

(Matt. 18:21-22) – Peter’s question and the Lord’s answer set the stage for the Lord’s parable that follows. It has to do with the fact that the Lord tells us that we are to forgive our brethren who sin against us as we ourselves have been forgiven by God. The Lord’s people are objects of His everlasting covenant love and grace (Jer. 31:3; Psa. 89:33-36). We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19) and born again by the Spirit (1 Pet. 1:23-25). By effectual power, we are made to come willingly to Christ and receive Him as our Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and King (Psa. 110:3; John 1:12-13). As a result of sovereign grace, we have been drawn to Christ (John 6:44-45), and we have committed unto Him our very souls (2 Tim. 1:12). The Holy Spirit has taken up residence within every one of His children and, as a result, we grow in grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). Notwithstanding this truth, it is also a fact that, though we are the Lord’s offspring, we are still sinners prone to say and do improper things out of sinfulness, ignorance, and weakness, even doing wrong against our brethren. None of us have arrived at the perfection that we can only claim in Christ by the imputation of His righteousness to us. Therefore, we must be ever ready to forgive and be forgiven by one another. The question of how often we forgive our brethren who sin against us should not even enter our minds.

“UNTIL SEVEN TIMES: BUT, UNTIL SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN,” shows us the reality of what we as sinners forgiven of ALL our sins, ought to forgive one another. As there is no end to God forgiving us, there can be no end of our forgiving one another. God’s forgiveness of our sins is always the motivating factor for our forgiveness of one another (Eph. 4:31—5:2). No one has ever wronged us to the degree that we have wronged God, and He has forgiven us fully and given us the promise that He will remember our sins no more (Heb. 10:17-18). The one offering of the sacrifice of Christ has so erased the debt of our sins that the Lord will not charge us with that debt (Rom. 8:33-34). Let us, then, seek to follow Him and strive to forgive our brethren when they sin against us. We see a great example of this in Joseph when he met his brothers who had treated him so badly and forgave them (*Gen. 50:20-21*).

(Matt. 18:23-34) – The Lord then spoke this parable to illustrate the kind of forgiveness that believers ought to show towards one another. In this parable sin is described as a debt. This is one of the ways sin is defined in the New Testament. For example, sin is revealed as missing the mark of the perfection of the law that can only be found in Christ (Rom. 3:19-23). Sin is unrighteousness and breaking or transgressing the law of God (Rom. 5:14; 1 Tim. 1:9). There are others, but sin is also defined as running up a debt to God’s law and justice. In the model prayer, the Lord expressed sin through the image of debt (Matt. 6:9-13). It is the same in this parable. Our sins are debts to God, which we, the debtors, cannot pay. This is why the only way God can forgive us of our sins is by

charging our sin-debt to Christ, imputing that debt to Him, and by Him coming to pay that debt with the price of His own blood (Heb. 2:14-17). Our debt was charged to Christ, and His payment (righteousness) was charge to us, His people for whom He died and arose again (2 Cor. 5:21).

This parable shows that we who have been freely forgiven of our debt by God's grace through Christ ought to be ready to forgive any debt owed to us by our brethren. Here, a king took "*ACCOUNT OF HIS SERVANTS*" and found one who "*OWED HIM TEN THOUSAND TALENTS.*" Commentators estimate this to about 12 million and even up to a billion in our modern currency. Clearly, it was an unpayable debt for the servant who owed it. What a great picture of our sinfulness and sin-debt, one which we have no money to pay. The king had every right to punish this servant by selling him and his family to repay the debt. But the servant "*FELL DOWN, AND WORSHIPPED HIM*" and begged for mercy. The king "*MOVED WITH COMPASSION, AND LOOSED HIM, AND FORGAVE HIM THE DEBT.*"

The same servant who had been treated so compassionately by the king "*WENT OUT, AND FOUND ONE OF HIS FELLOWSERVANTS, WHICH OWED HIM AN HUNDRED PENCE: AND HE LAID HANDS ON HIM, AND TOOK HIM BY THE THROAT, SAYING, PAY ME THAT THOU OWEST.*" The servant who had been forgiven had no compassion for his fellow servant who owed him a mere hundred pence. He punished his fellow servant severely "*TILL HE SHOULD PAY THE DEBT.*" When the king heard of this, he called the "*WICKED SERVANT*" and punished him "*TILL HE SHOULD PAY ALL THAT WAS DUE UNTO HIM.*" The key is in the king's question – "*SHOULDEST NOT THOU ALSO HAVE HAD COMPASSION ON THY FELLOWSERVANT, EVEN AS I HAD PITY ON THEE?*"

(Matt. 18:35) – All of this must be interpreted in light of the message of the entire Word of God. Sinners are forgiven by God freely and fully and justified in His sight based on the blood (righteousness) of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was (and is) not by our works. It is all of God's grace in Christ due to God's justice being satisfied (the payment of our debt) in the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. We are to forgive others because we have been forgiven. When a person cannot forgive, it is a strong evidence that they have not experienced in their hearts and minds the free forgiveness of their own sins (debt) by God's grace in Christ. Understand that this does not teach that God forgives us based on how we forgive others. If that were the case, none of us would be forgiven. But it teaches that a revelation and realization of how God has forgiven us freely by the blood of Christ will create within us a true desire to forgive others who sin against us. And this is not to say that forgiving others will not sometimes be a struggle. Even as redeemed and regenerated persons, we still have within us the flesh that fights against the Spirit and which causes us to be selfish and vengeful. This is why we must strive to "*walk in the Spirit ... and not fulfill the lust of the flesh*" (Gal. 5:16).