

How Will God Treat You?

‡ In grace? (vv.21-27)

‡ In the mirror? (vv.28-35)

In the name of Jesus, our forgiving Lord and Master, dear fellow slaves:

Even the self-employed sometimes feel like slaves to their work. And if you have tough teachers or belligerent bosses, you'll really feel chained to your projects. But it is hard in our culture to fully understand how slaves had to give up their whole self and completely submit their will to their master. Estimates are that nearly half the population of the Roman Empire were slaves at one time or another, captured in war or born that way. Although they didn't want to admit it, the Jewish nation was enslaved by the Romans and knew all about slavery. That's why the master in Jesus' *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant* is so amazing. Who else was like him, except God? Jesus' question for each of us is **How Will God Treat You? In grace? Or In the mirror?** God wants us to see His true feelings on forgiveness.

‡ In grace? (vv.21-27)

One of our Seminary professors told us about a young woman who came home from college all excited. She exclaimed to her father, "Our religion teacher told us our sins are completely forgiven, and we don't *have to do* anything to be saved!" "That is true," her father replied. "But, Dad, why didn't you teach us that in Catechism Class?" He answered, "You would have abused it" It's not just the Pope who wants to keep people from finding out. Jesus said, "***It is finished!***" (John 19:30) Forgiveness is complete.

Can you see Peter's problem? He was there for last Sunday's sermon text when we heard our Lord Jesus say, "***If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.***" (Matthew 18:15 NIV) Jesus teaches private admonition, then two or three witnesses, finally excommunication as the last act of love to win our brother back from sin. He gave the Ministry of the Keys to His church to forgive the sins of the penitent, but to lock on the guilt of those who refuse to repent. Have you ever wondered when we confess our sins and the Pastor pronounces Absolution or forgiveness on everyone, "Isn't that too easy?"

See why Peter asked, "***Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?***" Peter thought he was being generous. But Jesus' answer must have sounded strange. "***I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.***" I don't know about you, but sometimes I have to get down on my knees and ask Jesus to help me understand and believe His Word. Is **grace** that cheap? Only if we're looking at ourselves on the wrong side of Jesus' parable.

"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him." There was no safety net in those days, no "Chapter 11" bankruptcy or borrower's rights under the law. And if you were a slave, you had even fewer rights. "Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt." What else could he do? "The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'" You and I would have laughed. "You're a slave! You owe millions of dollars! You can never pay me back!" But that's because we want to be the one in control. Instead, Jesus says, "The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."

Did you ever go to church only because you had to? Me too. We broke the First Commandment by that sin and are no longer holy enough for God. Ever wish you had some of your neighbor's money? Ever give less than your best at work or school? Each of these seems small to us, but it sets us apart from

our Creator in a debt we can never repay. God has every right to demand perfection and holiness from us. ***“Be holy, for I the LORD, your God am holy.”*** (Leviticus 19:2) Since God is our holy Creator, He can condemn us to hell’s eternal prison for debts we cannot repay. What else can we do but beg for time? But God is so full of compassion and **grace**, that instead of making us try to pay off our debt of sin, our Lord and Master cancelled all our guilt and keeps us in God’s family! **How Will God Treat You?** Admit you are wretched and sinful, and you will find Him eager to forgive and to **Treat You** kindly in His goodness and **grace**. God’s heart is all wrapped up in loving kindness and tender mercy.

† **In the mirror?** (vv.28-35)

Reality check: Many fine women have husbands who are harsh with them. And many fine men have wives who take them for granted and refuse their affection. Do we forgive the hurt at home? What is it about us that makes us so much like this servant in our lack of pity and on the wrong side of the master’s forgiveness? This forgiven servant ***“went out and...found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. ‘His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’”*** His debt was small enough to pay back in a few months! ***“But [the unmerciful servant] refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.”***

“Not me!” you say? How many times have you been so mad at your husband you could spit? How often have you thought of your wife first when you were upset, as if she were to blame, even when she had nothing to do with whatever? How many times have you kicked the dog or the nearest possible object out of hurt or anger or frustration? You’ve been angry at your parents, haven’t you? You’ve been so upset with your children you weren’t thinking straight. Maybe you even punished them more than they deserved because something else set you off that day. Then you blame others for your sins.

You know what these all have in common? Our minds are enslaved by sin. We forget how much God has forgiven us. You and I fall into this sin again and again whenever we think we’ve been wronged beyond forgiving. We may try to excuse ourselves as if it’s just natural, but God has other ideas and so do fellow slaves who see our unforgiving ways. ***“When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. ‘Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”*** Suddenly, the whole impossible debt was back with interest!

Why does God get so angry when we fail to forgive? Because God knows that **grace** is free, but it is not cheap. In order to cancel our debt of sin, all our money and possessions together could not remove the guilt of even one. So how would we erase the DVD of our sin from cradle to the grave? Only God’s Son, could pay the price for one sin of ours. In fact, He paid for all of them with His holy blood, His innocent suffering and death. The more you love someone, the more it hurts if they despise your mercy.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” How can any of us bear to keep looking **In the mirror?** Close your eyes. Go back to the beginning of this parable and find God’s mercy there. On your knees, ask again, “Lord, if I am to forgive and forget the way you have forgiven all my sins, I need a clean heart from you. Forgive me for my lack of mercy and make me merciful like you.” Then pray by name for whoever hurt you most. Ask God to have mercy on them as He has had on you. Forgive as you have been forgiven.

“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,” has a promise we want to keep. God has forgiven us and wants to keep on forgiving us. He just wants us to be like Him. So each time that hurt or that angry face or that abusive word comes back to mind, use it as an opportunity to pray again for God’s forgiveness on that person. ***“Mercy triumphs over judgment.”*** (James 2:13) Amen.”