

**The Federated Church of Hyannis**  
**Sermon for Sunday, November 15, 2020**  
**Reverend Derek White**

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

Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?”

“No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”

“Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt.

“But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.

“But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment.

“His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.

“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.

“That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

## SERMON: “CAN I FORGIVE?” PART II

### INTRODUCTION:

Welcome to our second part of the series of “Can I Forgive?”. Last week was the story of the prodigal son that focused on how forgiveness really benefits us the forgiver. We covered what forgiveness is not.

- Forgiveness is Not Forgetting
- Forgiveness is Not Reconciliation
- Forgiveness is Not Redemption
- Forgiveness is Not Faking it

**Forgiveness is not allowing what others do stand in the way of what God calls us to do.**

We forgive because we believe in grace and God’s unconditional love. We can forgive people we don’t like. We do this because Jesus taught us to forgive. We forgive because it is for our benefit, not for those who have wronged us. We are free to receive joy and happiness when we release our bitterness towards others.

### **Part 1: FORGIVE OUR DEBTS**

Last week was about forgiving transgressions. This week is about forgiving debts. Next week will be about forgiving sins.

The word Jesus uses when he teaches his disciples how to pray the Lord’s Prayer in Greek is ὀφείλω (opheilo). The majority of scholars agree that this word means a financial debt. However, in the context that Jesus uses it in reference to God, it doesn’t make sense to think we owe God money as a debtor. Therefore, it is open to other possibilities in translation like trespasser, debtor, or sinner. Trespass suggests a fine to be paid. Debt implies an amount borrowed or owed required for repayment. Sins is sometimes used in the Lord’s prayer because of the belief a sacrifice is the payment for sin.

We don’t give God money to pay off our debts owed to God. When we give resources like money it is part of stewardship. This being stewardship Sunday we make pledges out of gratitude for what the Lord has provided. We **don’t** try to pay off God with financial support.

The most accurate translation of the word “opheilo” is debts. But in the context Jesus uses it, it can have multiple layers of meaning. And a good Rabbi would have had teachings that had multiple layers of meanings to them.

We are called to **forgive trespasses**. We are called to **forgive debts**. We are called to **forgive sins**, but we forgive those sins when we know God has forgiven those sins.

## **Part 2: FORGIVE OUR DEBTS**

In the Matthew 18:21-35 we have the parable of Jesus as it regards to forgiveness of debts. Again, when Jesus speaks of debts he is not speaking of debts in the financial sense, Jesus is referring to debts in the spiritual sense. At first glance at this parable we might think this is the forgiving financial debts. It is not. Our money has no value in heaven because it is worthless as a means of exchanging goods and services. What God gives is given freely; it cannot be purchased. So this parable is not about money, this parable is about grace.

What Jesus is speaking about is the evil practice of slavery. No one should be in debt to another. Last week we discussed the prodigal son who returned to his father asking to be taken back as a slave because he was unworthy to be treated as a son after wasting his fortune. The father refuses to treat him as a servant slave. As a matter of fact, the father pardons the son for throwing it all away because he loves his son.

I learned a hard lesson many years ago. **If you think someone owes you something, you're wrong**. In the same way **if you think you don't owe others something, you're wrong**. All good gifts come from God. It is God who provides, it is our responsibility to be faithful stewards of those gifts. And if we have been more fortunate than others, we need to share what we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ. **How can we ask God to forgive us of our debts if we don't also ask for the debts of our debtors to be forgiven?** It is not the government that zeroes out the debt, it is God who zeroes out the debt by providing the equity for all.

## **Part 3: WHO DO WE REALLY BORROW FROM?**

Everyone borrows. An economy is based on how we take what God has given us for free, assign a value to it, transfer that value to a thing we call money, and move the values from one group of people to another group of people. It is all about the flow of goods and services. But at the end of the day it all comes from God. God does not assign value to it; we assign value to it. God does not create debt, we create debt. And based on

wealth and debt we treat people with inequality. **We treat people with inequality, God does not treat people with inequality.**

Anyone who abuses the poor or fails to help the poor get out of debt is the servant in the parable Jesus preached. Jesus did not preach socialism; Jesus preached the forgiveness of debts. Socialism means everyone gets the same amount. Jesus didn't preach that. Jesus preached everyone's debts should be forgiven. Some were forgiven much, other were forgiven a little. **It is not about how much we receive; it is about how much we are forgiven.**

Forgiveness is what benefits everyone. We cannot receive grace and then refuse to share grace. It is a pay it forward system. If trickle-down economics worked with grace, it be an incredible thing. But unfortunately, there are many who need grace and there is a broken system of distribution. Jesus warns it is far worse to hold back grace than it is to violate the Levitical laws or the 10 Commandments. Sin is sin, but nothing annoys God more than those who have received grace and then exploit others by refusing to share grace. The consequences of such actions are severe.

### **Conclusion: Grace Filled People Forgive**

Grace filled people forgive. This sermon series is on the topic of "Can I Forgive". If we have received grace than the answer is yes. Everything we need to pay it forward comes from God. If your neighbor can't repay you don't put them in debtor jail. What I mean by that is don't demand repayment or hold a grudge against someone if they cannot give you what they don't have. If you have two cloaks and they don't have one, share what you have rather than selling it to them on credit with interest. It's called usury and it is unbiblical. Many often inflate the debts of others demanding more than what God instructs us is a fair exchange rate. We engage in currency manipulation of grace when we do that.

Jesus used the word *opheilo* meaning debts when he taught the disciples how to pray. He used the parable of the debtor as a metaphor to teach that unforgiveness is not an option for those who want to receive grace. The economies we create use currencies that mean nothing to God. The only currency that matters in the Kingdom Jesus taught his disciples about is the currency of grace. And like all economies it needs to flow in the allocation and distribution of grace. To be part of that kingdom means we all benefit from an economy of grace. Grace is God's GDP.