

Learning to Forgive, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 18:23–27

Code: 2334

REVIEW

In the final section of Matthew 18, we are learning about the importance of forgiving one another. Rather than holding vengeance or grudges, we free ourselves from the bondage of those things as we forgive others as we ourselves have been forgiven. Having seen the Enquiry, the Extent, and the Effect of Forgiveness, let's now turn our attention to...

IV. THE EXAMPLE OF FORGIVENESS (vv. 23-25)

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, who owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had nothing with which to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant, therefore, fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, who owed him an hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what thou owest. And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me! Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was angry, and delivered him to the inquisitors [or, tormentors], till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall My heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye, from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother his trespasses."

A. The Identification of the Persons Involved

1. The Chastening of Christians

There is a very straightforward principle in this parable that is accompanied with a certain harshness. In fact, there is such severity in the attitude of the king in verse 34 and in the application in verse 35, that many people have studied the parable and concluded that it couldn't be speaking about Christians. They ask, "How could the Lord get angry with Christians and turn them over to the tormentors?" Well, let me tell you at the very beginning that I believe it does apply to Christians, and as we go through the parable verse by verse, I will point out those elements that cause me to believe so. If you do not forgive others, you will not be forgiven, having put yourself into a position to experience two things: the loss of joy in communing with the Lord, and the chastening of the Lord. On this basis, I see no problem with understanding what happens at the end of this parable as the chastening that comes to a sinning Christian. We should not be shocked that the Lord is harsh and stringent in dealing with His own because that's partly how He conforms them to the holy standard of His revealed will. We also know very clearly from the twelfth chapter of Hebrews that the Lord does chasten His own. In fact, verse 6 says that He scourges His children, using similar terminology to the idea of tormentors in verse 34.

2. The Context of the Chapter

The key to understanding who the parable applies to is found back in verse 23 at the beginning of

the parable with the word "therefore." That word links it with the previous passage, which is all about one Christian forgiving another Christian. It deals with my brother or sister in Christ who sins in the fellowship and needs to be restored and forgiven, and the parable is built on that principle. Though this is a general principle which can be widely applied, it is primarily a reference to those within the family of God who need to understand the import of forgiveness. It is a very dramatic and powerful truth. The only question is whether or not we choose to obey its application.

Let's begin our consideration of the parable with verse 23:

B. The Interpretation of the Parable's Instruction

1. The Conviction of Sin (v. 23)

"Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would take account of his servants."

a. "...the kingdom of heaven..." Now the Lord often spoke about His Kingdom in terms of parables, which are veiled stories from common everyday life that carry a spiritual meaning. They usually provide a description of some element of the Kingdom of heaven, or the sphere of God's rule on earth through grace and salvation. We are presently in that Kingdom, for we who love Christ are under His control and power, because God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Although very frequently in Matthew, the Kingdom is broader than the actual people in it and doesn't include those who superficially attach themselves to it, I think in this context as Jesus is talking to the disciples, that He is speaking of the Kingdom in its truest sense: "People who are in My Kingdom need to understand that My Kingdom is like this...." b. "...a certain king..." The main character in this parable is a king, and this is the first parable given in the New Testament in which God is likened to a king. This particular king had set a time to take account of.... c. "...his servants..." 1) A Specific Identification The word "servants" is *douloi* in the Greek, which means "bondslaves or bondservants." It refers to a servant who is in bondage to his master, though it doesn't necessarily mean he's in chains. Though some of them may have had very limited freedoms, others would have had very extensive freedoms and privileges. They were, nonetheless, bound to the one over them whether they were slaves, or household servants with more liberty than a slave, or even provincial governors called satraps, as they were in this case. Serving the king by ruling the various provinces of his kingdom, the satraps had the responsibility to report to the king and to rule in his behalf, primarily in the area of collecting taxes which were then to be turned over to the royal treasury for the support of the entire kingdom. So the term here is not the one used for the usual household or bondslave type of servant, but is used to refer to the provincial governors. 2) A General Application Now may I suggest to you that these servants are picture of all men in general, for when God created man, He gave him dominion over the earth, making him a steward of all that he possesses. Whether men know Christ or not, they have been entrusted with the treasure given by God. Their very life and breath are gifts from God along with all that they possess. It is God who provides for their needs and heals their ailments. All the talents, capabilities, and potential they have has been deposited in them by God Himself. For this reason, every man lives in the world, even before he knows God, with a stewardship committed to him by God who created him the way he is and where he is. I understand this parable, then, as speaking of a king who has given all his servants certain commodities. Those commodities belong to the king, and his servants owe him an account for their use of those commodities. This is why verse 23 says that he.... d. "...would take account..." 1) Explained Now I don't believe this is the ultimate accounting, but rather an annual accounting when the king wants to take an inventory of all the taxes that these provincial governors had collected. At this periodic accounting, they had to give the royal treasury the proper percentage and keep for themselves and their own operation what was rightfully theirs. 2) Expressed What we see in the passage is that God calls men to a periodic accounting. It isn't necessarily the final accounting of the Great White Throne Judgment, but it is the accounting of a time of great conviction when men are called to face God for what they're doing with their lives. That's the heart of the

interpretation of the first few verses of the parable. For some people, that accounting might be happening today for the first time or the hundredth time. But periodically, through the flow of life, since men possess in their hands the stewardship of the things that God owns, they are called to give an account for their lives before that final judgment verdict is rendered at the Great White Throne.^{a)} Romans 1 God has deposited in man the knowledge of Himself by providing in the environment around him enough information so that he may follow that path to a deeper knowledge of God. God has also given man the intellectual capability to understand the truth presented to him in the revealed Word and through the Holy Spirit. In other words, God has given a treasure to men that they are to perceive as having come from Him, and they are to follow that perception to the full understanding of who He is and what He wants. God periodically calls men to such an accounting.^{b)} John 16 Verse 8 says that the Holy Spirit convicts "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit at the discretion of the sovereignty of God, to periodically call men to an accounting of conviction. You've been there. At one of those junctures, if you're a Christian, you believed in Jesus Christ. You were called to an accounting when someone preached a sermon or confronted you with the sinfulness of sin showing you the law of God and how miserably short of it you were. Someone informed you that you had violated the law of God, and when you looked in your heart aided by the convicting work of the Spirit and the Word of God, you saw that it was so and realized you were a sinner. Whether that conviction for some of you was heightened by a physical illness, by the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or some other painful experience, you ultimately accepted the grace of salvation.³⁾ Exemplified God calls men to such accountings whereby alarming circumstances, truth, or guilt penetrate to the conscience and awaken those who appeared to be asleep before to suddenly realize the sinfulness of their sin. Sometimes he brings along severe circumstances to heighten that intense awareness.^{a)} Romans 7 That's exactly what happened to the Apostle Paul. He was going along in his life and it seemed as though everything was going well when all of a sudden God took him on the Damascus road, slammed him in the dirt, and blinded him, calling him to an accounting. I believe it was at that very point in his life that Romans 7 became a reality to him and he looked inside his life and he saw that exceeding sinfulness of his sin. He had sort of smugly gone on prior to that thinking that he could keep the law on his own, no doubt under a certain kind of conviction in his desire to self-righteously please God. However, he failed to understand the exceeding sinfulness of sin until he was slammed in the dirt, blinded, and forced to face the reality that sin is not just something you do or don't do on the outside, but is something that boils in the very nature of the soul itself. When Paul saw the sinfulness of sin, he had a right response, but not all people do. For example, in...^{b)} Matthew 19 The rich young ruler was confronted by Jesus Christ. He, too, thought that sin was only an external issue of what you do or don't do, and when he was told the commandments he had to keep to gain eternal life, he said, "All these things have I kept from my youth up..." (v. 20). The Lord drove the point to his heart as if to say, "It isn't what you do or don't do on the outside, it's what's inside, and what I see in you is covetousness. Therefore, you need to do sell everything you have and give the money to the poor. Sadly, the man walked away because he was convicted, but he rejected the conviction. He had an accounting that day but he rejected it. Paul, on the other hand, was brought to an accounting and he saw the laws of coveting, of lust, and of of evil desire at work in his life. But instead of turning and walking away, he embraced the Savior who alone could deliver him from his sin, and he was redeemed. All men come to that same accounting. It may happen again and again and it may be rejected each time. But for all of us who know Christ, at one time it was accepted and we entered into eternal life. Having seen how God calls men to account through the conviction of sin, let's examine...

2. The Calculation of Sin (v. 24)

"And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, who owed him ten thousand talents." At the time of conviction, one is forcefully brought because these people don't come voluntarily. He would never have come if he had not been called, for it would be an admission of guilt for embezzling

the ten thousand talents.

Now, it is difficult to calculate exactly how much ten thousand talents would have amounted to, because from one nation to another and from one time period to another, values change so much. All we can say is that this was a lot. However, comparative figures might give us a better appreciation of how large this debt would have been.

a. The Comparisons in Scripture¹) **Literal Amounts** This provincial governor in the parable owed ten thousand talents. As a fascinating comparison you might want to know that at the same period of time around the life of Jesus, the total revenue collected by the Roman government from Idumea, Judea, and Samaria, was 600 talents. The total revenue collected from Galilee was 300 talents. So if this guy had collected, embezzled, and wasted ten thousand talents, it is easier to realize what an astronomical figure it was. For another example, when the Tabernacle was built, many of its elements including the Ark of the Covenant were overlaid with gold. Yet, Exodus 38:24 tells us that there were only 29 talents of gold used. And then when the Temple was built, David donated three thousand talents of gold (1 Chr. 29:4). For this reason, many people have estimated that the amount mentioned in the parable could be millions and even billions of dollars. When the queen of Sheba came to visit Solomon, she gave him a gift of 120 talents that was commensurate with his own incredible wealth (1 Kgs. 10:10). The king of Assyria demanded 30 talents of gold from Hezekiah before he would withdraw from Judah (2 Kgs. 18:14).²) **Figurative Amounts** a) Daniel 7:10 -- In a vision of the glorious Son of man at His Second Coming, the scene is described as He comes before the Ancient of days: "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him; a thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him...." This pictures the vast amount of angels that were present. b) Revelation 5:11 -- "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Such usages of the words thousands and ten thousands appear in both the Old and New Testaments (S. of S. 5:10; Ezk. 45:1-5; 48:9-18; 1 Cor. 4:15; 14:19). The largest numerical term in the Greek language is ten thousand (murias). Rather than being a technical term for an exact number, it is a figurative expression which means "myriads." It would be equivalent to us saying, "He owed the king zillions." It's just a term that attempts to take us beyond numeration. Therefore, in the passage under consideration, "ten thousand talents" is best understood to mean that the servant owed an incalculable debt beyond any ability to repay, let alone even to calculate. b. **The Conclusion About Sin** This debt that is owed is best interpreted as being our sin. We are brought before God in a moment of conviction and we are faced with the fact that our sin is inestimable, its sum being beyond comprehension. When a person comes to the accounting time of conviction by the Spirit through the Word, God intends for the person to see the utter sinfulness of sin. Essentially, this is the message of Paul in Romans 7:13 where he admits, "When I saw what I really was in light of God's law, I realized the utter sinfulness of sin." That realization is a critical element in leading someone to true salvation. Every one of us must be brought to the point where we see an insurmountable mountain of sin in our lives.

3. The Consequences of Sin (v. 25)

"But forasmuch as he had nothing with which to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made."

This is just punishment for a real debt, which apparently arose from him embezzling money from the king. When his thievery was discovered, there was no way for him to recover any of it. For this reason, he and his family were sold into slavery along with his possessions in order to regain some of the money that had been taken. And the fact that no complaint was recorded, implies that this punishment is even better than justice because the debt couldn't be paid.

a. **The Practice of the Heathen** This kind of punishment would have been unusual in Israel. There are only a few special circumstances in the Old Testament where a person could be sold into the service of another to repay a debt. But this was primarily the way the pagan world operated, so people in that

part of the world would have been very familiar with such a practice. If you couldn't pay a debt, you instantly became a slave and you paid your debt by working off what you could. Your wife and kids became slaves, and everything you owned was sold and turned into cash for the one to whom you owed the debt. That was not uncommon. The man who had been defrauded had a right to claim back all that he could claim. (I think if we had such laws today, it might affect some of those who abuse bankruptcy laws, knowing that they would have to go to work for the one to whom they are indebted.)b. The Punishment of Hell1) An Eternity of JudgmentThe fact that the debt could never be paid is a good indication that this punishment is a reference to hell. Where else are men sent to pay for their sin, the unpayable debt they owe to God? People may go to hell to pay for their sins, but one thing you need to know is all eternity in hell will still not pay for their sins. They just go there to pay whatever is possible to be paid. The parable teaches that the debt of sin is so vast that it could never be repaid. You could never recover the glory stolen from God. And the sad fact is that men who have spent eternity in hell will be no better for their payment than they were when they began--they'll be no more fit for heaven at the end of that time, were there an end, than they would be in its beginning.2) An Expression of JusticeWhen people are sent to hell, it is because God is a just God who says that sin is an unpayable debt that must be punished. The utter bankruptcy of every son of Adam makes it impossible for them to pay off the debt they owe to God. Furthermore, the inability to be made any better by the punishment that they suffer in hell means that men will never be able to repay the debt, nor will they ever be any more fit for heaven than they were when they were first sent to hell. Truly, this is a terrible picture, but the king is not a tyrant--he is a just king. In fact, he's been merciful in not calling this individual to an accounting long before he did. He has even given life in itself as an act of mercy, for you could have been sent to hell as soon as you were born. So I encourage you, if you are not a Christian, to respond to God's merciful calling and conviction of your heart.

4. The Confession of Sin (v. 26)

"The servant, therefore, fell down, and worshiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

a. The servant, therefore, fell down..."That's quite a prayer. First of all, he was in the right position...he fell down. I think the man was devastated. He was at the end, because he knew what he faced--he couldn't pay the debt and was going to lose his freedom and be in permanent bondage. He realized that he could work his whole lifetime and never pay it off. Once he went into the service of that man to pay off that debt, he would be in abject slavery until the end. Without pleading for justice or denying his sin, he confesses his guilt, and falling down crushed and broken in true humility. He was in the very attitude where God wants men to be when He convicts them of sin--overwhelmed with their own sinfulness and shattered by a debt they could never pay as they face an eternity of inability with no relief in sight.b. "...and worshiped him..."This phrase literally means "to kiss toward." It comes from kissing the hand, the knee, or the foot of the monarch to whom you pled for mercy. In this manner, the servant pleads for mercy, admitting his sin like the publican who beat his breast saying, "...God be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk. 18:13b).c. "...Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."Like so many broken men, the servant doesn't fully understand the impossibility of paying the debt back. Desperately he pleads for compassion and his lord's patient endurance. Though he rationally knows the debt can't be paid back, in this highly emotional moment, he hopes he can think of some ways to do it.The servant's response is rather typical of those who are under conviction. The first response that comes to them when they are overpowered by guilt and confronted with the sinfulness of sin is, "I've got to shape my life up and be a better person. I want to turn over a new leaf and make some resolutions. I want to moralize and reform myself." He has admitted his sin and acknowledged the lostness of his condition, but he really doesn't quite understand how that the debt could ever be paid. So he begs for a chance at it, promising to do the best he can. He is like people who, in the midst of their conviction, seek to be religious. That's not uncommon. But before they come to Christ to receive the gift of forgiveness from Him, they usually

want to make themselves better during this process of pre-salvation conviction. The heart attitude is right. It's just that they doesn't understand the grace of forgiveness yet. Now that his lord has him right where he wants him, let's see the lord's response:

5. The Compassion in Spite of Sin (v. 27)

"Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

a. Explained 1) The Loosening Though the convicting power of the law of God has smashed and crushed the servant as he cries out for patience, I want you to notice that the king has no comment on the utter impossibility of what he promised in verse 26. He doesn't say, "O silly man...you can't pay." Rather, the lord compassionately forgives the debt. He forgave an absolutely incomprehensible debt in a moment out of compassion for the debtor. The phrase "loosed him" means that the lord released the servant from the obligation of the debt. Why did he do that? Because he was moved with compassion. 2) The Love Where does compassion come from? It comes from love. This lord happened to love that servant, as God loves all men, and when he saw him in a situation where there was no remedy, his love was not diminished. Even though the debt was incurred against him when his treasury had been robbed, the king still forgave the servant. 3) The Loan At the end of verse 27, the Greek literally says that "the king forgave him the loan." The king is so tenderhearted, he considers it as a loan instead of money embezzled. He cancelled the loan. He released the obligation.

How to Receive the Forgiveness of God

You say, "Well, what did the guy do to deserve such forgiveness? How do you get the forgiveness of God?" You come to God with a broken heart over your utter sinfulness, knowing you could never pay the debt. You cry out to God for mercy and patience, aware that you deserve eternal judgment. In the midst of that brokenness, God comes in His tender grace and loving kindness to forgive your debt. I believe that the moment the sinner recognizes and confesses his sin, coming with a repentant and worshipful heart to the only One who can possibly forgive it, is the time when God rushes in with the forgiveness made available in Jesus Christ. God can forgive because He Himself has absorbed the loss through the death of Jesus Christ who has already paid the debt for sin.

The process of God's forgiveness is illustrated in Joseph. He called his brothers and poured conviction on them until they were devastated with guilt. Then he revealed himself and gave them grace. That's how it is in salvation. God comes first as a fire, confronting people as He calls them to an accounting where they face the utter sinfulness of sin. God will forgive, but He will also have the sinner know what and how much is forgiven. That is why Isaiah said that there must first be a recognition of one's sinfulness: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet..." (Isa. 1:18a). In other words, "Before we can talk about making your sins as pure as wool, let's talk about how really bad they are. Let's reason together about your sin." That's where the gospel begins. The sinner must know that there's a mountain of sin that is never able to be repaid by that sinner before he can ever be cast into the deep sea of God's mercy. We must first have the sentence of death in ourselves before the word of life means anything to us. But oh, how comforting it is to know that the moment we come with a mercy-seeking heart, the Father forgives. Do you see yourself there? Such a salvation should cause us to rejoice. We have escaped eternal hell! We have been forgiven a debt we could never pay!

Let's see how the compassion of God is... b. Exemplified I'd like to illustrate this with a familiar story from Luke 15: The Prodigal Son couldn't wait for his father to die so that he could receive his inheritance, so he demanded that his father give him his share in advance. Taking it, he left home and entered into riotous living. But after he became dissolute, having wasted all of his money, he wound up slopping pigs, a rather demeaning task for a noble Jewish boy. 1) A Contrite Sinner Verse 17 says that when he came to his senses, he exclaimed, "How many of my father's hired servants

have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" He realized that his father's hired servants were better off than he was. A hired servant was not a household slave, he was only a day laborer who walked in and was given a job in the morning and was paid and sent away at the end of the day. A hired servant was the lowest of the low, who had no part in the family life. In verse 18, he plans to take action, saying, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." Here we find a contrite sinner who has been broken. He's faced his accounting day slopping pigs. The Spirit of the Lord did His work, allowing the son to look at his own life and admit his wretchedness. He saw the unpayable debt that he owed his father after having taken all of his inheritance and affronted the love of his father. The love and money of his father which he wasted could never be repaid. In verse 19 he continues rehearsing his speech of repentance, saying, in effect, "Look, I'll just offer myself as a hired servant and, until the day I die, I'll try to work it off. I won't ask for a thing. I don't even want to be treated as part of the family." He was saying essentially what the man in the parable of Matthew 18 was saying: "I'll come back and I'll do my best to work off the debt." That's the attitude of the sinner. He's shattered over his sinfulness, he knows he has a debt to God he can't pay, but he says, "I'll just do all I can to pay it." And he figures maybe the Father will let him be a hired servant. 2) A Compassionate Savior Verse 20 says, "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran...." The father, periodically looking down the road, has waited and watched for his son every day for a long time. And seeing him in the distance, he does something that just shows no class at all...he has compassion on his son in spite of what he had done. Furthermore, the father ran--literally "raced" in the Greek--which seems to be totally out of character for an older man of nobility in the east. Of such, one would expect a slow, dignified gait. Did you ever try to run full speed down a road with a robe dragging on the ground? You couldn't do it very well. Do you know what the father must have done? He must have gathered up the whole garment into his arms and thus exposed his undergarments which was the shame of all shames for a man. Picture him running down the road while everybody's looking on, saying, "What is that crazy guy doing running down the road like that? He is shaming himself! He is humiliating himself, pursuing that wretched kid of his!" Do you see the character of God in the father there? Do you see God who looks down the road and sees the sinner coming and who humiliates Himself by embracing that sinner? Do you see God coming into the world in the form of Jesus Christ, picking up the robes of His regal splendor and showing his undergarment, as it were, in the humiliation of His Son as He pursues the sinner down the road? Well what happens when the father and son meet? Verse 20 says that the father "fell on his [son's] neck" and began kissing him tenderly and repeatedly. He didn't say, "Oh listen, if you'd like a job, I can maybe work it out." No, he kisses and embraces his son even before hearing the son's humble confession: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But the father says, "Stop that speech, kill the fatted calf, and put a ring on his finger--my son is home!" That is a great illustration of the forgiveness of God. The sinner wants to try and work off the debt of his sin, but God graciously embraces him and makes him a son. That's the gospel--that's what God has done for us.

CONCLUSION

If God has so forgiven you, are you obeying the lesson of the parable, and forgiving each other? If you're not, it is the height of evil that you should take so much forgiveness and give so little in return. God has put away the enormity of our sin, and if we have been forgiven so much, how much should we forgive? We will see this question answered in more detail in the second half of the parable.

Focusing on the Facts

1. When you do not forgive others, what two things do you put yourself in a position to experience?
2. Why should we not be shocked that the Lord is harsh in dealing with His children?

3. What is the key word which indicates to whom the parable applies? How does it do so?
4. Of what are parables usually a description?
5. What kind of a servant was the one in the parable most likely to have been? What would have been his primary duty?
6. In what sense are all men stewards for God?
7. What type of an accounting is in view in the parable? What kind of accounting does God call men to from time to time throughout their lives?
8. Why has God provided a knowledge of himself in man and in man's environment (Rom. 1:19-20)?
9. What does God anticipate men will realize when they are called to an accounting of conviction?
10. Contrast the responses of Paul and the rich young ruler in their accountings of covetousness.
11. In the parable, what is the 10,000 talents best understood to mean?
12. What does the debt in the parable symbolize? How is the recognition of its presence in one's life a critical element in leading him to salvation?
13. What was a common practice among the heathen if a borrower couldn't repay a debt? What did the one who had been defrauded have a right to do?
14. What does the parable teach about the punishment for an unbeliever's debt of sin?
15. What is the implication in the parable that God is a just King?
16. Why was the servant devastated? In what condition does God want men to be when He convicts them of sin?
17. What is a common response that initially comes to people who have been overpowered by guilt and confronted with the sinfulness of sin which shows that they don't understand the grace of forgiveness yet?
18. Why did the king release the servant from the obligation of the debt? What does this teach us about God?
19. What has God Himself absorbed that allows Him to forgive?
20. Briefly explain what the story of the Prodigal Son teaches about the sinner? about God?

Pondering the Principles

1. In a sense, you are a provincial governor for God entrusted with a stewardship. On a piece of paper, list every treasure that is directly in your care and indirectly in your sphere of influence, such as your material blessings, your abilities and spiritual gifts, your relatives, neighbors, friends, and co-workers, and so on. Next, decide how you can improve your oversight and care in each of these areas. Make a prayerful commitment to God, not to squander His resources, but to use and to relate to them in ways that honor Him.
2. Is the forgiveness of sin a vital element in the gospel that you share with others? Why must it be so? (see p. 11) Do you think an unbeliever can understand God's great mercy without understanding his own great debt of sin? Have you considered sharing the gospel by relating the story of the Prodigal Son? It might provide a vivid picture of man's waywardness and God's mercy that will make a lasting impression upon those you share it with.
3. Meditate upon God's mercy in Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. 9:6-31). If mercy is understood as being kindness that withholds deserved judgment, where do you see that attribute expressed in this passage? Thank God in your own prayer for the mercy He has shown to you at your salvation and in your daily life.

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