

Title: IN THE PLACE OF GOD, MATTHEW 18:21-35
(Chatham, NJ; 09/14/14, AM) [Pc – Topical: Unfolding Telescope]

Theme: If God forgives us through Christ, we have the responsibility to forgive others when they offend us.

Purpose: To demonstrate that not to forgive others puts us in the place of God.

Introduction:

1. Joseph forgives his brothers by recognizing his human position. He asks, "Am I in the place of God?"
2. This is the foundation upon which the entire theology of forgiveness rests. "To err is human; to forgive is divine." Cf. Ex. 34 on the nature of God.
3. This applies to our relationships especially within the community of God.

I. Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, Mt. 18:21-35

A. Peter's question

1. How often do I need to forgive my brother? (21)
2. Peter implies that he'd like to limit forgiveness
3. Jesus answers with a number implying infinity
4. Luke 17:4 – even if he commits sin against you seven times in a day, you must forgive him
5. Forgiveness becomes the centerpiece of Christian behavior

B. The Unmerciful Servant, 23-35

1. Amount of debt owed is probably exaggerated for increased effect
2. The issue is the lack of mercy for small debts versus the enormous amount of forgiveness for a large debt
3. The master revokes his forgiveness because of the hardness of the servant's heart
4. Jesus concludes that we must forgive our brothers from the heart
5. His words from the cross, "Father, forgive them," still challenge us

II. More Nuts and Bolts: Romans 14 reflects at least a shadow of the forgiveness issue; we'll demonstrate as we move through the passage.

A. What Is the Proper Way of Being Religious? This is the issue.

1. Accept him whose faith is weak
2. Do not get into quarrels over matters of opinion
3. The matter of food is the one at issue here
4. Celebrating certain days is another one
5. People have fought over these and many other things
6. Paul is telling them not to.
7. In fact, he does not take sides in the issue

B. The first group

1. We can eat anything, 2
2. We tend to see this group as emphasizing freedom; they feel less restricted
3. They are probably the ones who esteem all days alike rather than consider one day or another as particularly holy, 5
4. Their problem: they tend to look down on those who see more of the restrictions, 3 – "Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains"
5. "Who are you to pass judgment on another man's servant?" 4

C. The second group

1. Eat on vegetables, 3
2. This group sees their religious practices in a more restrictive way
3. They are likely the ones who observe particular days, 5
4. Their (those who abstain) problem: they pass judgment on those who don't observe their restrictions and particular days, 3
5. Whereas the first group is condescending, the second is judgmental

D. The God connection

1. Here is the connection between forgiveness and the unity of practice in religious matters
2. The connection is God, 6-12
3. Each one honors and gives thanks in his own way, 6
4. None of lives for himself, but for God, 7
5. We live to the Lord; we die to the Lord, 8
6. Christ died for this, 9
7. Why pass judgment? Why despise (look down on)? 10
8. We will all be judged by God, 10-12

Conclusions:

1. Are we in the place of God to withhold forgiveness?
2. Jesus tells us no.
3. Are we in the place of God when it comes to certain opinions of religious practice?
4. Paul tells us no.
5. We must forgive like God forgives.
6. We also must "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding," 19.