

Pent 16 (9/17/23) SM,SJ

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.²³ "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.²⁶ "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'²⁷ The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.²⁸ "But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.²⁹ "His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'³⁰ "But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.³² "Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to.'³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?'³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, DFR:

Ronnie and Anita Smith moved to Libya because they wanted to help its people. He was a teacher who was in the habit of going for a daily run. In December of 2013, he was shot in killed by an unknown gunmen in Benghezi. She would later write a letter to the gunman, saying: "I love you and forgive you. How could I not? For Jesus taught us to 'love our enemies' — not to kill them or seek revenge."

Why should we forgive those who hate us, do evil to us, who are mean to us? Isn't it natural to hate those who hate us? Let's listen today to our Lord and Master, Jesus, as he teaches us:

- Forgive As We Forgive
1. God forgives us by grace
2. We forgive by grace

1. God forgives us by grace

When Jesus talks about the debt of sin in the parable, he compares it to money. A denarius was the coin given to a Roman soldier for a day's pay. It was considered good pay. A talent was more money than most people would see in their lives. It was worth 16 years' pay.

When we look at the debt that we owe God, Jesus compares our sins to 10,000 talents. That's a 160,000 years pay! Can you imagine going to the bank and asking for a loan of about 3.6 billion dollars? Three point six billion is about how much 10,000 talents is at minimum wage (\$8.85 for small businesses today in MN), which certainly isn't the good pay that a denarius represented. No bank would loan us that amount of money because there is no possible way that we could pay the interest, much less the loan itself.

Of course, no amount of money could ever repay even a single sin. We could have the riches of Bill Gates or Warren Buffet. We could work for 160,000 years and we couldn't even pay for a single sin that we have committed. Yet our debt before God is not for one sin or even two or three. It's for sins so many we can't even list them or guess at their numbers.

If we owed God 160,000 years wages for a single sin, imagine the size of the debt we would owe our heavenly Father for the hundreds and thousands of sins that we have committed. It would truly be an immense debt, an impossible debt for us to repay.

God taught his OT people that only blood could atone for sin. They learned that lesson by the sacrifice of countless birds, calves and bulls. Yet the blood of animals could never really forgive sins; they merely

pointed ahead to the true sacrifice for sins, Jesus.

So what our greatest efforts could never do, Jesus did for us. The blood of Jesus is not like the blood that flows in our veins. It's not the same as the blood at a blood bank or at a hospital. All that blood is common human blood. God became flesh in the body of Jesus because the blood of God was required to atone or to pay for the world's debt of sin.

2. We forgive by grace

Jesus' parable doesn't just talk about God's forgiving us; it also shows us that by God's grace, we also forgive others.

Forgiving is hard. We understand how hard it is, because even as Christians, we still have a sinful flesh. It doesn't want to love those who hurt us. It wants to hurt back. It wants to return hate with hate, violence with violence.

Forgiving is hard, but it isn't impossible, because as Christians we also have a new nature. That nature understands that God has forgiven us.

How often should we forgive? That was the question originally asked of Jesus? Once or twice seems humanly reasonable. Five or six seems extremely generous. God calls us to be more than reasonable, more than generous. He asks us forgive with the same amazing grace and generosity with which he has forgiven us in Christ.

how much should we forgive? One article I read stated the answer is infinitely, and I think that is exactly what Jesus is teaching us. To forgive as many times as people sin against. We do this because God's own love for us is infinite.

In 1972, a young 12 year Vietnamese girl was sprayed with napalm. A famous picture of her was taken that caused her to be known as the "Napalm girl." If you're not familiar with napalm, it basically jellified gasoline. It causes terrible burns and is extremely difficult to put out. She had to undergo many, many operations Yet she has become a Christian

She has said, "Forgiveness made me free from hatred. I still have many scars on my body and severe pain most days but my heart is cleansed. Napalm is very powerful, but faith, forgiveness, and love are much more powerful. We would not have war at all if everyone could learn how to live with true love, hope, and forgiveness." If that little girl in the picture can do it, ask yourself: Can you?

Yes, we can forgive, but not by ourselves. Despite the astronomic size of our sins, God has forgiven us. We forgive because God has forgiven us. We love our neighbor because God has loved us. Amen.