

# The Unmerciful Servant

The issue of mercy is addressed prolifically throughout the scriptures, especially in the New Testament—and no one spoke about it more than Jesus Christ. The parable of “The Unmerciful Servant” presents one of the most powerful lessons on this topic ever given by the Messiah. It proclaims a message of great hope to all who receive it as well as one of great doom to all who refuse to extend it to others. The following questions are intended to add some insight into this remarkable lesson being taught by the Messiah.



**Was there any significance to Peter suggesting that a person should forgive his brother seven times for his trespasses (Mt.18: 21)?**

Peter probably thought himself generous by suggesting seven times because in rabbinical discussions, the consensus was that forgiveness should be offered three times for a sin; on the fourth occurrence of that sin, there was no forgiveness. Jesus' answer shows that He means forgiveness should not be limited by frequency or quantity.

**How much is ten thousand talents?**

The value of this debt takes on greater meaning when one considers that King David offered three thousand talents of gold and seven thousand talents of silver for the construction of the temple, and the princes contributed five thousand talents of gold and ten thousand talents of silver. Some recent estimates suggest one talent could be worth \$1,200. If that were the case, ten thousand talents would be worth twelve million dollars. However, with inflation and fluctuating precious metal prices, this debt (ten thousand talents) could easily represent over a billion dollars in today's currency.

**Can God rescind forgiveness that he has already extended, as was apparently done to the unmerciful servant in this parable?**

This is an interesting question because it appears that the king in this parable did just that. But is there more to this lesson? According to the story, when the king heard that the servant he had recently forgiven of a debt had failed to extend the same mercy to another servant, he (the king) was furious. Notice how Jesus describes it.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt, because you desired me to: Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tortures, till he should pay all that was due unto him. (Mt.18: 32-34)

Clearly the forgiveness given by the king was ultimately withdrawn. But what does this mean? We at **Blow the Trumpet** believe this parable is best understood to mean that God's forgiveness of us is predicated on our forgiveness of others. Therefore, because the unmerciful servant refused to forgive his fellow servant, he violated the terms of the king's forgiveness. In other words, it wasn't the king that rescinded his forgiveness, but rather the servant that rejected it by virtue of his lack of mercy toward others.

## **Does God want us to forgive the unrepentant?**

Although many well-intended believers think Christians have a moral duty to forgive all who trespass against them—even those who don't repent, the scriptures suggest otherwise. To forgive the unrepentant is to devalue mercy. This God will not do, nor should His people. With this said, how are God's people to regard those who are in a state of unrepentance? What does God desire regarding our attitude toward them?

Perhaps the greatest mistake people make in this matter is to think that there are only two choices—forgive them or condemn them. However, this is not true. There is a third option that most Christians never consider. That option is to “withhold judgment in hope.” To do this requires a genuine desire for the debtor to be loosed of his debt. In other words we need to want with all our heart for the debtor to be forgiven, even if we must pay for the trespass. But how is this accomplished?

## **Withholding Judgment in Hope**

One of the great examples of withholding judgment in hope is recorded in the eighth chapter of John's gospel. Here, Jesus is approached by the religious leaders of His day and asked to judge a woman caught in the act of adultery. The intent of these men was to try to get the Messiah to contradict Moses and the law. But these “pious” leaders were no match for the Jesus. After hearing their query, He presented them with a challenge they could not meet. When they walked away in embarrassment, Jesus asked the woman where her accusers were. She responded by telling Him that they had all left—a fact that Jesus undoubtedly knew. Notice what He says next.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (Jn. 8:10-11)

Notice what Jesus did not say. He did not say, “your sins are forgiven.” He simply told her to “sin no more.” In other words REPENT. Jesus did not condemn her because it was His desire that she turn from this sin and receive God's mercy. Although He facilitated the saving of her life, Jesus would not judge the matter. This is because the only judgment He could have rendered in righteousness would have been death. This was unacceptable to Him. Jesus desired that this sinner be forgiven but knew that this was not possible until she had repented. Therefore, He told her to go and “sin no more” (repent). Although nothing further is said of this adulteress, most believe she changed and may very well have become a Christian convert. If this is true, Jesus' blood paid for her sin and her repentance claimed that sacrifice. This is what Jesus desires for all mankind.

The lesson for God's people today is that like our Savior, we must love mercy and respect judgment. Therefore, if someone has sinned against us and not repented, we should not bear a grudge, but rather long for the day when the matter will be made right. At that time we should forgive the debt with joy.

## **What was the point Jesus was making with this parable?**

Jesus was illustrating that all Christians have an insurmountable debt to God, which He has graciously and compassionately forgiven. By contrast, any debt a Christian might be owed would pale into insignificance. With this parable, Jesus was pointing out that forgiveness is a part of God's character and He wants it to be a part of every Christian's character. The point He was making was that if man won't forgive the insignificant, then God won't forgive the insurmountable, “So My heavenly Father also will do

to you, if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” (Mt. 18:32-35; see also: Mt. 11:25; Lk. 6:37; Col. 3:13; Jas. 2:13)