

BASIC BIBLE THEMES

SESSION 5: FORGIVENESS

STUDENT

Background Scripture: Matthew 18:15-17; 21-35

1. Engage Interest

- How many times did you say “I’m sorry” during the past week?

- How many times did you say “I forgive you” during the past week?

2. Explore the Word

A. Matthew 18:21-35

True or False?

For each statement below, circle “T” if you think the statement is true, or circle “F” if you believe the statement is false.

- T F 1. Peter was in favor of forgiveness, but only up to a point.
- T F 2. Jesus said our forgiveness must be limited and conditional.
- T F 3. Jesus said we should forgive only those people who ask to be forgiven.
- T F 4. Jesus told a parable to illustrate that those who are not forgiving prove they have never personally experienced God's forgiveness.
- T F 5. Jesus’ teaching means we must forgive even a person who has wronged us and severely hurt us.
- T F 6. The unforgiving servant in Jesus’ parable did not really appreciate that he had been forgiven.
- T F 7. Unforgiveness does not bring divine judgment.
- T F 8. Unforgiveness springs from selfishness—what “I” want and what is best for “me.”
- T F 9. We can forgive others because God has forgiven us.
- T F 10. For the Christian, forgiveness is not meant to be an attitude and a style of life, but is just an isolated action.

- Imagine that a member of our church violated one of the rules of membership. What do you think would be the best course of action?

Matthew 18:15-17

- What are Jesus' "guidelines" for forgiving an errant church member?
- How do the ideas we discussed above line up with Jesus' teaching?

3. Examine Life

- Thinking about the nature of the forgiveness asked for and extended in the situations you have mentioned, how do you feel about saying "I'm sorry" in such situations?
- How do you feel about people who say "I'm sorry" to you in such situations?
- What do you think Jesus would say to a person who says "I'm sorry" with no genuine feeling of sorrow or regret?
- Can you name a situation where only genuine forgiveness can break the impasse between two people?
- In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to offer forgiveness first?
- Does the Holy Spirit bring to your mind a situation in which you should offer forgiveness to someone else?

4. Exercise Your Faith

- Is there someone I have wronged from whom I need to ask forgiveness?
- Is there someone who has wronged me whom I need to forgive, even if that person has never asked for forgiveness?

LESSON SUMMARY

Jesus came to earth for a number of reasons, but the main purpose was to procure salvation for all who believe, salvation that would result from God forgiving us of our sins. Jesus' ministry would need to provide not only the means of forgiveness, but also the pattern by which His followers would be able to both receive and express this gift.

How is this possible? How do we move beyond the desire for judgment and condemnation to a more Christlike expression of forgiveness and grace?

The 18th chapter of Matthew is very helpful in answering these questions, and revealing the biblical theme of forgiveness. It is an extended discussion by Jesus regarding the exercise of grace toward one another. He reveals three major understandings that must be held by people who hope to live like Him: (1) In relating people to people, we must recognize *equality*. (2) In relating people to the law, we must recognize *priority*. (3) In relating people to God, we must recognize *liability*.¹

Looking at Jesus' example and teachings, we come to the timely question: why is His call to forgiveness so important to our present experience? The answer has three facets. First,

there is a *personal* dimension. As Jesus has stated in the parable of the unmerciful servant, the need for a person to forgive others is not a suggestion, but a command. Our failure to forgive people will result in the sacrifice of our own salvation. We must be willing to extend mercy if we hope to receive it. Second, there is a *corporate* dimension. The actions of the followers of Christ must exhibit to the world the nature of Christ. Do we not contradict our message when we refuse to forgive people? Don't we distort the image of the Church when we proclaim a message of grace while living a life of judgment?

Third, there is a *holiness* reason. If we understand holiness to be that transformation of the inner nature of humanity to where we love God with our whole heart and our neighbors as ourselves, then Jesus' mandate for forgiveness is a primary requirement. As forgiveness is the first necessity for us to begin our relationship with God, it must also be the completing act which allows His salvation to be made complete within us. Holiness without forgiveness is legalism. Holiness expressing forgiveness is the very breath of God blowing upon an all-too-desperate world.