**THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT**

***Matthew 18:21-35***

Sunday School Lesson

*Parables of Jesus Christ*

Week 7 – 12/3/2017

**Introduction:** The parable of the unmerciful servant reveals the double standard of an unforgiving Christian. The greatest act of forgiveness took place on the cross of Calvary. While we gladly take advantage of this forgiveness, we are still very slow to offer forgiveness to others in our own lives. There is probably no better way to be like Christ than to offer forgiveness to those who wrong us! As we study this parable, we should let it serve as a reminder of our Scriptural responsibility to forgive others.

1. WE MUST REALIZE THAT WE DO NOT HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO DECIDE WHETHER TO FORGIVE OR NOT. (22-23, 28, 35)
2. **Notice that the money the servant loaned was not his own.** If we follow the story, we realize that the hundred pence that was given could not have been his own money. It was a very small portion of the ten thousand talents that was loaned from the King. The new life that we have through Christ is not our own. It was bought with a price. If someone wrongs our flesh, it ought not to matter because the Lord pardoned that sinful flesh and expects us to live as a new creature. (2 Corinthians 5:17)
3. **Notice that the Lord does not expect us to keep count of a person’s offenses.** In verse 22, the Lord responds to Peter’s question regarding the number of times to give forgiveness. Peter asks if seven times is enough, and Christ advises that he should forgive seventy times seven. Of course, this was not meant as a specific number to count daily. The point was that Christ expects us to continually forgive each other without recalling the number of prior offenses of the offending party. (Matthew 5:38-40)
4. **Notice that the Lord does not provide us with exceptions for forgiveness.** In verse 35, the Lord advises that the expectation is that we will forgive every one. The forgiveness found in salvation is offered to every man. The Lord does not limit His forgiveness based on the individual or the significance of the offense. He is not a respecter of persons. He calls for all to come and freely take of His forgiveness and mercy. Likewise, we must realize that any exceptions we make for forgiveness are based on our own thinking and emotions, and they are not based on the Word of God. (Romans 2:11)
5. WE MUST REALIZE THAT TRUE FORGIVENESS IS BASED ON COMPASSION. (27, 33)
6. **Notice our compassion is established through understanding our own condition.** It seems hard to believe that the servant in this parable would deal so harshly with his fellowservant. Had he so soon forgotten the predicament that he was in and the mercy shown to him? If we keep the proper perspective in realizing how often we wrong God, it makes it much easier to show compassion to others who wrong us. This is because we understand that nobody is perfect, and that we will certainly all have times where we wrong others. (Hebrews 4:15)
7. **Notice that a lack of forgiveness shows that selfishness is dominating your life instead of compassion.** If compassion is having sympathy or pity towards the misfortune of others, then one of the antonyms for compassion would have to be selfishness. When we will not forgive, we are revealing that our own feelings and hurt take priority over everything else. In spite of having received forgiveness for his debt, the servant was so selfish that he had to try to collect just a little bit extra for himself. We often ruin relationships in our life over petty things that should have been resolved immediately with forgiveness. (Philippians 2:3-4)
8. **Notice that compassion is not a calculated response.** Forgiveness should not be something that we have to greatly consider. We must remember that compassion is an emotion that grows through our love for Christ and realization of what He has done for us. We should not have to weigh out the benefits of forgiving someone. Christ did not have to decide whether to show compassion. He was moved with the compassion that was already there. The King was immediately moved with compassion on his servant and acted on that compassion. Additionally, verse 35 tells us that we must forgive from our hearts. This means that we have already forgiven others before they even ask for it. Too often, we are worried about whether someone is truly sorry, when we should be worried about whether we truly forgave them! In fact, whether they ask for it or not is irrelevant for us. The forgiveness is there waiting for them whenever they want it. Christ offered forgiveness to everyone when He was on the cross! (Matthew 9:36)
9. WE MUST REALIZE THAT IT IS HARD TO GIVE FORGIVENESS WHEN WE ARE LOOKING FOR A REASON TO FEEL WRONGED OR OFFENDED. (24, 28)
10. **Notice that the servant was brought to the King, but the servant went and found a fellowservant.** It is interesting to note in this parable that the servant went out actively looking for someone who had not paid him. Perhaps, did he feel that he would have been able to pay back the King if that one servant would have just paid him back on time? Was he the person who just constantly looked to blame others for the failures in his own life? Regardless of what someone may have done to you, each of us are responsible for the poor decisions that we make. The Lord will require us to give an account of our own decisions. If we are failing in our lives, seek forgiveness from the Lord and then move forward in the freedom that he provides. Looking to blame others for what has already been forgiven keeps us in the bondage of the thing we have already been freed from! (John 8:34, 2 Corinthians 5:10)
11. **Notice that the servant dealt harshly with his fellowservant before he had even been given a chance to pay back his loan.** In verse 28, we see that the servant finds his fellowservant and grabs him by the throat to demand payment. It is pretty clear from this that the servant does not expect him to be able to pay back the loan. The treatment that he provides him is totally different than the treatment that he received even prior to being forgiven. Many times, we may be guilty of creating or at least escalating issues by the way that we handle ourselves. Given that it was only one hundred pence, it is very likely that the fellowservant would have been able to pay the loan back if given the opportunity. Instead, the servant went into the situation expecting to have to throw the fellowservant in jail. (Colossians 3:13)
12. WE MUST REALIZE THAT A LACK OF FORGIVENESS AFFECTS EVERYONE. (30-34)
13. **Notice that a lack of forgiveness keeps the offended in a prison of their own making.** The parable ends with the servant being cast into the prison that he had already been pardoned from. This was not because the King wanted to send him to prison. The servant created this situation for himself. When we are not willing to forgive others, we are sinning against God and keeping ourselves from having victory in our Christian lives. Essentially, we are agreeing to put ourselves in the bondage of sin that the Lord saved us and gave us freedom from. (Galatians 5:1)
14. **Notice that a lack of forgiveness keeps the offender in a prison of their failure.** When we are not willing to forgive, we are causing others to stumble. We are keeping them from being able to put the failure behind them and move forward in their service for Christ. I am afraid that there are many fallen Christians who have tried to return to the Lord, but they were reproved by “well-meaning” Christians who were not willing to allow them to find forgiveness in the house of God. If we will not forgive, how can we expect that person to ever make things right and move forward? (Galatians 6:1)
15. **Notice that a lack of forgiveness keeps the bystander in a state of sorrow.** In verse 31, we see that other bystanders witnessed the actions of the servant, and they were very sorry as a result. Perhaps, they feared that someone would do the same to them, or maybe they were sorry because they saw the impending destruction that would be caused by his actions? When we are not willing to forgive, we often affect others around us who struggle to keep us encouraged. They can typically see the damage we are doing to ourselves, and it can be sorrowful to watch a person destroy himself. Additionally, there are those who are trying to help others be restored, and they become sorrowful when the fruits of their work are in vain due to a lack of forgiveness. (Hebrews 12:14-16)
16. **Notice that a lack of forgiveness kindles the anger of the Lord.** In verse 34, we see that the Lord was wroth with the servant because of his actions. Given that the Lord is merciful and full of grace, an unforgiving heart is in direct defiance of God and His nature. When His anger is kindled, the work of the Lord is not being fulfilled. A great example of this is the nation of Israel in the wilderness. As a result of bringing the anger of the Lord, they had to make a detour from the will of God. (Numbers 32:13)

**CONCLUSION**: If there is someone that you have not forgiven, you should not wait any longer to give them forgiveness. Whether they have asked for it or not, the forgiveness must first start in your heart. We should continue to remind ourselves daily of the forgiveness that God has given us on the cross of Calvary. Additionally, we should remember that God expects us to be tough as Christians and not allow ourselves to be so easily offended. No offense is worth keeping you from fulfilling the will of God in your life.