

Lesson 5 – 28 November 2010.

Kingdom Relationships

Lesson Scope: [Matthew 18](#)

Lesson Focus:

Matthew 18 is quite familiar and may even seem commonplace to some, but the teachings our Lord here set forth are indeed lofty. We cannot attain to these standards without our Lord's help. Seek to teach the ideal. No one is perfect, yet it is right to strive to be perfect. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

One of the greatest assets in the realization of these goals is to simply be humble as our Lord pointed out with the object lesson of the child. Being truly humble is one of the greatest lifelong challenges that faces man. Evidently the disciples were entertaining the idea of Jesus setting up an earthly kingdom. They thought it would naturally follow that they themselves would hold positions of prominence in that kingdom. According to Mark 9:33, this idea had received no small discussion on the way to Capernaum.

In Matthew 18 we see Jesus taking their warped ideas and redirecting their thinking into channels that would make them useful in the kingdom of heaven. Like the disciples, we need to unlearn some things at times in order to better serve Christ and the church.

The teaching in this important passage is not easily worked out in real life. Entrance into the kingdom of heaven requires a humble, forgiving spirit. These childlike qualities are essential to the function of a brotherhood of believers.

Lesson Aim: To present principles for proper relationships within the brotherhood.

Theme Verses: [Colossians 3:12-13](#). "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

Lesson Text.

Humility

[Matthew 18:1-4](#)

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Heedfulness

[Matthew 18:7](#)

Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!

[Matthew 18:10-11](#)

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. ¹¹For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Reconciliation

[Matthew 18:15-17](#)

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. ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷And 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.

Forgiveness

[Matthew 18:21-35](#)

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? ²²Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

²³Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. ²⁴And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have

patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ²⁷Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. ²⁹And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. ³⁰And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. ³¹So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. ³²Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: ³³Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? ³⁴And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. ³⁵So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Questions for Study

Humility

1. What motivated the disciples to ask the question in Matthew 18:1?
2. What great object lesson did Jesus teach with the little child?

Heedfulness

3. What is so serious about despising one of these little ones?

Reconciliation

4. Why is reconciliation so difficult?
5. Explain the importance of each step in the process outlined here.

Forgiveness

6. What misconception does Peter reveal in Matthew 18:21?
7. Why is forgiveness a necessity within the brotherhood?
8. How will the concept of Matthew 18:35 change our outlook on life?

Analyzing the Passage

Jesus completely bypassed the disciples' anticipated answer in verse 1. They who were selfishly and arrogantly aspiring to be great were instead introduced to some heart-searching lessons on conversion and true humility through the example of an unassuming implied little child.

Jesus implied (but did not specifically state) that, in their present state,

they themselves were far from entering the kingdom of heaven.

Verses 6-11 focus on the thought of offenses and the seriousness of being, an offender. One way is to despise one of these little ones. Little ones here refers to small children, but Jesus expanded the concept to include new believers.

It should be noted that the trespass (or wrong) of verses 15-17 is between brethren. It is not speaking of immorality or other gross sin, which calls for immediate church action. The heathen man of verse 17 is in need of repentance and restoration.

Even though verses 19 and 20 are not included in our lesson text, the principle here is simply that one person alone does not have the authority to exercise church discipline, as does the assembled body.

No doubt Peter felt that forgiving a man seven times was being generous (Matthew 18:21). The Jewish rabbis taught that three times was sufficient; upon the fourth offense, forgiveness was no longer necessary (see Amos 1:3.6, 9).

Ten thousand talents (Matthew 18:24) is the equivalent of millions in today's dollars. One hundred pence is very insignificant by comparison, perhaps one-third of a year's wages for a common laborer.

Principles and Applications

Humility

1. Conversion is a pre-requisite for brotherhood relationships to flourish (Matthew 18:3). Without a change of heart, man will continue to relate according to the dictates of the flesh. The sharp tongues with biting retorts and sarcasm and the sullen moody "airs" both belong to the pre-conversion experience. If not crucified, they will create the same types of concerns the disciples held in verse 1.

2. Proper brotherhood relationships require a mentality of humility and service (Matthew 18:3-4). Adults do well to learn from children at times. Children are trusting eager to learn, and quick to forgive and forget. Children desire to please. Overshadowing all of these is the unassuming quality of humility that Christ declared is the forerunner of true greatness. "Adult" humility is a bigger challenge than many of us would like to admit. When we are truly humble Christian service in the kingdom comes naturally.

Heedfulness

3. The Christian seeks to minimize occasions for offense in the brotherhood (Matthew 18:7, 10). Jesus said that offenses will come: we get our turn to be offended. But the bigger challenge is—are we taking seriously our responsibility to not offend? A grave accountability goes with offending. Are we as parents living out what we teach new applicants for church membership?

Reconciliation

4. Great care and effort must be expended to effect reconciliation in the brotherhood (Matthew 18:15-16). If we do not put forth this kind of diligence brotherhood relationships can become like a festering wound that does not heal. The key to successfully gaining our brother is to be meek and humble. To go in the spirit of an unprofitable servant will aid in our brother's acceptance of our concern. Going personally and privately as opposed to exploiting the matter will also gain our brother's confidence.

5. Brotherhood relationships will grow when the church deals with pride (Matthew 18:17). The problem in this verse is a result of not being childlike as Jesus taught earlier in the chapter. The proud heart will eventually manifest itself in an unwillingness to listen or to submit to church authority. The church of Jesus Christ cannot prosper with such attitudes in her midst. Am I willing to receive the concerns of others related to my business transactions, my speech, my conduct, or my appearance?

Forgiveness

6. Brotherhood relationships prosper when forgiveness is offered willingly and without keeping account (Matthew 18:21-22). True forgiveness does not keep a record. It will forgive again and again and again. This does not mean that we avoid trying to give constructive help or that the church should overlook sin. But it does mean that we let the past be past, and we move onward with the spirit of forbearance.

7. Brotherhood relationships prosper when we remember what we have been forgiven and spared from (Matthew 18:25, 30).

Who of us can comprehend all that we have personally been forgiven? When we carry this awareness into daily life, it will restrain the expression of our carnal desires. Our humble attitude will be evident.

8. God holds us accountable for our relationships to our fellow men (Matthew 18:35). There is no better incentive to right relationships with

our fellow men than to recognize that God's forgiving us hinges on our forgiving others. Sometimes forgiving is harder for us than at other times. Neither will we always be able to forget incidents as we would like to. But the real challenge is, when our memory is refreshed, to forgive again as we did before. Then God can bless.

Important Teachings

1. Conversion is a prerequisite for brotherhood relationships to flourish (Matthew 18:3).
2. Proper brotherhood relationships require a mentality of humility and service (Matthew 18:3-4).
3. The Christian seeks to minimize the occasions for offense in the brotherhood (Matthew 18:7, 10).
4. Great care and effort must be expended to effect reconciliation in the brotherhood (Matthew 18:15-16).
5. Brotherhood relationships will grow when the church deals with pride (Matthew 18:17).
6. Brotherhood relationships prosper when forgiveness is offered willingly and without keeping account (Matthew 18:21-22).
7. Brotherhood relationships prosper when we remember what we have been forgiven and spared from (Matthew 18:25, 30).
8. God holds us accountable for our relationships to our fellow men (Matthew 18:35).
9. Special care must be given to avoid offending children and those who are young in the faith (Matthew 18:10-11).
10. Brotherhood relationships are enhanced when we follow the Biblical pattern (Matthew 18:15-17).
11. Brotherhood relationships are enhanced when we move with patience and compassion (Matthew 18:26-27).

Answers to Questions

1. What motivated the disciples to ask the question in Matthew 18:1?

This was a repeated topic of discussion among the disciples, because they believed Jesus would soon set up an earthly kingdom. Prior to this, three of the disciples were invited to witness the Transfiguration. Peter had been present at the Transfiguration, had walked on the water, and had even received tax money by means of a miracle. Jesus had also told Peter that

He would give unto him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. These events created some friction among the disciples. Self-esteem and pride were at the root of this question.

2. What great object lesson did Jesus teach with the little child?

A child is unassuming, trusting, loving, and forgiving. Children are eager to learn and be taught. Unless we are born again and are humble enough to assume these good qualities of little children, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

3. What is so serious about despising one of these little ones?

Their sincerity of heart and sensitivity of conscience can easily be damaged through others' inconsistency and thoughtlessness. A child or a young believer will find it much harder to return to God and the church after he has been offended; perhaps he will never return. Verse 10 indicates that to offend little ones is to also offend their guardian angels who stand before the Father.

4. Why is reconciliation so difficult?

It is not easy to share the fault of a brother with him personally. It is easier to talk about his fault to other people, and that is wrong. We run the risk of being misunderstood when we use the brotherly address. Also, we expose ourselves to the other person's evaluation of us.

5. Explain the importance of each step in the process outlined here.

Going to the brother alone, first, keeps the matter private and confidential. If the issue is simply a misunderstanding, it is easily cleared and forgotten. If this fails, taking one or two unbiased, spiritual brethren along helps to insure that the approach is made in the right spirit. If this contact is also fruitless, the broader church needs to become involved. In all of this, it is wise to remember there are two sides to every story! Listening is important.

6. What misconception does Peter reveal in Matthew 18:21?

He was sure that he would need to do the forgiving. He failed to consider that others might need to forgive him. Forgiveness is not confined by limits and measures, as Peter thought. Peter felt that he was being very generous and loving in order to forgive seven times. But true forgiveness does not keep track of offenses.

7. Why is forgiveness a necessity within the brotherhood?

Without forgiveness, reconciliation is impossible. Forgiveness helps to

build trust among brethren. Forgiveness is a condition for our forgiveness. A forgiving attitude will overlook petty grievances we may be inclined to harbor. With this spirit, it will be easier to see our brother's good points than his faults.

8. How will the concept of Matthew 18:35 change our outlook on life?

It will make us more willing to honor the requests for patience (Matthew 18:26, 29) that come along the way. We will see our fellow men as individuals with the same needs and feelings we have. We will more deeply appreciate our own forgiveness and salvation. We will recognize that God has forgiven us more than we can ever begin to forgive others.

Summarizing the Lesson

Our relationships with our brethren, our families, our neighbors, and others will be tested. It is not a matter of if but when. The devil would seek to separate brethren from one another and thereby ruin their relationship with the Lord. As we keep a humble view of self and a lofty view of our Lord, brotherhood relationships will be strengthened.

Research Guide

1. Read the chapter titled "Humility" in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
2. In a topical Bible, study passages related to forgiveness.