

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 18 (PART 3)

Matthew 18:21-22 - How Many Times Should I Forgive

Q - Why does Peter even ask this question?

The commonly accepted standard for forgiveness was 3 times - so in a way, Peter (asking about 7x) is already considering moving beyond what the respected rabbis taught.

Rabbi Jose bar Hanina noted that Joseph's brothers used the word "please" (נא, *na*) three times in Genesis 50:17 when they asked Joseph for forgiveness.

Genesis 50:17 - Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please (*na*) forgive, I beg you (*na*), the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." And now, please (*na*) forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

"The verse uses the word please three times, which shows that one need not ask more than three times, after which the insulted friend must be appeased and forgive." (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 87a)

Here's what the famous rabbi Maimonides taught (he lived in the middle ages but reflects the 3x standard in his teaching)

"Even if a person only upset a colleague by saying [certain] things, he must appease him and approach him [repeatedly] until he forgives him. If his colleague does not desire to forgive him, he should bring a group of three of his friends and approach him with them and request [forgiveness]. If [the wronged party] is not appeased, he should repeat the process a second and third time. If he [still] does not want [to forgive him], he may let him alone and need not pursue [the matter further]. On the contrary, the person who refuses to grant forgiveness is the one considered as the sinner. (Rambam, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:9)"

Jesus' answer of 70x7 is not simply increasing the literal number from 3 to 7 to 490. The number 7 is often used in instances to demonstrate completeness or perfection. Seventy times seven then represents perfect forgiveness multiplied to its fullest extent. He's putting the emphasis not on counting but on forgiving. There is to be no stoppage point or limit where forgiveness is no longer given.

Matthew 18:23-34 – Forgiving Master, Unforgiving Servant

A talent was worth more than 15 years wages for a laborer.

A denarii was a day's wage.

v. 24 - 10,000 x 15 years wages. If we use \$50,000 as a years wage, one talent (15 years) was \$750,000. The slave owed 10,000 talents - that's \$7.5 billion. If you make \$20/hr, it would take 375 million hours to earn \$7.5 billion - which is 42,779 years (working 24 hours a day).

v. 28 - 100 denarii - not a small debt it's 100 days wages. If you make \$20/hr, we're talking \$16k owed

Q - Do you think it is significant that the way the master finds out about this situation is from the other servants? What do you think? This tells us about the way the community is involved in these matters? (v. 31).

It's interesting that the fellow slaves "saw" what happened.

The servant forgiven by the master did not allow this to transform his own heart with grace and mercy. The debts owed him were real and wrong, but his heart and approach demonstrates he did not understand or truly experience the forgiveness he had received from his master.

The focus should be on what we have been forgiven of **RATHER** than what is owed us.

Matthew 18:35

Q - What does it look like to forgive from the heart? Why does Jesus make that distinction?

Jesus is concluding the parable of the unforgiving servant with a strong warning: God takes forgiveness seriously. Just as the master handed over the unmerciful servant to judgment, so too will God hold accountable those who refuse to forgive others—*especially after receiving His forgiveness*.

The key phrase is **"from your heart"** - Jesus isn't talking about superficial words or outward gestures, but genuine, internal forgiveness. It's not enough to say the right things; true forgiveness flows from a heart that has been changed by grace.

This verse is both a diagnostic (is your heart still bitter?) and a discipleship call: live as someone who truly knows what it means to be forgiven.

It's sobering to consider that Jesus links our willingness to forgive others directly to our own experience of being forgiven. This isn't a minor side note in the Christian life—it's a defining mark of those who truly know God's mercy. The servant in the parable didn't just forget the mercy he received—he revealed that it hadn't changed him. Forgiveness isn't simply something we pass along; it's evidence that we've actually understood and been transformed by the grace of God. If we hold others in contempt for their small debts, perhaps it's because we've minimized the weight of our own.

But Jesus doesn't tell this parable to shame us—He tells it to free us. Forgiveness doesn't mean what happened didn't matter; it means we're choosing to release the weight of it into the hands of a God who has already forgiven us so much. This is the way of the kingdom: a community where mercy flows freely, not because the offenses are small, but because the grace of God is so great. The question we're left with is not just, "Will I forgive?"—but "Have I really let God's forgiveness change

me?” May we be a people who forgive from the heart, not out of duty, but because we are living testimonies of what mercy looks like.