

Forgiven People Forgive People

Matthew 18:21–35

Thursday July 29, 2021

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Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

—Matthew 18:21–22

A woman in southwest France received a huge shock when she opened her telephone bill in 2012 and discovered that she owed 11,721,000,000,000,000 euros (nearly 14 quadrillion U.S. dollars). That amount is almost 6,000 times France’s total annual economic output. She had requested her account be closed after losing her job. The former teaching assistant said she “almost had a heart attack. There were so many zeroes I couldn’t even work out how much it was.”

The phone company, Bouygues Telecom, initially told her there was nothing they could do to change the computer-generated statement. Later, they offered her the opportunity to set up installments to pay off the bill. How kind of them!

In the end, the company admitted the bill should have been for 117.21 euros only, and eventually waived it entirely. It also apologized for the gaffe, blaming a printing error and a subsequent misunderstanding between the client and staff at their call center.

While it took months for the telephone company to admit their mistake, they eventually did. They even canceled the woman’s debt. As human beings, we are reluctant to admit our mistakes. Even large businesses (like the French telephone company), struggle to admit to incredibly apparent errors. We also struggle to extend forgiveness when others have wronged us. We fail to confess our faults quickly, and we fail to forgive others’ faults quickly.

Yet, within the Body of Christ, the Church, the New Testament teaches, and Jesus Himself taught that forgiving others is essential to the church’s health. As we explore the “One Another” commands of the New Testament for a few days through our Take5 devotionals, we have to unpack how important forgiving others is for our health and the health of the church as a whole.

In the time of Christ, Jewish religious leaders debated how many times the law required a person to forgive a repeat offender. They actually discussed an actual number. In Matthew 18:21–22, Peter asks Jesus to resolve the debate. He asks Jesus how many times a person

should forgive someone else. Jesus answered by saying 77 times.

Depending on your understanding of the original text, Jesus’ answer might have been “490 times.” Either way, what Jesus said did not resolve the debate among religious legal scholars. He did not even enter their debate. He blew away the cap on the number of times we forgive someone who has wronged us. With His answer, He was saying we should forgive an infinite number of times.

Then, He redirects the conversation to that which was more critical in terms of forgiving others. The issue was not how far you should go in extending forgiveness. The real issue was that you should forgive another human being because, through Christ, God has forgiven you. The standard is the divine, sinless God forgiving fallen, sinful human beings. Since Jesus died so the person who wronged you could experience God’s forgiveness, who are you as a fallen being to hold back your forgiveness of another fallen being?

Who have you not been willing to forgive? Don’t think that you can hold onto that unforgiveness because Jesus knows what you have gone through and how deeply it hurt. Jesus died so you could be forgiven. Colossians 3:13 says, “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Forgive as the Lord forgave you!

Ask God to open your heart so His forgiveness you have experienced can flow to those you need to forgive. Pray and express to God that you forgive that person or those people. Look for opportunities to let those you forgive know that you have forgiven them. Let’s forgive one another!

Healthy Christians forgive others. That is who they are. Do you forgive others?

Today’s Prayer

Dear Father, remind me constantly of your forgiveness and grace. Help me to see the great kindness you have shown me. Let me learn to forgive others the way you have forgiven me! —Amen