

## Seven times Seventy

The idea of forgiveness was as difficult for the Apostles as it is for us. In fact, once Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive someone. He suggested that perhaps seven times was enough. You can imagine his surprise when Jesus told him seven times seventy!



Because the idea of forgiveness is so important, and because it can be complicated, Jesus gave an extended teaching on it. This teaching is found in Matthew 18:15-35. Here, Jesus brings up three important issues. We mentioned one of the issues above: how often we should forgive a person. Peter probably thought he was being gracious when he said seven times. Jesus' answer shows us that we should not limit the number of times we forgive someone.

Jesus also raised two other important issues. The 1st is, if someone hurts

## Talk with Them!

us, should we just forgive and forget or should we do something about it? The second issue is, what are the consequences of unforgiveness. Let's consider these next.



To forgive when someone hurts us does not mean that we have to just ignore it. Jesus gives us specific instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 as to what we should do.

First of all, you should go to them privately and discuss the matter. Explain to them what they did and how it affected you. Oftentimes, people do or say things that are hurtful, but have no idea that it has affected us. Airing these things out can often resolve it. So speak peaceably with them about the situation. This helps them see your side and gives them a chance to apologize and make things right. It also stops the issue from becoming bigger in your life and keeps walls from forming between you.

Now suppose this does not work. Perhaps the person refuses to receive what you say or you cannot come to an agreement. If the matter is serious and you believe you should go further with it, the Bible says we should then take a second person with you and talk further with them. The person should be a godly person, someone who keeps confidences.

If this still does not work, you should then consult with the leadership of a church, who should pray and take the appropriate action.

There is something that is very important, though. Sometimes we have to simply accept the wrong and forgive for the sake of love. Love covers a multitude of sins. No one is perfect, and people make mistakes. Forgive for the sake of love and go on! This frees God to come and heal the situation in your life.



## As we Forgive Others

Jesus next talks about what happens if we choose not to forgive. He tells the story of a servant who owed his master a great sum of money. The master forgave him after he begged for mercy. However, when a fellow servant asked the same servant for mercy on a debt he owed him, the first servant refused. Instead, he threw him into prison until his debt was paid. When the master heard of it, he then threw the first servant into prison where he was to be tormented until he paid all. Jesus concludes this teaching by saying that this very thing would happen to us if we do not forgive others from our hearts when we have been wronged.



The idea here of course is, that if God forgave us and had mercy upon us, who are we not to forgive others? We must extend the same mercy that we received from God to others. If we do not, we will end up paying serious consequences which can far exceed the hurt the person originally caused. Forgiveness, however, leads to love, peace and mercy flowing to and through our lives. It reflects the very heart of God.

One last tip! In this passage, Jesus was talking about forgiving a “brother” who has sinned against you. He is talking, of course, about a fellow Christian. Non Christians do not follow these rules! So if a non Christian hurts you, see what you can do to clear it up with them. If this is not possible, ask God to forgive them, and you do the same! God will bring His peace and healing in your life. It is a wise choice!

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