

Seventy Times Seven

By David Phillips

The church is a body; it is the family of God. As such, its members are expected to interact with one another, to encourage one another, to study, to work, and to associate with one another. With such frequent interaction it is inevitable that conflicts will arise. People will say things and do things that may make each other upset or offended. Understanding this, Jesus commanded that we *“love one another”* (John 15:12). It is out of love that we are able to work around our differences. It is out of love that we also forgive one another, not once, not twice, but continually. As we ask God for forgiveness of our sins, so we must be willing to forgive the mistakes of others. This is the point of Jesus’ comment in Matthew 18:22, *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*

Peter, thinking that he was being quite generous in his willingness to forgive, asked Jesus, *“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”* (vs. 21). It is evident that Peter’s question was provoked by his consideration of Jesus’ teachings. How many times should we allow a brother to sin against us before we finally give up on them? How much of a debt ought we to forgive? How patient and loving should we be with one another? Peter said seven times! Now this is generous isn’t it? Perhaps we would have a hard time with forgiving one another seven whole times! Surely we would get tired of their mistakes before that. But was Jesus impressed with Peter’s generous suggestion of seven times?

It was in response to this that Jesus said, *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven”* (Matt. 18:22). What was His point? That we must not put a limit on the number of times we are willing to forgive our brethren. God’s desire to forgive us was so strong that He was willing to send His Son to die on the cross. How willing are we to forgive our brethren? How far are we willing to go to bear *“with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph. 4:2-3)? Jesus’ point is that there should be no end to our desire to forgive our brethren. If they sin against us and we go to them and tell them their faults and they repent, the slate should be clean, the debt forgiven, and the relationship restored. This is what God does for each one of us every day of our lives!