

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It's easy to dismiss outright the question Peter asks of Jesus in the Gospel reading. To be sure, it's missing the point, but still he thinks he's being generous when he asked Jesus, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" When you think about it, that's a lot. That's a lot more patience and generosity than most people have on a good day. Forgiving your brother seven times seems to be more than enough.

Yet, Jesus answered Peter with "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times" and then told a parable. Jesus takes this question which seems reasonable and generous to men, who are sinful, and then teaches how God's Kingdom operates. He shows the generosity not just of God but what this means for you now who have received this same mercy and generosity.

Listen again to what Jesus said in the first part of the parable, "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 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. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt."

Realizing one's debt is an important first step that seems so obviously but easily overlooked. It doesn't help matters when debt is abstracted into oblivion as theoretical reality or concept that is not seen in tangible ways. There's something to be said when certain financial gurus like Dave Ramsey insist on people paying cash for things because there's a better sense of cost and seeing the price and impact it has upon whatever may be in your wallet. A credit card is easy to swipe, scan, or just simply tap nowadays a purchase without seeing how much what you just bought will impact bank account.

Sin has a similar danger when you want to abstract it as well. There is rightly a doctrine of original or inherited sin that you possess from the time you were conceived in your mother's womb, and this is passed down from Adam and Eve to the present. This sin, though, manifests itself in sinister ways either in actual sins you commit, things you fail do, and even the desires and thoughts you have which go against God's word. All these things are real. You are a sinner and have sinned in real ways in thought, word, and deed, by what you have done and left undone.

There is debt, then, the sinner owes God. This debt is real and must be answered for or God would unjust and a liar. The Bible teaches in both the Old and New Testaments that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins." There is a price to be paid for sin. The wonderful beauty and mercy of the atonement, then, is that Jesus pays this price in our place to make satisfaction for our sin, our original sin, and our actual sins. He suffered the wrath of God in our place and shed his blood so that peace with God is made. He did this as only he could as fully God and fully man in his one person. He did this as the perfect sacrificial lamb without spot or blemish. He actively and obediently fulfilled the law of God perfectly and completely and so when he dies and is obedient unto death, even death on the cross, he propitiates or atones for you sin and the sin of the whole world.

Every time your sin is forgiven it is only because Jesus has paid for it. Sin has a cost and Jesus has paid the price for your sake. Sin doesn't just vanish into thin air like college students think they could do with debt, or it isn't some abstract concept. No, your real sins that you know and have done or not done were paid for by Jesus. He bore them, he paid for them, and God forgives you on account of Christ. This is God's mercy. His mercy is toward you and his mercy endures forever.

The man in the parable then, knew the debt he had and what it was costing him, his family was going to pay this price as well. Yet the king had mercy on him. He forgave him his debt and set him free. The man was given life when everything he knew and loved was owed to someone else. Now the second part of the parable comes into the frame. "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.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. 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."

Jesus teaches you to pray in fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer, "and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Here your Lord is showing you this and teaching you what you should not do and do as a Christian who has been forgiven. Do not be like this man who was forgiven a great debt and then refused to forgive the debt, albeit a smaller debt, than what had been forgiven him. That is arrogant unbelief in action.

Think about what God calls you to do instead. Peter asked that initial question of Jesus and the Lord responded with this story. Real sins have a real price to be paid. Likewise real sins need real forgiveness. The mercy of God shown to the man by the king is to be shown to the other who owed a debt to the forgiven servant. It doesn't negate the fact that both men had a debt they owed, it was a real debt with a real price and cost. The point here, today, though is that one who was shown mercy refused to show mercy to another.

A selection from the Large Catechism on the fifth petition teaches this well, "There is here attached a necessary, yet comforting addition: 'As we forgive.' He has promised that we shall be sure that everything is forgiven and pardoned, in the way that we also forgive our neighbor. Just as we daily sin much against God, and yet He forgives everything through grace, so we, too, must ever forgive our neighbor who does us injury, violence, and wrong, shows malice toward us, and so on. If, therefore, you do not forgive, then do not think that God forgives you [Matthew 18:23–25]. But if you forgive, you have this comfort and assurance, that you are forgiven in heaven. This is not because of your forgiving. For God forgives freely and without condition, out of pure grace, because He has so promised, as the Gospel teaches. But God says this in order that He may establish forgiveness as our confirmation and assurance, as a sign alongside of the promise, which agrees with this prayer in Luke 6:37, 'Forgive, and you will be forgiven.' Therefore, Christ also repeats it soon after the Lord's Prayer, and says in Matthew 6:14, 'For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,' and so on. This sign is therefore attached to this petition. When we pray, we remember the promise and think, 'Dear Father, for this reason I come and pray for You to forgive me, not so that I can make

satisfaction or can merit anything by my works. I pray because You have promised and attached the seal to this prayer that I should be as sure about it as though I had Absolution pronounced by You Yourself.’ For Baptism and the Lord’s Supper—appointed as outward signs—work as seals [Ephesians 1:13]. In the same way also, this sign can serve to confirm our consciences and cause them to rejoice. It is especially given for this purpose, so that we may use and practice forgiveness every hour, as a thing that we have with us at all times.”

You are to show mercy and forgive those who sin against you. Jesus teaches you that today. He’s instructing you as his people to whom he has shown mercy. Think about that for a moment. When someone sins against you and you refuse to forgive them and show them mercy, what are you saying about the mercy and forgiveness God has shown to you in Christ? When you refuse to forgive someone then you are despising this forgiveness you have received. It’s not to say your forgiveness is dependent upon forgiving others nor does it mean that sin is no big deal and you really haven’t been hurt when you have been sinned against. Earlier in Matthew 18 Jesus teaches about confronting someone who has sinned against you and before that he teaches about those who cause little ones who believe in him to sin it would be better if a millstone hung around his neck and he be cast into the sea. Jesus is not downplaying or dismissing sin. Yet when you refuse to forgive your neighbor, you are despising what God has done for you in Christ, or to put it another way, you are despising Christ. This is where you are called to repent in your life when you have failed to forgive someone who has sinned against you. Hear those words at the end of the parable, “‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.” Repent.

Your sin is forgiven. This is most certainly true. Rejoice in this forgiveness. Listen and learn from Jesus too how to treat your brother when he sins against you. Forgive him. What if he is being mean to you? Forgive him. What if what he did is something terrible? Forgive him. What if it’s hard to do so? Forgive him. What if I don’t want to, repent, and forgive him. This is what your Lord teaches you today as Christians. Take it all to heart and learn from your Lord and seek to conform your life to what he teaches. God’s prayer for the Philippians inspired by St. Paul to write to them is the same for you. “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Rejoice dear saints of God this day. You have been shown mercy and your sin is forgiven on account of Christ. No matter the weight or severity, Jesus has atoned for it by his perfect life and sacrifice for you. That’s the comfort you have this day. He died for you and for the whole world. Rejoice in his forgiveness for you and your brother. Rejoice in showing this same mercy and forgiveness to your brothers and look forward to that day when you no longer sin against one another. That day, the day of resurrection and eternity will be a glorious day which knows no end only eternal peace and joy with your Lord and his saints. For you will, like his mercy and word, will endure forever.

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