

Let's begin by re-capping what we learned a couple of weeks ago. Jesus gave us the process, for dealing with sin and broken relationships in the church, and this is what He said:

Matthew 18:15–20 (ESV)

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

OK, so we were looking at Christian unity. Christ prayed for unity between Christians, and it's not just a skin-deep, illusion of unity, where we all pretend to get on with one another and play 'happy families'... It is a unity totally and completely based on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a unity of truth; faith; hope; and love.

That's the sort of unity we should be looking for, within the church:

- A unity of truth – that together, we believe the apostolic witness, written down in the Bible
- A unity of faith – that together, we have faith and trust in the one Lord Jesus Christ...
- A unity of hope – that together, we yearn for the hope that we have, to be fully realised, with the return of Christ.
- And a unity of love – common children, of a common Father in Heaven, bound together in a love, that just delights in one another...

Because as we delight in God, so too we should be delighting in one another. Because as we are transformed to become more and more like the image of Christ – as God the Holy Spirit begins to dwell in the heart of your Christian brother or sister, our love for them should increase, as our love for God increases, because God is in them...

And of course, **this** kind of unity, is what Christ prays for, and desires in His church, but the sad reality is, we are far from it. And when division enters into the church, that division is caused by sin. We humans don't naturally get on with each other – we have to work at it...

And part of this working on our relationships, is reconciliation between one-another...

And so a couple of weeks ago, we learned about the steps to reconciliation: confrontation, repentance, forgiveness...

So, that message was a couple of weeks ago, and apparently it 'hit the spot' for a few of us. Several people came to me afterwards and said "Michael, I needed to hear that. I've been challenged about getting my relationships right with others".

And I praise God for that. I love it, when God does His sanctifying work in our hearts...

And so, some of us were challenged, but I wonder "How are you going with it now???" – 2 weeks later...

I suspect that if anyone's actually tried to put it into action over the last couple of weeks, it mightn't have been quite as easy as what you'd hoped... You see, forgiving someone once, is often just the beginning. We humans have a nasty habit of being repeat offenders.

I know when I receive forgiveness, I know it's only a matter of time, until I'm back, asking for it again, because I've hurt someone again....

How many times do you have to forgive someone? When is enough, enough?????

And that's what today's reading is all about.

Today's reading is: Matthew 18:21–35 (ESV)

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "**I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.**"

23 “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.
24 When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Video clip – unforgiving servant

This is my wallet. Notice how thin it is. Right here are three holes that hold a needle. And with that needle, I’m pretty sure I’ve been a source of annoyance to several ministers.... When I used to live at Goondiwindi, I did a lot of sheep work, and the dog bur and the galvanised bur, Bathurst burr

– they'd all get stuck in the wool, and then into my hands. And if you left them there, they'd start to fester.

And I could find no better time than Sunday morning to dig them out. The minister would start out strong in his sermon, the little old ladies would pull out their knitting needles, and I'd open up my wallet and take out my burr digging needle, and dig out those festering burs.

When you get a burr, it can be a bit of a source of annoyance, you can try and put up with it, but when they start to fester, and the puss shows that you've got an infection, there's only one thing for it – they've just got to come out.

And it's the same with forgiveness. Issues arise, we leave them under the surface, and they begin to fester. But you've got to get them out into the open – you've got to dig them out, and you **have** to deal with it.

Forgiveness **serious** business. Whether you're receiving forgiveness (from God or from others), or whether you're giving forgiveness to someone else – forgiveness is a **serious** business. It is a **serious** responsibility for the believer, not to only **be** forgiven, but also, to do the forgiving when earnestly asked for it. Peter thought he was doing alright. "How many times should I forgive my brother when he sins against me? 7 times? Now that's a pretty fair quantity – much more than the teachers of the day suggested.....

But "No" Jesus says, "77 times, or 70x7" The grammar's a bit unclear. But the number's not what's important. It's the

principle, and the principle is that you will forgive over and over and over and over again. Why? Because your heavenly father does that for you....

And it's just as well that He does. I commit the same sins over and over again, I keep asking forgiveness, and you know what? He forgives me. Over and over again, He forgives me. And when someone sins against **me** and asks for **my** forgiveness, **I** have no option. Because of what the Father has done for me, I **have** to forgive them, over and over again.

The parable of the unforgiving servant would have to be one of the most blunt and confronting stories that Jesus ever told.

The servant owed the king 10 000 talents. Now, 10 000 talents mightn't mean a lot to us. But let me put it like this. A talent was the largest unit of currency that they had, and 10 000 was the largest number in their language. It's like us saying a million, billion, zillion, gobble-a-gillion dollars. The whole tribute of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea combined, came to 600 talentsⁱ. 600 talents was a vast amount of money – a king's ransom. But this servant owed his king 10 000 talents. He owed the king more currency than what existed in the entire circulation of the whole country at that time. It was a bill that could not **ever** be repaid. In fact, it equated to around 250,000 years wages for an average man. It could not be paid back.

How much is your forgiveness worth? It is priceless. There is nothing that can make you pure before your Heavenly Father, except for the blood of His Son. And the blood of

the Lord Jesus Christ is priceless – it cannot be bought... So, how much is your forgiveness worth? – more than you can possibly imagine. And God loves you that much. He has forgiven you that much.

And it is an impossible debt – we could never pay him back.

But in the story, there was also a second debt. It was a debt the servant carried against one of his fellow servants. 100 denarii. That's about 1,000,000th of what he owed the king, so about 3 months wages he was owed. That's something – that's **not** insignificant.... And if someone owed me 3 months wages, I'd want to get it, but it pales into insignificance compared to the 250,000 years wages I'd just been forgiven.

When someone has wronged you, or if you have wronged somebody else, that is no little matter. And it might be something that you carry and remember, and inflicts you for years. Let's not make light of it – hurts that we have, and the subsequent lack of forgiveness can ruin life time relationships. Unforgiveness can ruin friendships. Unforgiveness can ruin work relationships. It can ruin family relationships. It can certainly ruin a marriage.

It is a big thing to forgive.... It is costly to forgive... But it is also **Godly** to forgive.

I find this story, **very** confronting, in fact I'm finding this all the way through the gospel of Matthew – Jesus reveals some very confronting truths... There are severe consequences for those who do not forgive, and keep on forgiving. Jesus

said, ³⁵ "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." Now He's not talking about a superficial forgiveness – He's not talking about putting a bandaid over a bur and failing to dig it out. He's talking about forgiveness from your heart – He's talking about real forgiveness. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

How will He treat all those who refuse to forgive? Well, let me merge the story with practical example, right from the start.

1. the king called his servant to account. – God convicts me of my sin, I know that I'm a sinner, I know that I need forgiveness, and I beg for His forgiveness. There is no way that I can pay the debt that I owe, for all of the wrong things that I've done in my life... The Bible says "The wages of sin are death", and I deserve the death penalty, so I forfeit life..... And so I depend entirely on the grace and the mercy of God – there is no other way to be saved, other than by the grace and the mercy of God.

Don't think for a moment that you can do anything to save yourself – you can't – that's what grace is all about: God saves those who cannot save themselves.

2. And so, the king had mercy on the servant – he tore up the debt. – God has mercy on me. He says your sins are forgiven. I remember your sins no more. As far as the east is from the west, I have removed your sin. I've taken your sins away. I've dealt with it. I've nailed it

to the cross of Christ.

And so we stand before the Father, made righteous through the blood of Christ. The cost was beyond what I could bear... But Jesus paid the cost on the cross, and He forgave me of my sins.

3. And so the servant is free – he has no more debt to carry. – I am free. Free from sin, free from death, free from punishment, free to commune with God... a ticket to glory – an assurance of eternal life.
4. but...., in the story, the servant doesn't have a heart like the king's heart. The king forgave the servant, but the servant would not forgive – And so the story is about a forgiven sinner, someone like me, perhaps someone like you, but someone who does not have a forgiving heart like their Heavenly Father's.

Our Heavenly Father is merciful – we too, must show mercy.

Tragically, I have heard it said, so many times, I cannot remember. Even coming from the lips of Christians, those foul and damning words: "*I could never forgive that person for what they did....*" When Jesus hears you say those words – when the Lord your God, who searches hearts, knows that that sort of unforgiveness is in your heart, do you know what He says??? ... `You wicked servant,.....³³
Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow-servant just as I had on you?'

That brings it home, doesn't it? ...God expects us to forgive others in the same way that He forgives us.

Understand this very important principal: Forgiveness requires repentance.

If I punch (so-and-so) in the nose and then ask them for forgiveness, well before they forgive me, they're going to want to know if I intend to do it again.

To repent, means I have to actually agree with God – “That – what I've been doing is wrong”. And, it is to make a conscious effort and decision, “I'm going to do all within my power (and the power of God) – to change my way of life – so I'm not doing this any more.”

So, understand the principle – forgiveness requires repentance. (now, repentance doesn't mean (of course) you'll never sin again, but it does mean you're going to work with God, to be changed for the better).

Salvation without repentance, is an empty hope – it's an illusion – it's a lie.

Why are there so many people who claim to be Christians, but who are not living transformed lives??? I'll tell you why – It's because they're living on the empty promise of salvation without repentance – and there is no such thing.

- John the Baptist preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- Jesus preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
- In the early church, Peter preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

- The apostle Paul said ^{Acts 17: 30} **The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,**
- God is delaying the day of judgment, because He is giving everyone time to come to repentance....
- ^{Romans 2: 4} ... do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

It's not kindness to forgive without repentance – the two go hand in hand.

All the way through, not just the New Testament, but the whole bible, you will find this principle in practice: forgiveness requires repentance.

And unless we repent of our unforgiveness, we cannot be forgiven, **for** our unforgiveness.

The king cancelled **all** the debt. And God sets the sinner free. When God forgives, that's the end of it. God forgives us, and sets us free to live a life of freedom. And that life of freedom must be lived day by day.

But when we begin holding grudges, and harbouring resentment – when your brother or sister, in all sincerity, asks you for forgiveness, and you refuse.... Well you begin to bind yourself up again...

So what are the consequences of refusing to forgive?

Well, the image presented in this parable should be of a very great concern to us. It seems pretty clear to me, to be an image of eternal condemnation. The wicked servant was handed over to the jailers to be tortured until he paid back all that he owed. And he was never going to be able to pay it back....

But what did he owe? He owed God gratitude, and he owed his brother forgiveness. The other debt had been cancelled.

And here is the crunch: I can live in a life of grace. I can know the forgiveness of God in all areas of my life, but if I refuse to forgive my brother, God will not forgive me for not forgiving my brother – He can't, until I repent.

Forgiveness is serious business.

If there is someone who you feel you cannot forgive, I urge you, to come and talk to me about it.... The grace of God, is sufficient for you... The Holy Spirit, can transform every area of our life, so that the grace of God doesn't come to us and then stop – but so that the grace of God comes to us, and flows through us.

I've got a video clip here, of a song called forgiveness.

Questions????

ⁱ Keener CS. A commentary on the gospel of Matthew, Eerdmans, p.458