

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.

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