

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

Forgiveness

*"What Goes Around
Comes Around"*

A Short Bible Study from
Matthew 18



Bible Studies from Southside Bible Church
Questions and Discussion Notes by Dawn Hawkins

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

What Goes Around – Comes Around

Matthew 18:15-35



"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2:10

"I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. ²² For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"
Romans 7:21-25

Jesus has been giving the disciples an object lesson in regards to who is going to be the greatest in heaven. He starts in verse 15 with a new thought –but He says "Moreover" – so even though it is a new topic it along the same line of thinking – and that is heaven.

Sometimes I find myself playing a little game and asking myself what I think heaven will be like –much like the disciples were doing at the beginning of Chapter 18. And, I find myself longing for a place where there is no sin. But, God chose the institution of the local church to be exhibit A to an unbelieving world. And He knew that sin between believers would be the stumbling block that would prevent this from happening. And so he takes the opportunity to teach 2 giant principals

to the disciples in regards to their ministry before they joined him in heaven.

Sin is a given. Look at the verses above – we all have sinned. We all have fallen short. We see Paul’s struggles with his flesh. The local church today is made up with believers that struggle with the same things as the disciples and Paul did. The local church is made up of the following...people who get angry, gossipers, liars, people who cheat and steal, people who put other things (idols) before our God, they struggle with lust, are prideful, have addictions, doubts, the wrong priorities, lack of faith, people harboring bitterness, some that lack joy and peace...I could probably fill quite a few pages just listing my own struggles. Now put 20 people together who know Christ as their Savior and what happens? Now think about 100? And 500? I think you start to see the picture – our flesh can get the best of us – we sin and we are affected by others around us sinning. Isn’t it great though that God knew this in advance – and He gave us the ultimate road map to deal with it.

First – deal with sin immediately. Second, forgive anyone who sins again you.

Remember, the world is watching.

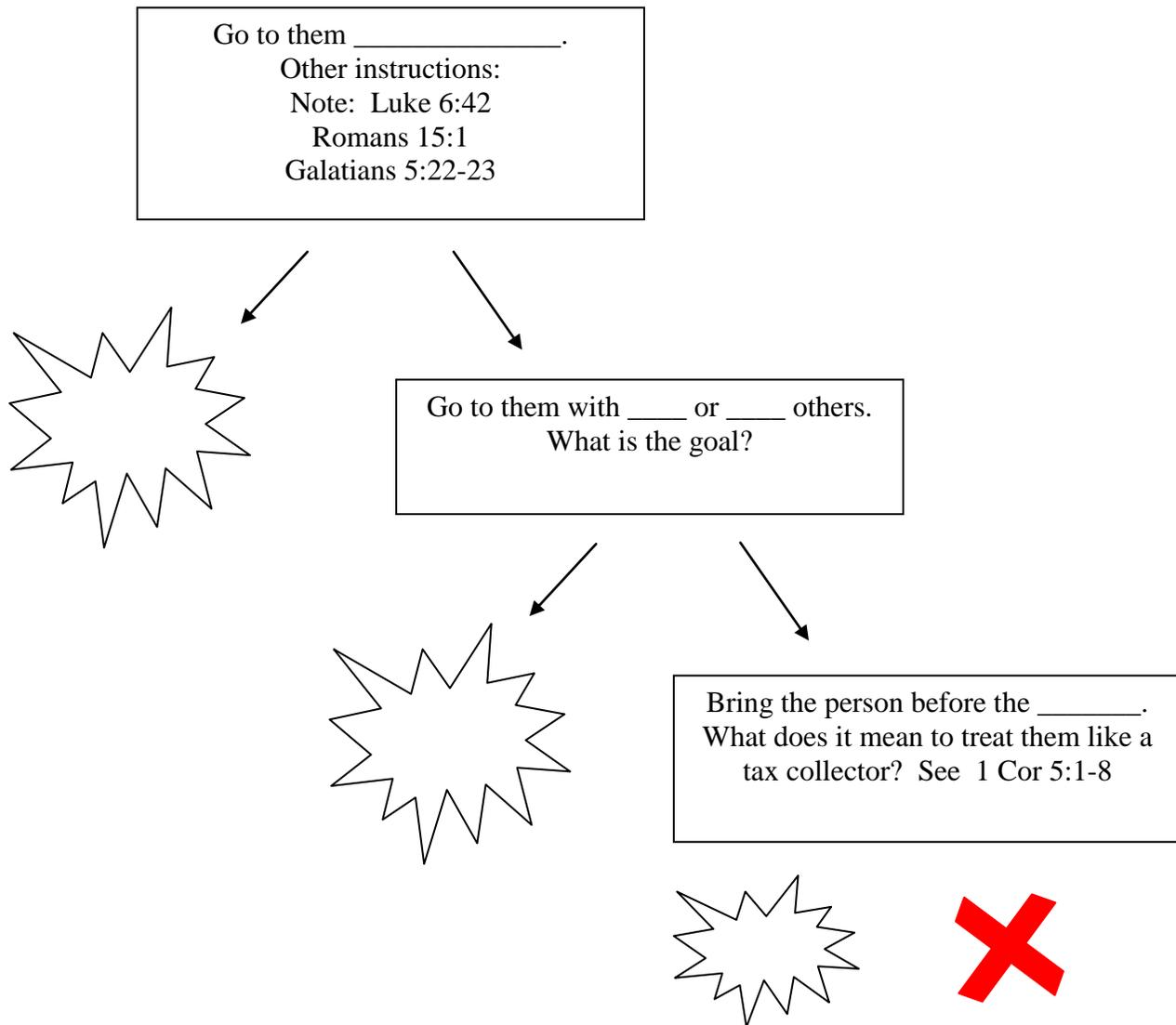
Matthew 18:15-17

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. ^[b] ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

1. How does sin affect us? How does it affect other believers around us? How does it affect those that don’t know Christ?
 - a. Isaiah 59:2
 - b. Psalm 51:12
 - c. Hebrew 12:6
 - d. 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
 - e. 1 Corinthians 11:28-34

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

2. What is the road map?



It would be wrong for anyone to take Jesus' word here as a *command* to confront **your brother** with every sin they commit against you. The Bible says we should bear with one another and be longsuffering towards each other. Yet clearly, there are some things that we cannot suffer long with and must address. You can go to them directly and deal with it; or you can drop the matter under Christian longsuffering and bearing with one another. Other options – holding onto bitterness, retaliation, gossiping to others about the problem – are not allowed.

If the person refuses to listen, God then instructs to take 1 or 2 other people to the person. It is as if God knows that in some circumstances the emotions will be so high that sometimes a new perspective is needed. And what happens if that still doesn't work? You take it to the church. One must always remember that when confronting another brother or sister in Christ – it is not to “prove” yourself right – it is to bring that person back into a right relationship with the Lord. To restore that persons witness as an example to non-believers.

Application:

1. What is our 1st reaction to sin by another brother?
2. What holds us back from confronting according the verses we just looked at?
3. Has anyone ever tried? What was the result and what did you learn?

Matthew 18:18-20

"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹

"Again I say^[c] to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Sometimes I love saying that last line and inserting my name. God is in the midst of us right now! He knew confrontation would be tough. We just shared some examples of experiences that we have had in regards to the steps listed. Sometimes it is easy – a believer is maybe making a wrong choice, you share some scripture and they immediately respond by a new course of action. Other times it isn't so easy. I will never forget a time I met with a friend along with 1 other person who was older (and much wiser). Our hope was to turn a dear friend of mine away from a pattern of lying and disobedience to her family. That person we confronted chose to turn a deaf ear and in the process chose to end our friendship. I was devastated. But there was a lesson for me as well. My older and wiser friend took me to this very passage.

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

I was reminded that it wasn't me at all that was in charge of changing the person – my job was just to be the instrument . I was to bind – and God was to do the rest. God would then work on the heart of my friend. But if I didn't bind...that person would be loosing out. God needs us to be His instruments. And the choices my friend was making was taking her away from the fellowship of other believers – and that is a special place – a place that God is smack dab in the middle of!

Step #2 – Forgive

What is probably the #1 pitfall that we can run into if we follow the roadmap of confrontation? Without a doubt it has to be the danger of self-righteousness. The idea that we lose site of the true purpose of confronting our fellow brother in Christ and we make it about us being "right". So without hesitation, Peter enters and asks a question about just this thing. He knew most would confront without an attitude of forgiveness and he thought by offering to forgive 7 times – he was good to go. See, the rabbinic law said to forgive 3 times – Peter was doubling that and throwing one in for good measure.

Would you agree with me that forgiveness falls close to the top (if not #1) on the list of things that is so easy to talk about – and so extremely hard to do. We live in a "They deserved it" or a "What Goes Around Comes Around" type of World. What is your first reaction when you see that latest politician getting caught by the IRS for tax evasion? In some way, we find comfort in seeing people get what they deserve. But there is another side to that coin – on the opposite end of the spectrum we truly dread to get what we deserve.

You look in your rear view mirror and see flashing lights. You know you were breaking the speed limit. The policeman walks to your window and tells you that you were going 52 in 35. What is your response?

Do you make excuses? Do you try to promise it will never happen again? Do you break down in tears hoping for a little sympathy? I don't think many would say. "You are right. I was speeding. Please write me a ticket – thanks officer!"

Thankfully – God's standards for forgiveness are much different from ours. And although it may not come naturally for us. Forgiveness is a command and it can come through Christ help.

Matthew 18:21-22

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Peter has been listening closely and he comes to Jesus with a question and a bit of a "Hey look, I think I have this Lord" type of attitude. So if sin is going to be a part of the local church and if we are going to be sinned against – How often should I forgive a person? Peter considered 7 times to be a very generous number. As we stated above – traditional teachings at the time instructed a person should forgive up to 3 times.

3. What is forgiveness?
4. But what was the Lord's response to Peter? What limit (or lack of limit) did Jesus give in His response?

7 x 10 x 7 = complete and infinite

5. How are we to forgive others? See 1 Peter 4:8 and Ephesians 4:32
6. Read Colossians 3:13 – What do we learn about our willingness to forgive? What does Christ forgiveness look like?
7. What should forgiveness not be based on?

Matthew 18:23-27

²³ Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

It was not uncommon for kings during this time to perform an audit of their books to determine the faithfulness of their servants and resolve any outstanding debts that people may owe. When the servant was brought to him that owed 10,000 talents – this was a limitless amount of money. Basically in Greek, 10,000 was the largest number that could be recorded and is where our word myriad comes from. It literally means this person's debt was so vast it could never be paid back!

8. So what was the ruling by master?

Next, the servant fell prostrate and begged for mercy. He asked for patience and he promised to pay back the debt. This promise was literally absurd – the debt was so large it could never be paid back!

9. How did the master respond to the servant at this point?

Just as the servant...we will all face a Day of accounting

2 Cor 5:10: All will appear before the judgment seat

Hebrews 4:13: Nothing will be hidden and we will all give an account

Psalms 38:4: Our sins are too heavy – too big for our comprehension

Romans 6:23: The punishment for our sin is death

Romans 5:8: Our God demonstrates compassion towards us

Acts 8:22: Our debt is forgiven – we only need to repent and pray

Matthew 8:28-30

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet ^[d] and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all. ^[e] ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

Our parable thus far has shown us a man forgiven a tremendous debt by a compassionate master. God has shown us mercy and forgiveness – should we do any less?

A silver denarius was Roman coin equal to about 1 days wage at the time. Basically the debt that was owed was small – at least comparatively. But the servant in our parable went and sought out a fellow servant.

10. What physical action did the servant take against his debtor?
11. Comparing vs 26 and vs 29 – what can you say about the 2 servants responses?
12. Contrast the way the servant treated his debtor with the way he had been treated.

So I have thought a lot about where the servant went wrong. Maybe it was that he was embarrassed by his encounter with his master and he wanted to blow off some steam. Maybe it was that he wanted to somehow show his master that he could pay back the debt and with no money he had to get it from somewhere. What I do know is that we can do it right. Looking at Galatians 6:1 – how do we go about forgiving...we do it gently and by considering ourselves lower than the other person. And, forgiving is always in our court. If someone sins against us or you sin against someone –the ball is in your court.

Matthew 18:31-35

So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' ³⁴ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ³⁵ "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."^[f]

Our unforgiveness affects other believers. Verse 31 talks about how the fellow servants were watching and they were grieved. Because of this, God does not take an unforgiving heart lightly. Hebrews 12:6 clearly outlines that whom the Lord loves He chastens. There are consequences for our disobedience.

13. What was the master's response to the servant?
14. What is the consequence for us if we do not forgive a fellow brother or sister in Christ?

Chapter-by-Chapter Bible Studies

The principle is clear. God has forgiven such a great debt, that any debt owed to us is absolutely insignificant in comparison. No man can possibly offend me to the extent that my sins have offended God.

Application:

1. How does unforgiveness affect us?
 - a. Personally?
 - b. In the local church?
 - c. In our relationship with God?
2. Is there someone that you need to forgive? When are you going to talk with them?
3. What should be our motivation in forgiving others?