



As believers in Jesus, the most important aspect of our life in Jesus Christ is the aspect of our faith in Jesus. This is spoken about in many different ways throughout the New Testament. Many of us take the idea of having faith as the basic fundamental aspect of our decision to follow after and choose to be a true disciple of Jesus.

Actually, the fact of the matter is that, when an individual truly chooses to believe in all that Jesus did on the cross and then believe His rising from the dead, it is the main step to becoming "born again." The next step is to accept the fact that Jesus did all of that for you, personally, and accept Him as your personal Savior. You accept the fact that Jesus saved you from eternal death because He died and rose again.

However, we must remember that believing and accepting what Jesus did is the first step of salvation. If you truly believe that very fact and accept that Jesus died and rose again for you then you are truly "saved" and born again. However, there is also another aspect of our salvation that is just vital as believing that Jesus died for you. What I am talking about is the fact that Jesus now must be your "Lord"—the absolute, supreme and final authority in your life.

We all say that Jesus is our Savior and Lord. However, we must realize that when we say that, we are actually expressing two different aspects of our salvation. Expressing Jesus as your Savior is fundamental. He saved you from the effects of living a life as a sinner. Believing in what Jesus did and accepting Him as the one who took all of your sin upon Him is vital for a person's salvation. You then become "born again." You become a "new creature" as it tells us in 1Corinthians 5:17 - a "new creature" in Christ. You become a new species of being – a child of God!!!

However, that is not the end of it. Jesus now must also be your "Lord" – the absolute, supreme and final authority in your life for the rest of your days while you are here on this earth. This is where the "fun" starts. We must allow Jesus and all His ways to now become all our ways. We must change to be more and more as Jesus was when He walked this earth and as He is now in heaven.

One of the most difficult ways of being like Jesus, when He walked this earth and now in heaven waiting to return, is in the area of forgiveness. I am referring to the way that Jesus teaches us how we are to now walk and live our lives as children of our Father, God. Yes, one of the most difficult aspects of a true believer's life is being able to walk now as a true child of God in the area known as "forgiveness."

We see that this is a very serious aspect of being a true child of God. In Matthew 18 and Luke 17, Jesus is giving a teaching to His disciples and to anyone else who would be listening, including the religious leaders. In Matthew's account as found in Matthew 18:1-11, Jesus starts out about "offending the little ones." He starts here but He will finish up with how the true believer should walk in the lifestyle of "forgiveness," not just to children but to everyone. In Luke 17:1-4 we see that Luke gives us the same exact account.

In speaking about forgiveness the way Jesus was presenting it, we must first get a little bit of understanding the way the Jewish mindset of forgiveness was. We must also understand Jesus' method in His teaching process. We must understand that Jesus many times started off with the way the Jewish people had seen and taken the scriptures. As we know, many times, they were "off" in their understanding of many of the concepts that were given to them by God as found in their scriptures, what we refer to as the Old Testament.

In referring to forgiveness, their main concept was found in Amos 1:1-2:9. We read in those scriptures, the following: *"Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four.."* and then the wrath of God would come against those that attacked Israel. What they took this to mean was that God would forgive three times but after that, the fourth time, God would combat them.

We must understand that in Amos, it was talking about those who came against everything that God stood for and that God was protecting His people. However, the Jewish rabbis and sages took this and made it a precept of saying how many times a person should forgive, three times, and then if they were offended by a person for a fourth time "it was over" – you did not have to forgive.

That was the “starting point” of where Jesus’ teaching concerning this area of forgiveness began. In Matthew 18:15-18, Jesus states, *“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the assembly: but if he neglect to hear the assembly, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

This was the basis of the **Jewish understanding** of the aspect of forgiving others. This was the starting point of this teaching on forgiveness. From here, “the plot thickens” and we will see what Jesus wanted to actually tell us about what true forgiveness really is.

We see Peter comes and asks Jesus, *“...Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?”* This was not necessarily a question but rather it was a statement presented as a question. Peter was stating and telling Jesus that he got what Jesus was inferring – that we should go even further when talking about forgiving others. Peter was on the right track but he still did not get the full picture of what Jesus was teaching.

Peter was stating and using the number seven (as being the number of completion) and thereby doubling the number stated by the rabbis as they saw it in Amos. Peter was being Peter. He was again listening to Jesus and hearing what Jesus was teaching but, again, he was missing the full aspect of what Jesus was actually teaching. Again, Peter was on the right track but he only understood a “foretaste” of what Jesus was going to tell them about this area called forgiveness.

Peter was stating that he understood what Jesus was teaching but he may have wanted to add to Jesus’ teaching and say how wonderful it would be for Jesus’ disciples to now forgive others “seven times.” That would show that they were better than the rabbis, the Pharisees and the Scribes. Obviously, Peter was missing the point. It was not the number of times that we need to forgive but rather it was the “attitude of the heart” when forgiving the offense of others that is important.

Jesus, in love, understanding that Peter, and most likely the other disciples were missing the point, responded by stating as we see in Matthew 18:22, "... I say *not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*" As you can imagine, this was quite a shock to the disciples. That is why we read in Luke's account that they all blurt out, "...*Lord, increase our faith.*" (Luke 17:5)

What Jesus had said concerning the "*seventy times seven,*" seemed to them to be impossible. If that is what it meant to follow Jesus, then they needed a boost in their trusting of Him and who He was. To their natural understanding and even in their most "religious understanding" this seemed "crazy." However, that is the essence of "**true faith.**"

Trusting that Jesus and His words will never lead us astray and even though they may be difficult (and sometimes seem crazy) to obey and follow, is vital for us to grasp. Our total trust in Jesus and in who He is the very thing that will carry us forward in doing what He is telling us. In Luke, we read that Jesus goes on to describe how just a "little faith," using the analogy of the size of a "mustard seed," would grow into something much, much bigger.

That "mustard seed" faith, that "little starter faith," means choosing not to go by what is the "letter of the law" or what they would feel like doing or not doing. It may even seem impossible and maybe even "crazy" to do. It involves not only a total lifestyle change but it involves a totally new way of thinking. It involves totally trusting in what Jesus is now teaching them.

To be disciples of Jesus, we must be totally "sold out" to whatever Jesus teaches and exhorts us to do. That is making Jesus the "Lord" of your life. That is the beginning of walking in faith. That is the "mustard seed," the "starter faith," that Jesus was expressing. A disciple of Jesus chooses to change their lifestyle, their entire way of thinking, and turns from the ways of the old sinful nature to that of the nature of a "born again child of God."

This is the beginning of faith and that is the essence of "the faith" - placing your total trust and confidence in God and His Word, His precepts, His principles and His ways. We must remember that the only way any disciple of Jesus could possibly walk in the type of forgiveness and mercy that Jesus walked in was and is to place their total trust and confidence in Jesus and who He is.

Walking in "Christ-like" forgiveness can only be truly accomplished in and through a total trust in Jesus and through the in-flowing of the Holy Spirit within the believer's life. Having this total trust and confidence (faith) in Jesus and His teachings would allow His disciples to walk in power and authority that would be able to cast aside every obstacle within themselves that would hinder them from walking in His love, mercy, forgiveness and compassion.

In Matthew's account, Jesus used the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" to teach on what this Christ-like forgiveness is and what it is not. We can see this because Jesus begins this parable by saying *"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to..."* (Matthew 18:23) Jesus was giving this parable in reference to His answer to Peter concerning the *"seventy times seven"* and their exclamation to, *"increase our faith."*

In the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" we see how God truly views this whole aspect of walking in true forgiveness. In essence this parable tell us how God the Father, out of His own love and mercy, chose to forgive you and me. We see that the man in this parable owed a great deal to his lord, his master. So does each one of us. We were all sinners who could never pay back to God all that He had given us. He has given us the breath that we breathe.

Yes, we all owe a great deal to our God. We could never ever repay to our God what He has given to man. However, just like the man in the parable we have abused what God has given. We see that the man never did really ask for forgiveness but the ruler actually did forgive the man of all his debt – which was a huge debt. The lord simply forgave the man of his debt. God has forgiven all of us through the blood of Jesus.

We know that in the parable, this first man refused to forgive another man's debt and he chose to throw him into a debtors prison until all would be paid back. We know that the lord in this parable heard of this and took the first man and threw him, not into a debtors prison but rather to the "tormentors" – in other words to the devil.

Jesus states in Matthew 18:35, *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."* Hmmm..... What this is telling us is that the area of forgiveness is so very, very important to God and therefore, we as His people must also look at it as being very, very important to all of us.

The conclusion of this parable in Matthew is interesting. It doesn't state that the wicked man ever gets out or gets away from the "tormentors." It is an open ending in which anything can happen. I believe Jesus is telling His disciples and He is telling each of us today, that we must always be walking in true forgiveness towards others. It is a choice we need to make.

No where in the Word does it ever tell us that there is any reason why we are allowed not to forgive anyone. This is a very difficult "pill to swallow" for all true believers. Jesus forgave the people who put him on the cross. It is a moment that almost becomes more difficult to comprehend the more you think about it. He said, "*Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.*" (Luke 23:34) That must be the way we are to now be thinking. We are to have the "mind of Christ" so we must start thinking and being as He thinks and as He is!!!

In many of His other teachings, Jesus always points us to forgive. Jesus knew that seeking revenge or getting even does not fulfill or really make you feel better. Holding on to hatred and/or resentment only breeds more of the same – within you and the people you have it with. Choosing not to walk in forgiveness is the total opposite of the true character of God. We must choose to forgive anyone and everyone. Yes, this is very, very hard for each of us!!!

The scripture is clear, God desires none to perish but that all would come to the saving knowledge of Jesus. If you cannot forgive someone, then, whether you realize it or not, you are saying that you do not want that person to be "saved" and go to heaven. I know that is very difficult for you or even myself to hear but it is the truth.

That is not the attitude of God and therefore, if you are a true child of God, it should not be anywhere in your way of thinking. I know it is difficult but that is what walking in true faith and in true love the way the Word, Jesus and the Father tells us. The Holy Spirit is within us to help us in having this "attitude of the heart." Why must we forgive? Because it is God's will!!!

Jesus chose to walk and live in total forgiveness towards all people. That is why He went and died on the cross. God had chosen to forgive **all** the people of this earth-past, present and future. He offers to everyone His love and forgiveness, freely. Now, His call is for all His people to do the same. Jesus was, still is and will always be our ultimate role model for all things—including forgiveness. Will we follow in His footsteps??? "**Lord, increase our faith!!!**"