

Jesus Teaches about Forgiveness
Matthew 18:15-35

Dealing with a Sinning Brother

¹⁵ “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. ¹⁸ “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

²³ Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ ²⁷ Then the master of that servant was 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 denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ ³⁴ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ³⁵ “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Questions:

1. Who is meant by "your brother" who sins against you? Does it change our responsibility any if the brother has not sinned against us personally, but we are aware he has clearly sinned?
2. How do we determine if this sin is truly sin (not just some trivial irritation, personal slight or embarrassment which would be better simply ignored)? Does this have to be a public disgrace before we do anything?
3. What is involved to go and tell his fault privately at first? What does this require of us and how is this wise?
4. If this fails, why should one or two others go? What is their exact purpose? Why should we tell the church?
5. Just because two people agree to ask God for something does this mean God is obligated to grant their request? In what sense is Jesus present whenever two disciples gather together in His name?
6. When Peter asked how often he should forgive his brother, what had been said that would cause him to ask this question? Do you think Peter was being generous? Why must we forgive seventy times seven?
7. In Jesus' story of the man who owed the king 10,000 talents, how large a debt would this be (1 talent would equal 6,000 denarii and a denarius was equal to one day's labor)? What does this great forgiveness represent for us?
8. What is so unthinkable in the actions of the servant who had been forgiven this great debt? Was it wrong for the fellow servants to report this to the master? Why was the master so angry when he was told about this?
9. At the end of the story of the unmerciful servant why do you think Jesus says we must forgive "from the heart"?