

Matthew 18:21-35

Practicing forgiving others

Vv. 21-22. The limit of seven times to forgive suggested by Peter is countered by Jesus' proverbial statement which alludes to Gen. 4:24, contrasting the unlimited vindictiveness of Lamech with the practice of unlimited forgiveness.

Vv. 23-34. The parable which illustrates the values of the kingdom of heaven (God's rule) highlights the dangers of an unwillingness to forgive.

V. 35. The application is a warning and a challenge. Only the practice of genuine, 'from the heart', forgiveness is acceptable to God.

The Lord's Prayer. – forgiving as we have been forgiven.

1. In the Lord's Prayer we say, '*Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us*'. Our request to God to forgive us our sins is dependent on our commitment to practise forgiveness to others.

2. Hard as this may seem at times, it is right to link our request for forgiveness from God with our willingness to forgive others. **Forgiveness is at the heart of God's love for the world. So, forgiveness should be at the heart of all of our response to others.** We have been given **new life** because of God's forgiveness. We are therefore called to **practice forgiveness** so it should permeate all of our life.

A. Daily seeking forgiveness and daily practicing forgiveness.

Because it is difficult to practice, and because of our failure to trust God's enabling, we need to daily **seek God's forgiveness.**

B. Confident in a forgiving God.

When we pray '**Forgive us our sins...**' – **we can do so confidently** because Christ's death atoned (paid) for all sins, past, present and future. Believers are justified by God (declared righteous because of Jesus) but are also called, as His children, to confess their sins in gratitude to God and to live as His family.

C. Practicing forgiveness.

Refusing to forgive means sinning against God. It echoes the error put starkly in 1John 1:8, 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.' Those who seek God's forgiveness must be willing to commit to forgiving their debtors. We do not earn our forgiveness by our action (i.e. forgiving others), God's forgiveness is undeserved. In the Lord's Prayer we are acknowledging God's demand that we who are forgiven practice forgiveness. We are also acknowledging that the means God has set for us to continue to receive His forgiveness is to confess our sins and to practice forgiveness toward others. God's mercy and judgment are illustrated in the parable. Refusing to forgive is ultimately to sin against God, failing to obey His commands. It is mocking God to seek His forgiveness while we are refusing to own and turn away from our sinful practices. Refusing to forgive allows sin to fester in us.

Reflection/Response. Can we say this petition? By saying the Lord's Prayer, we are committing ourselves to obey God's requirements to practice forgiveness. We need to pray for each other that we may draw on the help God's Spirit gives to live as forgiven people, those who practise forgiveness. Forgiveness does not depend on a person 'deserving' our forgiveness, otherwise we could not receive God's forgiveness! Are there people we need God's strength to forgive?

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