difference between the Master and that servant in their response to forgiving debts exemplifying the way we treat each other in violence and lack of forgiveness. When we sin towards God, once we confess our sins and receive absolution from the father of confession, our purity and peace are regained because of God's forgiveness and mercy *"not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Ephesians 2:9). If we have been forgiven for that much, why when it comes to forgiving my brother, it takes a lot

of rebuking, reviling and offending before complying to forgiving. Even so, that would not be called forgiveness but satisfaction to one's anger.

God's Reaction

"So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him," (Matthew 18:31-32). The fellow servants are the angels who carry our deeds to God. Seeing what that person had done to his fellow servant, they were grieved and came and told their master all that had happened.

"You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him" (Matthew 18:32-34). More serious is our Lord's comment with which He concluded the parable and which revealed the whole aim behind it *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* (Matthew 18:35).

Our Reaction

The explicitness of this parable and the power of the

Lord's concluding words leave no room to even ponder harboring grudges or unforgiveness. We have been forgiven so much. In our Lord's prayer, there is mention of neither the amount nor size of sins that we ask God to forgive. Forgiving others is the conspicuous condition for receiving forgiveness from God. "*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*" (Matthew 6:12). Forgiveness springs from a merciful heart, "*blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy*" (Matthew 5:7). This beatitude, though not explicitly worded, puts being merciful as a condition for obtaining mercy. Turn the Lord 's Prayer into a beatitude and it reads, "Blessed are those who forgive for they shall be forgiven."

Conclusion

Forgiveness is the threshold to healing. Just as one does not wait to be healed before being seen by a doctor; so is the case with spiritual healing. One has to forgive in order to be healed. Forgiveness means tearing the arrears of offense against someone and so one has nothing against another confirming that both ends owe each other nothing except forgiveness and reconciliation. These were the Lord Jesus Christ's words "*Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you*

*seven times in a day, and seven times in a day
returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive
him" (Luke 17:3-4).*

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