



**KIAMA ANGLICAN  
CHURCHES**

**Congregational Ethics:**

**Other-Centred Love**

**Sermon - Steve Stanis**

**5 February 2023**

**Matthew 18:10-35**



## Sermon Series: Ethics & Encounters (Matthew 18:10-22:14)

### Introduction

They were the 'up and coming' couple in the Youth Group... committed, focused on Jesus, training and growing in the role of youth group leaders of a vibrant, dynamic church. They were very much in love and marriage was the next announcement we all expected. However, the announcement that came surprised us all. One evening service they announced to the congregation that they were expecting a baby.

Back in our day, this came as a great shock; people were surprised, some even devastated. Their private choice was now thrust into the public domain. However, they stood before us with contrite sincerity, asking for forgiveness from God and from his church.

We are still in touch with this couple. Their faithful response, trusting in the forgiveness of God, taking hold of the grace of God, still marks them today. They understand their dependence on God, not in their own strength.

Forgiveness asked for and forgiveness received, are such powerful aspects of our faith.

Today, their first son leads a youth group in a nearby suburb. Other-centred love is able to forgive so that others can thrive. Today I will look at four aspects of forgiveness that reveal God's grace through Jesus in our lives.

## Sermon Series: Ethics & Encounters (Matthew 18:10-22:14)

### 1. To forgive or be forgiven is beyond our own measure

A man who was telling a friend about an argument he'd had with his wife commented, "Oh, how I hate it, every time we have an argument, she gets 'historical'. The friend replied, "You mean 'hysterical'? "No", he insisted, "I mean historical. Every time we argue she drags up everything from the past and holds it against me."

In Matthew 18, right after Jesus' instruction on resolving conflict, Peter asks a probing question.

"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Fortunately for Peter, the religious leaders of the day had put a numerical cap on this question. Rabbinical law said three times. Peter, ever the overachiever, generously added four more. He expected Jesus to be very impressed.

But Jesus' response was to not measure forgiveness.

"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

The forgiveness Jesus requires does not count the cost. It does not exact repayment. It does not measure our failings.

Jesus goes on to tell a story to explain his daunting answer.

A servant is brought before his master to settle an account. Verse 25 says, "Since he was not able to pay." This servant, who promised to pay back everything, **can't** pay! Yet his master overlooks his empty promise and personally absorbs the debt. Remind you of anyone? Thank you, Jesus!

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Romans 5:8 says,

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Our gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus is revealed in how merciful we are to those who owe us. Our horizontal relationship with one another reveals the nature of our vertical one with God.

Forgiveness is not a spiritual gift. Forgiveness is a choice that we have to make daily. Jesus looked down on those who had nailed him to a cross, and he cried out,

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

Isn't this the example we must follow? Forgiveness is a choice. It cannot be measured. As we truly understand God's forgiveness in our lives, we must strive to express this same forgiveness to others.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The full measure of forgiveness and our capacity to forgive can only find its full payment within the outstretched arms of Jesus Christ.

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### 1. Forgiveness and our capacity to forgive requires a change of heart

Shortly after, this 'forgiven' servant pursues a fellow servant who owes him far less than he had owed his master. He grabs him and begins to choke him.

"Pay what you owe!"

The fellow servant's reply sounds familiar.

"Have patience with me, and I will pay it back."

Is this fellow servant also making a promise he cannot keep? Maybe!

Forgiveness is not about negotiation. Forgiveness requires a change of heart. The unforgiving servant has not had a change of heart. He is a hypocrite with a hardened heart. Unrepentant, his situation is hopeless. The master hears of his lack of mercy and he is sent to the gaolers.

Our new life, our change of heart, happens when our hearts are filled with the love of God. He sends his Spirit to transform us. The more we allow the love of God to fill our minds and emotions... the more we allow our love for our Heavenly Father to grow within our hearts... the easier it is to love others with the pure love of Christ.

As always, Christ is our exemplar. In his teachings as in his life, he showed us the way. He forgave the fringe dwellers, the unaccepted and those who sought to hurt and to do him harm.

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Jesus said it is easy to love those who love us; anyone can do *that*. But Jesus Christ taught a higher way. His words echo through the centuries and are meant for us today. They are meant for all who desire to be his disciples. They are meant for you and me:

Matthew 5:44 "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven."

Forgiveness may not initially be forgetting when personal boundaries are disregarded through hurtful words or actions. It is our daily experience that we love each other and we hurt each other. We must grapple hard with forgiveness to get there. We need to pray. We need space. We need to dwell on the Word of God.

When our hearts are filled with the love of God, we become kinder to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, even as God for Christ's sake forgave us.

True reconciliation, not just patching up cracks that open up again when put under pressure, is found in the power of the Spirit.

The pure love of Christ renews our hearts and minds. This change in our heart separates us from our old ways. We turn to God. Heaven is not full of perfect people. It is full of forgiven people.

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### **2. Forgiveness is humanity's deepest need and God's highest achievement**

God's highest achievement is gathering his people, in his place, under his rule. Our hope is eternity with him forever. For us to enter his glory, we must turn to him in repentance, knowing we need his forgiveness. God offers his forgiveness because of his love.

Forgiveness is love in action. It is where the two great commandments from Jesus intersect.

**Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and love one another as I have loved you.**

It is our greatest need to experience God's love. God's full expression of his love is wrapped up in grace, forgiveness and mercy, shown to us in his son, Jesus. This forgiveness is our greatest need.

Stop and reflect on this for each of us. As you become older and more experienced in your faith is it easier to love and easier to forgive?

The need for forgiveness is understood in the context of our need for relationship, both relationship with God and the people we live with. We are exhorted to love each other. We note in the parable of the lost sheep, not even 99 out of 100 is satisfactory. So it is with our forgiveness. 99 out of 100 is not satisfactory. God's call is that forgiveness becomes 100% part of our character. All are worthy in God's eyes.



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These words are simple to speak but so difficult to apply, especially in the times we are dry, desolate, struggling, or sad. When our faith feels blurred or we are spinning out of control, we must focus every part of ourselves on the Lord our God and give him our love, no matter how weak it may seem. This is a great command from God because he understands our greatest need.

Malcolm Fraser, in 1971 said, "Life is not meant to be easy." Our human nature seeks to measure out love and forgiveness because we can be quick to discern right and wrong from our own perspective. Rather, as we grip firmly to God's promise of love, we can delight in forgiveness. As George Bernard Shaw says, **"Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful."**

The only way to understand this command to love is to seek the Kingdom of God above all else. Put down your earthly treasure so that you store heavenly treasure. Seek peace and contentment in your relationships. Let go of anger and resentment. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength is simply a response. We love because he first loved us.

### **3. Forgiveness is active and practical**

Forgiving someone isn't easy. Believe me, I know from personal experience! But I also know it is possible. With promises in the Bible we can do whatever we need to do with God's power.

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Many people think that forgiveness only benefits the *other* person... the person who hurt you... but I would say the main beneficiary is *you*. As you release your bitterness and anger, you are able to live with real peace and joy.

Another reason people choose not to forgive is because they think it's too hard. '

Here are three steps you can take to genuinely forgive:

### *1. Make a Quality Decision*

Forgiveness is about more than saying a prayer, like, "Lord, I forgive so-and-so." It is a serious decision that you make over and over again. It will probably be uncomfortable or even painful but going through this process will always be worth it in the end.

Forgiveness must be based in prayer. Prayer is critical in turning our hearts to God, causing us to be mindful of the Spirit at work in us. When forgiveness is blocked, prayer opens the human heart to allow God to work.

Forgiveness allows us to move forwards. This is hard and we stumble. Life has consequences but forgiveness is the way of other centred love.

### *2. Depend on God*

Fortunately, God gives us the strength to forgive. We can live with a prayerful mindset and attitude: "Lord, help me not to be offended today. Keep me from unnecessary anger. Give me the grace to forgive."

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If you're easily offended or there's a person in your life who just annoys you, not only do you have to decide to forgive and live in peace, but you are going to have to depend on God for the grace to do it and make it a matter of prayer.

This forgiveness requires listening. To listen... really listen to God and others... is the start of healing. Listen with spiritual ears. Grace filled practice within each of our lives speaks more loudly than any words!

### *3. See others with fresh eyes*

God calls us to see others as made in his image. We must see others as Christ sees people - of worth and value. This is other centred love.

In **conclusion**, Romans 12 gives valuable insight into how forgiveness is the gateway to other centred love.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, ... be transformed by the renewing of your mind. ... Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought. ... in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ... Love must be sincere. ... Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ... Live in harmony with one another ... live at peace with everyone.

Amen



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