

Lesson 16: Chapter 18 “Forgiveness”

Servant’s preparation:

http://www.suscopts.org/pdf/presentations/biblestudy/NT/Matthew/Matthew_18.pdf

Brief introduction:

At the beginning of each lesson in the bible study of St. Matthew, please mention this book overview.

- ✓ Who is St. Matthew? He was one of the twelve disciples; he was a tax-collector before Jesus called him to follow Him.
- ✓ Who did he write his gospel to? The Jews, it is designed to prove that Jesus is the Messianic king of Old Testament (OT) prophecy.
- ✓ What is its theme? Jesus is the King of the Heavenly kingdom, Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

Remember:

Matthew 16 mentions Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, who seek a sign, and His revealing of His identity to the disciples. Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ leads to Jesus' statement that He will build His church upon Peter's confession [this faith for all Christians] and that Peter [representing the church] will receive the keys of the kingdom. Jesus then foretells His death and resurrection, followed by His rebuke of Peter for attempting to dissuade Him. Jesus concludes the chapter by calling all followers to take up their crosses and deny themselves.

Matthew 17 describes Jesus' transfiguration on a mountain, followed by the healing of a demon-possessed boy.

Memory Verse:

18:35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Lesson Opener:

At times we may not know how to approach someone who has sinned against us. We may feel nervous or even scared as to how they will react. So, we are going to practice a bit of role play. Others can observe and offer feedback as to what was done well and what could be improved.

Person A: You used to have a close relationship with person B. You often talked together and did activities together. But then you made some hurtful jokes about that person. You thought it was funny, but it hurt person B deeply. You felt embarrassed and so you avoided person B. You don’t return his phone calls or messages. You know you’re wrong and are willing to confess when person B talks with you.

Person B: You used to have a close relationship with person A. You often talked together and did activities together. But then person A made some hurtful jokes about you. He thought it was funny, but it hurt you

deeply. He doesn't return your phone calls after that. You decide to meet this person and talk about it face to face.

Lesson Goal:

God wants us to forgive others like He forgives us.

Lesson Body:

Who Is the Greatest? (18:1-5)

The disciples thought it was a temporary kingdom of an earthly authority. This is why each of them was eager to obtain a share in it, or to occupy a position greater than the others. Even though it was not a good question, Jesus answered them kindly.

It was amazing for them to see the Lord calling a child and putting him in their midst as a living example of obtaining the admission into the heavenly kingdom. The Jews, the Greeks and Romans disregarded childhood. But the Lord was raising humanity to a mature life.

The Lord assures those asking for the kingdom, to return and become as little children, and thus would be able to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is a growth towards the humble and simple childhood. Man, through his experiences on earth, is very much puffed up, and is unable to enter the narrow gate. It is therefore appropriate for him to decline all pride, so his self would be belittled, and become absolutely crucified. He would then cross, through the crucified Lord, from the narrow gate. This is the royal gate and the only entrance to the heavenly kingdom.

The point is one does not enter heaven by trying to be great. He enters only by realizing he is not great. A person can enter God's kingdom if he admits that Jesus is great and he is not. Children are far from perfect. But they are generally speaking quite humble, they easily admit their sin, they have strong faith, they are dependent on others and never worry. That is why they are closer to the kingdom of heaven.

Surely, we need to be daily renewed in the spirit of our minds, that we may become simple and humble as little children, and willing to be the least of all.

Jesus Warns of Offenses (18:6-9)

May be the Jews in the old times used to punish criminals of major crimes by tying a millstone round their neck and throwing them in the depths of the sea.

Is it possible for the believer to amputate every member in his body that obstructs him/her or obstructs others? In church history there are unique stories of people who have done so such as Simon the tanner, and the girl so devout that she punched her eye with the awl so as to offer it to someone who tried his best to entice her to sin because of her beautiful eyes. But that is not what God asked us to do.

In the fathers' opinion the Lord's words here imply a spiritual symbolical meaning: the hand is nothing other than the person who supports me and works for my account. If this is changed to an

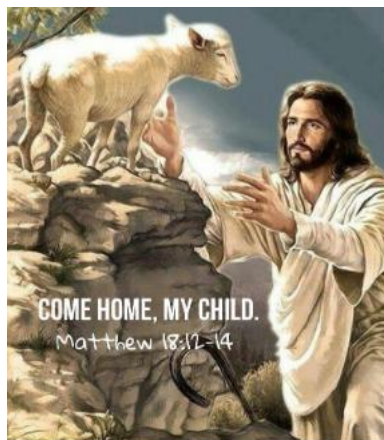
offense to me, making me lose my faith or chastity, I amputate it to usurp the kingdom without it, though I am eager to save it.

Joseph, in the book of Genesis, conquered his desires when he left his clothes in the hands of his mistress, and escaped sin. He preferred to cut off the relation with her who provided for his living and be humiliated in jail just like someone with no powers and be deprived of the bodily freedom for the sake of being blessed with the devout paradise life. What is amazing is that God did not leave Joseph without support. God Himself became His own source of power, for, wherever he went, his work was blessed and multiplied, whether inside the jail or at Pharaoh's place.

We are not without any hands [powers], but the Lord Jesus Himself becomes our working hands, and works through us and in us. Every amputation to the source of the offense, in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, is not a loss but rather gain, for you take and not give away.

What we say about the hands applies to the feet and the eyes.

St. Augustine says, "If someone who has authority wishes to cover up his injustice and wrong doings, and he asks you to do an act of service to him by bearing false witness; do not accept this. Reject the false witness, lest you deny God who is right and true. Your boss will be wrathful and has authority to pressure you. What can this one who has authority do to you or how could he bother you? He can kill you physically in his wrath and authority. Let the body be killed, for the body will die even if it is not killed. But as for the soul, he cannot kill it. If he whom I upset with the truth will bother my body with hardship, then I shall listen to my Lord who says, (Matt 10:28) "Do not fear those who kill the body.""



The Parable of the Lost Sheep (18:10-14)

Even though the process of amputation is sometimes urgent, it is performed on a narrow scale, after all the effort has been made. Maybe the Lord wished to say in verse 10 that 'childhood' is not to be disregarded or thought lightly of. Every person, however small he may be, has his angel who stands in the presence of the father for his sake.

It is as if before the process of amputating one of our members with the cross of the Lord, we cut off our relation to it, but look for their salvation, as one of these little ones whom God is eager to save. In this parable, the Lord reveals His outlook on man, that he is not just an individual among many others, but God is concerned about him personally and who he is by his name. The Lord gives him all His concern more than all the group kept in his pastures, so as to win him over and makes him become a member in this group. God is concerned about every member, for he is a son to Him. If God thus loves and preserves the redeemed, then surely man should not despise them.

More time, energy, and attention may be given toward the one who is not doing well and needs salvation and/or restoration than to those who are faithfully serving God with little need for active involvement from us.

Dealing with a Sinning Brother (18:15-20)

We are to follow four steps when someone sins against us:

1. Go to the person who is in error or who has wronged you and privately tell him his fault; this was required under the law Leviticus 19:17 law, Leviticus 19:17.
2. If he listens, be reconciled with him, but if he does not listen, take others along and speak to him a second time so that you have witnesses, it is based on Deuteronomy 19:15. It is done to gain the brother not for revenge.
3. If he refuses to listen, take the problem to the Church
4. If he refuses to listen even to the Church, then the person is to be considered outside the fellowship.

This behavior the Lord commanded us to do, is not only an act of politeness the believer is committed to doing, but in its essence, it is a hiding in the person of the Lord Jesus. The believer does not see his brother as wronging him, but he sees him as wronging his own self, and in his obtaining eternity. Therefore, he goes to him to tell him his fault, not to ascertain that his brother is making a mistake or that he expects him to apologize to him. He rather goes to his brother carrying the thoughts of Jesus to win him over in love to Jesus, as a live member in His body. He tries to save him from the error and gain him as a member with him in the same body.

On step 4, by rejecting the church, this person deprives himself of being a member in Christ's body. It is the right of the church to bind him just as Jesus says in verse 18, not for serving him right, but rather to preserve the other members from his corruption lest he infiltrates to them. It is terribly hard for the church to see someone throwing himself out and forcing the church to bind him. The church keeps waiting for his return from day to day to loosen him, and he finds the church's door open. The power of binding and loosing is promised to the apostles and their successors, bishops and priests.

The group prayers are answered quickly, and bring forth a lot of fruit, when those prayers are in unity and agreement of thoughts.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (18:21-35)

How many times is the personal sin to be forgiven?

St. John Chrysostom says, "The Lord here does not speak of a certain number (70 X 7 = 490), it is rather immeasurable and constant forever. There is no number for forgiveness, but he asks it to be continuous and forever"

St. Jerome says, "If my brother asks for forgiveness only with his lips and not with his heart, what should I do?" He says, "If he sins seventy times seven times every day, and he asked you for forgiveness, then forgive him, and do not say he is not asking for forgiveness from his heart. Leave the judgment for God! Since he asked me for forgiveness, if he is not saying the truth, it is God who knows best".

If a Greek silver talent is meant in this parable, the ten thousand talents would be about \$7,500,000, which is beyond human's ability to pay back.

This poor man asked for some more time, thinking he would be able to pay the debt. The king had compassion on him; He not only had patience and was slow to react as the man wanted (verse 26) but He also gave him more than what he asked for, He set him free through the cross and forgave his debt by His grace.

Later, the servant was unwilling to forgive a far smaller debt and he put his debtor in jail. That poor servant, who was put in jail, did not open his mouth to complain; but it was the voice of the others that cried out in great grief. God hears the secret human sighing, because of people's cruelty to each other, and their unforgiveness to each other. Therefore, God measures to them in the same way they measure to their brothers.

The Lord has confirmed, we must forgive, to be forgiven (Matt 18:35).

Takeaway and lesson delivery ideas:

Lost a sheep? Search!! Find !! Rejoice!!!

1. Search:

This word shows the type of attitude we are to have toward the lost sheep. Before you can search for the sheep you must know that it is lost. How would a shepherd know a sheep is missing? A shepherd has the responsibility to know his sheep. He knows how many he has. He knows their habits. He knows where they like to graze and sleep. If one is absent out of habit, then he knows there is a problem.

Church servants, like you would be in the near future, must know their sheep as well. They should be aware when a sheep is missing. A long time ago Cain asked the question "Am I my brother's keeper?" Are we? Actually yes.

So first we must be observant to know when there is a problem. Once you know that there is a problem, what next? What can you do to help? First, we must search. Searching means we must make an effort to reach out to this person. It may not be easy. The parable describes them as lost. A sheep who cannot find his way back again. When we relate this parable to people, we know that they may intentionally leave the church or avoid fellowship.

A straying believer may hide from us. You won't be able to help this person unless you make a very strong effort to get in touch with this person.

Application: What do you do when a friend you know starts to stray away from church? Are you apathetic? Do you ignore it and hope they will come back one day on their own? Do you think "that is his problem!"

God wants us to take responsibility. He wants us to care for others. He wants us to get off our seats and search! He wants us to care enough to spend time and effort to reach out to those who are straying.

2. Find him:

You are not going to find the straying person, unless you search. When you do find him/her, the goal is to restore them, to bring them back again. You need to have a plan for what you will talk about with this person. Sometimes it might require a listening ear, a light touch, a caring heart.

Other times a firm word or stern rebuke might be necessary. Every situation is different, so you need to pray for wisdom and be discerning.

3. *He rejoices:*

Here we see the heart of a shepherd. A good shepherd really loves his sheep. He cares deeply for them. They are not just a number or statistics. How should you feel when a brother or sister goes astray? God calls us to love and care for those around us. We should care enough for them that we are emotionally moved when they struggle or go astray.

Verse 14 – Here we get a glimpse into God’s heart. He does not want any of His believers (the little ones) to perish. And indeed, they do not. His ultimate will is for the final salvation and glorification of every true believer. And part of the means for this to happen is our search for and restoration of the lost.

Discussion questions:

- Who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?
- Why does Jesus use a little child to illustrate His teaching point?
- What parable illustrates the Father’s concern for the lost person?
- What four steps are we to follow when a "brother" or "sister" has sinned against us?
- Who asked Jesus how many times do we have to forgive someone?
- What increases the likelihood that God will answer prayer? [group prayers]
- What authority from heaven does the hierarchy of the Church exercise then and now?
- What grave warning is in the parable of the unforgiving servant?
- What should be your efforts in solving interpersonal problems?
- Why is forgiveness so important to the Christian community?
- What are the consequences of failing to forgive our brothers or sisters? Why?
- What are the limits of your own willingness to forgive others?
- Do you forgive readily, do you wait for the offenders to ask for forgiveness, or do you look at forgiving others as a sign of weakness? What should the limit of your willingness be?
- If a church today excommunicate a member, does this mean that this person is excommunicated in heaven? [No, they can always repent and be forgiven]