

FORGIVENESS

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Lessons: Matthew 18:15-22, True Christian Religion 407

One day, when the Lord was living on earth, He spoke of people doing wrong things against each other. Then Peter, one of the Lord's disciples, asked Him how many times should he forgive another person. He said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" You see, Peter thought that to forgive someone who had done wrong against you seven times was more than enough. But the Lord gave an answer to Peter that may seem strange to you at first. He said, "I say not unto you, Until seven times, but until seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:21,22). Seventy times seven is four hundred and ninety—but by this the Lord did not mean that we should forgive another just that many times, but that we should be willing to forgive him always and forever.

This may seem a very hard thing—to always forgive someone who does wrong to you. But that is just what the Lord asks. You see, He wants us to be forgiving people—people with a kind heart and not hard-hearted. There is a very important reason why the Lord wants us to be forgiving and not hold grudges. The reason is this—we cannot *receive* the Lord's forgiveness for the wrong we do unless we are willing to forgive the people who do wrong to us. The reason we do not receive the Lord's forgiveness is because we close our minds off from the Lord when we hold grudges. In fact, we turn our minds upside down when we hold hatred in our hearts against others.

Our minds are like little cups. They are meant to be cups that are right side up—open to the Lord. When we do wrong, and all of us do, then the Lord immediately forgives us. His forgiveness is like an endless fountain. If our minds are right-side up, we receive His forgiveness. But if we hold hatred, grudges, and lack of forgiveness in our minds, we turn the cup of our mind upside down. Then it cannot be filled with the Lord's forgiveness any more than a cup held upside down can be filled at a fountain. The forgiveness is there, but we don't receive it.

Now it is not easy to forgive someone who has wronged us. The first thing we want to do is to do something wrong back to them—to pay them back. But this isn't right. Two wrongs don't make a right. The Lord wants us to forgive the wrongs that are done to us, and to forgive not just once or twice, but always. But we should know that this does not mean that we aren't supposed to defend ourselves against wrongdoing. We have every right to defend ourselves. Indeed, it would be wrong not to defend ourselves—for that would be just giving in to

evil. Sometimes we might even have to hit back, as in the case of a bully. But the important thing to keep in mind is that while we are defending ourselves we should not *hate* or try to *get even* with the person who has wronged us. We should still be forgiving and try to love them even when we might have to see that they get punished for the wrong they have done. We should not be happy that they are being punished. We should only want them to learn their lesson and not do that wrong thing again. We should want good for them—not evil—and be willing to be friends with them again when they have learned to do what is right.

As we have said, this is not always an easy thing to do—still it is the Lord’s command that we forgive others so that we can receive the Lord’s forgiveness when we do wrong. In another place in the New Testament, the Lord said, “if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother has ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled with thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift” (Matthew 5:23, 24). By this is meant that if we have done wrong to someone—even if it is just in our heart by being angry against him or hating him, we cannot really worship the Lord. Only a forgiving heart can worship the Lord.

This is what we mean when we pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.” We are then saying that we know that the Lord can only forgive us the many wrong things we do if we are willing to forgive others the wrong they do to us.

Let each one of us promise the Lord and promise ourselves, that we will try to be truly forgiving persons. Let us really try to wish well to our neighbor and be willing to forgive him “until seventy times Seven”—forgive him always. *Amen.*