



NO LIMITS

by Carl McMurray

Some biblical subjects seem to have the ability to capture our interest over and over again through the years. Sometimes it is because they are puzzling, such as how Noah got all those animals in the ark. Sometimes it is because the subject is important to us personally, such as how I can “know” and have confidence in my relationship with an eternal God. I believe the topic of forgiveness falls into this latter category.

Many of us seem continually interested in the subject of forgiveness. Possibly this is because the humble spirit is always seeking it. Just as possible, however, is the interest coming from a desire to give it as it has been given. Whatever our interest, Matthew 18:21-35 gives us a slant on this subject that should build our appreciation for forgiveness, whether giving or receiving it. Our Lord touches on the unlimited nature of forgiveness.

The first thing we immediately note is the comparison between men’s idea of gracious forgiveness (seven times) and God’s idea (seventy times seven, i.e. an unlimited number). How thankful we should be that God is in heaven and not man. Even when man tries to be gracious, he does not approach the level of forgiving mercy our Father and Savior are able to extend. There are no limits on the number of times God will forgive if one is truly penitent. While man’s forgiveness might be numbered and expended, God’s forgiveness is unlimited, uncountable, immeasurable, and unexpendable — no limits.

As Jesus relates His account, we are struck by the figure of the debt He uses. One man owes another ten thousand talents. Depending on the price of silver, that might well amount to over ten million dollars. The thought of one in Jesus’ day owing that much is significant. It is obviously a figure beyond any ability to repay. So, we are made to understand clearly that there are no limits to the amount of the debt. God sets no limits on the sin He will forgive, if one will repent. There is no limit on the distance we might go from our Lord as long as we’re willing to turn and come back. His forgiveness in this way is unlimited.

Lastly, we read the sad end of the account. The one who is forgiven so great a debt as to be unpayable goes out and holds a much smaller debt over a fellow servant. He mistreats his fellow servant even to casting him into the same “debtor’s prison” he himself just recently escaped from by grace. Word of this despicable behavior gets back to his master, and he is soon called into account. Verse 33 is the clear lesson; mercy received should have been mercy extended. Because it wasn’t, the slave is not just sent into prison, but now is turned over to the torturers. His fate is sealed. Likewise, the lesson should be clear to us. God’s mercy is tied strongly to His sovereignty. Because He is The Living God, He can even override justice (what one deserves) with His mercy (what one does not deserve). At the same time He does this, however, His justice does not just disappear. His justice (the equalization of all things, making all wrongs right) becomes tied to His forgiveness, and it also becomes limitless. There is no limit to its extent. When one receives God’s mercy in forgiveness and refuses to extend that same mercy to others, there are no limits on God, no limits on His justice, no limits on the righting of this foul wrong. Our God is a God of righteousness who is not bound by rule or mind games. He can and will make all things right. Mercy shown in forgiveness received, and then selfishly withheld from others, will be punished, and as a last note, there seems to be no limits to the extent of that punishment.

Forgiveness is an unlimited subject when connected with a Holy God and not a subject to be considered lightly. May we all learn this gracious attitude in order to become more like our Father and honor the exchange of justice for mercy.

