

Good morning! This week we have been studying a subject that lies at the very center of Christianity, the subject of forgiveness. We have seen that God links His forgiveness to our forgiveness. In other words He tells us in several places in the Bible that if we won't forgive others' sins, He won't forgive our sins. If we aren't willing to forgive other people, that's pretty bad news! If we want God's forgiveness, we must learn to forgive others. Yesterday we considered four ways in which forgiveness operates in our relationships and what some benefits and consequences might be for the ways we either embrace or reject forgiveness. Let's go a little deeper this morning as we read today's passage together:

"Lord, when my fellow believer sins against me, how many times must I forgive him? Should I forgive him as many as seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, you must forgive him more than seven times. You must forgive him even if he wrongs you seventy times seven."

Matt. 18:21-22

Some passages in the Bible are called "Hard Sayings". That means they are difficult to embrace, usually because they involve some great personal cost. Today's passage is a Hard Saying. Peter asks Jesus, "How often do we have to forgive?" The Pharisees' rule was that a person was obliged to forgive three times; after that, if the person kept offending, the victim was free of any further obligation to forgive. Peter thought he was being very magnanimous when he asked Jesus, "Lord, when my fellow believer sins against me, how many times must I forgive him? Should I forgive him as many as seven times?" After all, he was more than doubling the Pharisees' rule! Jesus' response must have stunned the disciples: "I tell you, you must forgive him more than seven times. You must forgive him even if he wrongs you seventy times seven." What? Do the math--- that's 490 times! Wouldn't you lose count? This is exactly what Jesus had in mind; there is no end to our duty to forgive. In fact, if you and I keep a record of the times we have forgiven, we have not really forgiven at all! When we keep a record of how often we forgive, we are also keeping a record of the wrongs. This is the opposite of biblical forgiveness! Remember what Paul said in yesterday's passage:

“Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” When I think about this I think, well, if that person keeps sinning against me and apologizing and then does it again, he isn’t repenting. That’s probably true---but that doesn’t mean I shouldn’t forgive him. If the person who wronged me hasn’t repented, that’s not my business ---that’s God’s business. According to Jesus in today’s passage, my business is to keep forgiving. This is counter-intuitive. We want to teach that person a lesson and if we keep forgiving that person, he'll never learn. Could it be that God wants to teach you a lesson? If you have to keep on forgiving someone for doing the same stuff... maybe God is teaching you how to forgive!