



Chapter 18: Love and Forgiveness

This whole chapter is about relationships between believers. **It tells us how** God's children should behave to one another, **particularly** when differences or offences occur. God does not want any of His children to **be like lost sheep and lose the kingdom** prepared for them

'Who is the Greatest?' (18:1-13)

From Luke's account (Luke 9:46-48) we know that the disciples had been arguing about which of them should be the greatest (in the Kingdom of God). When they put the question to Jesus in Matthew 18:1, he taught them that the way to enter the kingdom is not to seek for greatness but to be converted into people who approach God in a humble, childlike spirit. This is like the teaching at the very beginning of his ministry that we looked at in Lesson 2.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
(Matthew 5:3)

When we are proud we fail to see how very small we are in God's sight. Jesus went on to warn that we need to make sure that we do not upset the faith of others or encourage them to sin by our poor behaviour as disciples.

He then uses some very powerful language to show how we should remove from our lives anything that may stop us from serving God.

"If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.
And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."
(Matthew 18:8-9)

Jesus did not mean that we should literally cut off our hands and feet or poke out an eye! How would that help us to get to the kingdom? But there are things that we do (with our hands), places we go (with our feet) and things that we look at (with our eyes) which are wrong and will keep us from it. We need to cut these out of our lives.

People hearing Jesus use the terms which have been translated as "*the eternal fire*" and "*the hell of fire*" would immediately think of the Valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem.

The local name for this valley was 'Gehenna' which is the word Jesus used. It was the place where all the rubbish from Jerusalem was sent to be burned. The fires burned continually and Jesus often used the picture of Gehenna to represent the idea of total destruction – just like rubbish which is not wanted and is totally burnt up.

So the Lord Jesus shows us that if we follow desires which lead us away from God, then when he returns and judges the world we will be rejected and die for ever. We will not be allowed to enjoy the blessings of God's kingdom on earth. Note that Jesus did not say that the wicked will be punished by burning forever!

Another problem with wanting to be 'great' is that it can make us look down on those who are young or weak. In verses 5-6 and 10-14 Jesus showed that God takes a very different view. He cares deeply about individual men, women and children however unimportant they may seem to be. Because God cares about them, so must we.

When Other Believers sin against Us (18:15-20).

This next section tells us how to deal with disagreements that arise between people. If someone offends us we must first go to the person concerned and discuss the matter with him to try and resolve it. Sometimes when we talk to the person that we think has sinned against us we find that we have misunderstood him and there is not really a problem.

However if the problem is serious and we fail to resolve it then we should ask two or three others to listen before we bring it to the whole church. (The 'church', or 'assembly', means the local community of believers). At each stage the aim must be to try and find a way to be reconciled together. If we develop a





humble, childlike spirit, then we will resolve our problems in God's way. Doing things His way is important because God, through His angels, sees all that we do and say.

Forgiving Others (18:21-35)

The last part of this chapter continues the same theme. Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive a brother who has sinned against him. He thought it would be generous to forgive him seven times.

Jesus told him that he should forgive 'seventy times seven'. What did he mean? Should we forgive until we have reached 70x7 or 490 times and then stop forgiving?

Jesus showed that we should not stop forgiving others however many times they sinned against us. Long before we have forgiven someone seventy times seven we should have lost count! The parable which follows teaches us that we should willingly forgive one another because God forgives our sins which are perhaps far greater than those of our brother.

Why should we be so generous to others like this? Jesus explains the reason in the parable that follows. The first servant, who owed his master ten thousand talents, owed a huge amount of money that he could never expect to repay. So his master was extremely generous in forgiving him. The second servant owed the first servant a hundred denarii. This was a much smaller amount – we can show it like this:

10000 talents = 60 million denarii

We are like the first servant. We can have a huge debt forgiven us by the Lord God, our Master, the debt is our sins and we will never find a way of paying Him for all the wrong we have done.

In comparison, anything that anyone has done against us is totally insignificant and we should freely forgive, always remembering what has been forgiven us.

Name	
Address	
Reference Number	
Tutor	

Answers to most questions can be found in the lessons or Bible passages given. Please write your answers on this question paper and return them in the envelope provided:

Questions on Chapter 16

- 1a Who did Peter say Jesus was?
- 1b Who is the foundation of the church, Peter or the Lord Jesus Christ?
- 2 In which verse does Jesus say he will return in glory with his Father's angels?

Read Jonah chapter 1 and Mathew 12:39,40 to help you with question 3

- 3a Why was Jonah swallowed by a large sea creature?
- 3b What do you think is meant by the 'sign of the prophet Jonah'?

Questions on Chapter 17

- 1 What happened to Jesus when he was transfigured (or transformed)?
- 2 What New Testament person was like Elijah?

- 3 Verse 18 says that the demon came out of the boy. What had been wrong with him?
- 4 Which verses suggest that Jesus knew he was to die and then be raised from the dead?
- 5 Since Jesus was the Son of God, who owns everything, he did not need to pay tax to anyone. Why then did he pay it?

Questions on Chapter 18

- 3 Which verses tell us that we should speak directly to the one who has done wrong, instead of telling others about him?
- 4 Which verse says that we should forgive people from our heart (so we do not just appear to forgive them but genuinely want to completely forget that they have wronged us)?
- 5 Fill in the table below about the parable at the end of the chapter:

The part of the parable	Who or what it represents
The king or master	
	Forgiving a very sinful life
	Not forgiving another person's little sin against you