

## How will the world recognise us, the church, as disciples of Jesus?

# 5

**Aim of study:** to show that the way we love and forgive each other as Christians has a powerful effect on outsiders

Review: Would anyone like to share how you got on with the homework last time?

Launching question: When asked how he could be a Christian and have a less-than-perfect life style, tennis star Andre Agassi replied, "That's why I need God." How would most people respond to that answer, do you think?

Ask someone to read these verses from John, and then someone to read the introductory paragraphs

### John 13:34,35

Although love was commanded in the Old Testament, Jesus gave a new command that we should love each other as he has loved us. This love would stand out, so that everyone who saw it would say, "those people must be disciples of Jesus" - "those people must be churchgoers".

The next two studies focus on this sort of love and how it works out day by day in the local church. Study 5's focus is forgiveness, the underpinning of love. Study 6 will cover issues of identifying and resolving conflict in God's family - forgiveness made practical.

The main point of this study is to accept our own forgiveness and be able to extend it to others. Questions 1-7 should take no more than 10 minutes. Ask someone to read...

### Luke 7:36-50 God forgives me

This woman was able to wash Jesus' feet because the table was near the floor & the guests reclined on cushions. Normally the host would provide water to wash his guests' feet, anoint his head with oil and give a kiss of greeting. Simon did none of these, showing he had little respect for Jesus.

**1. What was the woman's reputation in the town?**

*She lived a sinful life.*

**2. Why do you think she interrupted the dinner?**

*She felt guilty, wanted forgiveness, she loved Jesus and that caused her to disregard the opinion of others.*

**3. How did the woman's attitude about herself change during the course of her encounter with Jesus?**

*She presumably left with the sense that she was forgiven and accepted completely by Jesus. She probably felt her burden of guilt had been removed.*

**4. What do you think was going on in Simon's mind?**

*The Pharisees saw themselves as righteous, not needing to be baptised by John. Simon presumably was no exception.*

**5. What might the woman have told others about her experience?**

*I don't know what made me do it. Afterwards he told me I was completely forgiven - that's what he said. It's as though my life has started again. Then he told me as I was leaving that my faith had saved me.*

Jesus makes the issue clear - the bad news of sin (self-centredness) and the good news of forgiveness. It must have sounded so presumptuous to Simon's other guests to hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven". But Jesus knew that he was going to put things right between us and God by dying for us.

**6. How could Jesus' death affect us today when we had not even been born then?**

You may find it helpful to look at Hebrews 10: 1-4; 9-12; 17,18

Ask different people in the group to look up the verses, read aloud and suggest an answer to the question

**7. In light of this, how does God view me now? (see how the following verses describe a Christian)**

Colossians 2:13; Ephesians 1:3,4; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 8:1; Isaiah 43:25

**8. If Christ has forgiven us completely, how does God want us to deal with our failures - disobedience, sinful thoughts and actions? (Read 1 John 1:9)**

*Confess our sins as soon as we become aware of them. To confess means 'to say the same as'.*

**Ask - What do you think God says to us, as his children, about our sin and self-centredness?**

*"I love you. My instructions are for your protection and your provision, not to harm you. You harm yourself. Your way of living is wrong, it's already forgiven, it's unacceptable. I long for you to ask me to help you live right."*

**9. If my forgiveness is already sorted, why do I need to confess my self-centredness? Read Isaiah 59:2**

*Un-confessed sin breaks my fellowship with God. My father/child relationship is secure, but my experience of the blessing and benefit of the relationship is interrupted, making me feel cut off or estranged from the one who still loves me.*

**Now I can forgive others**

Jesus rebukes Simon for his self-righteousness (v 44-47), contrasting the woman's act of repentance with Simon's lack of it. His final words are 'he who is forgiven little, loves little'. It must follow that 'he who has been forgiven much, loves much'. Experiencing God's love and forgiveness provides the basis for loving and forgiving others. (1 John 4:11 'Since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another'.)

- Does this mean that I have to be a great sinner in order to love God much?

Divide into three groups and assign one passage to each to discuss. After 5 minutes, get brief summary from each group.

**Luke 17:3-5; Colossians 3:12-14; Ephesians 4:30-32**

**1. From each passage, make a note of what are we told to do.**

Luke 17:3-5	Colossians 3:12-14	Ephesians 4:30-32

Then ask

- Is this realistic when my grievance is fair?
- Are there any exceptions?
- How does my own up-to-the-minute experience of God's forgiveness help me to forgive others?

*We can be tolerant and gracious with others when they sin, knowing that we suffer the same weaknesses and are capable of the same actions.*

**2. What can happen if, as Christians, we do not forgive one another genuinely? Why?**

*God's commands are for our protection and provision. Our fellowship with God is broken when we disobey his command. Our relationship with a fellow Christian is cut off if our grievance is against them. Our example to others (including those who are not Christians) is diminished if we are unable to even love and forgive those in our spiritual family. If we are to share the gospel of forgiveness with others, we have to embrace and practise it in our own lives and local church.*

An example; if your child disobeys you, he/she is still fully a member of the family; the relationship hasn't changed. But if there is no apology or confession, the family fellowship is broken and needs to be restored. It is similar in our relationship with God: by agreeing with God that he is right about my utter self-centredness, and that he has dealt with it by the blood of Christ, I can once again experience harmony. 1 John 1:7 & 9 refer to being cleansed. Although I am not forgiven all over again; through honest confession, I make real what is already mine and surrender again to his control of my life.

**Apply** Give a few moments for thinking through these questions.

- Is there something in my life that is hindering my fellowship with God?

Read 1 John 1:6-10. Ask God to search your heart. Confess whatever he brings to mind by (1) acknowledging that it is wrong; (2) thanking God that he has already forgiven you and (3) deciding to turn away from it. Then once again, God's love and forgiveness can be a reality

**3.** What else (from personal experience or from reading the Bible) might help us forgive those who have wronged, hurt or offended us?

*Knowing that God is at work to change our wants so that we will be willing to fully forgive (Philippians 2:13). Pray, claiming this promise, for his Spirit to work on our wills to give us an attitude of willingness to forgive. Realise that the more serious the offence, the more time it might take for our attitude to be brought into submission to God's desire for us - for his good pleasure. God puts up with our imperfect Christian lives. Can we trust him to give us grace for others who offend us?*

**Apply and Pray** - allow a few minutes for quiet reflection on the following:

If we are followers of Jesus who freely offers grace and forgiveness, then we must be showing grace and forgiveness in our own lives. Is there someone I have not totally forgiven?

*Ask God what the next step should be.*

Some grievances need talking through. The focus of study 6 will be dealing with resolving conflict.

**Before next time...**

Make sure you have completed the personal application in the Apply sections

Read Acts 15:35-41. Why did this disagreement arise?

Continue praying for your Five in Focus

## How will the world recognise us, the church, as disciples of Jesus?

# 5

**Aim of study:** to show that the way we love and forgive each other as Christians has a powerful effect on outsiders

### John 13:34,35

Although love was commanded in the Old Testament, Jesus gave a new command that we should love each other as he has loved us. This love would stand out, so that everyone who saw it would say, "those people must be disciples of Jesus" - not "those people must be churchgoers".

The next two studies focus on this sort of love and how it works out day by day in the local church. Study 5's focus is forgiveness, the underpinning of love. Study 6 will cover issues of identifying and resolving conflict in God's family - forgiveness made practical.

### Luke 7:36-50 God forgives me

This woman was able to wash Jesus' feet because the table was near the floor & the guests reclined on pillows. Normally the host would provide water to wash his guests' feet, anoint his head with oil and give a kiss of greeting. Simon did none of these, showing he had little respect for Jesus.

1. What was the woman's reputation in the town?
2. Why do you think she interrupted the dinner?
3. How did the woman's attitude about herself change during the course of her encounter with Jesus?
4. What do you think was going on in Simon's mind?
5. What might the woman have told others about her experience?

Jesus makes the issue clear - the bad news of sin (self-centredness) and the good news of forgiveness. It must have sounded so presumptuous to Simon's other guests to hear Jesus say, "Your sins are forgiven". But Jesus knew that he was going to put things right between us and God by dying for us.

6. How could Jesus' death affect us today when we had not even been born then?
7. In light of this, how does God view me now? (see how the following verses describe a Christian)  
Colossians 2:13 / Ephesians 1:3,4 / 1 Corinthians 6:11 / Romans 8:1 / Isaiah 43:25
8. If Christ has forgiven us completely, how does God want us to deal with our failures - disobedience, sinful thoughts and actions? (Read 1 John 1:9)
9. If my forgiveness is already sorted, why do I need to confess my self-centredness? Read Isaiah 59:2

### Now I can forgive others

Jesus rebukes Simon for his self-righteousness (v 44-47), contrasting the woman's act of repentance with Simon's lack of it. His final words are 'he who is forgiven little, loves little'. It must follow that 'he who has been forgiven much, loves much'. Experiencing God's love and forgiveness provides the basis for loving and forgiving others. (1 John 4:11 'Since God loved us so much, we ought to love one another'.)

- Does this mean that I have to be a great sinner in order to love God much?

## Luke 17:3-5; Colossians 3:12-14; Ephesians 4:30-32

1. From each passage, make a note of what are we told to do.

Luke 17:3-5	Colossians 3:12-14	Ephesians 4:30-32

- Is this realistic when my grievance is fair?
- Are there any exceptions?
- How does my own up-to-the-minute experience of God's forgiveness help me to forgive others?

2. What can happen if, as Christians, we do not forgive one another genuinely? Why?

An example: if your child disobeys you, he/she is still fully a member of the family; the relationship hasn't changed. But if there is no apology or confession, the family fellowship is broken and needs to be restored. It is similar in our relationship with God: by agreeing with God that he is right about my utter self-centredness, and that he has dealt with it by the blood of Christ, I can once again experience harmony. 1 John 1:7 & 9 refer to being cleansed. Although I am not forgiven all over again; through honest confession, I make real what is already mine and surrender again to his control of my life.

### Apply

- Is there something in my life that is hindering my fellowship with God?

Read 1 John 1:6-10. Ask God to search your heart. Confess whatever he brings to mind by (1) Acknowledging that it is wrong; (2) Thanking God that he has already forgiven you and (3) Deciding to turn away from it. Then once again, God's love and forgiveness can be a reality

3. What else (from personal experience or from reading the Bible) might help us forgive those who have wronged, hurt or offended us?

### Apply and Pray

If we are followers of Jesus who freely offers grace and forgiveness, then we must be showing grace and forgiveness in our own lives. Is there someone I have not totally forgiven?

*Ask God what the next step should be.*

Some grievances need talking through. The focus of study 6 will be dealing with resolving conflict.

Before next time...

Read Acts 15:35-41. Why did this disagreement arise?

Make sure you have completed the personal application in the Apply sections

Continue praying for your Five in Focus