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Matthew 18:21-35 (The Unmerciful Servant)

Matthew 18:21-35 (NKJV)

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 don't 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, *doesn't forgive his brother his trespasses.*"

Another even stronger biblical text along the same lines is the following one from Matthew 6:14-15:

Matthew 6:14-15 (NKJV)

¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵ But if you don't forgive men their trespasses, *neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

The objection brought by some believers based on these two passages is that if you, as a child of God, fail to forgive others as you have been forgiven, your original sin debt will be reinstated, and you will lose your eternal salvation. At first glance, these passages seem to tell us God's forgiveness, our salvation, is



conditional upon how much we forgive others, and if we don't do that, God will reinstate our sins, even after we have been forgiven initially.

We must note that what Matthew 18:21–35 conveys is in the context of the Jewish Law. At that point in time, when Jesus gave the parable, He had not died yet on the cross and nobody from His audience was yet born again. Because of this, we need to realize that Jesus, during His life before the cross, made the transition from the Law of Moses to the Gospel. Most of the things He said were in the context of the Old Covenant because that is what His audience was familiar with, while a few things were looking forward and speaking about the future New Covenant. The conditional nature of His saying in this parable sounds very much like the Law of Moses. Jesus, throughout His ministry on earth, took the Law of Moses and raised it to the strictest of standards. He talked about its spirit, about intentions, and motivations of the heart, not just outward works. By showing the extremes of the Law, Jesus was preparing them for what was coming: the New Covenant of the grace of God through Christ. Jesus used the apostle Paul to teach that grace to the Gentiles. The sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–6) amplifies the Law of Moses, and this parable is along the same lines. So, it doesn't say God can revoke salvation for those who are saved and whose sins were forgiven through the atonement of Jesus Christ. That would go against the many scriptures that show we are secure in Christ from the moment of our salvation. That would even contradict many of the words of Jesus Himself. Let's take a closer look at this parable.

First, Jesus is not saying anything about those unforgiving people being thrown into hell.

Second, the way the servant asks the king for mercy and the request to give him more time to pay back the debt shows this individual doesn't grasp the reality of the situation. He thinks he can pay back the debt of sin through self-effort, but no one can do that. Only Christ accomplished this payment for people's sins on the cross. Third, notice that nobody paid for the servant's debt in this parable, but it was forgiven, meaning his debt was overlooked. As a child of God, you need to understand you are not just forgiven, but you are justified as well! When a husband and wife argue, they might often bring up things from the past. While the husband may have forgiven his wife (or the other way around), the moment he brings back into discussion the conflict from the past, he proves he hasn't justified her. God is entirely different. He says, "I remember your sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). Justification means you never sinned, and you will never be blamed for sin. You are unblameable and this is a fundamental theological concept.

God didn't only forgive you in the sense of overlooking your sins, He didn't only provide an atonement or a covering for your sins. These are Old Covenant concepts. Someone paid with innocent blood for your sins and for the whole world's sins. Hebrews 10 says, "Jesus took away your sins" once and for all. Forgiveness means overlooking the mistakes without making any payment for them and God forgave us only in the sense that we were not the ones who made the payment for sins. However, we were justified, which is beyond forgiveness, because sin was also paid for in full, not just overlooked by God.

All our sins have been taken away by Christ. That is why before the cross, we had to forgive before we were forgiven but after His work, we are first and foremost forgiven completely and permanently. Yes, we should still forgive, but not as a condition of salvation.

Believers in Christ are no longer under the Law of Moses, and neither salvation is under the condition of obedience.

Unforgiveness is a sin like any other. The apostle Paul writes the following words about forgiveness:

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV)

³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even *as God in Christ*

forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 (NKJV)

¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even *as Christ forgave you*, so you also must do.

Notice here that God is the One Who has forgiven you first.

Then you are called to forgive, but not under the threat of losing your own forgiveness. The passages say you should do this as a natural flow and outcome of what has already been done for you. If you are in Christ, you have been forgiven, so, now you forgive as well! The Apostle Paul says true forgiveness comes under grace because we know how much we have been forgiven ourselves. Under the Law, it would flow out of fear of not being punished again, it didn't come from the heart, and it kept a record of wrongs. Before Christ came, there was no forgetting of the sins of the other.

But now, when you realize God doesn't even keep a record of your wrongs, but He has chosen to forget your iniquities, you find that forgiveness flows from His grace.

Matthew 12:31-32 (The Unpardonable Sin)

Matthew 12:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but *the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.*

³² Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, *it will not be forgiven him*, either in this age or in the age to come.

The Mark account is even harsher, talking clearly about eternal damnation in the case of those blaspheming the Holy Spirit:

Mark 3:29 (NKJV)

²⁹ but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit *never has forgiveness*, but is subject to *eternal condemnation*.

Many genuine believers have this fear from time to time, that they might have committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit and lost their salvation. That fear comes from a faulty interpretation of these passages, that born-again believers can commit that sin by mistake, in a fit of anger, and be subject to eternal condemnation, even if they were sorry about it afterwards.

The word “blaspheme” means to speak evil of, defame, or revile. In context, Jesus is saying blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is attributing the working of the Holy Spirit to the Devil. Many people in the Bible did this, including Saul, who became the apostle Paul. However, in 1 Timothy 1:13, Paul said he received mercy concerning his blasphemy because he had done it ignorantly in unbelief.

Therefore, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit Jesus is warning against here must be willfully reviling the Holy Spirit with knowledge of what is being done.

When Jesus mentions the unpardonable sin in Matthew 12:31-32, He speaks to the Pharisees, who were aware that such deliverances and miracles could not be done except by the hand of God. But because they hated Jesus, they attributed His work through the Holy Spirit to Satan. Moreover, they rejected Him at every turn and were looking for ways to kill Him. The unpardonable sin is committed when a person constantly rejects Jesus, knowing He is the Messiah.

Those who have accepted Christ are in no danger of committing this sin after salvation, which is why the apostle Paul, who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament, never mentioned the unpardonable sin. Instead, he assures believers all their sins have been forgiven because of Jesus’s one sacrifice at the cross (Hebrews 10:12-14). Plus, God’s Word shows us that if anyone is in that irreversible state, they lose all conviction from God and they don’t care about it (Romans 1:28).

Therefore, anyone who is convicted and repentant over having possibly blasphemed the Holy

Spirit hasn't committed the unpardonable sin.

The simple fact that you are wondering about it means you haven't done it, no matter if you are a believer already or not. Regenerated people can never blaspheme the Holy Spirit willingly, and if they ever do, it means they were never born again in the first place.

Philippians 2:12-13 (Work Out Your Salvation)

Philippians 2:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;*

¹³ for it's God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

This is a great scripture and full of God's grace, yet people have turned it into a very legalistic one to scare Christians into action and to make them fear the loss of salvation if they don't sanctify themselves and live morally. They promote the idea that you must do good works to maintain your salvation, you must constantly be on your toes with fear and trembling, so that you won't end up in hell. Another way of saying the same thing is the following: "Be sure to do enough good works in your life to divert God's attention from you and not send you to hell. But you will never be able to know if you are still in or out of salvation. So, add some genuine fear and trembling to ensure that you remain saved, because God will see your so-called reverence and spare you." This is a false interpretation.

The first thing to note here is that it doesn't say "work for your salvation," but "work out your salvation." That is a big difference! Many people have completely changed this verse to mean work for your salvation or work to keep your salvation. And you must do this with such fear and trembling because you just don't know when you might lose it and go to hell! However, the verse says to work out your salvation, not work for your salvation. It's simply teaching us how to walk in the Spirit, that it's God Who works in us, and we respond by working it out in our lives, by bringing it to light, trusting in God and not in our flesh.

Next, let's see from the immediate context and other places in the Bible what "fear and trembling" means. This is not a phrase meant to strike fear and insecurity in people's hearts. In the New Testament, whenever you see the phrase "fear and trembling," it's only associated with good things! It's associated with awe and respect for God and a sense of submission to His greatness. It's a trust in God and a distrust in our flesh.

When Paul preached in Corinth, he said he did so with much fear and trembling, so his confidence wouldn't be in his preaching but in the power of God! (1 Corinthians 2:3) His fear and trembling were all about not having confidence in his flesh but putting his faith in God. Then in 2 Corinthians 7:15, Paul commends the Corinthians for welcoming Titus with fear and trembling. That meant joy, honor, and respect.

Furthermore, in Mark 5:33, the woman with the issue of blood also had fear and trembling, but it wasn't because Jesus had called her out and she was scared of the consequences of the fact that she was an unclean woman among Jewish men. Her fear and trembling were because she knew what had happened in her body and that she had been healed! It was amazement and awe at God's mighty working in her body!

Mark 5:33 (NKJV)

³³ But the woman, *fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her*, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

People who say we must work for our salvation with fear and trembling seem to forget or leave out the following Verse 13 from Philippians 2, where it says, "for it's God Who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Those who advocate for this wrong interpretation end up teaching the opposite of what this verse is trying to convey. They end up getting people in the flesh, making them to work for their salvation, when in fact, this verse is trying to teach us how to walk in the Spirit and respond to God's working in us so that it can be gloriously worked out through our lives! Notice that Verse 13 answers the question, "Why should we work out our salvation with fear and trembling?" If it were because of hell or God's punishment, it would have said so, but instead, it says to work out our

salvation with awe and honor because God is the One doing it all, not us.

It's God Who works, and we then work it out, we manifest, what He has done inside us. God has put His goodness in us and we work it out through our lives. God has put His grace and mercy in us and we work them out. God has put His victory and strength in us and we work them out. God has put His wisdom in us and we work it out.

God has established His Kingdom inside us and we work it out through our lives.

What a glorious picture of partnering with God! And the way we work it out is simply by believing and acknowledging every good thing He has put in us in Christ (Philemon 1:6).

In conclusion, I would like to paraphrase this scripture to show precisely how it is supposed to be read and understood: "Work out and exercise in, and through your lives, all the wonderful things God has already put in you, with joy, anticipation, excitement, and gratefulness."

Ecclesiastes 7:1,8 (The End of a Person)

Ecclesiastes 7:1 (NKJV)

¹ A good name is better than precious ointment, and *the day of death than the day of one's birth*.

Ecclesiastes 7:8 (NKJV)

⁸ *The end of a thing is better than its beginning*; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Many preachers use this phrase in reference to eternal salvation, affirming that the end of a person is what counts when it comes to salvation. In other words, they are trying to say that the state of people at their death decides their eternal destiny. What they mean is the following: "Born-again Christians may have all kinds of sinful fallouts during their lifetime that would potentially make them lose their salvation if they were to die in those moments, but if they manage to have a good name and reputation in the eyes of people, at the end of their

lives, if they have enough good works done, and all of their sins confessed when they die, then we can be sure they were saved.” This implies that our eternal salvation continuously fluctuates and it’s always in jeopardy of being lost, so we must make every effort to make sure we end well, whatever that “well” means. Now let’s see if this is true. The only texts I found in the Bible in the vicinity of this idea are verses 1 and 8 from Ecclesiastes 7, which I’ve just read.

First and foremost, let’s notice that neither one of the texts don’t say the end of a person is what counts, but the day of death is better than the day of birth, and the end of a thing is better than its beginning. It’s just a comparison between the beginning and the end of a person or a thing. Second, the passages don’t say that only the end of a person or a thing matters, as if the beginning is not important, but instead say that the end is just better. However, beginnings have their value as well.

Third, these Old Testament passages were written by King Solomon before the cross and before salvation coming to light. Moreover, in the immediate context of these verses—that is, in the whole of Chapter 7, in the verses before and after—there is no indication or hint to make us believe these texts can be applied to salvation in general, or to eternal security, in the sense that the good works of Christians gathered at the end of their lives count, to be sure that they were saved. How can anyone measure the good works, or to know if they are enough in front of God to save someone, besides the sacrifice of Jesus?

These verses talk about perseverance and patience in all things. Any beginning in any area is full of excitement and anticipation but is also more difficult because you don’t see any significant results or rewards immediately. However, if you have enough patience and persevere through all the obstacles to the end, then the end of that thing will give you more satisfaction. For example, Jesus could endure the cross and all the shame because He looked at the joy He would have at the end of all His sufferings (Hebrews 12:2). Even in agriculture, the time of sowing is more difficult and less satisfying than the harvest. Moreover, when you go to school and prepare for life, school is not always pleasant, but if you persevere and finish it, and then you have a job with a good income or start a business, you have much more satisfaction than when you were doing courses and learning. Another illustration is

building a house. It's one thing when you start it and another thing when it's finished. And the same principle applies to any area or thing.

The second part of Verse 8 tells us that when we are at the beginning of a thing, and it's hard, to look with patience at its finality, encourage ourselves, and move forward because the end is better than the beginning. Another interesting thing is that if we think about the end of Jesus Christ Himself here on earth at the cross as a criminal, it was a shameful end from the point of view of the disciples and of the people living in His time. Even my son, when he was just four years old, and I told him Jesus always overcame, he said that He lost in one thing when He was on earth. I asked him, "Where did Jesus lose?" He answered, "He lost when He died on the cross." I had to explain to him that Jesus didn't lose but won the biggest battle in human history. What I am trying to say here is that what we consider from the outside as the end of a person (good or bad) can be very relative because only God knows man's heart.

And, as you probably already know by now, salvation is not dependent on believers' good works or reputation but only on the innocent blood of Jesus.

Along the same lines, there is one more passage worth mentioning here, and that is Hebrews 13:7, which says the following:

Hebrews 13:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. *Consider the outcome of their way of life*, and imitate their faith.

In some languages, like Romanian, for example, the phrase "consider the outcome of their way of life" is translated in such a way that most believers understand it this way: "look carefully at the way of their life when they were at the end of their life and follow their faith!" Because of this faulty translation, many believers think their behavioral state at the moment when life ends is very important and decisive in their eternal destiny. However, as all English translations show, the text encourages us to evaluate the end of their WAY of life, meaning the good result or effect of their way of life in faith, and not the end of their life.

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