

## **Parable of the Unjust Steward (Matthew 18:21-35) – To Forgive is to Be Forgiven**

As born-again Christians, one of the most difficult things for us to do is to forgive from the heart. Sometimes, we may offend others and others may offend us. The need to forgive is of utmost importance to every believer. Our Lord Jesus Christ understood this extremely well when He highlighted this truth immediately after the Lord's Prayer. Jesus says in Matthew 6:14-15, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" Christ has interlinked the doctrine of forgiving others with the doctrine of receiving forgiveness from God.

What happens when there is no forgiveness? The believer would harbour anger, or resentment, or unhappiness, or might even lose his sleep mulling over the sin done to him. With lack of sleep, irritability sets in. Obviously the peace of God has already departed from the believer. Each time the unforgiven person appears in the same room or vicinity of the unforgiving believer, the latter's mood changes. His discontentment and unhappy feelings surface and his day is ruined. His prayer and worship are affected drastically, more so if this unforgiven person is in the same place of prayer and worship. Hymns cannot be sung from the heart. The Lord's Supper cannot be taken at all. If the unforgiving believer attempts to take the Lord's Supper, the still small voice would say, "You have not forgiven your brother! How can you eat the bread and drink the cup? The Lord has forgiven you of ALL your sins, why can't you forgive your brother of his sin?" The ill feelings do not get better with time. The spiritual walk is severely affected. In time he may even backslide and drift far from God, though he might still be coming to church and serving the Lord. He wears a façade to hide his unforgiving spirit. Who is the real loser here? Is it the unforgiving believer or the unforgiven one?

**Analyzing the Parable** – The situation of a debtor and his debt was common to life then and is just as common now; the King is the Lord God; the unjust steward is the professing believer; his fellow servant is anyone who has sinned against him; the debt represents sin.

**Explaining the Parable** – Peter the apostle asked the Lord Jesus how many times he ought to forgive someone who has sinned against him. Peter cited the common belief at that time that the most number of times one ought to forgive someone was 7 times. In His reply, Jesus raised the number to 70 times 7 times. This was followed by the parable. The King had a steward who owed him 10,000 talents. 1 talent is equal to 6,000 pence or denari. A labourer's weekly wage was 6 pence. This means that the steward owed the King an amount which would take him 275 years of work to pay back, assuming he worked for 70 years of his life. The amount was so enormous that it was impossible for him to pay. The punishment for not being able to pay was that he had to sell all that he had, including his family, i.e. they and their succeeding generations had to become slaves for life. The steward bowed down and begged for mercy: "*The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*" The King was moved with compassion, loosed him and forgave him the entire debt.

Then this forgiven steward left the King and found (i.e. searched out deliberately) one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 pence. This was a grossly insignificant amount compared to the 10,000 talents (= 60,000,000 pence) he used to owe the King (1:600000). The forgiven (unjust) steward demanded the 100 pence from his fellow servant. "He laid hands on him and took him by the throat." This was a vicious and most humiliating way to ask for a debt.

The reaction of the debtor was similar to the unjust steward's own reaction a moment ago: *"And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."* But his response to the debtor was opposite to that of the King. The unjust steward would not have compassion. Instead he went and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. This means that the debtor had to spend prison time equivalent to the 100 pence. The unjust steward would rather forgo his 100 pence and see his fellow servant in prison!

The evil deed of the unjust steward was told to the King. The King called for the unjust steward and said to him, *"O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?"* The unjust steward received the same treatment he gave to the fellow servant who owed him a measly 100 pence. The King was very angry with him and delivered him to the tormentors till he paid all that he owed (i.e. a lifetime of torment).

**Applying the Parable** – The thrust of the parable is mentioned by Christ at the end of the parable. *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."* The true believer who has received the forgiveness of God must reciprocate in kind to all who have sinned against him. This is one of the marks of a true believer, having the heart and ability to forgive all sins.

The reason is that the sins which we have committed against God cost Christ His precious blood. Our sins against God are like the 10,000 talents debt. When others sin against us, their sins are like the 100 pence debt, a grossly miniscule amount, comparatively speaking. Therefore, every true believer who has tasted the compassion and forgiveness of God cannot not forgive. He must forgive. To not forgive is as good as not having been forgiven by God. If the professing believer says that he will not forgive another who has sinned against him, he is basically saying that his 100 pence is a greater debt than the 10,000 talent debt that he owed. Can this ever be true? The sins against God cost the true believer Christ's blood. Can anything or anyone we love on this earth be more precious than Christ's blood?

In other words, to be forgiven is to forgive.