

# Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

**Key Verse:**  
*“Shouldest not  
thou also have had  
compassion on thy  
fellobservant, even  
as I had pity  
on thee?”*  
—Matthew 18:33

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Matthew 18:21-35*  
times?”—Matt. 18:21

**IN THIS PORTION OF** Jesus' discourse concerning sins and offenses, he turns his attention to our responsibility of forgiving others of wrongs committed against us, in particular those done by our brethren. Peter asks a question concerning this matter: “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven

Peter appears to have understood that he must forgive. Jesus had previously taught his disciples concerning this in conjunction with the giving of the model prayer, and they evidently had not forgotten. (Matt. 6:14,15) Peter knew also, from the meaning of the word, as well as from the daily example he saw in the Master, that true forgiveness meant not bearing a grudge against another, nor looking for revenge. Rather, it implied only doing good and forgetting the offense.

Peter, however, had only a limited appreciation of the full scope of forgiveness. From his question, he seemed to believe that one who sinned against him would only be forgiven a certain number of times, suggesting seven as an appropriate number. He supposed that if a brother had wronged him more than seven times, he would not

be worthy of forgiveness. He might then justifiably abandon his fellowship, and have no more to do with him. Perhaps Peter thought of Proverbs 24:16, which states: "A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again."

Jesus answered Peter's question, saying, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Here the Master expressed an extravagant number to imply an indefinite one, for no one would literally keep track of 490 [70 times 7] sins committed against him by a brother. It is, in fact, not proper that we keep any count of offenses done against us by others. God is the judge, and any retribution or punishment is his, not ours, to give. (Deut. 32:35,36) More importantly, however, is the fact that God is very merciful. He multiplies his pardons, and is full of compassion. (Ps. 78:38,39) Thus, we are taught to make it our constant practice to forgive, that it might become our habitual response, as it is God's.

Following his answer to Peter, Jesus gave a parable to show the necessity of forgiving the wrongs that are done against us. In the parable, a servant is forgiven a large debt owed to his lord. However, the same servant is unwilling to forgive a very small amount owed to him by a fellow servant. When the lord finds this out, he is very angry with his servant and demands that he make full payment of his large debt, because he did not show compassion on his fellow servant who owed him only a small sum.—Matt. 18:23-34

For the followers of Jesus, the lesson of the parable is clear. God has forgiven us our Adamic sins through the redemptive work of Christ. (Eph. 1:3,7) We have been forgiven much. Thus, sins committed against us by our brethren, who have likewise been forgiven by God, must stir within us a similar response of compassion and mercy. Only in this way can we fulfill that which we are told is required of us, "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly" with our God.—Mic. 6:8 ■