

The Importance of Forgiveness

Matthew 18.21-35

Last week we marveled at God's love: He forgives us when we return to Him. But what happens when forgiven people don't forgive others? We find it hard to forgive those who have wronged us. Does it matter? Jesus says it does, in the parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

Peter's Question About Forgiveness

- *Categories of forgiveness: Positional vs. Progressive*
- *Confusing categories leads to bad theology.*
- *Radical idea: Forgive others as often as they sin against you.*

Jesus Reveals the Importance of Forgiveness

- *Parable, part 1: Unbelievable forgiveness!*
- *Parable, part 2: Unconscionable lack of forgiveness!*
- *Parable, part 3: Terrifying judgment.*
- *Moral of the Story (see James 2.12-13)*



1. The narrative of Matthew 18 is all concerned with what might be called 'practical issues relating to kingdom living.' The disciples asked Jesus questions (verses 1 and 21), and He gave them more than they asked for! What was their question in v1? What different subjects does Jesus address in His response (verses 2-20)?
2. In the paragraph before our passage, Jesus instructs His disciples on how to respond to a brother who commits sin (vv15-20). What is that instruction? What does it mean to treat someone "as a Gentile and a tax collector"? What is the goal in all the instruction Jesus gives?
3. Understanding the context, Peter's question in v21 makes sense; he subtly changes the subject from a 'brother who sins' to one who 'sins against me.' Peter is criticized by some for his suggestion of forgiving "up to seven times," but actually, he's pretty generous! Think of a time when you were repeatedly wronged by a fellow-Christian. How hard did you find it to forgive? Have you forgiven them yet?
4. Jesus illustrates a truth of "the kingdom of heaven" in the parable of the unforgiving servant. This story is intended to instruct us on how to live with a 'kingdom experience' now. Who does the king in the story refer to? Who does the slave who owed ten thousand talents refer to? What is ten thousand talents equal to in today's money? What was Jesus saying about our debt of sin that has been forgiven?
5. In comparison to our sin-debt, how much is owed to us by those who have wronged us? In the parable, the judgment on the unforgiving servant is very harsh! Some have rashly concluded that an unforgiving person is going to hell. Why is this conclusion wrong? While failure to forgive others does not mean we are going to hell, how seriously does God view it? What do we forfeit in this life – and in the life to come?