



Satan's Deadly Trap – Part 10
Various Scripture
GCSP – 11/28/2009

Let's pray.

As we wind down this series of sermons, I will spend the last few on the topic of forgiveness. I am not completely sure that next week will be the final installment in this series, but we are no more than three weeks away.

We have seen from Scripture the consequences of not properly handling offences that come our way. The Bible has made it clear that offences will come into your life; there is no escape. The Bible has also made it clear that when we choose to hold on to offences that we are in the snare of the devil and are destined to do his will.

The Bible tells us that once offence comes into your life and you choose to hang on to it you will experience the progression of betrayal, hatred, and deception also working through your life. Unresolved offence will cause you to be a spiritual vagrant. You will wander around from place to place and person to person; always searching but never finding just like Cain. Your life will become very self-oriented because you will feel like nobody is on your side.

Scripture has told us that we must not only forgive but also love and do good to those who have offended us. We saw how the context of **Romans 12:14-21** primarily deals with how we are to relate to those who have offended us: Bless those who persecute you, rejoice and weep with your enemies, don't be spiritually arrogant or high-minded toward them, never take revenge in your own hands, and live peaceably with them. All of these commands given to us are in context of having these attitudes and actions toward your offenders.

The last several times together we saw the difference between when it is okay and even right to offend, and when it is wrong to offend. We should never be concerned with offending others when we are taking a stand for God and His Word (just make sure you know His Word and aren't just standing on your opinion), but it is wrong to offend for the purpose of standing up for your own personal rights, spiritually speaking.

And now we have some important thoughts concerning forgiveness; because forgiveness is so much more than just speaking the words, "I forgive you."

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Matthew**. Although the primary focus will be forgiveness, there is also another principle in this passage that is impossible for me to ignore if only because it applies to most of my adult life. So bear with me as I try to deal with both applications for us tonight – or at least for me. I will be interjecting some comments on financial debt as we go but will show you how forgiveness is the primary concern of the Lord in this specific parable.

Matthew 18:21-22

Jesus had just finished talking to His disciples concerning forgiveness and repentance in a church setting, and how to handle the person who refused to repent. Jesus outlined the authority the church has in these matters and how that if we choose to follow His ways that He will be right there in our midst agreeing with our discipline on the unrepentant brother or sister.

Peter then poses a question to the Lord, thinking He was really going the extra mile. "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother, up to seven times?" Can you see Peter just about to burst the seams of his robe – because the standard taught by the Pharisees was to forgive up to three times. So Peter more than doubles that standard and is probably expecting another, "Blessed are you Peter..." like he did when he proclaimed Jesus as the Christ. But instead the Lord answers, "No Peter, seventy times seven." And in the parallel account in Luke we see that this is the daily standard, not a lifetime tally for you track.

Now for you to offend to the point that I need to forgive you 490 times in single day, you would have to offend me once every three minutes provided neither one of us goes to sleep. I've met some nasty sinners in my time but I don't know anyone that can sin that good.

That's the standard, which really means that Jesus is telling us to give forgiveness each and every time it is requested. And may I add that you need to forgive even when it isn't requested? Because when you choose to not forgive even when forgiveness is not sought, what are now guilty of? You have now grabbed hold of an offence and you are in the snare of the devil. So if you need to forgive the same person once every three minutes each and every day, then you do so.

True forgiveness is unlimited, and to make His point Jesus tells a parable.

Matthew 18:23-24

Here is a citizen in this kingdom who had borrowed ten thousand talents from the master of the kingdom over the years. In Jesus' day, money was measured by weight most of the time. Coins were used in some cultures but even then the value was based on the weight and material of the coin. A talent was about 75 pounds and usually represented gold and sometimes silver. For our example I will assume it was gold. So somehow over the course of time, this servant had borrowed 750,000 pounds of gold. At the price of gold today that would be about 11 billion dollars.

How many of you would call that an un-payable debt? If any of you view that as a debt that you can pay I need to see you after the services – I just need a small fraction of that to settle all of my accounts.

So the point being made in the opening of this parable is that a servant in the kingdom owes an un-payable debt to the master of the kingdom, and now the master of the kingdom is calling the loan.

Matthew 18:25

The master is calling the loan and the servant has no means to repay. In that culture if you owed money and could not repay you went to prison, your possessions were sold,

and in some cultures, your wife and children could be sold into slavery as payment. You were then left to rot in prison unless a generous family member or friend paid your debt for you. You were in a somewhat hopeless situation, waiting for the slim possibility that someone will show mercy on you.

We don't have debtor's prison today, at least in the physical sense, but we do have multitudes who are in over their heads with very little hope of getting out. It is amazing how debt persists once you head down that road.

As most of you know, I cut up my credit cards here in one of our services 8-10 months ago. But even though I have not accumulated more debt, and adjustments have been made in many areas of our life, it is still seemingly impossible to get caught up. God has given us reason to hope over the next year with several avenues for increased income opening up, but without these new opportunities the prospects of breaking this cycle of debt and running behind every month would be bleak at best.

But my situation is no where near as dire as this servant's. You just don't come up with 11 billion dollars over night.

Matthew 18:26

Facing the prospect of life in prison and his wife and children being indentured slaves for the rest of their lives, this servant begs for mercy and time to repay the debt; which is ridiculous given that the implication is this servant has somehow blown through the 11 billion already. But he does the only thing he can do – beg for mercy and time.

Matthew 18:27

The master not only grants mercy, instead of giving him more time he wipes the slate clean. He has such compassion that the 11 billion dollar debt is cancelled. I know how relieved I feel when I am current on my bills; I'm not sure how I am going to feel when the Lord gets us to the point of being debt-free. But that is where this servant is; he went from 11 billion in debt to debt-free in the blink of an eye.

So how does he respond to this unimaginable turn of events?

Matthew 18:28

A denarius was the common term for a day's wage. In today's economy this would be a total debt somewhere between \$10-20,000, so let's use \$15,000 for the purpose of this illustration. \$15,000 is nothing to sneeze at. This isn't someone borrowing ten bucks for lunch and forgetting to pay you back; this is a major chunk of change that is owed.

The servant who was just forgiven 11 billion is furious that his fellow servant can't pay back the \$15,000; so furious that he is violently choking the man and verbally abusing him.

Matthew 18:29

Again, the implication is that there is no money with which to repay, so the servant does the same thing we just saw the other do; he bows down and begs for mercy and time.

At this juncture of the parable you would think that someone who was forgiven so much could at least find it in his heart to show enough mercy to provide the time necessary to repay the debt, if not forgive the debt completely just like was done for him.

Matthew 18:30

The laws of the land gave this servant the right to throw his fellow servant in debtor's prison until the debt was paid. The servant that owed the money had no legal right and no leg to stand on so to speak. This is the nature of debt – the Bible says the borrower is slave to the lender. And like I said before, even though we do not have debtor's prison today, you are still in a horrible place when you are in debt; you are not as free as you are meant to be in Christ Jesus when you are a slave to your lenders.

For far too much of my life I missed this principle of God's Word, and thus ignored the lessons that needed to be learned. Even though I am free in Christ, at the same time I have been in bondage to debt even before I got married; and this has severely limited me at times in my spiritual growth. Jesus told us that we cannot serve two masters, and in that comment He was specifically speaking of the choice between serving God or serving money and possessions; and when you are a slave to your lenders it is difficult to serve God as completely as we are supposed to do.

So even though this servant should have displayed compassion for his fellow servant, by the letter of the law he had the right to demand payment. But Jesus desires that we go beyond the letter of the law. Jesus more so wants us to have a heart of compassion even when we have the law on our side. Jesus wants us to be merciful just as He is merciful. Jesus wants us to love others as He loves others. Jesus wants us to release the offences that come into our lives and leave retribution and revenge in His capable hands.

God's Word teaches us to lend as if we will never see the money again. At the same time God's Word tells us to pay our debts. Whichever side of the debt equation you find yourself on, take care to deal with your end in a biblical manner.

So back to the parable:

Matthew 18:31

The story is out; everyone knows about the 11 billion dollar debt being cancelled for this servant, and now everyone knows how this same guy has thrown a fellow servant into prison for an extremely smaller debt. And while this verse seems to be making out the other servants as tattle-tales, don't miss the principle of taking your grievances and injustices to the master; we have already seen that principle in this series and we see it again here.

This also reminds us that our evil deeds are never hidden from the Master. When the Bible says that God sees all, and that He will settle all accounts, these are just as solid of a principle as any other aspect of the Bible. Is there anything hidden from God? – No. Does God settle all accounts? – Yes, as long as we let Him. If we choose to take matters into our own hands then God will graciously step back and let you. So if you think you can take care of things better than God then by all means go right ahead.

Matthew 18:32-33

11 billion was forgiven and in turn \$15,000 was demanded. Not only does this show how petty and selfish this servant is, it also shows that he really wasn't all that grateful for the kindness the master had showed him. The forgiveness that was offered was never truly appropriated in his life – his life didn't change.

The servant suffered from the same ailment we all battle from time to time – me syndrome. What about me, what about me, what about me? The whole issue of offence has its roots in me syndrome. We are so self-focused and we are so easily offended when anyone does something to us that we don't like. If so-and-so doesn't behave and react in the exact way we think they should behave or react, "Throw the bum in jail!"

How many times have you caught yourself saying or thinking, "That'll teach him", or "She doesn't know how she's dealing with"? Oh boy – who are we aligned with in this parable when our attitude is like that?

The master is furious at the servant for not extending the same forgiveness he had received, to someone else who was in a bind; and we will come back to this point later.

Matthew 18:34

The forgiveness was rescinded. Now before you take a wrong leap as to the application of this verse in how it relates to salvation, stop where you are; I have an answer for you that is right in front of us. First, let's deal with the servant in the parable. Because he did not use what was given to him in the proper manner it was taken away from him. Because he did not become like his master he lost the opportunity to become like his master.

We are to give to others what has been given to us; there is great responsibility that comes with great blessing. And I trust you understand that I am not talking about just money right now – especially in light of the primary focus of this parable. Yes, money played a large role in this story but the blessing that was to be passed on was forgiveness, not money. But at the same time, this principle applies to every area of your life.

Has God comforted you through a great trial? Then you now have a responsibility to comfort others. Has God revealed His Word to you as we have studied a few weeks ago? You are now responsible to teach what you learned from God's Word to others. Has God protected you when you were in a vulnerable position? You now are responsible to protect others who are vulnerable.

Do you see the point? And yes, this applies to money as well. Whatever God has blessed you with must be passed on to others. We are never to just be recipients of God's blessings; we must also be distributors of God's blessings. And to be a distributor means you must first be a recipient. You can't give what you don't have.

But the bottom line and immediate application is forgiveness. Every one of you has received God's forgiveness so every one of you must in turn also distribute forgiveness to others. And this is not an option.

Matthew 6:12 says, “**And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**” Let me ask you a question, how many of you would like to be forgiven by Jesus in the same manner in which you have forgiven others throughout your life? Have you shown the same love for those you have forgiven that Jesus has shown to you? Have you fellowshiped with those you have forgiven like Jesus fellowships with you? Or has it been more like, “Yeah, I forgive you, now go away and leave me alone; I’m not talking to you anymore and I would appreciate it if I never have to have contact with you again”?

How many times have you broken fellowship with a brother or sister in Christ because they made the mistake of offending you in some way? How often has the communication been shut down when someone has done something you didn’t appreciate?

And beloved, please understand, the wicked servant in our parable had the legal right to throw his fellow servant in jail. A crime or a sin had been committed against the wicked servant. So we are dealing with legitimate offences against you – things where you are in the right. But what happened to the one who was in the right in our parable? Why? – Because he refused to give what he had been given.

Matthew 18:35

There are two keys in this verse that we need to consider. First let me deal with the aspect of how some view this as a verse that proves you can lose your salvation. They will point to the fact that the wicked servant was forgiven but in these last two verses his forgiveness was revoked.

This can be easily explained. What do the first three words of **verse 35** say? - “**My heavenly father.**” If this was talking about a genuine believer wouldn’t Jesus have said, “Your heavenly Father” or “Our heavenly Father”? So in this parable, God is not the wicked servant’s heavenly Father. He never truly appropriated the forgiveness that was given.

Also, as we have already studied, you cannot give what you do not have. The wicked servant didn’t give God’s forgiveness because he really never had God’s forgiveness.

Can a person come to church, hear the gospel presentation, feel convicted, ask forgiveness, but still not truly be saved? – Of course they can, it happens all the time. If confession is not accompanied by repentance and a changed life, they have not truly received forgiveness have they? When this person stands before God at the Great White Throne Judgment they will be just like the wicked servant who must pay his debt on his own.

The second key in this verse is what we have been hinting at all along; the last three words of this verse. “...from your heart” – this is genuine forgiveness. Words are not enough when it comes to forgiveness. Come to think about it, words are not enough when it comes to anything. Words are cheap. I can say I love you, but if I ignore you all the time... I can say I forgive you, but if I never talk to you or do anything for you...

Now go back to **Matthew 18:21-22**. 490 times a day we are to forgive in this manner.

John Bevere says, *"A person who cannot forgive is a person who has forgotten or never realized what they've been forgiven of. When you realize that Jesus delivered you from the eternal death and torment, you will release others unconditionally."*

Henry Ward Beecher said, *"Forgiveness should be like a cancelled note that is torn in two and burned up so it can never be shown against one."*

Joyce Meyer said, *"Realize that you can't keep waiting until you feel like forgiving someone to do it...Be smart enough to stop hurting yourself after someone else has hurt you...Learn to let the offences go."*

Where is your life on this issue of forgiveness?

Let's pray.