

There was a time when Jesus was talking with his disciples about forgiveness and Peter asked how many times should a man forgive another; seven times? ***Matthew 18:21-22 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? (22) Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*** Upon hearing these words, the apostles said unto the Lord, “Increase our faith.” (Luke 17:5). I saw the cartoon where one frame tells about Jesus giving this command and the other has a man holding his head and saying “Great, not only do I have to forgive my brother but now I have to do the math.”

This is not a math equation. This is a matter of embracing a Christ-like attitude. The apostles understood how difficult it is to forgive, yet it was something they had to learn to do. It’s something we need to learn as well; so they said, Increase our faith.

Let me provide a few stories and I want you to consider what you would do. First let’s consider Peter. Peter the apostle of Jesus was once a fisherman and apparently was a little rough around the edges. As we study the gospel accounts, we often see Peter doing things without giving his actions very much thought. Many can relate to Peter because of that. Then there was the time in the court yard during the trial of Jesus. Here we see him lying about his identity.

***Matthew 26:69-75 Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. (70) But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.*** At this point Peter was ashamed of Jesus and even denied knowing him. ***(71) And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. (72) And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.*** This was what we might call a “ball-face” lie. And to make matters worse, he denied Jesus with an oath. ***(73) And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee. (74) Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew.*** Here we see Peter continuing to lie and began to curse and swear. Because of his vulgar language, the people were satisfied that he was not one to have been with Jesus. No one that had been with

Jesus would have talked this way. Then the rooster crowed. ***(75) And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.***

After this was over and a few days lapsed, imagine that you were in an upper room in Jerusalem with the 120 other disciples including Peter. How would you feel toward him? Perhaps he remembered the Lord's teaching on forgiveness and asked to be forgiven. Would you forgive him? Would you ever trust what he said again or would he first have to prove his trustworthiness to you. After all, he is a rude, crude liar. Would you consider him to be the spokesman to preach the first gospel sermon? What kind of influence would he have with the people? He was in the same city where he sword, cursed and lied. Who would listen to him; a vulgar liar – would you? If someone lied to you in similar fashion today, could you forgive him and put that in the past? You see, that's what forgiveness is. It's putting the past in that past and not letting that influence how you treat that person in the present.

Let's consider another episode. What if you had been in the shadows watching the angry Jews cast one stone after another until your Christian brother Stephen gasp and took his last breath. While there, you had a good look that the young Jewish man they called Saul as he looked after the coats of those doing the stoning. During the next few months you continued to hear about Saul and how he was arresting and persecuting Christians. Perhaps he had tortured a few of your friends. Then one day he came to your town and Barnabas was with him. Barnabas claimed that Saul had been converted and was now a Christian. Would you trust him?

Years passed and you found yourself in Jerusalem and you saw Saul once again, but now he went by Paul; but he was the same fella. Would you keep a close watch on your back? Then there were some Jews from Asia began to make claims how this Saul had polluted the temple and taught against the Law of Moses. ***Acts 21:27-28 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, (28) Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and***

***the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.***

What would you do? Would you say to yourself, “*I knew it; I knew he was not to be trusted even though he was baptized I knew he was still a trouble maker.*” Would you give your brother the benefit of the doubt or would you drag up the past and hold his past against him? If you had been there would you be one of the people in the streets that were beating Paul? ***Acts 21:30-31 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. (31) And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.***

Go to 1 Cor. 6. ***1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, (10) Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (11) And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.***

Let's say you just moved in to Corinth and found out were the church met and you visit their services. When you arrive the people are friendly and you were spiritually uplifted; so you go back. As you asked around about the congregation, you find out that some of the members had been thieves and extortioners; would that change your thinking any? In your quizzing around you also find out that some had a sinful sexual past. Some had been fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals. Would you be having second thoughts about worshipping there? But then you talked with a church member which said, “Yes, these people used to be that way, but we had some members that loved them anyway and taught them the message of salvation and now they ***are washed, they are sanctified, and they are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*** Now how would you feel? You see those sinners had been forgiven by both God and man and now they make up the church. Could you put that kind of past behind you, leave it there, and worship with those people?

Forgiveness is an area that most all of us need to grow. When a person asked for forgiveness, it's hard to not let the past continue to influence the present. Forgiveness does not mean we forget the past but it does mean we don't let the past affect the present. In essence we put the past behind us just like the church in Corinth, like the audience in Jerusalem with Peter and the infant churches with Paul. There is no indication that the people ever said, "Yea but you use to be this way or that."

The word "forgive" is found 28 times in the NT; "forgiveness" six times and the word "forgiving" twice, So there are some 36 passages that deal with this matter of forgiveness. Notice what Paul writes to this church in Corinth; the one that had all the wickedness of the past (*2 Corinthians 2:6-8*). He said if any man caused grief, *Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. (7) So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.* When a man has sinned and he is grieved by that sin and seeks forgiveness, we as his spiritual family are to forgive him and comfort him – not step on him. Without that comfort and support, this poor man is likely to be swallowed up with "overmuch sorrow." (8) *Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.*

Paul writing to the church in Ephesus and Colossea said similar statements regarding forgiveness. To one he would say. *Eph 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving, one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* The to the church in Colossea he would write *Colossians 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* Embedded in these lists of attitudes is the command to forgive if we want to be forgiven in heaven.

If there is some animosity or hard feeling toward a brother, make it right. Let's put the past behind and focus on the future. We would do well to heed the words of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 18 we are familiar with the words how a person is responsible for his own sin and not the father for the son and the son for the father. *Ezekiel 18:20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the*

***father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.*** From this passage we point out that a child does not inherit his father's sin and thus does not to be baptized as an infant. But if we continue to read we learn about the forgiving nature that we should have toward another.

***Ezekiel 18:21-22 But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.*** Here we have a picture of a penitent sinner – a wicked man that has turned from his sins and made restitution with God for he is now “*keeping God laws and doing what is lawful.*” Of such a person, what should our attitude be? Well we learn this in vs 22. ***All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.*** The transgressions, i.e. the past shall not be mentioned. That means put the past in the past and leave it there. When you forgive, you don't let the transgressions that a person commits influence the how you treat them in the present.

Why is forgiveness important? Because if we don't, we want be forgiven which means it will keep us out of heaven. ***Mark 11:25-26 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. (26) But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.***

Today, do you need forgiveness? Have you wronged someone and need that wrong forgiven. Has someone done something that you can't put it in the past? Well you need to. Would you do that today? Do you need to have your sins remitted, removed? Do you need to obey the gospel?

Do you need to respond to the Lord's invitation?

Invitation