



The Price of Forgiveness

Read: Matthew 18:21 – 35

Forgiving someone can be very difficult to do. We have all experienced pain at the hands of another person, sometimes on multiple occasions. No matter the situation, we have all struggled with offering forgiveness.

This is the predicament Peter finds himself in during the gospel narrative. He wants to know how many times he should forgive someone who has repeatedly hurt him. Jesus responds by saying, “seventy-seven times”. In Jewish culture the number seven is very significant. It represents an association with God. Jesus is informing Peter that he must forgive like God forgives: perfectly and without limit.

Jesus illustrates his point with a parable about a king who forgave a slave an insurmountable debt, while that same slave wouldn’t release another slave from a much lesser debt. Jesus’s point is that we have received the great forgiveness of God, and yet we sometimes refuse to forgive others.

Of course we can choose not to forgive, but, as Sirach points out, that only causes anger and wrath to grow within us (27:30). Harboring resentment causes our hearts to become obdurate and chokes out love, leaving us in a bitter state. Not only is this harmful to our well being, it is contrary to God’s command to love and forgive others (Sirach 28:7).

Of course forgiveness is not so cut and dry. The sting of betrayal can linger long after we forgive the other person. We may have to continually offer forgiveness as the memory resurfaces. Over time the hurt will dull, and God’s peace will heal our wound. Often a simple prayer like “Lord Jesus, help me to forgive” is enough to put our hearts on the path of mercy and peace. This process can take time, but it will free us from our pain. That is why we must forgive perfectly.