

Multiplying Forgiveness

Matthew 18: 21 - 35

Sunday 14 September August 2008
(*Lectionary Readings for the day*)

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### **I need help, after today's Gospel reading**

Forgive someone, as many as Seventy Seven Times?

Or as other readings have it, Seventy Times Seven?

Even  $7 \times 7$  is enough:

5 sevens are 35

6 sevens are 42

7 sevens are 49 – add a zero and you've got 490

Who's joking like that around here?

Oh – it was Jesus... and he was not joking!

Nor was he doing a mathematics lesson.

If anyone feels self-satisfied or self-righteous, today's reading of the words of Jesus, as told by Matthew in his account of the life of Jesus, highlights our need of God's grace to live as God intended.

Jesus is asked a question (v21) about the number of times we should forgive someone. In his reply (v22), even whilst giving a number, he's really giving an attitude. His reply takes us beyond counting into a total-life-attitude that says: Forgiveness is about NOT counting; it is a way of living.

Then, to elaborate, he follows it up with a story that well illustrates his point. Clearly, he contrasts God's huge level of forgiveness to us, to our (relatively speaking) small levels of forgiveness required towards others. His story is unambiguous. We've probably heard it more than once before,

The values that Jesus taught are hard to live by. To be a true disciple (follower in the way of Christ, follower in the footsteps of Christ), is not easy. Those who claim Christianity is a cop-out or an easy thing, haven't reckoned with the different values of the Kingdom of God! The Christian Gospel is not easy! Love your enemies, turn the other cheek – even in the church, people often think that's taking things too far.

Seems to go against human nature – revenge is in our systems, and holding onto bitterness and grudges – even if they eat away and destroy us from within, as they ultimately do.

### What are we being asked to do?

- To forgive, as a way of life
- (Ties in with) To love even those who do wrong to us

### Qualification:

We struggle emotionally / in our gut, in case if we forgive and 'let go', we somehow may 'baptise what is wrong as right'. That is not the intention in forgiveness – it does not make a wrong right, nor necessarily absolve someone from being correctly punished. (Elaborate)

### Who do we need to forgive?

- People we hate, perhaps
  - People we hold grudges against, don't easily pray for etc.
  - Someone who has hurt us
  - Ex-spouse (many in that situation), desertion,
  - Fraud – unpaid bills / corruption / company downfall
  - Political situation (ex-SA, current-Zimbabwe, many other situations)
  - Economic or political situation responsible for our hardships
  - People who have shamed us
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- Possible response: An impossible demand, I will fail anyway, so why should I bother?
  - Requirement of God, built into the fabric of the universe
    - If something is true, it is true – independent of our thoughts on the matter (e.g. gravity - elaborate).
    - Failure to do these things – illness, churns us up, shrivel our heart and soul;
    - Modern medical and psychological research; the need for forgiveness / letting go of grudges
    - Called on to love / to forgive / to pray for
    - Each one of us is forgiven by God, who models this behaviour for us – “I will not hold your sins against you, but will forgive them”; even when in a state of sin, God still loves us, longs for friendship with us, does not completely cut us off
    - Very much for the real world – tough, unambiguous, demanding; that's the real world; this way of living takes courage and strength! And the grace of God.
    - It also requires big-heartedness
    - We will fail, but let that not stop us
    - “Fall down – get up, fall down – get up, fall down – get up” – a description of the Christian life

Elie Wiesel and Viktor Frankl re Holocaust / TRC experience / Amy Biehl's parents /

**Qualification:**

Do we always make peace? No

Are we always reconciled? No

Examples: Hitler / murderer / abuser in a family situation

We may need to remove ourselves from a situation or person

[Elaborate]

However: Holding onto grudges damages us, in body, mind and soul

Need to let go – may be a process; may take years to let go of and have to deal with the feelings again and again

God blesses us in the process

- Natural blessings: none (or less) of the physical, emotional and spiritual damage that otherwise results
- Blessings to the persons concerned even if they are unaware...
- ... Spiritual blessings: Freedom even of perpetrator, perhaps?
- It avoids the shrivelling of our souls

Humility – all deserve and need God's love – even me!

Faithfulness to God

**Concluding comments**

Not covered every issue

Common issues to all

In dealing with them:

- Ask God to deal graciously with others,
- ... and for us to have the grace to deal lovingly with others,
- as he deals graciously with us
- Pray for those who have hurt us
- Ask God for strength, if it seems too hard for us
- Seek out help / support  
Books / conversations / seek out help from clergy or other

**Come to communion rail**

Symbolically as if to the holy ground beneath the Cross on which Jesus died

All things dealt with there; all sins left there, for God to handle

Arms symbolically outstretched to give away that which is ungodly & to receive God's grace

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