

Matthew 18:21-22

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-18/matthew-1821-22/>

Peter asks Jesus where he should set the limits of his mercy toward his brother and suggested that he should forgive him up to seven times. Jesus said no, do not put limits on your forgiveness, and told Peter to forgive his brother as many times as needed without any limitation whatsoever.

The parallel gospel account of this teaching is found in Luke 17:4.

Peter then spoke up and asked Jesus to return to the topic of mercy.

Earlier, in what was likely a single conversation or series of conversations spanning from Matthew 17:25-18:35, *Jesus* shared the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14). One of this parable's main points was that God loves His children, and will go after them, even when they stray. *Jesus* prefaced this parable by telling His disciples that He came to seek and to save that which was lost (Matthew 18:13). And *Jesus* followed up this parable by instructing his disciples in how to go about trying to restore a brother who had fallen into sin.

Peter asked *Jesus*, *Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?* He was asking *Jesus* where he should draw the limits of his mercy. *Peter* suggested what he thought was a good answer. "Shall I forgive him up to seven times?" His suggestion possibly indicates that *Peter* was beginning to grasp the mercy principle *Jesus* taught His disciples in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:7, 5:41; 5:44; 6:12; 6:14-15; 7:1-2).

The mercy principle that *Jesus* taught was that the measure of mercy that we give to others is the same measure of mercy that we receive from God. *Peter* seems to partially recognize this principle when he asked if he should forgive his *brother* for *sins* or offenses done *against him* up to *seven times*. Or perhaps *Peter* is recalling and applying what *Jesus said* about forgiveness elsewhere.

"If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."
(Luke 17:3-4)

Seven times seems pretty generous on *Peter's* behalf. But *Peter* is placing limits on mercy and forgiveness, while *Jesus* was teaching unlimited forgiveness.

Jesus's response to *Peter* rhetorically and memorably tells him that *seven times* is far too inadequate. *Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Jesus* was not teaching *Peter* to set the limits of his mercy at four hundred and ninety times. *Jesus* was teaching *Peter* to set no limits on how much mercy would show. In other words, *forgive your brother* for *sins* done *against you* as many *times* as your *brother* needs forgiving. *Do not show your brother* forgiveness *seven times* only. Show your *brother* an infinite amount of mercy and forgiveness.

In the following verses, *Jesus* teaches *Peter* a parable to demonstrate this point.

Biblical Text

Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”