**Matthew 18:21-35**

**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 times seven. **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.”

**“Forgivingness Dependent On Christ”**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. So our texts today drives us to ask the big question, “Is it harder to repent of sin or to forgive sin?” The answer is simply to say, “yes.” Martin Luther explains it this way, “We believe that sin exists and that at the same time it has been forgiven. Forgiveness devours sin. On the other hand, whoever believes in and confesses forgiveness must also believe in and confess sin.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Both the need to repent and being able to forgive are finally gifts God works by His good Spirit. This alone comes from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our Old Testament reading shows us Joseph’s brother trying to do everything to earn his favor, when the real problem was they did trust his word of forgiveness. Likewise, our epistle reading from St. Paul warns us about quarrels over opinions and not to judge those things needing forgiveness when God’s Word has not spoken. Lastly, the Gospel reading picks up where we left off last week. Jesus told His disciples the benefit and duty to warn a brother who sins against you. Now if that was about dealing with repentance over sin, what follows today is how necessary it is to forgive repent sinners. Our master always brings His mercy when pleading to Him, so mercy to forgive must be what we give to those pleading with us.

1. **First off, it is not too shocking already to know the need to forgive.**
2. Peter knows what it means to forgive.

* Being a Jew, he was familiar with the God of Israel forgave His people when they went astray.
* Following Jesus as the Messiah also proved that forgiveness was the great work of His ministry.
* Peter offering up seven times to forgive his brother was actually generous compared to the Pharisees.

1. We know what it means to be forgiving.

* This is a kind of leniency in our society able to keep cooperation going between party lines when they appear to hate each another.
* We also find forgiveness in common moralism like, “Don’t sweat the small stuff” or “Don’t make mountains out of molehills.”
* Christianity has helped to elevate forgiveness, which if the government tried to do would leave wickedness unpunished and not fight evil.

1. Only Jesus knows the meaning of unrestricted forgiveness.

* Peter’s generous words received greater words of grace, “No Peter not Seven times. How about seventy times seven!”
* This is not correcting a miss calculation, but Jesus literally throwing out the calculator all together!
* In the Bible, seven is a perfect number, so multiplying it by seventy means forgiveness is endless and inexhaustible.

1. **However, this forgiveness must be mercy that goes out to others.**
2. The debt owed by any none can pay off.

* The parable by Jesus speaks of a master who taking account had a servant living a pretend life, smoke and mirrors kind of thing.
* Who knows how he got into debt, but 10,000 talents was an amount that no one could pay off in many lifetimes.
* If you noticed, this servant did not take his master seriously until he started to liquidate the man’s assets.
* Falling on his knees and bargaining to pay back, which was impossible the master had pity for the poor sap, releasing him and forgiving the debt.

1. Forgetfulness is not what we need.

* Kind of like going to church, but leaving the Gospel at the door when heading home, this servant blew off the grace of His master.
* Instead, he went and actually found someone who owed him 100 denarii, which is like 3 months wages, and has his way with that person.
* The guy was trying to be like the master, but enjoying more of the shakedown over a small debt rather than sparing this fellow servant.
* There was no pity even when there were pleas made no less than his, but power is what he really wanted at the expense of another servant.

1. Refusing to forgive does no good for anyone.

* The other servants who saw this gross misconduct were both sad and angry having to go and tell their master.
* The servant in prison was not going to be able to pay back any debt owed, let alone his absence from work would hurt the master.
* The master went from generosity to wrath with no room for begging only a blunt verdict for such a wicked servant.
* The servant unable to forgive a small debt now had a far more serious problem of punishment with no sign of compassion.

1. **Christ’s mercy to forgive makes Him the master so His servants forgive.**
2. He calls us to the debt paid by Him on the cross.

* When it comes to our rightness not even trying to forgive others earns our salvation, because that is the gracious gift only from Jesus.
* This parable proves not to be foolish about that mountain of debt we each have pretending we can “pay it back” because that will never happen.
* Failure to forgive especially the deepest hurts from another leads to hear Jesus say from His cross, “Father forgive them they do not know what they do.”
* We might not lop off an ear like Peter did, but grudges go deep, anger simmers in the heart and forgiving for the same sin is not easy.

1. Yet, Christ remembers to extend His mercy to bring forgiveness.

* Seventy times seven is what the crucified king holds out for God has canceled, “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).
* In baptism, God made an investment upon your life giving the riches of Christ so that you will never be poor.
* It is not about minimizing sin, but Christ comes to devour sin with His kingdom of forgiveness by Word and Sacrament.
* The world sells a sorry forgiveness that ends in tyranny, but Christ releases us from grudges, snuffs out that anger, and makes His mercy ours every day.

1. Our master forgives without limit to let us forgive by depending on Him.

* This has nothing to do with approving injustice, but to say like Joseph, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good…”
* Forgiveness gives a different perspective where power is nothing compared to the gift of showing mercy to those pleading with us.
* Of course, we should forgive to prove and witness that perfect forgiveness worked alone by faith in what Jesus has given most of all for each of us.
* Those sinning against you are not far away, but right before you in life and so forgiveness will be personal, sacrificial, and generous.

It is good, crucial, and possible to forgive, but not by force or guilt. The perfect love of Jesus is great and goes with us. Our master always brings His mercy when pleading to Him, so mercy to forgive must be what we give to those pleading with us. Amen. Now the peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds to life everlasting. Amen.

1. Complete Sermons of Martin Luther Vol. 7, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)