

# Forgiving the Repentant Ones

Matthew 18:21-35

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## **Introduction & Review**

As we come to Matthew 18:21 today, it is important to remember the context...

- In Matthew 18, Jesus has been telling us how to treat one another in His kingdom.
  - In verses 15-20, He teaches us how to confront the erring ones.
    - He commands you to go your sinning brother alone and point out to him his sin.
    - If he repents, then you have gained your brother.
      - If he will not repent, you are not to give up on him...
      - You are to take two or three others with you and try again...
        - And if he refuses to hear them, you are to bring it before the church... that is, the elders who represent the church...
        - If he refuses to hear even the church, then he is to be removed from the church until such time as he does repent.
- Jesus is speaking about the times when someone has sinned against you.
  - Usually this refers to a direct sin against you;
    - but I explained to you that in sense,
      - every sin that another believer commits is against you because it is always against your heavenly Father and against the Saviour you love...
      - and because it hampers the reputation of the church,
        - weakens the church,
        - divides the church,
        - and has many other destructive tendencies.
    - For this reason, we should always be concerned to go to our brother when he errs and, to whatever extent his sin is against us, we are to forgive him if he repents.
- I think it is very important in our day to emphasise that restoring your brother is what forgiveness is all about.
  - It is become all too common to think of forgiveness as something you do only for your own good...
    - as something you do to make **you** feel better and not have those yucky thoughts of bitterness and hatred troubling you.

- But in Christ's kingdom, forgiveness is much more than that!
  - It is not just about you, it is about your brother who has sinned.
  - You cannot say that you have forgiven him unless he knows about it.
    - You may have decided to let something pass and sometimes that is just what you need to do—but that is not forgiveness.
  - Forgiveness always involves the restoration of the relationship that has been divided by sin.
    - For that to happen, he has to be confronted and he has to repent and then you have to say to him, "I forgive you."
    - It is a promise you make to not hold the offense against him ever again.
  - This does not mean that you may have hostile feelings or actions against him if he doesn't repent...
    - It simply means that forgiveness as it is defined in the Bible has not yet taken place.
    - You still have to press for his repentance, assuring him that you want to forgive him.
  
- It's very important to understand this because we live in a society that tries to deal with the problem of sin by denying it.
  - We are like the person with terminal cancer that tries to pretend nothing is wrong.
  - We have become very proficient at helping each other make excuses for sin, minimise sin, and deny sin...
    - In the opinion of many in our society,
      - Good parents are not supposed to chastise their children,
      - Good judges are not supposed to sentence offenders,
      - Good pastors and elders are supposed to understand, but never to rebuke or correct.
  - Anyone who doesn't join in this whole game is looked upon as intolerant and severe, cantankerous and legalistic.
    - This is not to say that there is no such thing as a wrongful intolerance and severity...there are persons that are both cantankerous and legalistic...
    - But what we want is those who love God and their neighbour enough that they want to deal with sin in a loving and godly way...
      - They want to restore to their brother...

- They do not want to pretend that he has no sin when he does, but they want to lead him to repentance in order that they might forgive him and in order that he might look to the Lord for forgiveness.
- This kind of practice is what we must aim for in our church!
- This is what you must aim for in your family and in your friendships with other believers.
  - Oh that God would give you a heart to forgive your brother—to reconcile with him when his sin has divided you!
  - Matthew 18:21-35 is aimed at giving you such a heart.

**I. Be honest now, forgiving your brother is often something you want to put limitations on, is it not?**

- . Peter is great at asking questions that everybody else is thinking, but is afraid to ask...
  - 0. When he hears this teaching about forgiveness, his first thought is,
    - “Go to my brother and forgive him?”
      - “You mean I have to go to him **whenever** he sins against me to forgive him? If he does not come to me, I have to go and show him his fault and then forgive him if he repents?”
      - “How many times to have to do this?”
        - “up to seven times?”
  - 0. Peter probably felt pretty generous saying “seven times”...
    - A lot of the rabbis used a passage from Amos to say that you only had to forgive your brother three times—the fourth time, you were no longer obligated.
      - Peter thought, perhaps Jesus will double that...
  - 0. But the truth is, Peter’s question only shows that he wants to put limitations on forgiveness.
    - This is the spirit of legalism...
      - Legalism wants to have set rules...
        - then it can work around to manipulate the rules in various ways.
      - You even see this spirit in a little child when you tell him to keep his hand off his little sister and he begins to push on her with his foot...
        - When you rebuke him, he says, “But you told me to keep my hands off...”
        - That’s the way the legalistic mind works...

- “How many times must I forgive my brother?”
  - Peter is showing that forgiving his brother is not something he wants to do...
    - He wants to avoid it as much as possible...
    - He has no heart for it.
- . Be honest now, what is it like for you when your brother has sinned against you?
0. Do you want to go to him to try to work things out?
- Do you want to forgive him?
    - Is that the first thing that comes to your mind?

TRANS> I doubt very much that it is ...

0. There are many reasons you may not want to forgive him...
- . Often, it’s just that you don’t want to go to the trouble.
    - It’s awkward,
    - It’s not a pleasant thing to do...
    - You don’t know how he will react... and you often expect the worst.
  - . And sometimes you are just too offended to forgive him!
    - After all—he has done it again!
      - “Let him come to me if he wants to reconcile!”
    - And even if he does come,
      - there may be times when you still feel that he has hurt you too much...
        - that he is not sufficiently repentant for you to forgive him.
        - You find that it is something that you just don’t want to let go.

TRANS> Now there may be some here that would not admit that they find forgiveness hard...

- but I want you to examine yourself about this...
0. I want to show you four things that people substitute for forgiveness and I want you to ask yourself if you ever do these things!
- . First, instead of forgiving do you try to deny that your brother has sinned...
    - 0) You know what I mean...

- You know that your brother has done wrong and needs to repent, but instead of going to him, you start to justify him...
  - You say, "Well, I suppose he was just having a bad day... I am sure he didn't really mean it." and so on.
- ) You don't want to take the trouble to go to him...
- You parents do this with your children, don't you...
    - Instead of going to them when they have sinned, you make excuses for them...
    - Instead of going to them to lead them to repentance, you determine that no repentance is really necessary...
    - This is a very common problem of our day...
      - As I pointed out before, we wrongly think a good parent is one who never finds fault...
      - A good judge is one who never passes a sentence.
- ) And sometimes, when you are thinking this way,
- With this mindset, you may even refuse to forgive your brother when he comes to you and asks you...
    - He comes and says, please forgive me for lying to you, and you say,
      - and instead of saying, "I forgive you,"
      - you say, "Oh, that's okay."
  - Your brother didn't come to be told that what he did was okay because it was not okay...
    - He came to ask your forgiveness...
      - Why are you saying its okay for him to lie?
      - Do you want lying to be acceptable so nobody will criticise you if you do it?
      - That's usually the real motivation behind the permissive attitude in our society today...
        - Instead of forgiving, we want to declare that sin doesn't matter.
- 0) Now of course I am not saying you need to become a nit picker...
- ) You are not to be like the chap I spoke about a couple of weeks ago

- the chap who accused his poor brother of stealing because his brother took a sheet of company paper to write out a list of things to pick up for his wife on the way home from the office...
  - There are some things that should be overlooked!
- ) You are also to make room for immaturity in other believers...
- You have to give your brother room to grow and make some allowance for him...
    - Love covers a multitude of sins...
- ) No Christian should be easily provoked by his brother...
- but neither should you become indifferent about dealing with him when he needs to be dealt with.
  - I can't give you a rule here, it is something that wisdom must determine...
    - But just beware that you do not substitute a "that's okay" for an "I forgive you."
- . A second substitute for real forgiveness is gossip.
- 0) Instead of forgiving your brother—which means you promise not to bring the matter up against him...
- do you go to publish his fault everywhere?
  - Do you go to tell everyone about what he has done to you?
    - To your spiritual friends, you go in a more spiritual way as one looking for help and guidance...
    - To your not as spiritual friends, you just go to tell them the latest gossip about what so-in-so did to you.
- 0) If you publish your brother's fault, you are not forgiving him!
- Publishing and forgiving are mutually exclusive and you can't pretend otherwise!
  - For some, publishing faults becomes quite a hobby—
    - the gossip feels that he would be depriving himself if he forgave his brother.
    - He would much rather go and tell the story than go to the brother who sinned against him...
      - sometimes, not even entirely out of hostility...
      - but just because it makes for interesting and engaging conversation—

TRANS> So beware that you do not substitute gossip for forgiveness...

- . A third substitute for forgiveness is stockpiling your brother's offenses in your magazine for future use...
  - 0) You know, a magazine like they have at Citadel Hill... a place where ammunition is stored...
    - You will file away what he has done for future use—
      - When a fight breaks out with your brother or when he comes to rebuke you,
        - you will take out his past offenses to shoot him down...
      - If he says,
        - “I need to talk to you about the way you yelled at me when I called you last week...”
        - Instead of repenting, you will go to your magazine and pull out a cannon ball to fire back...
          - “How can you accuse me? You're the one that go so upset last year when I forgot to pick you up for the play...”
          - If you had forgiven your brother, you wouldn't have the cannon ball anymore!
  - 0) This is really quite a serious problem among believers...
    - When you don't forgive, you have all these past offenses that get piled on top of each other...
    - Take Fred and Betty as an example...
      - Every time Fred leaves the cap off the toothpaste, it is a big deal for Betty...
      - It's a big deal because she already has in the back of her memory a thousand other things she has never reconciled with Fred about...
        - She may claim that she has forgiven him, but if she brings these things up again, she has not...
    - Every time a fight breaks out between them,
      - there is always a whole pile of unresolved issues from the past that make the fight ten times more severe.
      - There is no such thing as a little fight because every little issue is surrounded by all the issues from the past.
      - They both need to disarm so their fights won't be so severe.

TRANS> Closely related to this is the fourth substitute for forgiveness...

- . Instead of forgiving your brother, do you ever find yourself using his sin to justify your own sin—or perhaps your self pity.
  - Do you know what I am talking about?
    - It is easy, in a twisted kind of way, to sort of take comfort in the wrongs that have been done to you...
    - It gives you a good excuse for your own conduct...
      - “I am cranky because my husband doesn’t give me enough attention...”
      - “I accuse people all the time because my parents were so unreasonable with me when I was a child.”
  - But you see, if you forgive your brother (or your parents), you don’t have those excuses...
    - Instead of using excuses to justify yourself, you have to do something else—
      - like go to obtain your own forgiveness from those you have wronged.
      - You have to take responsibility for your own actions instead of excusing them on account of what others have done to you.

TRANS> The bottom line is, it’s not easy to forgive your brother!

- That’s why you substitute other things for forgiveness...
- Like Peter, you want to put limitations on it...
  - Surely it’s not something you have to do all the time, is it?
    - That’s what Peter wanted to know...
- . So Jesus sets Peter straight...
  0. In answer to Peter’s question He says,
    - “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”
    - Now I suppose there is probably a legalist somewhere that has counted up 490 offenses and decided to get a divorce or something at 491...
      - But that is obviously not what Jesus is getting out...
  0. He is telling Peter that forgiveness is something that is **always** to be done.
    - . There are to be no limitations on it!
      - As soon as your brother repents, you are to forgive him...



- And if he doesn't repent, you are to remain loving toward him and do all you can to bring him to repentance...
  - you are to work toward reconciliation.
  - But you are always to forgive when he asks you—to bury the matter forever, even in your own thinking.
- . This only makes sense!
  - The church is all about reconciliation of sinners with God...
  - Forgiveness should never be something you are reluctant to do!
    - You ought to be eager to make peace with your brothers and sisters and live constantly in that peace!
- 0. Oh what a happy place the church would be if only we would learn to do this!
  - How much brighter our testimony would be to a dying world!
  - How much better our fellowship would be and how much more energy we could put toward edification!
  - How much our comfort would be increased!

TRANS> But just being told that you must forgive is not enough!

- Your Saviour knows that...
  - He knows that your sin goes deep in this matter...
  - He knows that you need help...
  - And so He gives you this parable about the king who forgave his servant's debt...
    - A parable that is designed to give you a heart of forgiveness toward your brother!
    - A parable that **will** give you a heart of forgiveness if you will only receive it.

**II. In this parable, he uses the servant's debt to his king to remind you of how much God has forgiven you if you are a Christian.**

- . Learn from this parable how great your guilt truly is!
- 0. Jesus says this certain servant owed his master ten thousand talents!
  - . One talent is equal to 6000 day's wages...
    - that's about 20 years gross income for the average working man to earn just one talent!
    - This chap owed 10,000...that's 200,000 day's wages!
      - In today's money, that would be about 5 billion dollars.

- . Jesus' point is very obvious...
    - Every one of you has a debt to your heavenly Father that you can't even begin to pay!
      - You can no more make satisfaction for your sin than you can remove the earth from its place...
    - Even if this man and his wife and children were sold as slaves, they wouldn't even begin to make a dent in this debt...
      - The king is only calling for a token punishment—not a satisfaction.
      - So it is with your debt to God—even though you be cast into the Lake of Fire for all eternity,
        - you are still no better off than you were when you began.
        - It is a dreadful condition.
0. What's more, like the servant in the parable, you have no defence...
- . Now that he is brought before the king, he doesn't even try to explain himself.
    - Though he promises to pay all in time, he knows as well as his master that this is utterly futile.
    - Like every one of you before God, there is no way out for him but the way of free mercy.
      - You can't possibly wash away your sins...
      - You are shut up to God's mercy or you will perish forever.
  - . It is important to notice that the servant had not come to his king...
    - Perhaps he was trying to avoid his desperate situation...
      - perhaps he hoped the king would not call him to account...
    - So it is that every sinner goes along glibly until the day comes that God the Father calls him to account...
      - Then the horror of his sinful estate comes over him and settles deeply in his frame...
      - Then he sinks in desperation and misery.
    - Know for certain that every one of you will be brought before King Jesus to give an account...
      - The day of reckoning will surely come...

- It is my prayer that the Lord will send His Spirit to you before the final day that you may learn of your sin now...
  - while there is still opportunity to plead for mercy.
  - On the great day of judgement at the end of the world, there will be no more opportunity to plead for mercy.
- Let me ask you, have you heard God's effectual call?
  - It is only those God calls to salvation that truly come to grips with their desperate condition...
  - When I see professing Christians who believe that they contribute to their salvation by their own works,
    - I know that they have never really met with God...
    - If they think they can contribute to their debt, it is clear that they have not yet met their King.

TRANS> But for you who have been called,

- Jesus reminds you with this parable how great your guilt really is until God forgives you.
- He does in order that He might remind you of the second thing...
  - . Secondly, He reminds you how great God's forgiveness is!
    - 0. Notice how complete it is!
      - . It is absolutely unconditional!
        - "The master of that servant [says Jesus], was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt!"
      - . There are no conditions, no requirements, no repayments demanded, no punishment exacted!
        - The king himself will absorb the entire loss!
        - As believers, we know what that meant for our heavenly Father!
        - It meant that His own Son had to pay the penalty of our sin!
          - No one else had the merit to do it—
            - no one else could even realistically **think** about doing it.
            - Jesus alone is worthy to take away our sin because He is God's holy Son!
- 0. The great mercy of God can only be grasped you if you have been born again—if you have found this salvation...

- . All others are strangers to it.
  - How many there are even in the church who may talk of God's mercy,
    - but they have no clue that God's mercy in salvation has to do with his payment of this huge impossible debt!
  - It is not merely a matter of Him befriending us when we may not be the most attractive people...
    - It is a matter of Him coming to us when we were so obnoxious in His eyes that eternity in Hell was the only appropriate destiny...
    - It is a matter of His coming to us in that condition and providing full atonement for us through Jesus...
      - It is a matter of Him pouring out all His wrath and curse on Jesus in order that we might be fully forgiven—
        - entirely set free from the awful penalty.
- . Yes, there are many moralists in the church who do not grasp this at all...
  - Many of them deny that there is a real Hell...
    - Hell, in their minds, is not fair...
    - Well my friends, if Hell is not fair, why in God's name was Jesus put on the cross?
      - If the Son of God Himself had to bear the shame of the cross to atone for our sins, how could it be that there is no place of eternal punishment?
- . Why do I go on about this?
  - I go on about it because this is what Jesus is showing us in this parable!
    - He wants you to see the marvellous mercy of our God in forgiving sinners!
    - He wants you to see how great a price was paid for you.
    - His forgiveness is unfathomable!
      - It is something we should never get over!

TRANS> But Jesus has pointed this out for a certain reason...

- It is a back drop to what He brings out in the second part of the parable...

**III. In the second part of the parable, He shows you how wretched it is for you who have been forgiven so great a debt to refuse to forgive your brother!**

- . It is wretched because God's mercy to you ought to be something you never get over.

- 0. It seems that the forgiven man in the parable had barely left the king's presence and he found his fellow servant who owed him a debt...
  - He grabbed him by the throat and even though the servant pled in the same way his creditor had plead a short time before,
    - his creditor refused to give him even a drop of mercy—
    - He wouldn't even give him time to pay him back!
  
- 0. This is so entirely out line for one who had himself been forgiven!
  - . It is wretched for any Christian to ever refuse forgiveness to anyone!
    - As I mentioned to you before, our whole story as Christians is the story of God's mercy for sinners!
    - All our comfort, all our hope, all our joy, is rooted in God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ.
  
  - . To go forth from such mercy and refuse to forgive your brother is unthinkable.
    - We should look at such a thing in the church with every bit as much severity as we look at murder or child abuser or the worship of false gods!
    - Brothers and sisters, we've got to see how wrong it is in the face of such great mercy as God has shown us to withhold mercy from others.
      - Jesus emphasises this sin or refusing to forgive more than once in his ministry.
      - It may seem a little thing in the world, but it ought to be a huge thing in the church...
        - It is something the elders ought to address in the same way they address adultery or idolatry.

TRANS> If you ever have trouble forgiving your brother...

- . You need to stop and consider the difference in the debt that God has forgiven you and the debt your brother owes to you!
  - 0. Jesus illustrates this difference in the parable!
    - . He shows that the debt of the fellow servant was nothing in comparison to the debt the first servant owed to the king!
      - The first servant owed 10,000 talents which I showed you to be 200,000 day's wages or about 5 billion dollars in our money...
      - This fellow servant owed the first servant 100 denarii—or 100 days wages!
        - 100 denarii contrasted with 200,000 denarii!
        - Eight thousand dollars compared to five billion dollars!

- . You need to think about this difference if ever you are having a hard time forgiving your brother!
- 0) Eight thousand dollars is a fair bit of money, but it is nothing in comparison to five billion!
  - Your brother may have done a lot to offend you...
  - He may have murdered your spouse and all your children and your parents also and he may have done it out of sheer cruelty and malice...
    - But if he comes and asks you to forgive him,
      - you need to remember that your sin against God is **far** worse than his sin against you.
      - Do you believe that?
- 0) If any of you should say, “But I never did anything like that!”
  - It may be true—you may have been very mild and gentle toward your neighbour all your life...
    - You may have incurred no more than a dollar here and there...
    - But the comparison is not to be made between what you did to your neighbour and what your brother did to you...
  - The comparison is to be made between your sin against God and your neighbour’s sin against you.
    - Sin against God is always unpayable for us because God is God!
      - Unlike you, He is worthy of all honour and glory and allegiance.
      - You are a mere creature, but he is the glorious Creator!
  - We are so egalitarian in our thinking that we lose sight of this contrast!
    - We think God is like us!
    - But He’s not at all like us—
      - For Him to forgive us is a much bigger deal than for us to forgive our neighbour!
        - Ours is a debt that can never be paid for all eternity, but our neighbour’s debt to us is not eternal because we are not eternal.

TRANS> If you would but grasp this difference—what a difference it would make in your attitude about forgiving your brother...

0. Furthermore, you need to see how highly displeased God is with you if you will not forgive your brother when God has forgiven you.
  - . Jesus illustrates God's wrath with the wrath of the king toward his unforgiving servant...
    - 0) The unforgiving servant becomes the unforgiven servant...
      - The king calls up the debt again and delivers him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due...
    - 0) And lest anyone hearing this parable should say,
      - "But God would never do that—He would never go back on His promise to forgive us..."
      - Jesus says with no ambiguity whatsoever...
        - "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses!"
  - . How can this be?
    - Does God not give us His promise of forgiveness when we repent and believe?
      - How could it be that He should go back on His promise?
    - Does He not give us eternal life?
      - How could it be that this eternal life should be only temporary?
  - . I will tell you how...
    - 0) If you refuse to forgive your brother it is a sure sign that you are not a genuine believer...
      - You may have made a credible profession and been baptised...
        - You may go to church and speak of the love of God and tell others that you are a Christian...
        - But the truth is, you don't know what a Christian really is!
          - If you knew, you would forgive your brother!
            - I don't care if you can tell a good conversion story...
            - I don't care if people have seen a big change in your life...
            - I don't care if you have led others to the Lord...
            - I don't care if you have seen your prayers answered and have done many wonderful works for Christ...
              - If you can't forgive your brother, it is a sure sign that you are yet a stranger to our Saviour.

- If you do not repent, you will spend eternity in Hell...

0) But what about a true believer?

- ) Aren't there times when a true believer struggles with forgiving his brother?
  - Yes, of course there are such times...
  - A true believer may fall into almost any sin for a time...
- ) But there is a great difference, and that difference is that the true believer will not continue indefinitely in that sin...
  - He will repent if he has the true seed of faith...
    - He will not be able to settle down and make peace with his sin...
    - The Lord will chasten him and bring him to his senses...
      - He will use other believers to call him back to the way of righteousness...
      - If he refuses to forgive his brother, he ought to lose his assurance until he does...
        - And he ought to put out of the church until he does...
        - He has no evidence that he is a true believer if he will not forgive...
        - He does not have a credible profession of faith and should be regarded as an unbeliever.

TRANS> But if he is a true believer,

- ) In the end, he will be strengthened through the whole struggle of having to forgive his brother...
  - Child of God,
    - every time you are called upon to forgive your brother,
      - you are strengthened...
      - it forces you to see God's forgiveness in a fresh light!
  - You have to look at what your brother has done to you and at what you are being asked to forgive...
    - And then you have to look at God and what He has forgiven you,
      - and as a believer, you begin to appreciate your Lord more than you ever have before...



- If faith is there,
  - your heart will soon melt and you will gladly and joyfully forgive your dear brother and you will do it from the heart!

**Conclusion:**

Oh how excellent is our Lord's teaching!

- We are a forgiven people...
- And as a forgiven people, we are a forgiving people.
  - It cannot be otherwise for the true believer.
    - May it ever be so with all of you hear my voice.
  - There is nothing to count here, nothing to calculate, nothing to put limitations on!
    - Let us freely forgive as we have been forgiven.