

## **FORGIVENESS #9**

**Matthew 18:21 – 35. 21** *"Then came Peter and said to Him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? 22 Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven. 23 Therefore, is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would make a reckoning with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, that owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. 27 And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But, that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred shillings: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what you owe. 29 So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord called him unto him, and said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you besought me: 33 shouldn't not you also have had mercy on your fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on you? 34 And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. 35 So shall also My heavenly Father do unto you, if you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."*

Doesn't it seem strange that from the lips of Love Incarnate, such words as these should proceed from that Person, "Deliver him to the tormentors till he should pay all that was due." Stranger yet, that He should speak these words as a warning to those very people of whom John writes and says, *"Having loved His own, He loved them, unto the end."* These are love words to His own, *"So shall My Heavenly Father do unto you, if you forgive not everyone his brother from your hearts."* Yet even more strange is the fact that they're spoken in a setting in which the main subject is forgiveness. God's forgiveness of sinners and fellow sinners in their forgiveness of one another. Hence these words are a fresh reminder of how vital it is to have all of our thinking about forgiveness shaped and molded by the Word of God and not by our own notions, especially our

own sentimental notions, nor the opinions of men, nor popular ideas, and this is what we are seeking to do as we come to our ninth study in a series on forgiveness.

This series began by considering:

- **The centrality of forgiveness and biblical revelation.**
- **A biblical definition and description of what forgiveness is** was constructed.
- **4 common mistakes** concerning the privilege and duty of the mutual, horizontal, human, forgiveness were taken up.
- **3 practical, pastoral perspectives** concerning mutual forgiveness were considered.

In our next two studies we come to consider what is perhaps the most critical issue in all of our Lord's teaching on this subject of **mutual, or horizontal forgiveness**; that is, **the forgiveness that we are to extend one to another within the family of God.**

We will begin our study by taking our Lord's teaching on this subject and reducing it to a simple principle.

**A principle is** a fundamental truth, law, or doctrine, upon which others are based.

If we take our Lord's teaching on this subject of **mutual, or horizontal forgiveness, that is, the forgiveness that we are to extend one to another within the family of God** and reduce it to a simple principle, or to its irreducible minimum, the principle is this:

**According to Jesus, those truly forgiven by God are also the truly forgiving of one another.**

To state this principle a little differently:

**According to Jesus, only those who forgive one another will be forgiven by God.**

To state this principle in another way in the negative form:

**According to Jesus, if there is no forgiveness extended to the family members, there will be no forgiveness received from the Father.**

In the teaching of our Lord Himself, not that the teaching of the Apostles is not the teaching of Christ, but in the recorded Words of Christ Himself, there is no more critical issue than the principle that we are going to isolate and seek to expound and apply in this study.

It is that principle [of our Lord's teaching on horizontal forgiveness] upon which we will focus our attention in

the next two studies. If you believe that forgiveness from God, Who is the Moral Governor and Judge of the world before Whom you will stand in the last day, is unimportant and an issue of little or no concern to you, then you can afford the luxury of daydreaming. You can afford the luxury of indifference and of a wandering mind and be easily distracted as we get into this study: However, if knowing that you enjoy the manifold blessings which come to those who live under the canopy of God's forgiving grace, if that is an issue of supreme importance to you, then gird up the loins of your mind and bend all of your powers in present, continuous dependence upon the Holy Spirit, praying and thinking hard to grasp this tremendously vital principle:

**That according to Jesus, only the truly forgiving have any reason to believe that they are forgiven. The truly forgiven by God are also the truly forgiving of one another.**

We will seek to open up this principle under three heads:

- (i) The principle clearly and repeatedly affirmed by our Lord.**
- (ii) The principal clearly and dramatically illustrated by our Lord. [this study]**
- (iii) The principal pointedly and practically applied, based upon the teaching of our Lord. [next study]**

Remember, the One Who speaks the words we're now going to look at is the One Who knows that He came from heaven by way of Mary's womb in order to live the life that we should have lived but did not, and to die the death that we deserved but dare not, in order to secure our salvation. In other words, He was conceived in Mary's womb and born to die. No one knew that better than He. Throughout His lifetime, the shadow of the Cross was continually cast over our blessed Lord, so whatever He may teach us, concerning **this great principle**, that:

**\*If we are not forgiving, we have no grounds to believe we are forgiven. \*\* This in no way is to be construed as though our forgiving others earns us**

**THE GROUND OF OUR FORGIVENESS is to be found solely in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

However, having no family likeness of the children to the Father [in this matter of forgiveness, forgive as He forgave us] is an indication that there has never been union with Christ in the bonds of saving faith and, thus, the resulting inner moral renovation by the Holy Spirit. If we are born of God and are children of God, we not only partake of the **legal** and **experiential** blessings of salvation purchased by our Lord Jesus Christ, but we also partake of the **moral** blessings of God; one of which is adoption into His family.

No. Our forgiveness is rooted in the perfect life and substitutionary death of our Lord Jesus Christ, alone. So that when we look at these three texts in which this principle is clearly and repeatedly affirmed by our Lord, we must not for a moment think of them in such a way as to cast the slightest shadow of doubt over this central biblical truth: that **THE GROUND OF OUR FORGIVENESS is to be found solely in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.** The principle is clearly and repeatedly affirmed by our Lord.

We begin to open up the great principle:

- (i) The principle clearly and repeatedly affirmed by our Lord.**

**The first** witness is found in Matthew chapter 6. After our Lord has corrected the wrong way to pray, He gives to His disciples a pattern, a framework, for God-honoring prayer in what we commonly call the Lord's Prayer. In that prayer, found in Matthew 6:9 – 15, there are seven petitions. Three of them are directly related to God, and four of them are directly related to our needs.

**Matthew 6:9** *"After this manner therefore pray ye. Our Father Who art in heaven, [petition #1 Godward is] **Hallowed be Your Name.** 10 [petition #2 Godward is] **Your kingdom come.** [petition #3 Godward is] **Your will be done,** as in heaven, so on earth.*

**Hallowed be Your Name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done,**

are the 3 petitions directly related to God.

**11** [the 1st petition of our need is] ***GIVE US this day our daily bread.*** **12** [the 2nd petition of our need is] ***And FORGIVE US our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*** **13** [the 3rd petition of our need is] ***And BRING US NOT into temptation,*** [the 4<sup>th</sup> petition of our need is] ***but DELIVER US from the evil one."***

**GIVE US daily bread, FORGIVE US our debts, BRING US NOT into temptation, DELIVER US from the evil one** are the petitions directly related to our needs.

Among those seven petitions, only **two** of them have any kind of **qualification**. One petition is towards God, and the other petition is towards man. Look at the qualification of the petition that God's will be done. "Your will be done [here's the qualification] *as in heaven, so on earth.*" Then when we pray in verse 12, "forgive us our debts [here's the qualification] *as we have forgiven our debtors.*" Among the seven petitions, only two have qualifications. One of the petitions towards God has a qualification and one of the petitions towards man has a qualification.

However, only **1** has **detailed amplification**. You would think it would be one of those that is a Godward petition. That our Lord would have amplified what "hallowed be Your Name" means. 'Lord give us some more instruction as to what that means,' but He does not do that. Surely we would love some amplification on "Your kingdom come" but it is not given. The only petition that has anything approaching thorough **amplification** is that **one petition**. Two whole verses, versus 14 and 15, are given to this **amplification** upon that **one petition**. Think of the significance of that. Our Lord has given us this one framework for God-honoring, God-acceptable prayer. <sup>(1)</sup>

Here is **the amplification** in verse 14 and 15. **6:14** "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But, if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." In a typical, biblical, positive-negative framework, our Lord makes it abundantly clear that **if you are not a forgiving man or woman, you will not be a forgiven man or woman. If you are not extending forgiveness to the family, the father will not extend forgiveness to you.** There is the principle.

**OUR SECOND** witnesses is Mark 11:25. We are looking at the principle clearly and repeatedly affirmed by our Lord to feel the weight of its importance in the mind and heart of our Savior. In Mark 11, taking the occasion of the cursing of the fig tree, our Lord is giving to His disciples a very basic lesson concerning prayer. In Mark 11:22 He underscores the necessity of **praying in faith**. He summarizes His emphasis in verse 24. **Mark 11:24** "Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever you pray and ask for, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them." The first great lesson He gives concerning

prayer is that our prayers must be suffused with faith. Not a fanatical faith, but a faith rooted in the revelation of the will of God concerning those things that we can ask for in confidence that they are according to the will of God and, therefore, they are as good as in our hands when we ask for them. But then there is a second great lesson concerning prayer in verse 25. **Mark 11:25** "And whensoever you stand praying, forgive," [you must not only pray **in faith**, but you must always **pray from a posture of** a heart suffused with **the disposition and the activity of forgiveness**. "Whensoever you stand praying, forgive, if you have aught against any one; [in order] that, your Father also Who is in heaven, may **forgive you** your trespasses."

"In order that," is a **hina** clause of purpose <sup>(2)</sup>

"in order that your Father also Who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses." God doesn't forgive if you won't forgive. That's the force of the language. When you stand praying, forgive, in order that your Father may forgive. When you don't forgive, you tie up His forgiveness. **There is our principal; would you have the Father's forgiveness? Then extend forgiveness to the members of the family.** Have **the disposition** of readiness to forgive and take **the action** of conferral of forgiveness when **the terms** (repentance) have been met.

The principle is brought forth by our Lord Jesus in unmistakable language. "Forgive, in order that, your Father may forgive you."

Remember the principle we are dealing with is the **mutual, or horizontal forgiveness; that is, the forgiveness that we are to extend one to another within the family of God.**

If we reduce it to a simple principle, or to its irreducible minimum, the principle is this:

**The truly forgiven by God are also the truly forgiving of one another.**

**Only those who forgive one another will be forgiven by God!**

**If there is no forgiveness extended to the family members, there will be no forgiveness received from the Father. Would you have the father's forgiveness? Then extend forgiveness to the members of the family.** Have both the **disposition of** readiness to forgive and have the actual **activity** of

**conferral of** forgiveness when **the terms** to confer it (repentance) have been met.

**OUR THIRD** witness, Luke 6, is in a section that has material very similar to the sermon on the Mount, but according to most commentators, it is in a different setting. Our Lord was an itinerant preacher. Itinerant preachers use material over and over again and adjust it to the varying circumstances. Here our Lord is giving many of the materials found in Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Here in **Luke 6:36** our Lord says, *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. 37 And judge not, and you shall not be judged: and condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: release [or forgive] and you shall be released [or forgiven]"*

When we were considering a biblical definition of forgiveness, looking at the three main Hebrew words and the four main Greek words, we saw that there was a word used only here for forgiveness. It's the same word used for divorce, for sending something away, for loosing it and getting rid of it. Here our Lord says, and the obvious meaning in this setting is to set forth the concept of forgiveness, 'If you release, if you forgive, if you send the issue away –for remember, that's of the very essence of forgiveness, that is the commitment of your will that you will seek to put the thing out of mind, will not raise it with the person forgiven, will not raise it with others, will not allow it to remain a barrier in your relationship to that person– if you release or forgive, you shall be released or forgiven. Your forgiveness is predicated upon your being **forgiving**.

So there is the principle, repeatedly, clearly affirmed by the Lord Jesus and \*it in no way, undermines, the central biblical truth that our salvation rests on nothing done by us or what God does in us, but solely upon the perfect work of Him, Who laid the principle before us.

You don't need to teach Jesus how grace works. You and I don't need to teach Jesus how to protect the doctrine of justification by faith alone, based upon the work of Christ alone. We don't need to be His teachers. We are His disciples. We are His pupils. The principle is, **ONLY THOSE WHO ARE TRULY FORGIVING WILL BE TRULY FORGIVEN**. We need to incorporate this principle into the grid of our thinking, along with the truths such as: **John 3:5** *"Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."* **Matthew 18:3** *"Except you be converted and become as little children you cannot enter the kingdom."* **Luke 13:3** *"Except you repent, you shall all likewise perish."* We must put this

principle into the category of these verses. Unless **you forgive**, you'll be damned, because you'll be without forgiveness. We need to put it into that category of an absolute issue with respect to whether or not we are in the kingdom and an indicator of the health or state of our souls while we are in the kingdom.

Having established the principle as we see it clearly and repeatedly affirmed by our Lord, now we come to the principle clearly and dramatically **illustrated** by our Lord.

## **(ii) The principal clearly and dramatically illustrated by our Lord. –Matthew 18**

We have **THE INITIATING QUESTION** of Peter in verse 21 of Matthew 18. It begins with a little adverb, "then" or "at that time" **Matthew 18:21** *"Then [at that time] came Peter and said to Him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?"*

"Then," or "at that time," came Peter. What time? Our Lord had just been giving instruction about what to do when there are offenses among brothers in verse 15 of this chapter. 18:15 *"And if your brother sin against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone: if he hear you [owns his fault and seeks your forgiveness] you have gained your brother."* So it's in the context of dealing with offenses and resolving those offenses with biblical rebuke, reproof, the owning of sin, confession of sin, forgiveness of sin, restoration of relationships. In that setting here comes Peter, the grand spokesman of the 12, and he says, **MATTHEW 18:21** *"Then [at that time] came Peter and said to Him, Lord, how oft [how many times] shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?"*

So Peter says, 'Lord, you've told us, if your brother sins against you, tell him his fault. If he hears you, if he owns his fault and seeks forgiveness and you confer it, how many times am I to do that with that brother? Up to seven times?'

That's **THE INITIATING QUESTION** by Peter, and now notice **THE INITIAL RESPONSE** by our Lord in **8:22** *"Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven."* So our Lord's initial response is to say, Peter, not up to the seventh time, but until 490 times. What was our Lord doing? He was doing what we mean when we say, "Fight fire with fire." Do you know where that metaphor came from? Firefighters at times when there is a raging forest fire, and they see

the direction that it's going, the way they try to stop it, is to light a fire to establish a path of charred overland so that when the forest fire reaches there, it has to stop, because it has nothing to consume, no more combustible materials. So you fight fire with fire. Jesus is fighting the numerical concept of forgiveness with numbers. He's fighting Peter's numbers with His own numbers. He's saying Peter, do you want to think about forgiveness in terms of numbers, I'll give you some numbers, 490. Can you imagine how that must have struck Peter? That is our Lord's initial response. And what is He doing? Is He actually telling Peter, 'Go get a little notebook because your memory may hold up to seven times but 490 times? You have to keep a little book and keep track.' What He's getting through to Peter is, 'Peter, forgiveness is not a matter of numbers. It's not a matter of a checklist. Forgiveness is not an action to be regulated by numbers and a checklist, **it's a disposition** to be maintained and exercised whenever, wherever and how many times it is needed.' That's what our Lord is saying to Peter. 'Peter your whole thinking about forgiveness is in the wrong category. You've got it in the category of numbers and you're thinking like a Pharisee. You've got it in an area of external calculable grace, but it is not in that realm Peter. Forgiveness is to be **A DISPOSITION OF THE HEART**. And whenever that disposition needs to be exercised in the presence of a sinning brother, 1 times, 2 times, times without number . . . Peter, forgiveness is not a matter of a numbers game. Forgiveness is a way of life with its roots in the heart.' That's the note on which our Lord ends this whole section. *"If you forgive not every one his brother from your hearts"* in verse 35. **It is a heart issue.**

Having looked at the initiating question of Peter and the initial response of our Lord, now we come to,

**(iii) The expanded and illustrated reinforcement of our Lord.**

Starting in verse 23 of Matthew 18, our Lord sets forth this parable, but before we consider the parable, **consider this word about any parable.** When you are studying a parable, remember these 3 things:

**(i)** There is **a central lesson** to be **taught** in a parable. Therefore, when we study it, there is **a central lesson** to be **sought**. A parable is given **to underscore a central lesson**. Jesus is going to **underscore the lesson** about **FORGIVENESS** –that forgiveness is **not** a checklist issue. It is **a heart issue**, it's **a disposition issue**. There's the

central lesson that He's teaching. That's the lesson to be sought.

**(ii)** A parable is **not an allegory** where every little element and every person in it has some meaning and significance by the intention of the author. And finally:

**(iii)** It is **not necessary** to sort out all of the historic, cultural, and monetary issues in a parable in order to understand the thrust of that parable.

Who are these servants with all this money? Why is it called a loan in one part and a debt in another? How much is a talent? Is it a Hebrew talent? Is it a Greek talent? Was it a talent of gold or silver? It doesn't tell us and we don't need to know all of those details. A lot of the details, regarding first century Palestinian life under Roman rule, have no real one to one equivalent for us, so we have to exercise **THE DISCIPLINE OF EXCLUSION**, and say that's enough, we have enough to **understand THE MAJOR COMPONENTS** so we get the message.

We could go on and on with a million and one "interesting and fascinating things" but we are not here because we like to hear ourselves talk, or to impress people with what we know, or to blab and blab. We are here to rightly understand His Word and, out of love to Him, repent where we don't measure up and are wrong and ask Him for grace to grow. What areas do I need to change in and grow in???? How can I grow and be used??? It's a tool to be used to help us grow and it's weaponry used to help us assault the enemy. It's that simple and that real. <sup>(3)</sup>

There is no way we can come up with precise equivalence in the details of the parable. There's a lot of interesting things we can talk about, but it wouldn't be necessary and it wouldn't be edifying. So when you study parables, remember that a central lesson is being taught, a central lesson is to be sought, a parable is not an allegory, and a lot of the details rooted in first century Palestinian life under Roman rule have no real one-to-one equivalent for us. We simply have to say enough to understand the major components so we get the message, and we're going to do it under the four natural headings that are in the text.

With that explanation of **how to understand a parable**; having seen **the initiating question** by Peter, and **the initial response** by our Lord in 8:22 *"Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven"* consider:

**(iii) The expanded and illustrated reinforcement of our Lord.**

Remember where we are. Our Lord gave a teaching on the dynamic of forgiveness. He said in **Matthew 18:15** *"And if your brother sin against you, go, show him his fault between you and him alone: if he hear you [owns his fault, repents, and seeks your forgiveness] you have gained your brother."* So it's in the context of dealing with offenses and resolving those offenses with biblical rebuke, reproof, the owning of sin, confession of sin, forgiveness of sin, restoration of relationships. In that setting Peter initiates a question, **18:21** *"Then [at that time] came Peter and said to Him, Lord, how oft [how many times] shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?"*

So Peter says, 'Lord, you've told us if your brother sins against you, tell him his fault. If he hears you, if he owns his fault and seeks forgiveness and you confer it, how many times am I to do that with that brother? Up to seven times?'

That's the initiating question by Peter. Notice the initial response by our Lord in **8:22** *"Jesus said unto him, I say not unto you, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven."* In verse 22, our Lord clearly and dramatically illustrates the principle of:

**Mutual, or horizontal forgiveness. That is, the forgiveness that we are to extend one to another within the family of God.**

To reduce our Lord's teaching on horizontal forgiveness to a simple principle, or to its irreducible minimum, the principle is this:

**The truly forgiven by God, are also the truly forgiving of one another.**

To state this principle a little differently:

**Only those who forgive one another will be forgiven by God.**

To state this principle in another way in the negative form:

**If there is no forgiveness extended to the family members, there will be no forgiveness received from the Father.**

Now we come to **Matthew 18:23** *"Therefore"* [in the light of what I told you Peter, in the light of seeking to fight fire with fire, your #'s with My #'s, to emphasize that your thinking is altogether skewed] *"Therefore, the*

*kingdom of heaven is likened* [wherever My reign of grace comes to the heart of a person, wherever there is a community of those who have come under the impress and the dynamics and the power of the reign of grace, this is what you're going to find operative. It illustrates that forgiveness is not a matter of a number's game, but **a disposition of the heart.**] So He sets before Peter and the others this parable from verses 23-35 to expand and reinforce His teaching on forgiveness. The first natural heading is:

**(i) The King's forgiving mercy to a great debtor.**

[verses 23 – 27]

**Matthew 18:23** *"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would make a reckoning with his servants. **24** And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, that owed him ten thousand talents. **25** But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all. **27** And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt."*

So here is the King's forgiving mercy to a great debtor.

There was a certain king, who had entrusted the management of massive sums of money to some of his servants. Perhaps it was men who were governors over a large area, and often they would have the responsibility of collecting the taxes. What the specifics are, we don't know. All we know is that these servants were entrusted by the King with large sums of money, and a certain time came (and the Greek is emphatic) when the king determined to conduct an audit of the books of all of these servants. So the king sends out his official CPA's. As the auditing of the books progresses, a certain man, a certain servant, is found **18:24** *"And when he had begun to reckon, one was **brought** unto him..."* The text doesn't say he came, it says he was brought to him. When he was brought to him the accounting process revealed that he owed the King 10,000 talents. This much we know, a talent, whether it was gold, silver or some other precious metal, whether it was a Hebrew talent or a Greek talent, that when you have 10,000 talents, you are talking about millions of dollars; possibly even tens of millions of dollars. Safely, we can say at least \$13 to \$15 million dollars in today's currency. You may be asking, how did he come into so much debt? That's irrelevant. The Lord is teaching a

lesson. This guy had a massive debt and he admits to it. He has no excuse for being in that condition so what does he do?

Here's **the king's initial response: 18:25** *"But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made."* The initial response of the King was one that was legitimate in that framework. He could have sold the man and his family into slavery, and auctioned off all that he had, but obviously, this could never begin to pay even part of that massive debt, and when the servant realizes that the King is going to hold him accountable for his debt, what did he do? When the servant knew the debt was his, when he knew he was accountable to pay the debt, when he knew it would be impossible to pay the debt: **8:26** *"The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all."* What an overstatement to say, 'I will pay you all.' At least it reflects the disposition of his heart. He realized it was a bona fide debt and he asked for patience. Maybe this was in the realm of possibility. Perhaps it was the mismanagement of funds and it was something like our stock market where if things turned around he would be able to have incremental sums to pay back... We don't know, but what we do know is he falls down before him and says, 'Don't throw me into prison, don't sell my wife and my kids and my goods. Have patience with me. Show something of a disposition other than strict justice.'

Three verbs show what the king did in response to that plea. **THE KINGS RESPONSE TO THE SERVANTS PLEA:**

**18:27** *"And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt."*

**"Being moved with compassion."** This word is an untranslatable word, moved in his bowels, it means something grips you deep down in the deepest recesses of the soul. When the king sees this man prostrate before him, owning the reality of his debt, his culpability for the debt, and he's crying out, 'Have patience with me. I'll pay you all,' first, something happens **in the king's heart**, not in his accounting books. ". . . **moved with compassion.**"

The second verb says he "**released**" him. Apparently he already had him apprehended and was ready to have him hauled off. The king did all of that to this end –to make right his excessive debt. But he canceled the debt.

One minute the servant is looking at an eternity of loss and heartache and the next moment he has a clean slate!!

Consider the third verb, ". . . and **forgave** him his debt." All that debt was absolutely, totally canceled.

That's the king's forgiving mercy to a great debtor.

Now we come to the 2<sup>nd</sup> heading in the parable:

**(ii) The servant's lack of forgiving mercy to a minor debtor. [28-30]**

**Matthew 18:28** *"But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, who owed him a hundred shillings: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what you owe. 29 So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due."*

Here is **the servant's lack of forgiving mercy to a minor debtor.**

No sooner is the servant released and forgiven his debt, and he says, 'I have a fellow servant, one of my kind. I have one of my kind who owes me the equivalent of 100 days [20 weeks] wages of the average laboring man.' In today's market were talking about several thousands of dollars. The servant who was released and forgiven thinks of this fellow servant and he says, 'I remember he owes me some money.' And what does he do? The language is brutal. He laid hold of him, he seized him. The picture is he grabbed him by the back of the neck and the seat of his pants and says, We're going to deal with this.' Then the next thing you know, he's got his hands around his throat and the imperfect tense is used, he begins to be choking him.

The forgiven servant has a lack of forgiving mercy to a minor debtor. The forgiven servant just had his Mount Everest of debt removed and now he finds this man with a molehill of debt and he's going to hold him to pay it. What does his fellow servant do? **8:29** *"So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay you."*

Besought him – an imperfect tense which is passed action that is repeated – his fellow servant fell down and was continually beseeching him saying, have patience with me, and I will pay you. The forgiven servant heard his own words coming back to him. Isn't that what he

said to the king? **18:26** *"The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you all."* Now he hears a fellow servant, not a servant-to-a-King relationship, but a servant to a fellow servant saying to him, 'Have patience with me and I will pay you all,' but the forgiven servant was absolutely, resolutely, unwilling. **18:30** *"And he would not; but went and cast him into prison."* Again, it's vigorous language. It doesn't say he put him in prison, but he *"cast him into prison."* It's the word you would use if you are casting or throwing something away. He cast him into prison. He not only cast him into prison, but he says you're going to be there in debtor's prison **30b** *"till he should pay that which was due."*

That's the account our Lord gives of the servant's lack of forgiving mercy to a minor debtor. Now we come thirdly in the parable to:

**(iii) The king's treatment of the unforgiving servant.**  
[31 – 34]

**Matthew 18: 31** *"So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. [The fellow servants went to the only person who could rectify the situation. They knew what happened wasn't right, and they weren't just going to stand around and do nothing about it. They went out of grief to the King for the one who was the object of the forgiven servant's lack of mercy. They did it, not out of spite to that unmerciful servant, but out of grief to the one who is the object of his lack of mercy. It says, "they were exceeding sorry"]*

The King summons the forgiven servant into his presence. **Matthew 18:32** *"Then his lord called him unto him, [then he identifies him as a wicked man] and said to him, You wicked servant, [then he reminds him of two things, first what the King had done for him when he sought mercy] I forgave you all that debt, because you besought me: [then the king reminds him of the moral obligation to do to his fellow servant what the king had done to him] **18:33** "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on you?" [The thrust of the Greek language used is, were you not under a solemn, moral obligation to have mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? Next the King delivers him to the tormentors to pay the full debt he owed to the King] **18:34** *"And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due."**

He is now handed over to strict justice. Who are the tormentors? We don't know. The commentators speculate. If we needed to know, the Lord would have told us. One thing is clear, he's going to be punished for his lack of mercy to his fellow servant and that tormenting will go on until he should pay all that was due. In terms of temporal existence he'd be tormented for the rest of his days. That's what the king did to him.

So we looked at three divisions in the text, the king's forgiving mercy to a great debtor, the servant's lack of forgiving mercy to a minor debtor, the king's treatment of the unforgiving servant, and now the fourth:

**(iv) What is the central lesson of the parable?**

Jesus tells us what the central lesson is in His Own Words in **18:35** *"So shall also My heavenly Father do unto you, if you do not forgive every one his brother, from your hearts."* Earlier in this chapter Jesus had used the term My Father in heaven, promising answers to prayer in verse **19** *"Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father Who is in heaven."* The Gracious, Beneficent, Openhanded, Large Hearted Father Who gives to His children, as they symphonize, in prayer –Jesus said, 'It's that same Father, My Father, Who, in righteous, unsullied anger, will take any one of you,' [remember that He's speaking to His disciples] 'and He will deliver you to the eternal tormentors if you refuse forgiveness from the heart to anyone who asks for that forgiveness.'

It's grievous to see two contemporary men of God who have been greatly used, who, commenting on this passage, say the delivering to the tormentors is just a Christian delivered to chastisement. If you're forgiven, you can't be unforgiven. They try to read the doctrine of justification into the parable. They say, 'How can that servant have all of his debt forgiven and then be delivered to the tormentors, if delivering to the tormentors is a picture of hell? We believe the Bible teaches once in grace always in grace.' And it is a true statement, "once in grace always in grace," but the point is this, **\*IF YOU'RE IN GRACE, YOU WILL MANIFEST GRACE. One of the indispensable manifestations of grace is the prevailing disposition of forgiveness, and without that prevailing disposition of forgiveness, your heart has never come to a believing, internal appropriation of God's forgiveness,** for it is morally and ethically impossible after standing before the King of the universe with a debt that is incalculable and have



Him say, 'My son, My daughter, your sins are forgiven you for Jesus sake.' With the Mount Everest of my sin swallowed up in the ocean of His atoning blood, how can I go out and take a fellow sinner and wrap my fingers around his throat metaphorically, and say, 'I won't forgive you.' A HEART THAT CAN DO THAT, HAS NEVER KNOWN THIS GRACE. (3)

That is the central lesson of this parable. That's the teaching of this passage. And that's the underscoring of **the principle**, that **if I am truly forgiven by God, I will be forgiving of my fellow men. The prevailing disposition of my heart will be one of forgiveness to others.**

Yes, there may be, as there can be in any area of ethical and moral aberration, the believer falling into a sin of bitterness and unforgiveness as a true believer may fall into a sin of uncleanness and of lying or a host of any other sin. The Bible is clear, if the prevailing disposition of the heart is one of unforgiveness, **that heart has never been transformed by the grace of God and renewed by the Holy Spirit.** That heart has never been melted before the wonderful display of the King of the universe, Who, for Jesus sake says, "The Mount Everest of your guilt and debt is swallowed up in the virtue of the death of My Son.'

Sitting here now, tell yourself, as surely as the Bible says that no adulterer shall enter the kingdom of heaven, if adultery is a way of life for you, you're going to hell. It doesn't matter what you profess with your mouth, how many "decisions" you made, how many times you "asked Jesus into your heart" I don't care how many tingles you had up and down your spine and all your glorious experiences, the Bible is clear, no adulterer shall enter the kingdom of heaven. No liar, no murderer, no thief, no unclean, no homosexual. All of those sins are clearly identified, that if they are a way of life and you don't repent you're going to hell. This parable we just considered puts in that category, if an unforgiving spirit is a way of life for you, you're going to hell. If you are persuaded of nothing else from the Bible, I hope you are persuaded of that. From the clear and repeated articulation of our Lord, from the clear and vivid illustration of our Lord, do not carry the name of Christian if you carry it with a heart whose prevailing disposition is hard and unforgiving.

In our next study, we will see how the gospel, percolating in our souls, produces this disposition of forgiveness.

The goal of this study was to be persuaded of the principal so that you will never be comfortable that an unforgiving spirit is something that you can tolerate with anything approaching peace in your heart.

#### Footnotes:

(1) There is a parallel passage in Luke in a different setting that is a takeoff from this passage, and it follows the basic contours of the prayer in Matthew 6. It's a little more condensed and there is only one petition that is given detailed amplification . . . and what is it? It is the petition, "*forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.*" If you count the words in the original, you would find that the entire prayer has 57 Greek words, and the amplification has 30 Greek words. More than half of the words of the entire prayer, amplifying this one petition. Do you get the sense how important the Lord must've thought this was?

(2) Henna / hina

There are six purpose (Greek: *henna*) clauses

From a page at James White's Alpha and Omega Ministries web site, [Alpha and Omega Ministries. The Christian Apologetics Ministry of James R. White](#), there is this helpful statement:

The subjunctive in Greek is a mood that is often used to communicate possibility or probability. It can be used alone or in conjunction with other particles to add particular nuance of meaning. One particle that is often used with the subjunctive is the **particle hina**. When hina is used with the subjunctive, the mood changes from one of possibility or probability, to one of purpose or result. [i] It appears from the evidence of the New Testament that **hina clauses** (as such constructions are called) are **not intended to imply uncertainty**, even though they use the subjunctive mood, which, when used alone or with other particles, can indeed convey uncertainty.

**sub-junc-tive** adj. 1. of or designating a grammatical mood typically used for subjective, doubtful, hypothetical, or grammatically subordinate statements or questions.

#### Robertson's Word Pictures:

1Ti 2:2 - For kings (huper basileôn). And this included Nero who had already set fire to Rome and laid it on the Christians whom he was also persecuting. And all them that are in high place (kai pantôn tôn en huperochêi ontôn). Huperochê is old word (from huperochos and this from huper and echô), but in N.T. only here and 1Co 2:1. **That we may lead (hina diagômen).** **Purpose clause with present active subjunctive** of diagô, an old and common verb, but in N.T. only here and Tit 3:3. Tranquil (êremon). Late adjective from the old adverb êrema (stilly, quietly). Here only in N.T. Quiet (hêsuchion). Old adjective, once in LXX (Isa 66:2), in N.T. only here and 1Pe 3:4. Life (bion). Old word for course of life (not zôê). So Lu 8:14. Gravity (semnotêti). Old word from semnos (Php 4:8), in N.T. only here, 3:4; Tit 2:7.

#### The Subjunctive and hina Clauses

The subjunctive in Greek is a mood that is often used to communicate possibility or probability. It can be used alone or in conjunction with other particles to add particular nuance of meaning. One particle that is often used with the subjunctive is the particle *hina*. When *hina* is used with the subjunctive, the mood changes from one of possibility or probability, to one of purpose or result. [i] It appears from the evidence of the New Testament that *hina* clauses (as such constructions are called) are not intended to imply uncertainty, even though they use the subjunctive mood, which, when used alone or with other particles, can indeed convey uncertainty.

The best way to understand this is to look at some examples of passages that use *hina* clauses. The parts of the following passages in bold type are the parts that are translating *hina* clauses:

"And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"-- **so that they might accuse Him.**" (Matt 12:10 NASB)

There was no doubt that the Jewish leaders wanted to accuse Jesus, so their question was asked with this intent. "Might" here is not meant to represent uncertainty with regard to their intentions. Rather, "might" is an idiomatic way of conveying such intent in English.

"The Son of God appeared for this purpose, **to destroy** the works of the devil." (1 John 3:8 NASB)

This passage itself declares that the subordinate clause is indicating purpose. The infinitive ("to destroy") is used to translate *hina* and the subjunctive. Again, this is a perfectly legitimate way to indicate intent in English, and it translates the meaning of the verb adequately. Jesus' purpose was not to attempt to destroy the devil's works *if* He was able to do so. There is no question about Jesus' ability to destroy the devil's works. Rather, Jesus appeared *for the purpose* of destroying the devil's works.

"Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, **that they may** go into the surrounding villages and countryside and **find** lodging and **get** something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place." (Luke 9:12 NASB)

Again, the *hina* clause indicates the purpose behind the suggestion to send the crowd away: to enable them to find lodging and food.

The New Testament is replete with such examples. Therefore, when we come to Galatians 2:16, we see the same use:

"nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, **so that we may be justified** by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." (NASB)

Again, "*may*" here is an idiomatic way of translating purpose in English. The purpose of belief is justification. Indeed, one can also see here the *hina* clause being used to indicate result. [ii] Paul, by using the subjunctive, is not intending to communicate any kind of uncertainty with regard to justification. Rather, by using the subjunctive in a *hina* clause, he is proclaiming that our faith in Christ has its purpose in our justification, and also has its end result in our justification.

Further support for this interpretation is found in numerous passages throughout the New Testament. John 10:28 assures us that those to whom Christ has given eternal life shall never perish. [iii] John 6:39 assures us that Christ will raise up on the last day everyone given to Him by the Father. The testimony of Scripture is clear that those who are drawn by the Father put their faith in Christ,

and thus their justification is assured. The use of the *hina* clause in Galatians 2:16 does not detract from this great truth, but rather supports it beautifully by underscoring that justification is the purpose and final result of faith.

I hope this brief survey will encourage us to be diligent in our study of God's Word, and to be wise stewards of the tools he has given us to understand His Word. May we also rejoice in the finished work of Christ that secures our justification.

Colin Smith

8/17/2000

[i] Indeed, in his book *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Dr. Daniel Wallace lists seven distinct uses of the particle *hina* with the subjunctive, including purpose, result, command, and substantive (see pages 471-477). Purpose and result are, however, the most frequent uses of the *hina* clause. See also Dana and Mantey's *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pages 248-249, with regard to the particle *hina*: "Its most common occurrence is in purpose or final clauses, and it occurs regularly with the subjunctive mood, there being but few exceptions and those with the optative." (p.248)

[ii] On page 473, Wallace discusses "Purpose-Result" *hina* clauses. "... the NT writers employ the language to reflect their theology: what God purposes is what happens and, consequently, *hina* is used to express both the divine purpose and the result."

[iii] Interestingly, another construction using the subjunctive is employed here. This time it is the subjunctive with a double negative, which indicates that the action of the verb (here "be destroyed") shall by no means ever happen.

(3) Think of yourself as a house project. What rooms need to be redone? What areas need to be torn out? What additions need to be put on? If you think more about the physical renovation of your body and house and you are less concerned about the renovation of your soul, what are we doing? Who are we serving? Who do we love?

(4) Once we come into the orbit of union with Christ and participate in salvation from sin and its consequences, three problems are addressed. One of them is that our inward disposition is changed. That new inward disposition will have the capacity to forgive and to confess our sins to one another. (**Jas 5:16** *Confess therefore your sins one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.*) If there is no capacity to forgive, no union with Christ ever took place. No union with Christ, no conversion. No conversion, no salvation.

**1John 1:8** *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

