

FORGIVENESS

(Part 2 of 3)

Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” till seven times” (Matthew 18:21). Peter knew the human nature and how many times people need forgiveness, often for the same offense. He understood the principle of sin and the tendency to commit sin, be forgiven, and then before long commit the same sin again.

Peter was always good for a question when he didn’t fully understand a principle, and for this we are in his debt. In Matthew chapter 18 verses 15-20, Jesus taught the principle of church discipline and how to deal with those who sin. Sin is to be dealt with, no matter what the sin is. And if the sin cannot be resolved, further action is to be taken. And if necessary, the offender is to be brought before the church, because every sin not only is directly against God, but is also either directly or indirectly against the church and every individual believer.

Jesus said, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3). The commands to rebuke and to forgive cover any sin a fellow believer may commit, not just those committed directly against us.

With all of this in mind, let us go back to Peter’s original thought concerning forgiveness. Peter wanted to be sure he understood the teaching and actions of Jesus on this subject. Therefore, Peter’s question was: Does forgiveness have a limit? Granted that a person who commits an offense and repents should be forgiven and restored a few times. But what if he continually falls into sin, over and over again? How often should I forgive him? Then Peter suggests a limit of seven times.

Jewish tradition taught that the first offense should be forgiven, the second offense should be forgiven, the third offense should be forgiven, but the fourth offense should not be forgiven. Peter, however, was generous in his proposal of seven times; he superseded Jewish tradition by four. The reason for Peter’s proposal of seven times was no doubt based upon his understanding of the teachings and personal example of compassion and mercy that Jesus exhibited. Peter wanted to understand the full meaning of forgiveness, and the obligations that were expected of him. Peter was more concerned about pleasing his Lord than he was of pleasing the crowd.

Jerry W. Arnold
All Rights Reserved