

# OpenTheo

## Reconciliation (Part 2)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this piece, Steve Gregg discusses the topic of reconciliation in a church community. He suggests that a person who has been kicked out of a church for not following the standards upheld by the community should not be condemned, but instead should be approached with zeal and a desire to vindicate them. He explores the concept of denominationalism and suggests that one should not be afraid to speak out against it, as it is a biblical principle to do so. Gregg also emphasizes the importance of forgiveness and mercy in reconciling with others, even when they have sinned against us multiple times.

### **Transcript**

That person should not be in communion with the church. Now the assumption is, of course, not that we're talking about a person who has fallen one time into getting drunk one weekend, or fell into one immoral situation and repented. We're talking about people who have, this is their life.

They are fornicators. This is how you would describe them, because they're into it. They're into drunkenness, they're into fornication, they're into covetousness.

And the assumption is, of course, if they do it once, they'll be confronted. If they do it twice, they'll be confronted again. If they're keeping doing it, they've spurned confrontation, they have not repented, and therefore put them out and don't have anything to do with them, don't even eat with them.

Now, there was a man, excommunicated from the church in Corinth. We don't know very much about him, but he apparently was an opponent of Paul's. Some think it was even the man that we just were talking about, who was living with his father's wife, though this is not clear at all, and many scholars would dispute this.

But in 2 Corinthians, Paul acknowledges that the church had put a man out of the church, that is, had disciplined a particular person and put him out of the church. And yet, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians that the man should be forgiven. He says in chapter 2 of 2 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 2, verse 5, he says, If anyone has caused grief, he has not

grieved me, but all of you to some extent, not to be too severe.

This punishment which was inflicted, meaning they put someone out of the church, by the majority is sufficient for such a man. He's been punished enough. Presumably he's been brought to repentance now, and the church is still not quite eager to bring him back in, since Paul had ordered them to put him out.

So that on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. Obviously there is some particular person that has been punished by the church, has been disciplined by the church.

He's received discipline. He now wants to come back in. He apparently has repented.

And the church, because Paul has previously asked them to put him out, is not eager to bring him back in without Paul's specific statement on that. And so, Paul says, well, I'm telling you, specifically bring him in. And later in 2 Corinthians 7, he refers to the same thing, the same thing about the guy.

He apparently had written to the church and told them to put this guy out. It was a crisis for the church. It caused a lot of people to be sorry, because Paul had to write so severely to them about it, to put this guy out.

In 2 Corinthians 7, he says, for even if I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it. After he sent the letter, he wasn't sure he had done the right thing.

But now he sees the results, he doesn't regret it now. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while, not permanently. A little sorrow that results in joy later, when the right thing is done.

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted.

But the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner. What diligent it produced in you.

What clearing of yourselves. It showed that they were not going to continue with this person that had to be put out. What indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication.

In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. It seems obvious there was some kind of a scandalous matter going on that Paul had to write to them about. And said, listen, deal with it.

And they did. And he says, you cleared yourselves. You showed that you were not complicit in this particular matter.

We're not sure exactly what the matter was. It was apparently someone who was opposing Paul. But anyway, you notice that Paul takes it for granted in Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians that certain persons ought to be put out of the church.

If you look at 2 Thessalonians, of course if they repent they should be brought back in. In 2 Thessalonians 3 verses 14 and 15, Paul says, And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him. In other words, don't fellowship with him.

That he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now, he's saying if he rejects apostolic authority, if he refuses to obey what the apostles say in letter or whatever, that person should not be fellowshipped with.

He should be disciplined. But do it so that he might repent. Make him ashamed.

The idea is not to hurt him, but to restore him. The idea is to make him ashamed. If a person can sin with impunity in the church and never have to be disciplined, he'll never be ashamed of his sin.

But if the whole church is made aware of it and he's put out, then of course there is hope that he may be ashamed enough to repent. One other passage I'd like to point you to is Titus chapter 3 and verse 10 and 11. Titus 3 verses 10 and 11, Paul says, This resembles what Jesus said in Matthew 18.

You talk to him once, you talk to him twice. If he rejects it, you reject him. He's a divisive man.

He's not submitting to the standards that the church is there to uphold. And he says in verse 11, Knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned. You're not condemning him, he's condemning himself.

If you discipline a party in the church who is unrepentant, you will be accused by many of being condemning, judgmental. How dare you condemn him? Let him that is without sin cast the first stone. You'll hear it many times.

But Paul says, no, he's self-condemned. You're not condemning him. He's condemned himself.

You're just formalizing it. His choice of his sinful behavior and his refusal to repent is his own choice. He could repent and if he chooses to condemn himself, there's certainly no fault in the church notifying him and all concerned that that's what he's done and formalizing it by keeping him from communion, from fellowship.

Yes, it's very, very difficult to take this third step of taking to the church in our modern society. And I'll give you some reasons why. Although it had very good cause and many times good results, the church is in such a subnormal situation, so different than it was in the New Testament days, that it becomes difficult or nigh unto impossible to get those results today.

If a person is unrepentant and you take him before the elders of a church and he won't hear them and you put him out of that church, in all likelihood he'll just go to another church in town. And I have seen it in Santa Cruz. There was a person who got kicked out of three or four churches in a row.

But he could have been kicked out of all four at the same time if there was more unity among them. One church found him to be a charlatan, kicked him out, and he went to another church. The elders of the church that kicked him out contacted the elders of the new church he was in, but they said, mind your own business.

And so it took a while before they found him to be a schmuck. And then they kicked him out and he went to another one. And once again, you see, because the churches are not united as they were expected to be in the New Testament, the guy could just go from church to church and the discipline has no teeth.

Furthermore, as you pointed out, there are different traditions in the churches. And what is a sin in the view of some is not a sin in the view of others. And so this lack of unanimity, this lack of unity, these things make it much more difficult to really carry it out.

I was asked recently by somebody, a Christian brother who has been offended and sinned against by a certain Christian brother, what he should do. He was going to try to go through the steps of Matthew 18. And he said he wondered if this party that has wronged him doesn't repent after the first and second step, should he go to that person's pastor and talk about it? Well, it turns out that the party who is offended doesn't go to the same church as the party who is the offender.

And he was wondering, should I go to the offender's pastor about it? And I hated to be so cynical, but I told him, I said, I don't really know if you get anywhere that way. Because the pastor is very likely to be in favor of the guy from his own church, rather than in favor of some stranger by coming in and making some kind of a vague accusation. And really that's what it is.

There is wrong that has been done here. But it's vague enough. It's all in ways that could be, you could put a different spin on it.

And when the guy is talking to his home pastor, and the accuser is from somewhere else, and the pastor doesn't know him from Adam, there's going to be the tendency,

especially since the guy is a member in good standing of his pastor's church, there's going to be a tendency for the pastor to see his own parishioner's side of the story, especially since he can't confirm it from outside and doesn't know the accuser, and since the accused could always say, but that's not how it happened. Unfortunately there just isn't the kind of cohesiveness in the body of Christ that was taken for granted in the early church. In Paul's day you just wouldn't have two churches in one town separate.

If someone said I'm of Paul and someone else said I'm of Paulus, they'd get roundly rebuked by the apostles for that. And yet that's the norm today. It's not only the norm, it's considered to be okay.

You speak out against this denominationalism and people think you're some kind of weird radical or something, where in fact Paul spoke out very strongly against it. And he was shocked that Christians would even consider it in Corinth, because it was understood that the body of Christ is one, and if one congregation is dealing with a problem and feels necessary to discipline that situation, all the other congregations throughout the world should honor the decision of that church about it, and that discipline should be able to stick. So that that person could not find any readmittance into fellowship with Christians without repenting.

But unfortunately now you can just go from church to church and never repent, and make more victims along the way, wrong more people because churches don't listen. So I'm afraid, well of course you know that I think that Christians ought to follow Jesus' teachings. It's hard to know what to do in this third step.

If the person doesn't hear two or three witnesses, there's a sense in which, depending on the circumstance, if you're in the same church, maybe there is a place for bringing it before the church. If you're from another church, it's not likely that they're going to hear you. Anyway, my experience has been, unfortunately, that they don't.

Maybe someone said we should bring it before them anyway, whether they hear you or not, they'll be responsible, and that's true. It's hard to say what to do in these cases, because in some cases, I mean, things are very different now than in the situation Jesus foresaw in his own, in the days of the apostles who were going to be dealing with these things initially. But these days, for example, I know a guy locally here who took a pastor and his elders to task about something.

They had, he felt sinned, he brought witnesses, several witnesses said the pastor had sinned, and the pastor wouldn't let him, you know, at the church to bring it before the church. So this brother took it on himself to write a letter and Xerox it and send it to all the members of the church in the mail. Well, that's certainly a modern approach to this that couldn't have been done in the old days.

You know, I mean, you couldn't use the Xerox machine and send a private letter to each

member of the congregation in the mail. But that was his way of trying to bring this pastor's sins before this whole church. It's, you know, hard to say whether it got results of any value or not, but I'd have to say there's, I tend to be inclined, if I've talked to somebody alone and with witnesses and no resolution has come, I tend to be inclined to just say, well, we'll drop it and leave it in God's hands.

You know, I mean, it's not that I don't think resolution should come, it's just it's hard to know exactly what to do in a modern situation. For example, there was a guy in Bandon on our staff who just kind of went, kind of got strange on us. And he started bad-mouthing everybody in the staff, and that was about half a dozen families.

And he'd have the students into his home and spend the whole time poisoning them against everyone on staff. And so finally he announced that he was leaving. And we thought, well, well, we did confront him several times.

And finally in one of those confrontations he said he was leaving the school, and that was fine with us. But we wanted him to kind of repent of this before he left so that he could leave on good terms. Well, he didn't repent.

He went down to Santa Cruz and got involved in a church down there. Well, we felt that we should take it before the church. He'd been confronted with the first two levels.

This was years ago. And we sent letters down to the elders of the church that he was at and said, you know, you've got a new member in your church. You don't know him.

We do. We know him quite well. We've had him on our staff for a few years, and we've seen what kind of person this is.

And we guarantee you that he's divisive, and he's not only been divisive here, but he's been divisive in previous churches he's been in. And I think you should be informed of it, and that you should require him to repent of this. So, I mean, we took it to the church.

Well, his pastor and elders didn't have any - they weren't at all sympathetic toward us. Again, it was one of those situations where the guy had money to give to the church, and they weren't eager to offend him, since especially the people bringing accusation against him were 1,000 miles away or 600 miles away or something. So, you know, they wrote back and said to essentially mind your own business.

And I wrote back and said, well, I'd love to, but Jesus said to bring it before the church, and so it's not really my business or yours, it's the Lord's business, and he should be brought before the church. And the pastor wrote back as if I was being very vindictive and out of line and stuff, so I just dropped it. Eventually, the guy and I met up in Santa Cruz years later, and he repented, and we're friends again now.

But the whole thing is that the church he went to began to look at our school as some

kind of really uptight group of people who just couldn't let it rest. You know, I mean, this guy's gone out of our lives, and we just can't let it rest. We're pursuing him with letters to make his life miserable is the way they saw it.

The way we saw it was this is an unresolved relationship problem, you know, and it should be resolved in the proper manner. But I guess that situation showed me that really you can't count on the churches these days to do the right thing in a situation like this. Bringing it before the church can be totally inconclusive.

And that being so, there's a sense in which I think there may be times when you just kind of leave it in the hands of God. And it was not the church, but God who later made reconciliation between us and the guy. He later got convicted enough to come back and repent, and everything's okay now.

But that was after his own church had refused to get involved in the situation. It was God who worked it out. So I guess my own experience has inclined me toward cynicism about the value of taking it before modern churches.

I'm not sure that what our modern day calls churches are really churches at all anyway. So if you do want to take it before the church, how do you do that? You know, put a full page ad in Christianity Today or what? Yes, Jenny. Well, in Galatians 6.1 it says, If a brother is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual should restore such a one.

But see, everybody shouldn't ever be spiritual. Anyone who's walking in the spirit is, at least at that moment, spiritual. And even the youngest Christian can walk in the spirit.

It's true. If you aren't capable of being spiritual about it, then you probably shouldn't confront him because you're the one who has the problem. If you can't approach in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted, as Paul said in Galatians 6.1, if you can't approach in a spiritual manner, then you've got as many problems as the person in question, and you're not the right person to talk to.

In fact, maybe someone should come and talk to you. But you're right. It does require the right attitude.

You should always go for one motivation only, and that's for the glory of God. It's not glorifying to God that the relationship remains in its present form. And it needs to be worked out.

And it needs to be worked out with the goal in mind of being friends again, and having no animosity. Okay, now, let's look further down. Verse 18, Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it

will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them. Now, the way Matthew puts things together that were not always said at the same time, one wonders whether the passage I just read, verses 18 through 20, were uttered in the same context as verses 15 through 17 or not.

They may have been. They may well have been. But they might not have been also, because there is, you know, Matthew tends to put things together that have similar words in them.

Like the earlier part of Matthew 18, verses 1 through 14, the binding thread of all those passages, though they came from very many points in Luke, for example, and Mark, the binding thing was the expression little ones. Be like one of these little children. Don't offend one of these little ones and so forth.

Don't despise these little ones. So here, the two or three might be the thing that binds these passages together, whether or not they were uttered on the same occasion. He has said in verse 16 that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word should be established.

And now we have a couple other sayings of Jesus in verse 19 and 20 that both speak of two or three. He says if two of you on earth agree as concerning anything, they ask it will be done. And in verse 24, two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Now, I really can't be sure about this. I guess I'm inclined to think that there is a flow from the passage we just considered, verses 15 through 17, into the thoughts here, though that flow is not exactly clear what it is. In verse 18, he repeats, of course, what he said privately to Peter in chapter 16.

He said, of course, in Matthew 16, 19, You are Peter, the rock. Upon this rock I will build my church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it.

And whatsoever you bind on earth, I give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. And whatever you bind on earth shall be on heaven. We talked about binding and loosing.

We won't talk about that in detail now. All I can say about verse 18 is that he seems to make the promise more generally here than he did in chapter 16. In chapter 16, the appearance is that he made it to Peter personally, but here, the same exact privilege that was stated to be Peter's is uttered to the larger group.

Now, arguably, the larger group here was the apostles. The indication at the beginning of the chapter is that Jesus was in a private house with his disciples, probably meaning his apostles. Therefore, his statement in verse 18 might be speaking of a privilege which apostles and only apostles had, that they would establish the norms of right and wrong,



of ethics and doctrine for the church.

Whatever they would allow would simply be the things that Jesus had allowed. The things that were bound and loosed in heaven were the things that they would, on earth, bind and loose. They would be the authorities.

Now, it's also possible that he's speaking to them not as apostles, but just as believers. If that is the case, then the promise applies to all believers. And we discussed the pros and cons of that suggestion last time.

But when we get to the verses 19 and 20, it would be particularly easier to understand this to be a reference to the apostles, although it's more commonly, in modern preaching, applied to all Christians. It's, again, unknown to me. I don't know whether it applies to all Christians or not.

When he says, If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. The reference to on earth and in heaven there echoes the on earth and in heaven of the previous verse. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

Whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Whatever you agree on earth about will be honored by my Father in heaven. And if this speaks particularly of the apostolic privilege of establishing norms and so forth, it would be saying essentially that the apostles, if there was two or three of them in agreement, see, there might be many issues where they didn't all have an opinion, but any two or three of them together asking for something would get what they want.

Now, I don't want to restrict it to the apostles. I'd like to think that this applies to all Christians. One of the problems is, of course, that I have known Christians who have gotten together in groups of two or three or more and prayed for a thing and it didn't happen.

And we would either say, well, they didn't have enough faith, which isn't always a fair assessment of the situation. Many times they did. Or whatever.

But I think what we would have to say in cases where two or three or any number of people have prayed together and something didn't happen, one thing must be true, and that is that it wasn't God's will. They prayed not according to God's will. And I guess I'm inclined to think that the apostles, more than ordinary Christians, would be the ones who had revelation and understanding of God's will, and that the promise would be one that would probably apply better among themselves.

That were two or three of the apostles agreed that such and such a thing was God's will, that would be enough to establish it. Because he said back in verse 16, in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. However, they have to be

credible witnesses.

They have to be witnesses who know something. A bunch of false witnesses who don't know what they're talking about don't establish anything. It's obvious that the parties in question have to know what they're talking about.

And the apostles were, I think, given special privilege of knowing whatever they needed to know to do the will of God and to lead the church in the will of God. Jesus said to them that the Holy Spirit would lead them into all truth. He said to them that the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything Jesus had said.

And so forth. Again, these are promises that we like to take for ourselves, and perhaps some of the blessing of them does spill over beyond just the apostles. But he made these statements in private to the apostles in the upper room, and they would seem to be statements that gave the apostles authority to speak and have the church confident that they were speaking what the Holy Spirit had told them, what the Holy Spirit had reminded them that Jesus had said, what the Holy Spirit had led them into all truth.

So where two or more of them would agree as something, it would be enough to establish something as affirming that that was the will of God, and God in heaven would do it. God would honor it. It will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

Now, in making an application to the apostles, I don't mean to take away anyone's confidence that it's good to pray in groups of two or three. I think it's good for the church to pray as a whole. I think it's good to pray in any numbers, wherever more faith can be brought to the request, and more judgment.

Two heads are better than one, and really the issue that often is the factor that determines whether a prayer is answered or not is often whether they're praying in the will of God or not. People can have incredible faith for something that isn't the will of God, and their prayers not be answered, because prayer is not there for anything but getting the will of God done. But the more people you have involved in the prayer enterprise, the more discernment, the more confirmation, the more one can ascertain whether something is the will of God.

It doesn't mean that the whole church can't be wrong, but it means that the whole church is less likely to be wrong than one individual is to be wrong. Yes, Jenny? I guess whether he's talking to them as apostles or as Christians representing the church at large, the question would remain, why does he say you in one part of the sentence and they in the other? Especially since you and they are the subject of the same idea. They are asking, you are asking.

If any two of you ask whatever they ask, it's obviously a shift from the second person to the third person, which is not grammatically expected, but I'm not sure that that shift,

surprising as it is, I'm not sure that it would favor one or another interpretation as to whether he means the church or the apostles. I'd just as soon have it for the whole church, frankly. I'd like to have the whole church have all the promises.

Because I'm part of the church, I'm not an apostle. I'd like to have everything apply to me. I guess a couple of things.

One is the development of my exegetical skills or something, my hermeneutical skills, and the other is my experience of taking things as if they were promises to me and putting total faith in them and then having them not happen have made me relook at it and say, well, maybe this isn't for me. I mean, if I know that my faith was as much faith as a human being can bring to a situation, and yet the thing promised didn't happen, maybe I'm misunderstanding what was promised. Maybe I'm misunderstanding who it was promised to.

Maybe it wasn't me. And those things, you should not create doctrine out of experience. You shouldn't say, well, my experience is at this low level, therefore I have to drag doctrine onto it to make my experience normative.

But I would say that if your interpretation of a passage does not come true in experience, then it may be grounds for looking at the passage and saying, maybe I'm misunderstanding what it's saying. Otherwise it would come true. I mean, the word of God is true.

So if my interpretation of it isn't true, then maybe I should reinterpret it and see if there's some way that would vindicate God in the matter. Anyway, certainly there's two possible ways of looking at this. He could be making a statement that applied to the apostles merely.

We know of, I think we know of no case, where the apostles, two or three or more of them, agreed on something and God didn't honor it. But I know of many cases where other Christians have agreed about things that God didn't honor because it wasn't His will. I've sometimes said, with a little note of cynicism, that this statement of verse 19, if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven, that the underlying thought is that it's miracle enough for any two Christians to agree.

And if you can get that to happen, then anything's possible. But that's of course not what he's saying. It's just that these days it's hard to find Christians to agree about anything.

Now, verse 20 says, For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them. Well, again, I don't know. I don't know if this means all Christians.

I've always kind of understood it to be. I've always taken it that way. I've always

assumed that where I and two or more Christians were, Jesus is there.

But then the Bible says He's with us all the time anyway, even when we're not with two or three. There is a special sense in which the presence of Christ is promised in a group of Christians that is somehow different than the way He's with every individual Christian at all times. He's certainly always with me, whether I'm alone or in a group.

There's some sense in which a gathered group of Christians, gathered in His name, that is gathered for the sake of doing His will together corporately, is where His presence is. Now, such a statement could just be the same in any congregation of Christians, even in the smallest one. In some places in Turkey, you might have a hard time finding more than two or three Christians in a whole city or a whole district.

And the same is true perhaps in a place like Albania or somewhere, where there are just not very many Christians. The promise would mean that wherever the church is, even if it's the smallest church, and some churches there might not even be so many as three Christians in a given town in some parts of the world, that Jesus is there anyway. It doesn't take a big group.

It doesn't take a big church. But wherever Christians gather, officially to, not just where they gather to have pizza or to watch a video, but where they gather in His name, where they gather for the purpose of worshiping and honoring Christ, that is a church meeting. And that is, they can expect His presence there.

And whether that applies in every situation, I'm inclined to take it sort of generically, of all Christians. Now, Peter came to Him and said, Lord, how often shall my brothers sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times. Now, this question might arise out of what Jesus said back in verse 15.

You go to your brother if he sins against you, and if he hears you, you have won your brother. The implication is you forgive him if he hears you. And Peter says, well, wait a minute.

How many times am I supposed to do this? I've forgiven him already several times. Isn't it fairly magnanimous on my part to forgive him up to seven times? By the way, we kind of laugh at Peter for his small-mindedness because we know what Jesus said in response. Jesus' answer is well known.

No, not seven times, but 70 times seven. And we kind of joke about how Peter had such a small number in mind. But let's face it.

If we didn't know what Jesus said, we'd think seven times forgiving a guy would be pretty generous. I know people who haven't forgiven someone for doing something once to them. And if the person did the same thing twice, three, four times, and still expected to be forgiven, why, the Christian I'm thinking of would think it was outrageous for the

person even to expect to be forgiven after doing something four times.

For Peter to say seven times, he was choosing a number that seemed quite generous. And when Jesus said, no, not seven times, but 70 times seven, Jesus wasn't just changing the statistic from seven to a higher number. Obviously, 70 times seven would be more times you'd lose count before that.

No one, even people who are very careful about keeping track of wrongs that people have done, they would certainly lose track after a few dozen times. They'd lose count. And so Jesus is saying, you know, just keep forgiving me after you've lost count.

In other words, indefinitely, never stop forgiving them. Now, this is reassuring, really, because we know from elsewhere in Scripture, and even in the parable that Jesus tells to illustrate this in the next verses, that forgiving one another is to be done in the way that God forgives us. It's never otherwise.

We're not supposed to forgive people more than God forgives us. That would be impossible for us to do. And this parable he tells proves that.

But if God is willing to forgive us 70 times seven times, or let's put it this way, if he wants us to forgive each other that much, and we're just supposed to forgive the way he does, that means he must forgive that much. And there are times when we've come back to God 50 times, 100 times, 200 times, with the same flaw, the same mistake, the same sin on our part, and we come back asking forgiveness again, but it's hard to believe he'd really listen to us. He wouldn't even hear us again.

Are we presuming too much on his grace? Are we turning the grace of God into license? Who are we kidding? We certainly can't fool God. Dare we come back again about this same thing that we repented of not too long ago, and for about the zillionth time? Well, I think this would suggest we can. And must, of course.

Because God expects us to do that when someone sins against us that many times, and he only does so not because he's putting unrealistic expectations on us, but because he wants us to be like him, and he does that. And here's the parable he tells to illustrate it. Verse 23, Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants, and when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

That's a lot of money. I think it's like millions of dollars. At least it's a great sum that the man could never conceivably pay back.

But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children, and all that he had in his payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, Master, have patience with me. I'll pay you all.

Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. Now, the servant didn't even just ask. He didn't even bother to ask to be forgiven.

He just said, Give me time, I'll pay it back. But the master was moved with compassion, saw the man was in dire straits, and just said, Forget it, I'm not going to give you time to pay. I'll just say, Don't pay it.

Don't pay it back. I'll just cancel it. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, which is really a minimal amount, a few bucks.

And he laid his hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay you all. Same thing that he had said to his king.

And he would not, but went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. Of course, he couldn't pay it from prison. So when the fellow servant saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came and told their master all that had been done.

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him. So also my heavenly father will do to you, to each of you, if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother's trespasses.

Now, you might think, wait a minute. This king forgave the debt. How can he now reimpose it? He can do that because he is a king.

If you legally cancelled somebody's debt to you and later got mad at them, you couldn't reimpose the debt. If they had your word on it and there were witnesses and so forth, they could never come back and say, Well, I changed my mind. I want you to pay me back after all.

But a king can do whatever he wants. And the king forgave the guy at great personal loss to the king, of course, because that meant millions of dollars or something. The king would be out for doing so.

But it was obviously, though he didn't state so at the time, it was conditional. It was understood that, of course, now that you've received mercy, you will be inclined to show mercy to others. And when he heard that the man was not so moved, he said, Well, I've decided I'm going to unforgive you.

I'm going to put you in debtor's prison like you did to your servant. I'm going to deliver you over to the torturers. And you're going to have to pay all that debt again.

Now, the interesting thing about the parable is Jesus' statement at the end. He says, So my heavenly Father will also do to you. He didn't say, So also you should forgive people because you've been forgiven so much.

Though that too is one of the lessons of the parable. You've been forgiven a great deal. And according to the parable, far more than anyone could ever injure you.

You've injured God. Any debt you would be called upon to forgive of your brother is minuscule compared to what God has already forgiven you. Your offenses against God could never be matched by other persons offending you.

And therefore, you were never called on to forgive more than God does. Far less. But at least as much as anybody offends you, you should.

But Jesus doesn't point that out. Obviously, that's in there. What he points out about the story is the last thing.

He said, You know what the king did to that guy? That's what my Father will do to you if you behave the way that guy did. If you don't forgive like he didn't forgive. The emphasis on the story, of course, you would expect to be on forgiveness.

But Jesus places the emphasis on what the king did to the guy and said, That's what the Father will do to you. In other words, although in some parables we can say, Well, some of the details aren't really part of the corresponding lesson. And what the king did specifically to the guy is not important so much as the whole idea of forgiveness.

But Jesus made it important. He said, This is how my Father treats people who are forgiven by him initially but won't forgive others. Now, does this make salvation conditional on my being forgiving? Yes, it does.

Sounds like it to me. Doesn't it to you? Now you might say, But how then is it by grace? My church teaches blah blah blah. Well, whatever your church may teach, I guess the question is going to be on the Day of Judgment, what did Jesus teach? Churches don't always teach what Jesus taught.

And on the Day of Judgment, Jesus is going to say, Well, if you went along with whatever your denomination said, then that's okay. He's going to say, Didn't you have what I said? Didn't you have words from me in the Bible? Jesus made this kind of statement frequently. In Matthew 6, verses 14 and 15, he said, For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses. Couldn't be plainer. Matthew 6, 14 and 15.

Go over to Mark, chapter 11. In Mark 11, verses 25 and 26, Jesus again says, And

whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your heavenly Father may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Now those statements are not ambiguous, nor is the statement at the end of this parable. If you don't, from your heart, he says, in Matthew 18, verse 35, If you do not, from your heart, forgive your brother his trespasses against you, my Father will do to you something like what this king did to this servant. Well, what did the king do? He delivered him over to torturers and reimposed the debt.

Now, does this mean that the person went to hell? Maybe. Possibly. It has also been understood to refer to discipline that God might put somebody under in this life, until they get it right.

You know, if you are a child of God, he doesn't just throw you out after one infraction. He will chasten you, he will discipline you, and he'll try to get you to do the right thing before he'll punish you for it. And delivering over to torturers has been interpreted by some to be a course of discipline to get you to do what you're supposed to do, namely, forgive your brother.

If you won't do it, God will bend your arm a little bit. Now, what the torturers represent is not at all clear. There's no unanimity about it.

Some think it refers to hell. Some think it refers to demons. Now, people might think, well, God wouldn't turn people over to demons.

Demons are not on God's side. Well, everyone in the Old Testament that had demons, it says they received a demon from the Lord. An evil spirit from the Lord was sent against them.

That was true of Gideon's son. The Lord sent an evil spirit against him. It was true of Saul.

An evil spirit from the Lord came against him. It was true of the false prophets of Ahab. That a lying spirit from the Lord came to his false prophets to deceive him and so forth.

So, even the Old Testament indicates that the coming of evil spirits against a person can be a judgment from God, or a discipline from God. It might seem a little radical, you know, kind of a severe discipline to demonize a person, but apparently it's not too radical, because God has done such things to persons like Saul and others before. Now, some have thought that this is actually saying that one of the best ways to get yourself demonized is to maintain an unforgiving attitude, to maintain a grudge against somebody.

But, if you look over at Ephesians chapter 4, a hint may be there that would agree along



these lines. Though, by the way, demons are not the only torturers. The torture of a conscience unforgiven can also be part of what Jesus is talking about.

But, in Ephesians chapter 4 and verses 26 and 27, Paul said, Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. Well, what are you going to do with your wrath if you don't let the sun go down on it? You're going to get rid of it.

How are you going to do that? You're going to forgive whoever made you mad. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. That's all one sentence.

And, it may suggest that the way to avoid giving place to the devil is to make sure you don't let the sun go down on your wrath. If you leave that thing unresolved, even overnight it could result in giving place to the devil. And, what does place to the devil result in? I don't know.

I don't want to try it. Over in 1 Samuel, this will be the last place we'll look, I think. Probably.

Maybe not. 1 Samuel chapter 17. Actually, chapter 18, I think.

Yeah.