

The Character of Jesus 39
Forgiving Others
Matthew 18:15 - 35

- Characteristic: Forgiving Others
 - Note that the audience is the disciples, probably just the 12. Some of these instructions are for them only, so taking this as a formula for the church today is dangerous. General passages about forgiving others may be found in Mark 11:25 – 26 and Luke 17:1 – 5, surprisingly few.
 - This portion of the chapter follows immediately after the first half without a break, so a connection between the topics may be assumed: humility makes forgiving others possible.
 - (15) Forgiveness began with speaking up (privately). They should not just ignore it or let it go. Note the possible contrast to Mark 11:25 – 26; Jesus did not mention going to the other person. In Luke 17:1 – 5, Jesus mentions speaking up, but specifies “if he repents.” Also, this is not about disagreements over doctrine, but about sin and forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32 does not use the word usually translated “forgive.” Doctrinal differences are covered under unity (e.g., Philippians 3:15, Romans 15:5)
 - (16) If this were intended for the church of today, then this method is simply choosing up sides. I should gather the people who agree with me and gang up on one individual. Rather, this applies to the apostles who all knew each other intimately and who all had been promised special abilities and knowledge.
 - (17) Paul recorded such an incident in Galatians 2:11 – 19 in which he confronted Peter in the presence of the group. Although not stated, we may safely presume that Peter recognized his error. If this were for the modern church, this becomes the seed of denominationalism in which those who hold one opinion simply regard those who oppose them as non-Christians. This suggests that even one of the Twelve could fall away, which happened.
 - (18 – 19) Here, the apostles are being promised inspiration. If this were for the modern church, then every Christian can manipulate God.
 - (20) Although often quoted in the modern church, the logical conclusion is that when you are alone, you are truly alone. God will not interact with you if you are alone. Rather, it is a promise to the apostles that small groups of them were guaranteed to reach the right conclusion. They will not need general councils to iron out problems. I suspect that the prospect of leadership was frightening to them.
 - (21) Peter’s proposal was the same as that recommended by the Pharisees.
 - (22 – 35) The parable of the ungrateful debtor. (Note: at today’s prices, the first debt was about \$165 million. The second debt was about \$365, representing 4 months wages.) Jesus’ point is in verse 35; the faithful must forgive others based on the fact that God has forgiven them much more.
 - For the disciples, the connection between forgiving and humility is summed up in being grateful for having been forgiven by God. The middle part about going to a brother who has sinned against you has to do with how God sought us out, we were not searching for God. Jesus did not overlook the sins of others, but was compassionate and merciful (addressing root causes) for the purposes of re-establishing a relationship.
- Application: Forgiving Others
 - Even though verses 15 – 20 speaks to the situation of the apostles, what can the modern church learn?

- The ability to forgive others is rooted in humility, part of which is recognizing that God has forgiven me and I was not searching for God when He found me.
- Even inspired people could get confused or full of themselves. I am no better. Be open to correction as a function of humility.
- The objective is to rescue people, not “doctrinal purity.” Assume the best of others.
- God’s forgiveness should make me want to emulate God, not to feel bad about myself.
- Humility means I must step up and rescue others. They are neither disposable nor troublesome.