

The parable in Matthew 18:21-35 teaches us about the nature of love as we forgive others:

...it cancels a debt (this is a metaphor for forgiveness). When there is a debt, someone must pay. Either the one who owes must pay it back, or the one who is owed must absorb the loss.

Forgiveness requires bearing the pain and loss yourself.

Just as Jesus bore our sin as He forgave us on the cross, so must we willingly bear our offender's sin when we forgive them.

Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is a choice. The feelings of forgiveness come as a result of forgiveness and reconciliation. We are commanded to forgive!

Forgiveness is totally undeserved. No one deserves it. There is no good work we can do to earn God's forgiveness and so likewise, the person who offended you can never do enough to deserve your forgiveness. God forgave you out of mercy. You must choose to show mercy and forgive in the same manner that you have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32).

Forgiveness is a threefold promise:

1. Forgiveness means that you will not bring up that offense again or use it against them. The only reason to ever bring it up is for the purpose of reconciliation, not vengeance.

2. Forgiveness means that you will not bring it up to others in gossip or malign them because of it. We too often fall in to gossip and place all blame on others.

3. Forgiveness means you will not bring it up to yourself and dwell on it. You do not replay the videotape of the sin and you do not savor the details.

Failure to forgive turns victims in to victimizers. When we fail to forgive, we are active, not passive. We want to extract payment until we are satisfied. We take God's place and dole out doses of our own version of justice.

Forgiveness is both an event, and a process. When we forgive someone, it is an event "I forgive you". And, every time we remember the offense or think about it, we must continue to forgive again and again and again. We must remember the threefold promise we made and we must not act on any sinful desire for revenge.

If you do not understand forgiveness as an event and a process, discouragement and guilt can set in. This is because the decision to forgive may not immediately eradicate the hurt, lack of trust, and anger you have towards the person. But if you see it as both an event and a process, discouragement and guilt are minimized. You know you HAVE forgiven, even though you are also aware of your temptation to make the person pay. This

awareness keeps you vigilant against the sin in your own heart. It leads you to God's strength when you struggle.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. The word 'remember' in scriptures about forgiveness does not refer to memory, but to the promise not to treat that person as their sins deserve, just like God does not treat us as our sins deserve. He chooses to absorb the cost himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We must choose to absorb the cost when we forgive others. Jer. 31:34

Forgiving does not mean that you become vulnerable, like a doormat. Scripture does not tell us to make it easy for people to sin against us. It calls us to love them by challenging their actions. There may not always be opportunities for godly confrontation (sometimes we are called to suffer in a godly way), but this confrontation is important. It is a lack of love when we don't take the opportunity to confront in a godly way.

In dealing with someone who habitually sins against us: Matt 18 applies and outlines the steps to take if repentance and reconciliation do not occur. Forgiveness does not mean turning a blind eye to sin.

We are to love the sinner wisely. Romans 12:17-19 teaches us how to establish boundaries for loving a habitual sinner. In putting this in to practice, you are entrusting that sinner to God instead of taking matters in to your own hands. Sometimes others have to be called in to help, and sometimes that may even mean civil authorities for safety, or church leaders for discipline, etc.

Forgiving does not make it easy for someone to sin against you.

Luke 17:3 says to forgive only if the person repents. Mark 11:25 says you must immediately forgive an offender if you recall a sin. BOTH ARE TRUE. One of these describes the vertical axis of forgiveness, the other the horizontal axis of forgiveness. Mark 11:25 is the vertical: man to God. It is my own heart attitude toward the person before God. It calls me to repent of bitterness, and forgive. Forgiveness as an attitude (vertically) must be present in my heart first.

Luke 17:3 speaks of the horizontal, person to person. Forgiveness as a transaction between two people is possible only if the offender repents, admits sin, and asks for forgiveness. But even if the offender does not repent, the offended person must maintain forgiveness as an attitude in the vertical dimension. You cannot use the offender's failure to seek forgiveness as an excuse to hold on to your anger and hurt!

We tend to err on the side of not forgiving rather than forgiving. Without the grace of Christ working in us, forgiving does not become part of our lifestyle. Only someone who understands he has been forgiven will routinely forgive others. But none of us will ever forgive others in a measure that equals what God has forgiven us through Christ! When we fail to forgive, we have lost sight of our own forgiven debt.

Sometimes our own self righteousness keeps us from forgiving. It is as if we don't think we really need to be forgiven, and our hearts have hardened.

Sometimes we think we are unforgivable. This may sound humble, but it is actually pride. It is as if we are saying "my sin is so big that God's grace can't even top it!". We also may not want to rely solely on God's mercy because we would rather work for it.

Sometimes we think God has forgiven us, but that "I just can't forgive myself". This is totally unbiblical thinking. It is God who judges us and pronounces us NOT GUILTY by virtue of our trust in Him. But when we make the statement "forgive myself", we sit as judge and overrule God's decision.

Sometimes the joy of His forgiveness has grown dim. We forget about God's grace, and we need to be constantly reminded of it through friendships, sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Scripture, worship, and prayer.

**FORGIVENESS and ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS are supernatural works of grace. They can only happen when God's forgiveness captivates our hearts!!!**