

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

“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?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

Jesus takes this question which seems reasonable and generous to men, who are sinful, and then teaches how God’s Kingdom operates. He’s not teaching about the other kingdom of this world which operates according to power and exercises things like the sword to maintain order and protection through estates such as the government. That’s not what Jesus is talking about here in this reading. Likewise, he’s not downplaying sin one iota or saying that it’s somehow not an issue. No, he shows the generosity of God and what this means for you now, as his people, who have received this same mercy and generosity.

This Gospel reading is tremendously comforting, then, for those who trust in Christ and rejoice in his mercy. Consciences are put at rest for God reveals his heart toward sinners even as Christ himself has paid the debt they owe and made satisfaction for their sin. For those who stubbornly refuse to repent and those who treat others with contempt, however, there is a stern proclamation of judgment and condemnation.

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. This man had a real debt he owed, a day laborer would need to work 60,000,000 days to pay off the debt, that’s roughly how much he owed. 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 to 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 be 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 wages of sin is death.” 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 your 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.”

Peter’s question assumes that he’s being generous. As Christians you understand what Jesus is teaching you about the Kingdom of God in this parable. He’s teaching you about the great debt you owe God and how it has been forgiven you fully and freely. He’s also teaching you what you are to do as a Christian when someone sins against you. You pray in the Lord’s Prayer, “and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” All good, right? Easy to understand, it’s not difficult. You are right, it’s not. So then, you always forgive those who sin against you, right? Now, there’s where it starts to get a bit dicey.

Refusing to forgive a brother or sister is not only sinful, but also wicked. 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. Listen to 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.

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.”

God is teaching you something good and desirable about you and your life in this world when you forgive others. It’s not some abstract thing to forgive people but it’s real and beneficial for you and them. To not hold someone’s sin against him is to view a person with mercy and compassion rather than anger and judgment. It’s to go running to Christ. Think about that and what happens when you refuse to forgive your neighbor. Are you better off for it? Are they better off for it? No. In fact, both suffer, especially in the case of a brother or sister in Christ. Nothing is accomplished when you refuse to forgive those who sin against you and others, likewise, when they refuse to forgive you. Nothing is gained by this and nothing good comes from it.

Forgiving one another, however, is good and pleases God. That’s the thing about what God teaches you. It’s good and something you should desire to live in your life. God cares for you and for those around you. Peace and reconciliation are the will of God not only in your life but in the life, you have with him. Christ has made peace by his blood, and you

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are reconciled to God. You live at peace with God because of Christ and his life, death, and resurrection. You no longer stand condemned before the Father but by grace through faith you are declared righteous in God's sight.

Now when you look at your life with those around you, imagine if God didn't lay out before you the good that is forgiving one another. Holding grudges and judgment would be not only commonplace but they weight you yourself would endure every day would be crippling on a good day. Every relationship with someone would be at risk of being destroyed at the slightest misstep and then compounding one thing upon another with every move after that one transgression. There would never be peace only sin binding tighter and tighter around you and around others destroying everything in i's path. It would be a living death that spreads more and more death.

But you see, this is not so with you Lord and what he teaches you today. Your Lord has forgiven you and you, in turn, forgive one another. Colossians 3:12–16, shows you what this looks like at God's people. "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to 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. "“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?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

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