

Matthew 18:21-35

- Forgiveness -

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Introduction

- ❖ “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?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times (or: seventy times seven; Mt 18: 21, 22).
 - Forgiveness is an important theme in the Gospel of Matthew:¹
 - It is an authority given by God to “the Son of Man” “to forgive sins...” People were amazed that “who had given such authority to men” (Mt 9:6, 8).
 - “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Mt 6:14, 15; Mt 18:35).
 - Forgiveness must be studied, and believed concerning:
 - The holiness of God the Father (Mt 6:9) and his Kingdom of God (Mt 6:10; 5:3-9; 6:33; a.o.; **Mt. 18:23**); the will and righteousness of God (Mt 6:10, 33) and his judgment; the mercy of God (Mt 5:7; 12:7); The gentleness and humbleness of Jesus (Mt 11:29; Mt 5:8). And not to forget: the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23).
 - Forgiveness aims at:

¹ See also: Matthew 6:5-8 | christian library. (n.d.-a).

<https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Matthew%206.5-8.pdf>

Matthew 18:15-20 | Christian Library. (n.d.-a).

<http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Matthew%2018.15-20.pdf>

- Repentance (Mt 3:11; 4:17); reconciliation (Mt 5:24); healing (Mt 9:1-8; Jn 5:13-16²); purity of heart (Mt 5:8); peace (Mt 5:9) with God, among brothers, and oneself.
 - Forgiveness is intrinsically related to:
 - Baptism (Mt 3:11; Acts 2:38) and the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:28).
 - Forgiveness is ultimately made possible by:
 - The death and resurrection of Christ Jesus (Mt 26:28; Eph 1:7; 2:4-7).
- ❖ After Peter had asked Jesus about forgiveness, Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful servant. This parable is easy to understand but at the same time confronts the listener and reader: how do you act?
 - Remember that Jesus said: “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:20).
 - This implies that Jesus will be with those who forgive each other.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap with other sermon outlines taken from the Gospel of Matthew. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a stand-alone. You can also fit this outline into a series of sermons.

Context

- ❖ An overview of Matthew 18:

Introductory scene/question	
Matthew 18:1-4	<p>“Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ...”</p> <p>“Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”</p>
Protect the little ones	
Matthew 18:5-9	Don't cause “one of these little ones” who believe in me to sin.”
Matthew 18:10-14	<p>Don't “look down on one of these little ones, ...”</p> <p>“Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.”</p>
To win your brother over (= not be lost)	

² See also: <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/James%205.13-16.pdf>

Matthew 18:15-20	“If your brother sins against you...” “If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”
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?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

Form and structure

How many times shall I forgive (Mt 18:21-35)

<i>Setting:</i> (Mt 18:21, 22)	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?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.
Parable	
<i>Introduction:</i> (Mt 18:23)	"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.
<i>Scene 1:</i> (Mt 18:24-27)	As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had to be sold to repay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.
<i>Scene 2:</i> (Mt 18:28-30)	"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. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.
<i>Scene 3:</i> (Mt 18:31-34)	When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.
Conclusion	
<i>Conclusion:</i> (Mt 18:35)	"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Technical, hermeneutical and historical notes

forgiveness

- ❖ “Forgiveness” in the Gospels represents “a dynamic, social-psychological experience of being released from the deleterious effects of guilt and sinful behaviour and restoring broken relations between human beings and God and among themselves.” Forgiveness, and related words such as liberation, salvation, reconciliation and restoration, create God’s new community. “Because of humankind’s deeply flawed nature, forgiveness ultimately depends on the gracious love of God mediated through Jesus Christ.” A believer responds “to God’s reconciling mercy in various ways, especially repentance, baptism, confession, prayer and forgiveness of others.”³ “It is forgiveness as part of a dynamic, holistic project of rescuing people from the ravages of sin and enabling them to flourish.”⁴
- ❖ Forgiveness of sins in the Gospel of Matthew, an overview:
 - Matthew 1:21: “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because **he will save his people from their sins.**” (See also: Lk 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43.)
 - Matthew 3:1-12 (John the Baptist): “**I baptize you with water for repentance.** But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Mt 3:11).
 - = Luke 3:3: “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching **a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**” (See also: Acts 2:38.)
 - Matthew 5:21-26 (Reconciliation): “**First go and be reconciled to your brother;** then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:24).
 - Matthew 6:9-15 (The Lord’s Prayer): “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12).
 - Matthew 9:1-8 (Jesus heals a paralytic): “But so that you may know that **the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...**” Then he said to the paralytic, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” And the man got up and went home. When **the crowd** saw this, they were filled with awe; and they **praised God, who had given such authority to men.**”
 - **“Authority” = “ἐξουσία”:** potential or resource to command, control, or govern, capability, might, power.⁵ Power, authority to do a thing,⁶

³ Spencer, F. S. (2013, p. 284). *Forgiveness of Sins*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

⁴ Spencer, F. S. (2013, p. 285). *Forgiveness of Sins*. In J. B. Green, J. K. Brown, & N. Perrin (Eds.).

⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 352).

⁶ Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., & McKenzie, R. (1996, p. 599).

- Matthew 18:15-20 (A brother who sins against you).⁷
 - Matthew 18:21-35 (The parable of the unmerciful servant): “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?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Mt 18:21, 22). This parable is an apt illustration of Matthew 6:14, 15).
 - Matthew 26:28 (The Lord’s Supper): “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
- ❖ Forgiveness of sins (the New Testament, a thematic overview):
- **Work of the Spirit** (John 20:22, 23): “And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
 - **Preaching** (Lk 24:47; Acts 13:38; 2 Cor 5:19): “And repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.”
 - **Testimony of the Prophets** (Acts 10:43).
 - **Baptism** (Acts 2:38): “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”
 - **Lord’s supper** (Mt 26:28; Eph 1:7): “This is **my blood of the covenant**, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”
 - **Ministry** (Jn 20:23): “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”
 - **Prayer** (Mt 6:12; Lk 11:4): “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”
 - **Forgive each other** (Eph 4:32; Col 3:13).
- ❖ Forgiveness of Sins (Psalms)
- **Psalm 32: 1, 2**: “**Blessed** is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. **Blessed** is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”
 - See also **Romans 4:7, 8** and Psalm 103; “**Blessed**”, see also Matthew 5:3-10.
 - A personal prayer for forgiveness (Ps 51).
 - A communal prayer for forgiveness (Ps 130; also Ps 79:9; 85:1-3).
- ❖ Forgiveness of Sins (The Prophets)
- It is made clear by the Prophets that:⁸

⁷ <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/word/Matthew%2018.15-20.pdf>

- God is gracious and forgiving: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon” (Isa 55:6, 7).
- Cultic activity does not guarantee forgiveness (Ho 6:6 (Mt 12:7)).
- Forgiveness Is the Divine Prerogative.

Exposition

Verse 21-22 (Setting)

- ❖ **“Then” = “τότε”**: 2. to introduce that which follows in time: **then, thereupon**.⁹ De previous teachings (Mt 18:15-20) raised serious questions among the disciples:
 - “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over” (Mt 18:15)...
 - “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?’” (Mt 18:21).
 - (See also Eph 4:35:2; Col 3:13).
- ❖ **“forgive” = “ἀφίημι”**: 2. **to release from legal or moral obligation or consequence, cancel, remit, pardon**.¹⁰
 - “Forgiveness is as indispensable to the life and health of the soul as food is for the body.”¹¹
 - Newman and Stine remark: “*Forgive* has proved remarkably difficult to translate in many languages in which there is no one word that can be used. However, there is usually an idiom or some figure of speech that can express the concept of forgiveness. ‘Forget the wrong,’ ‘no longer see the wrong,’ ‘put the wrong behind one’s back,’ ‘lift the wrong from between us’—these are just a few ways we have seen ‘forgiveness’ expressed.”¹²

⁸ McKeown, J. (2012, p. 253-257). Forgiveness. In M. J. Boda & G. J. McConville (Eds.).

⁹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 1012).

¹⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 156).

¹¹ Stott, J. R. W., (1985, p. 149).

¹² Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 171).

- ❖ **“to sin” = “ἁμαρτάνω”**: to commit a wrong, to sin (in the sense ‘transgress’) against divinity, custom, or law.¹³ “There are no sins against one’s neighbour which do not affect one’s relation to God.”¹⁴ This is also true for the opposite. Sins against God will affect one’s relation to the neighbour.
 - **“Sin”** as a theological concept is deeply rooted in the theology of the Old Testament.
- ❖ **“my brother”** belongs to the same Christian community and is distinguished from the “pagan” and “tax collector” (Mt 18:17).
 - See also Matthew 5:43-45: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”
 - Forgiveness can be given to the pagan, the tax collector, and the enemy, even those who persecute. The main difference is that “my brother” shares the same faith.
- ❖ **“seven” is also a figure of completeness.** This implies that Peter didn’t mean counting up to seven times but do I have to forgive my brother and sister completely? Human patience (see below) is often limited. Therefore, in reality, it is difficult to forgive someone completely.
- ❖ **“Seventy-seven” (NIV) or “seventy times seven” (NASB¹⁵).** Which is preferred?
 - The use of this high number is an example of hyperbole. Hyperbole is the use of exaggeration as a figure of speech. It emphasizes, evokes strong feelings, and creates strong impressions. **As a figure of speech, it is usually not meant to be taken literally.**
 - “Lamech said to his wives, ‘Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.’”
 - Cain is avenged seven times by the LORD (Gn 4:15). Lamech will revenge himself. This revenge is disproportionate; "it refers to a blood-feud carried on without mercy and without limit."¹⁶
 - Peter asked “seven times.” This reflects Genesis 4:15. Seventy-seven times would reflect the vengeance of Lamech, but Jesus wants the forgiveness of his disciples to far exceed this. Therefore, “seventy times seven” is more preferable. This also corresponds to the parable, in which the first servant is confronted with his debt, which cannot be repaid in his entire life.

¹³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000, p. 49).

¹⁴ Michaelis, W. (1964–, Vol. 6, p. 171). πίπτω, πτώμα, πτώσις, ἐκπίπτω, καταπίπτω, παραπίπτω, παράπτωμα, περιπίπτω. In G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, & G. Friedrich (Eds.).

¹⁵ New American Standard Bible.

¹⁶ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 793).

- Davies and Allison quote Manson: “Just as in those old days there was no limit to hatred and vengeance, so among Christians there is to be no limit to mercy and forgiveness”¹⁷
- “The one who forgives is not to keep record of the number of times he forgives his brother.”¹⁸
 - See also Leviticus 26:18: “‘If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.’”

Verse 23 (Introduction)

- ❖ **“Therefore.”** Newman and Stine suggest the following translation: “I tell you this because God’s rule is like this story’ or ‘The reason you must forgive like that can be seen in this parable about God’s rule. It is like this.”¹⁹
- ❖ **“Kingdom of Heaven.”** Two alternative translations make the point more clear:²⁰
 - “When God establishes his Kingdom, he will act like a king who wanted to check up on those who were in charge of his possessions”²¹;
 - “When God establishes his rule, the situation will be like that described in this parable”²²

Verse 24-27 (scene 1)

- ❖ **“As he began.”** This introduction emphasizes the fact that the king does not begin with those who owe him little. He starts with the largest debtors.
- ❖ **“Was brought.”** This is a passive construction. The debtor didn’t come voluntarily.
- ❖ **“Ten thousand talents”**
 - This is again an example of a hyperbole. See above.
 - Newman and Stine: “Both the sum (ten thousand) and the monetary unit (talent) are significant, for in the ancient Near East ten thousand was the highest number used in calculating, and the talent was the largest currency unit of that time. In other words,

¹⁷ Davies, W. D., & Allison, D. C., Jr. (2004, Vol. 2, p. 793).

¹⁸ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 577).

¹⁹ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 577).

²⁰ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 577-578).

²¹ German Common Language Translation

²² Indonesian Common Language Translation

the amount is intended to stagger the imagination; it is the highest sum imaginable, to be contrasted with the trifling amount of the debt in verse 28.”²³

- Explanations like “millions of dollars” do not do justice to the image. “Billions of dollars” would be better.
 - The New Revised Standard Version²⁴ explains in a footnote: "A talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages of a labourer." As per consequence, a labourer wouldn't be able to repay this debt for eternity.
- ❖ **“the master ordered that he (...) had be sold to repay the debt.”** “This action is purely for the sake of revenge on the part of the king, since even at the highest value of slaves the total amount would have still been insignificant as compared with the monstrous debt.”²⁵
- **“to repay” = “ἀποδίδωμι”**: 2. **to meet a contractual or other obligation, pay, payout, fulfil**; 3. **to restore to an original possessor, give back, return.**²⁶ Note the judicial connotations.
 - This is a keyword in the parable.
- ❖ NIV: **“fell on his knees before him”** – NASB: **“fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him”**.
- **“prostrated himself”** is the main action.
 - = **“προσκυνέω”**: **to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully.**²⁷
- ❖ **“be patient with me.”** For how long?
- **“I will pay back everything.”** The servant thus
 - Newman and Stine refer to King Herod: “For example, the annual income of King Herod was only nine hundred talents, and for this man to have repaid ten thousand talents would have been an impossible feat.”²⁸
 - **“everything”** Thus the servant still hopes that he will be able to pay back everything.
- ❖ **“took pity” = “σπλαγχνίζομαι”**: *have pity, feel sympathy.*²⁹

²³ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 578).

²⁴ New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition. (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

²⁵ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, 579).

²⁶ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 109-110).

²⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 882).

²⁸ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 580).

- Compare the substantive “σπλάγγων”: 1. **the inward parts of a body, including especially the viscera, inward parts, entrails.** 2. As often in the ancient world, inner body parts served as referents for psychological aspects: of the seat of the emotions, in our usage a transference is made to the rendering *heart*³⁰
- ❖ “cancel” = “ἀφίημι”: 2. **to release from legal or moral obligation or consequence,** *cancel, remit, pardon;* in sense of divine forgiveness.³¹
- ❖ “let go” = “ἀπολύω”: 1. **As legal term, to grant acquittal, set free, release, pardon.**³² This translation is preferred, because canceling the debt has legal consequences.

Verse 28-30 (scene 2)

- ❖ “**But**” introduces the next scene and contrasts it with the previous passage. The servant was released from a burden, impossible to carry. Has his mind and heart been changed? He pleaded for mercy and patience, has he become merciful and patient?
- ❖ “**Found**” = “εὐρίσκω”: b. **accidentally, without seeking** *find, come upon someone.*³³
- ❖ “**one of his fellow servants**” He is equal in position to the other servants.
- ❖ “**a hundred denarii.**” A denarius was the daily wage paid to a labourer. “When a comparison is made between the value of the talent and the denarius, one discovers that the debt which the first servant owed the king is 500,000 times more than the debt owed him by his fellow servant.”³⁴
 - A hundred denarii is still a large amount reckoning with a daily wage.
 - The exact amount of money is not of interest. The comparison is important.
- ❖ “**He grabbed him and began to choke him.**” Compare this with the previous scene: “a man who owed him ten thousand talents **was brought to him.**”
 - Newman and Stine advise “in translation to do whatever seems the most dramatic.”³⁵
- ❖ ““Pay back what you owe me!” he demanded.” Compare the following two situations:

²⁹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p 938).

³⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 938).

³¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 156).

³² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 117).

³³ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 411).

³⁴ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 581).

³⁵ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 581).

- Servant 1 owes 500,000 times 100 denarii to the king. He gets 100 denarii from his fellow servant and starts paying back. There are still 499,999 times 100 denarii left.
- Servant 1 is released from his debt. He gets 100 denarii from his fellow servant. He can keep this amount of money to himself. He profits from the previous cancellation.
- ❖ Compare verses 26 and 29 (NIV and NASB; see also above, and below – with Greek text).
 - NIV: "The servant **fell on his knees before him**. 'Be patient with me,' he **begged**, 'and I will pay back **everything**.'"
 - NASB: "So the slave **fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him**, **saying**, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you **everything**.'"
 - NIV: "His fellow servant **fell to his knees** and **begged** him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'"
 - NASB: "So his fellow slave **fell to the ground** and **began to plead with him, saying**, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'"
 - The NIV translation suggests a similar situation both servant1 and servant2 "**fell on his knees**" and "**begged**." NASB makes clear that the situation is far more dramatic. The fellow slave fell to the ground, not because of reverence to, but because he was grabbed and choked. Therefore, I do not agree with Newman and Stine who wrote: "The meaning is close enough that translators can use a similar expression; 'knelt down to beg him.'"³⁶
 - Note "everything" (ten thousand talents) in verse 26 where Servant 1 asks for patience to repay, which is impossible.
 - "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed."
 - There is not a single sign of patience.
 - "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7:12).

Verse 31-34 (Scene 3)

- ❖ "**other servants**." In the Greek text, the same word as in verses 28, 29 and 33 is used: "**fellow servant(s)**." They are all equal and in the same position.
- ❖ "**saw what had happened**." What had happened is described in Matthew 18:28-30.
- ❖ "**greatly distressed**" = "**λυπηθῆναι + σφόδρα**": **become sad**, *sorrowful, distressed*³⁷ + *greatly*
 - They were distressed because of the harshness, the impatience and what he did to their fellow servant.

³⁶ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 582).

³⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 604).

- ❖ Compare the following verses. Note that the NIV translates similar Greek passages with slight variations. For verses 26 and 29, see also above.

Servant1 (verse 26)	Servant2 (verse 29)
<p>πεσὼν οὖν ὁ δοῦλος προσεκύνει αὐτῷ λέγων·</p> <p>μακροθύμησον ἐπ’ ἐμοί,</p> <p>καὶ πάντα ἀποδώσω σοι.</p>	<p>πεσὼν οὖν ὁ σύνδουλος αὐτοῦ παρεκάλει αὐτὸν λέγων·</p> <p>μακροθύμησον ἐπ’ ἐμοί,</p> <p>καὶ ἀποδώσω σοι.</p>
<p>“The servant fell on his knees before him.</p> <p>‘Be patient with me,’ he begged,</p> <p>‘and I will pay back everything.’</p>	<p>“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me,</p> <p>and I will pay you back.’</p>
Servant1 (verse 30)	King/Master (verse 34)
<p>ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἤθελεν ἀλλ’ ἀπελθὼν</p> <p>ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς φυλακὴν</p> <p>ἕως ἀποδοῦν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον.</p>	<p>καὶ ὀργισθεὶς ὁ κύριος αὐτοῦ</p> <p>παρέδωκεν αὐτὸν τοῖς βασανισταῖς</p> <p>ἕως οὗ ἀποδοῦν πάν τὸ ὀφειλόμενον.</p>
<p>“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.</p>	<p>In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.</p>

- ❖ “**all that debt**” with emphasis.
- ❖ “**wicked**” = “**πονηρός**”: 1. **pertaining to being morally or socially worthless, wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, degenerate.**³⁸ See also Matthew 25:26.
- ❖ “**Shouldn’t you have had**” a moral obligation?
 - “**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect**” (Mt 5:48).
- ❖ “**have mercy**” = “**ἐλεέω**”: **to be greatly concerned about someone in need, have compassion/mercy/pity.**³⁹
 - The centrality of "having mercy" is made clear in the Sermon on the Mount:

³⁸ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 851).

³⁹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 315).

- "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Mt 5:6-7).
- And:
- "But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mt 9:13; 12:7). Compassion/mercy is one of "the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Mt 23:23).
- ❖ "In anger" with emphasis.
- ❖ "the jailers to be tortured" (NASB "torturers") = "βασανιστής": **guard in a prison, frequently under orders to torture prisoners, oppressive jailer, Mt 18:34** something like **merciless jailer** seems to be required. In the background may be the image of a wealthy estate owner who would have a detention centre for recalcitrant slaves.⁴⁰ The resulting severe pain "βάσανος" is **occasioned by punitive torture, torture, torment.**⁴¹ This is a result of being **subject to punitive judicial procedure, torture.**⁴²
- ❖ This judgment is far more severe than the initial judgment:
 - "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" (Mt 18:25).
 - Matthew 7:2: "**For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.**"

Verse 35 Conclusion

- ❖ The message is clear. Our debt is immensely great. And our heavenly Father will forgive.
- ❖ "each of you" with emphasis.
- ❖ "from your heart"
 - Matthew 5:8, 9: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Forgiveness will purify the heart and establish peace.
- ❖ Compare with these sayings:
 - "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Mt 6:14, 15).

⁴⁰ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 168).

⁴¹ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 168).

⁴² Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p.. 168).

- “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Mt 7:1, 2).
 - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Mt 7:12).
 - “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Mt 22:37-40).
 - Forgiveness is the essence of the covenant: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28).
- ❖ The warning:
 - “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Mt. 7:26, 27).
- ❖ The urgency:
 - “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23, 24).
- ❖ Part of the teaching:
 - “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Application

Remark

- ❖ Tell the story vividly. It is a story. Some commentaries try to situate the story in real-life circumstances. That is not the purpose of the story, as is made clear that it is like the Kingdom of Heaven.

Important

- ❖ This parable doesn't leave room for cheap grace and forgiveness:

- Luz writes: “Human experience is that forgiveness that is unconditioned and endlessly repeated, that can be taken for granted, simply encourages evil people.”⁴³
 - Forgiveness is indeed unconditional, and when received with a grateful spirit, it simultaneously sets the conditions for the change of hearts, and minds See also Romans 6:1-4.
 - If people think that endlessly repeated forgiveness leads to continued sinning, then the sinner will have a huge problem with the Lord of heaven and earth (Matt. 18:32-34). He will be counted among the evil servants.
- Therefore, this parable follows the teaching on “church discipline” as outlined in Matthew 18:15-20.
 - “If he (the sinner) refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector” (Mt 18:17).
- ❖ There is a delicate balance between forgiveness and doing justice. The government has a special responsibility to do justice.
 - “For he (one in authority) is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer”(Rm 13:4; (13:1-7)).

Praise

- ❖ Praise God and Christ for his wisdom, grace, forgiveness, righteousness and mercy.

Ask the right questions

- ❖ It is **not** necessary to ask and try to answer questions like:
 - What was the position of this servant? A high official?
 - How was it possible for him to have created such a huge debt?
 - Jesus doesn't explain. He wants the parable to do its work:
 - The listener should ask questions regarding himself.
- ❖ Not voluntarily – are we ready to admit our sins with remorse, or just customarily because we expect that God will forgive our sins?
- ❖ Are we aware of the gravity of sin?
 - Why does Jesus treat forgiveness with such seriousness?
 - The power of sin is so great and causes so much damage.
 - Sin is against the Creator.

⁴³ Luz, U. (2001, p. 466).

- Sin is against the Law-Giver.
- Sin is against the “image of God.”
- The following examples make clear that sin is not only confined to the act of sin but also includes the damage caused by and the consequences in time.
 - If the victim was married, his widow has a lifelong sentence and remarriage will bring comfort but never take the painful remembrance away. And what to think of the parents who lost their child and children who lost their father.
 - If the sin consists of sexual abuse of a child, the victim might struggle for years and years because of feelings of guilt, loss of trust, difficulty in sustaining stable relationships, health and sexual problems.
 - These examples might help to understand why Jesus compares the debt of the first servant with a huge amount of money.
- People tend to deny or to belittle sin:
 - Yes, I am a sinner, just like everybody else.
 - I have offered my apologies, so things should turn back to normal. For victims, there is no normal situation.

Additional thoughts

- ❖ Forgiveness cannot be used as a means of justification, in the sense that you must acknowledge that you were wrong and I was right.
- ❖ “Expressing words of reconciliation and forgiveness cannot guarantee that a severed relationship can be restored, but it can result in a sense of integrity and peace.”⁴⁴
- ❖ “The path to wholeness and to holiness is through God’s forgiveness in Christ. The cross and resurrection of Christ represent the victory of good over evil.”⁴⁵
- ❖ “One of the great mysteries of faith is the process of redemption and reconciliation. At the heart of God is the desire to forgive, making confession and forgiveness spiritual exercises that can transform lives. The Scriptures clearly call us to practice confession on a regular basis, both as a private matter between the individual and God and as a corporate discipline between believers.”⁴⁶
- ❖ “Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!” (Js 2:12, 13).

⁴⁴ Craigie, F. C., Jr. (1999, p. 71). *Ambiguity, Intolerance of*. In D. G. Benner & P. C. Hill (Eds.),

⁴⁵ Sandage, S. J. (1999, p. 79). *Analytical Psychology*. In D. G. Benner & P. C. Hill (Eds.),

⁴⁶ Butman, R. E. (1999, p. 243). *Confession*. In D. G. Benner & P. C. Hill (Eds.),

- ❖ “It is helpful, at least at times, to distinguish between the *decision* to forgive another and the internal *emotion(s)* that a Christian may or may not experience in relation to another.”⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ Gibbs, J. A. (2010, p. 939-940).