



[Matthew 18:15-17](#)

(15) 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. (16) 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. (17) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

King James Version

Understanding our frame, [God](#) leans toward mercy. Three times He repeats, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice" ([Hosea 6:6](#); [Matthew 9:13](#); [12:7](#)).

He gets personal about it as well. In [Matthew 5:7](#), [Jesus](#) names mercy as one of the primary [beatitudes](#), or "attitudes to be in": "Blessed are the [merciful](#), for they shall obtain mercy." Here, in a very personal and positive setting, we begin to see mercy's cause-and-effect principle: Show mercy and you will obtain mercy.

Christ drew this principle from the attitude the unchangeable God has always maintained. Speaking of Him, the twin quotes from [Psalm 18:25](#) and [II Samuel 22:26](#) echo the beatitude: "With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful."

Not only is God of the mind to be merciful, He expects it of us, even *requires* it of us. Notice how the tenor of [Micah 6:8](#) becomes more intense, though remaining positive: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord *require of you* but to do justly, to [love](#) mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" This moves from a simple cause-and-effect principle to an absolute requirement.

We need to examine Matthew 18 in this light. With mercy and [forgiveness](#) in mind, Christ outlines His instruction on how to deal with those who [sin](#) against us. We show mercy by not escalating the problem beyond the sinning individual, if possible. Discuss it with him *alone*! We are not to bandy about anyone's sins. Doing so only makes it more difficult

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for the offender to swallow his [pride](#) and repent, for, by admitting his wrong, he is "losing face" with many who know the story. The object—neverforget—is to gain our brother, not to gain vengeance or vindication for ourselves.

If the offender does not listen, then we are to take one or two other witnesses. Again, if at all possible, we should keep the situation from escalating beyond that. Do we like *our* transgressions spread all over the church? Only in extreme intransigence should we take the problem to the whole brotherhood, or to the ministry as their administrative representatives.

After this step-by-step instruction, Christ underlines the thought by showing that we should forgive—show mercy and extend grace—even up to 490 times a day to the same person (verses 21-22)! In other words, like God, our mercy should endure forever, since 490 times a day suggests "infinitely." It is almost impossible to offend that many times in such a limited period, especially if connected with real repentance.

Jesus then relates the [Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#) who, though forgiven of enormous debt, threw a fellow servant in jail for not repaying a pittance. Christ then gives a stern warning: If you are merciless to your brother, expect like treatment from your heavenly Father. So, not only is mercy a good idea, God requires it, and severe penalties will fall upon us if we refuse to extend it.

James makes it even more emphatic! "For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" ([James 2:13](#)). The apostle links the fair and impartial judgment of God directly with mercy or [grace](#), for one without the other spells death for every sinner.

Frequently, we may state our willingness to forgive a brother or sister—but "only if they apologize!" What magnanimous largesse! What unassailable righteousness! "If they grovel, I will deign to forgive." No, what sickening, superior patronization! Mercy or grace need not always be contingent on the offender's apology or repentance.

Did not Christ ask His Father to forgive his assassins, "for they do not know what they do" ([Luke 23:34](#))? This was not some minor social infraction or everyday offense in life, but the crime of the ages! They were certainly of no mind to repent or feel any remorse, yet He willingly turned the other cheek, taking every despicable sin of all mankind on Himself in abject humility without a whisper of protest!

— Staff

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