

## **The Discipline of Christlike Relationships**

### **Lesson Eight**

**Focal Text:** Matthew 18:15-17, 21-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

**Background:** Matthew 18:15-35; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

**Teaching Aim:** To lead members to identify three ways they can help maintain unity in their Christian fellowship and apply these to their Christian relationships this week.

**Connect with Life:** Ask members to identify an important truth that can be found in the following verses of Scripture:

1. “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18-19)
2. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:46-47)
3. “To prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12-13)
4. “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)
5. Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 from the quarterly.
6. “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:18-20)

Allow members to share their ideas. Hopefully, someone will share that these verses remind us of the importance of the church in God’s plans for his kingdom and the importance that unity plays in the life of the church. The study for today will remind us of the role that forgiveness plays in helping to maintain unity in the church. How important is your church and Sunday school class to you? What are you willing to do to help improve the health of your fellowship?

**Guide Bible Study:** Continue with a study of Matthew 18:18-20. Use the following questions:

1. What is meant by “bind” and “loose” as used in verse 18? (The church binds us to our covenant with God and to one another. We declare that God’s forgiving grace in Christ will loose the hold of sin in the life of people who trust in Christ. Jesus showed that he has delegated authority to his church on earth to decide and to act on matters of significance in the church.)

Earlier, in Matthew 16 Jesus referred to this authority as “keys of kingdom of heaven”. The church is commanded to preach and practice the forgiveness of God.)

2. Why is their special power in the agreement between Christians as mentioned in v. 19? (The church is the body of God Incarnate on earth. The church is to operate under the authority of God. In a sense, the church is to speak and act for God. This helps us understand the importance of maintaining unity in the life of the church. Without this unity the work of God is hindered. Each church member must prioritize the agreement aspect of church governance and ministry.)

3. In what way can v. 20 be seen as a picture of what the church should be? (A group of Christians witnessing and experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit. This can also be seen in Acts 2:42-43 which says that a koinonia comes from spirit-filled Christians who study God’s word and pray, together, in a awareness of the Holy Spirit’s presence in their midst.)

Thus, the importance of unity in the life of the church if it is to be and do what God intended. Such unity requires a regular, consistent, and careful application of God’s forgiveness toward one another and toward the un-churched world. What do we learn from the other verses in our focal passage that will help us better understand this practice of forgiveness? Ask members to discover the points of application as follows: (study the verses in reverse order)

1. Forgiveness is commanded by God (vv. 23-35). Use the following questions:

a. What is the main teaching of this parable? (A man must forgive in order to be forgiven. In a previous passage Jesus said that we must become as a child in order to enter the kingdom.

Among other things, the child was a picture of humility. Nothing will humble us more than to realize the enormity of the debt for which we have been forgiven. Let us remember. Let us not forget that the mission of the church is to be living, breathing carriers of God’s forgiving love.)

b. How did these two debts compare in size? (The debt owed by the slave was more than the total budget of the ordinary province. The debt of the fellow-servant was one five-hundred-thousandth of his own debt. The 100 denarii debt could have been carried in one pocket. The ten thousand talent debt would have taken to carry it an army of about 8,600 carriers, each carrying a sack of sixpences 60 pounds in weight; and they would have formed, at a distance of a yard apart, a line five miles long!)

c. Why is it necessary for the church to practice such forgiveness toward one another? (Before we can represent God’s forgiveness to the world we must first practice it toward one another. Jesus was saying to the church that the kingdom of heaven on earth is the kind of reality where enormous debts are forgiven. But if there is no horizontal extension of this forgiveness to other human beings, then the kingdom of heaven on earth is also the kind of reality where forgiveness is denied.)

2. Forgiveness is unlimited (vv. 21-23). Use the following questions:

a. What did Peter’s question reveal regarding his understanding of forgiveness? (He understood the church’s teachings regarding forgiveness and he was willing to go beyond their limited requirements. But he had not gone far enough.)

b. Is there anything in the previous verses that might have led Peter to suggest that forgiveness might be limited? (There did seem to be a point at which the church should give up on a member

who refused reconciliation. Also refer to 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 at this point. Share background information from the Study Guide.)

c. What additional limitation is reflected in Peter's question? (He seemed to be limiting this forgiveness to fellow church members which was the direction of the previous verses. Jesus would soon expand his horizons regarding the recipient of forgiveness.)

3. Forgiveness should be practiced in the church (vv. 15-17). Use the following questions:

a. Why is such reconciliation so important in the life of the church? (See previous discussion about the unity of the church as it relates to usefulness for God.)

b. What are the key factors in the process for reconciliation as explained in these verses? (This deals with a member being sinned against by another member. We are to deal with them first in person. This is where reconciliation is best practiced because no one else is involved. If this fails, we are to take one or two other members with us- "where two or three are gathered together". This allows for confirmation from one another and from God. Then we are to bring the matter to the church and let the church minister to them as an outsider.)

c. Does this process ultimately allow a limit to our forgiveness? (No! The point is that this person no longer wishes to be a member of the church. If they are no longer a part of the caring fellowship then they will not serve as a source of division in the unity. Church unity is restored. The church can then respond to them as they would to anyone in need of God's forgiveness. They would practice the Great Commission toward them in an evangelistic fashion. The church will extend God's forgiveness toward them but only the Holy Spirit can lead them to receive God's forgiveness or ours.)

**Encourage Application:** Lead members to identify specific ways they can apply these teachings on forgiveness in their own lives this week. The following questions will help them with this application:

1. Is there anyone that I know who needs to hear a witness for God from me? Am I willing to tell them about God's forgiveness and how it has changed my life?

2. Is there anyone that I have considered to be unforgivable? Am I ready to ask God to help me become an extension of His forgiveness toward that person?

3. Is there anyone in the church that needs my forgiveness? Is there anyone in the church that I need to forgive? Am I willing to begin the steps of forgiveness as outlined in this passage?

Ask members to consider if there are any areas of concern they might have regarding disrupted fellowship in the life of this class? If not, pray a prayer of thanksgiving to God. Also pray for continued guidance to help prevent any future disruptions in the fellowship of this class. If concerns are expressed, plan an additional time for the class to get together to deal with these issues in light of this study.