

Matthew 18.21-35 [Worship]

21 Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times. 23 "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; 25 and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26 So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' 27 And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe.' 29 Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' 30 But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31 When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32 Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on

you?' 34 And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35 So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Consider:

[Think & Pray...]

"Strive mightily, but eat and drink as friends." The quote from Shakespeare was on the sign in front of an Italian restaurant in Washington, Pennsylvania. Words of wisdom, right below the weekly pasta special.

Jesus' call to forgive seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22) is not, of course, to be taken literally—490 times, not a single more. We are to forgive as often as it takes, and then some. There is not a statute of limitations or a top limit. Put together with Paul's exhortation against judgment (Romans 14:5-12), we have two of the most basic and two of the most difficult teachings in Christian life. Who can say they have completely, consistently followed both?

Jesus specifically did not promise that following him would lead away from conflict. ("Do not think that I have come to bring peace on Earth..."—Matthew 10:34. And see Matthew 18:15-20, which lays out a method for dealing with conflict between members of the community of faith.) But before we burn all our bridges and ready ourselves for casting out those with whom we disagree, we must know that it doesn't mean we're finished with them. Even if conflict requires separation—in a family, church, or community—we are still called to forgive the one we strive with, and not to judge them.

Righteous anger may be the most dangerous kind—justified, often necessary, but it is like a cornered animal if not acknowledged, like a slow poison if not dispersed when its rightful work is done. How do we keep needed arguments on principles from destroying the bonds of life? Do we regularly seek the embrace of a God who forgives each one with infinite mercy and loves each one without bounds? At the end of the day, do we eat and drink as friends? --Julie Polter



[Addl. Scripture]

Read **Romans 14.1-12**