

# Attitudes to Sin & Sinners – Matthew 18

## Summary:

This chapter focuses on issues of attitude to sin and sinners. Its teaching is profound and highly practical. There are five key issues here:

1. **Attitude of the sinner to God (vv1-4)** – Lessons from a Child
2. **Attitudes to the causes of sin (vv5-9)** – Tough on the causes of sin
3. **Attitudes to the sinner (vv10-14)** – God and Sinners
4. **Attitudes to sin in the church (vv15-20)** – Dealing with sin in the church
5. **Attitude of the victim to the sinner (vv21-35)** – Forgiveness is vital

## Lessons from a Child (vv1-4)

<sup>1</sup>At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

The disciples' question ("Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?") comes in the context of the Transfiguration of Ch17, when the inner circle (Peter, James and John) got a glimpse of Christ's kingdom glory. The disciples are excited about Christ's coming Kingdom, which they believe he will establish in the near future.

<sup>2</sup>He called a little child and had him stand among them.

Christ, the master teacher, uses an object lesson to illustrate his response: a little child. The use of a child is powerful – the child was possibly the only one in the group who wasn't thinking, "I wonder will He say that I am the greatest?"

<sup>3</sup>And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus makes two powerful related points:

### 1. To enter the kingdom people need to "change and become like little children" (v3)

The word "change" means literally "turn". The idea is of a person who "turns into" something they previously were not. To become a Christian means to be converted – to turn away from our own way of living (or repent), to accept God's way (trust). Both ideas (repentance and faith) are included in this concept of becoming child-like. To realise you are only ever a child in God's eyes is essential to entering the kingdom. A child is completely dependent on its father to protect it, guide it and provide for it. To become a Christian a person must acknowledge his complete dependence on God to save him, lead him and provide for him. In spiritual terms, none of us can be independent or self-sufficient.

### 2. To be great in the kingdom a person must "humble himself like this child" (v4)

The path to greatness in God's kingdom is the same as that of entering – child-like humility and faith. There is no room for pride in the kingdom of God. The word "humble" means literally to "bring low". A child has no ambition for himself, and does not seek the approval of anyone other than his father. As God's children we must seek first His approval, and be humble in all our ways.

The child is indeed a powerful illustration. As Wiersbe states:

An unspoiled child has the characteristics that make for humility: trust (Matthew 18:6), dependence, the desire to make others happy, an absence of boasting or selfish desire to be greater than others. By nature, all of us are rebels who want to be celebrities instead of servants. It takes a great deal of teaching for us to learn the lessons of humility.

Of course, it is important to realise that Jesus is not asking us to be "childish". To be **child-like** is a positive thing, reflecting an appropriate attitude towards God and an acceptance of responsibility, whilst to be **childish** is a negative thing, reflecting a wrong attitude towards others and an avoidance of responsibility. True humility is never about running away from responsibilities, or denying our abilities. As Michael Green puts it, true humility, "means coming when Jesus calls us and staying where Jesus puts us. So humility is not a matter of suppressing our drive and hiding our gifts." How can we have this true humility – that thinks neither too much nor too little of ourselves (see Romans 12:3)? Only by seeing ourselves as God sees us – reflected in the truth of His word, enlightened by His Spirit. How we need His enlightenment to see ourselves clearly for who we are!

## **Tough on the causes of sin (vv5-9)**

Jesus continues his thoughts about these little children who have believed in Him (v6). The teaching of these verses could apply to literal children and how they are treated (in fact there are many potential lessons in these verses for parents), but the reference to faith in Jesus (v6) would suggest that their primary reference is actually to those who have entered the kingdom of heaven like little children. Notice that Jesus identifies faith in Him with entrance into the kingdom of heaven. He is its King – it is His kingdom! He is no less than God Himself!

<sup>5</sup>*"And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.*

We must be very careful how we treat those whom Christ has accepted. In a very real sense, when we accept someone in His name (meaning "in His authority" or "for His sake"), we are accepting Him. This is profound, but very meaningful. We must not underestimate the value we have in Christ! Our value is such to Him that he treats the actions of another person towards us as actions towards Him. If we really grasped this, how would we treat one another? Just the same as we do now, or perhaps differently?

<sup>6</sup>*But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*

The contrast between the reward for the person who accepts those who believe in Jesus (the knowledge that they are accepting Christ Himself) and the curse for the person who causes them to stumble (the literal meaning of the word the NIV translates "sin" is to "cause to stumble") is profound. These words could hardly be more severe. A millstone is a heavy stone used to grind grain into flour, and the words "large millstone" refer to a stone so large that it would have to be pulled by a donkey (in contrast to the standard sized stones in many first century Jewish houses that could be turned by one woman). Now, we might be uncomfortable with the illustration Jesus uses – it certainly doesn't fit with the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" image that we often have of Him – but we surely cannot miss the force of His words. **It is a very serious thing indeed to cause another person to sin or to stumble in their faith.** How much more careful would we be about our attitudes, words and actions towards our fellow Christians if we really thought this one through? Do you spend time before the Lord to determine what impact you are having on others? **Does your lifestyle encourage others to stumble or to live lives of compromise, or when others see your life are they spurred on to holiness and to a greater devotion to the Lord?**

<sup>7</sup>*"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!*

"Woe" really means that it will be terrible. There are many things in this world that are "stumbling blocks" (the Greek word used in this verse is *skandalon*), but it is a terrible thing to be the person who trips another Christian up. Brothers and sisters, it is time to be serious about these things. To humble ourselves and repent before God in true repentance that is followed by acts of repentance – restoring relationships and seeking forgiveness. Of course, this is closely related to the humbling ourselves of v4 – a person who is made low is unlikely to trip another person up (just as a stone that doesn't stick up above the path is unlikely to trip anyone). In our lives we should aim to live with such transparency that others will see Christ in us – so that even in our weaknesses He is made perfect. Even if we do make mistakes this can be a reality if we deal with our sin in an appropriate way. Often the measure of our humility is how we deal with our own failures. The witness of a Christian apologising or seeking forgiveness can be even more counter-cultural and powerful than if they appear never to make mistakes!

<sup>8</sup>*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. <sup>9</sup>And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge 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.*

The emphasis here changes from the actions of others that may cause us to sin, to the things in us that cause us to sin. These words have been used previously by Jesus in Matthew's gospel (Ch 5vv29&30) in the context of temptation to sin. These verses may have an application to the church as a whole, with the hand, foot or eye being different individual members of the church "body" who must be "cut off", but it surely also has an individual application to our own lives. **The graphic pictures Jesus uses here are only pictures** – it is not literally possible for a part of our body to "cause" us to sin (as Jesus Himself taught, all sin comes from "inside", from a man's heart – see Mark 7:23) – but they are intended to shock us into realising just how seriously we should treat

temptation. Those things that lead us into temptation are extremely dangerous to our souls, and we should be ruthless in cutting them out of our lives!

What if we put this teaching into action in our lives? What difference would it make to the things we chose to watch, listen to and read? What would our level of censorship be like compared to the Hollywood movie censors? Of course, the real issue is our heart's tendency to sin (even if we locked ourselves away in a cave with no obvious source of temptation we would still be able to sin), and the real battle is at the level of the will, but temptation starts with a thought, and often that thought is triggered by an image, a sound, a word or a written phrase. Whatever tends to caused us to sin should be ruthlessly cut out of our lives in an act of spiritual surgery. This will be different for each one of us, and we must honestly, humbly seek the Lord's face about this in prayer. **How often do you perform "heart surgery" on yourself?**

## **Shepherds and Sinners (vv10-14)**

So, then, what of those who do give in to temptation, and are led astray? Is there hope for them? What is God's attitude to them, and what should ours be?

<sup>10</sup>"See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

This verse re-emphasises the importance of each believer to God. Jesus draws on the Jewish belief that each of God's people has a guardian angel (the Jews had a highly developed system of angelology). The idea of these "guardian angels" seeing God's face means that these "little ones" are right before His eyes – precious to Him and known individually by Him. Have you ever considered this – really thought about it? **That God, the Creator of all things, all-powerful, eternal, knows and cares about you individually! Here is the measure of your worth!**

<sup>12</sup>"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup>And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. <sup>14</sup>In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

This parable (Luke's version in Ch 15 is better known, and is, in context, about the love of God for the sinner and His desire that they will repent) emphasises the love of the Father for the individual who has wandered into sin. He will search for them, and is not willing that any of them should be lost. Our security in Christ does not depend on our own effort, but on His will and His saving power. How precious we are to Him! Of course, the ultimate way in which God rescued and saved us was through sending Christ into the world to seek and save us – to die for our sins!

The parable in this context in Matthew 18, in a chapter speaking about relationships in the church, has an additional application (distinct from the Luke 15 context). The leaders of the church must be shepherds, who will go out of their way to rescue the sheep who goes astray. If our Father God is not willing that any should be lost, neither should they be – they should not lightly give up on any individual. Are those of us in leadership showing this attitude of compassion? We must reflect the heart of God in this matter! Jesus is preparing His apostles for their leadership in the church – how will they view others? As lesser people in the kingdom, or as precious sheep to be rescued? There is a challenge here for all of us who are church members – when we see our brother or sister beginning to go astray, growing cold or taking an unwise path are we concerned enough to come along-side them and help to rescue them? Too often we wait until the situation goes so far that they have experienced great pain and loss.

## **Dealing with sin in the church (vv15-20)**

In these verses the word translated "sins" is not the "stumbling block" of vv6&7, but the standard Greek word for sin (literally meaning to "miss the mark" or "to do wrong against"). The issue is how to deal with sin in the church, and in particular, how should a person who has been sinned against deal with the sinner? It is important to note that the context is the church – there may be a different approach to a non-Christian who has sinned against you, with additional considerations – for example, you may not want to challenge that person because you may feel they do not have an understanding of sin, or because to challenge them might damage your relationship with them, making it more difficult for you to witness to them in future.

<sup>15</sup>"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not listen, take one or two others

along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'<sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

This pattern is of profound value. There are three simple steps:

1. **Speak directly to the one who sinned** – the initial step is private and personal. The offender may not have realised what he has done, and even if he has, he may repent and put things right when you speak with him. The matter will then be closed. You may even learn that what you considered a sin was actually a misunderstanding – that you have misjudged the other person's intention.
2. **Take 2 or 3 witnesses with you** – this step will further serve to clarify the truth of the matter. The advice of these witnesses may help us to see that we are wrong or may give us a deeper understanding of the situation. It is vital to remember this step, and to seek the advice of wise, mature Christians.
3. **Involve the whole assembly (church)** – this is the last step, and may lead to the person being put out of the fellowship if they will not repent. This does not, however, deny the possibility that they may still repent in future. In fact, to treat the person as a tax collector or pagan would mean to make a special effort to reach out to them in love and restore them. Remember how Jesus treated these social outcasts (Matthew himself was a tax collector!!!) The relationship cannot be restored unless they repent, but the attitude of the fellowship towards them should be loving, not condemnatory.

These steps are sequential. How often have we followed this simple advice? The lack of honesty in dealing with sin is a major source of disunity, distrust and lack of depth and growth in churches. Of course, there are many cultural and emotional barriers to us following Jesus' course. We may tend to run away from direct communication, openness or potential confrontation. Furthermore, when we follow Jesus' course we are opening ourselves to the same action from those against whom we have sinned, and we may lack the courage to take that step for fear that we will be challenged ourselves. However, in this matter we must allow the Lord's teaching to transform our culture and our personality. Of course, there are many sins that should probably never be taken as far as the whole church, and should not result in the "excommunication" from the fellowship that Jesus says should be the end result if the person refuses to listen, but we should not treat sins within the fellowship lightly. We do not do our brother any favours if we do not deal with the issue of sin. There are three vital principles to remember in this process:

1. **Most important here is the intent. It is not to humiliate, condemn or embarrass the offender, but to seek to restore him (literally to "win him over")**. As Wiersbe states, "go to him with the idea of winning your brother, not winning an argument". Notice Christ's emphasis on listening – the aim is that the brother will listen, and it is therefore vital that we communicate clearly and truthfully, avoiding unhelpful words, tones or accusations. We must also be prepared to listen ourselves!
2. **One action is notably missing from the list – we must not gossip or tell others who are not directly involved in the case**. Gossip is one of the foremost reasons for disunity and division within churches. It is absolutely wrong to share with an individual or group (e.g. your cell group) without speaking directly to the individual involved.
3. **We must ensure that we have an attitude of forgiveness**. Jesus emphasises this to Peter in the parable in vv21-35. Before you seek to put others right, examine your own motives and your own attitude – make sure you are ready to forgive, and make sure you are not just speaking out of anger or a desire to be justified but out of love and a desire to see him restored. This takes great humility and a prayerful attitude (see v20).

So, why is it so important to deal with sin in the church in an appropriate way? Because the unity of the church is vital to its function (this is clear from many New Testament passages, especially those that describe the church as the body of Christ). Jesus continues to speak about this unity in vv18-20:

<sup>18</sup>"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

There are two key questions about the meaning of this verse:

**a) Who does the "you" refer to?**

In Matthew 16:19, in light of Peter's confession of Christ, Jesus gave him a promise of authority represented by the keys of the kingdom, and He used the same words as this verse

to explain their significance. This verse seems to refer to an extension of this authority to the rest of the twelve who would become His apostles. The principle then would be one of apostolic authority, which may no longer apply to the church today. Alternative possibilities are that the authority referred to here actually rests with the church as a whole (this may fit in better with the context of v17) or that it refers to the leaders of the local church throughout the ages.

**b) What does Jesus mean by binding and loosing?**

Whomever Jesus is referring to by “you”, the key question in understanding this verse is what Jesus meant by “binding and loosing”. This phrase is unique to Matthew’s gospel in the New Testament, but is found elsewhere in Jewish writings. According to one writer:

The phrases to bind and to loose were Jewish, and most frequent in their writers. It belonged only to the teachers among the Jews to bind and to loose. When the Jews set any apart to be a preacher, they used these words, ‘Take thou liberty to teach what is BOUND and what is LOOSE.’

In this case, loosing and binding would be determining what was right and wrong in terms of conduct within the community of God’s people. This understanding certainly ties in with the context of v17, where the church has made a judgement in discipline of the unrepentant sinner. An alternative reading would be that it refers to determining the spiritual standing before God of the person who has been disciplined (i.e. salvation is found only in the church), although this would be hard to support from a wider reading of the New Testament and is not in keeping with the other Jewish usages of the phrase.

So, I conclude that here Christ is delegating to the leaders of the church (the apostles in this case, but presumably all church leaders in later ages) the responsibility to determine truth and guide the community in conduct where relationships are at risk because of sin. The leaders must lead and guide the flock!

<sup>19</sup>“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. <sup>20</sup>For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

**These verses, and the promises contained in them, should not be separated from their context in a passage about discipline in the church.** The promise that the Father will do what is asked (v19) is dependent on the two or three being gathered in Jesus’ name (meaning in His authority, or subject to His Lordship) (v20). It is only when we ask subject to the Lord’s will that we can be sure of receiving what we ask for. Statements like v19 should not be taken out of context to mean that we can “name and claim” anything we want. The emphasis in these verses is on the **agreement** of the believers (possibly referring only to the apostles, but conceivably with a wider application to all believers) particularly **in the issue of reconciliation between believers in the church**. We can be sure that a sincere prayer for reconciliation, understanding and unity will never be contrary to God’s will – His will for the situation is always that the little one will not be lost (v14)! In our modern Western world we have made our faith so individualistic that we have lost sight of the importance of community. It is in the fellowship of believers that we understand truth, and in this fellowship we receive God’s gifts as we pray in unity. **Prayer is the vital context of the discipline exercised in vv15-17. Without prayer it is a human exercise.**

Jesus’ statement about two or three meeting in His name is worthy of note. Michael Green makes reference to a saying of the Rabbis that where “ten people sit together and occupy themselves with the Torah, the *shekinah* abides among them” (the *shekinah* was the visible manifestation of God’s glory in the first temple – it represented the very presence of God). If Jesus is referring to this Rabbinic saying, then this verse is a powerful statement of His divinity. He is the omnipresent One (only God can be omnipresent), and His presence is the very presence of God! Furthermore it does not need 10 people to have His presence – even two of His people met in His name for prayer can be assured of it!

Church leaders should take heed to these verses – in particular as regards the issue of discipline in the church. A church whose leaders will not exercise wise, godly discipline with discernment will experience serious problems with gossip, disunity and probably division. Leaders must lead, and must do so prayerfully.

## **Forgiveness is vital (vv21-35)**

<sup>21</sup>Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Peter's question is perfectly understandable. The teaching of Jesus in this Chapter is quite profound. Many Jewish Rabbis maintained that a person should be forgiven only three times. Peter thinks he is being radical when he suggests extending this to seven times (seven is the number of perfection in the Bible) – surely Jesus will be impressed!

<sup>22</sup> *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.*

Jesus' reply is not literal, but is intended to show that Christian forgiveness should be limitless. He is blowing Peter's suggestion out of the water and removing the constraints on love and forgiveness.

<sup>23</sup> *"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.*

The parable focuses on servants in a reminder that this is what we are in the kingdom – we are God's servants, and we are all in a position of indebtedness to Him. The issue of humility is central to this truth – many of us struggle with forgiveness because we see ourselves as the central character in the story. In fact, sin is first and foremost against God, and it is His honour and reputation that should concern us more than our own. Pride is always an obstacle to experiencing God more. The fact that we are God's children should not cause us to lose sight of our identity as His servants – accountable to Him!

<sup>24</sup> *As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. <sup>25</sup> Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.*

<sup>26</sup> *"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' <sup>27</sup> The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt and let him go.*

<sup>28</sup> *"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.*

<sup>29</sup> *"His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.'*

<sup>30</sup> *"But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.*

<sup>32</sup> *"Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. <sup>33</sup> Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' <sup>34</sup> In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.*

<sup>35</sup> *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."*

The person who has not learnt to forgive others has not really appreciated God's forgiveness in his own life. One who is aware of the great debt he has been forgiven will display love and mercy even to those who sin against him. If we do not forgive one another from the heart we cannot know God's forgiveness, and our relationship with Him will be profoundly affected. This is echoed in the Lord's prayer, which says "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). It is literally true that we cannot expect forgiveness from God unless we are prepared to forgive others.

It seems that there is an increasing culture of victimisation in modern thinking. I do not for one minute mean to trivialise the very deep pain and wounds that have been inflicted on some people by others, and I am aware that there are many people who need to experience God's healing in a powerful way in their emotional lives. However, in Christ we cannot believe that there is no hope for these people – that they are condemned to live the rest of their lives as victims, simply the product of what has been done to them. **In Christ we can receive the power to forgive others, even if they have not repented** (as Christ prayed from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34)). Of course, the relationship cannot be restored unless they do repent (the message of v17 shows this powerfully), but you can be saved from the destructive force of bitterness. Until you let go of your own anger and frustration you cannot know the strength and power of God.

I have seen this power of forgiveness become reality in the lives of a number of people, but to illustrate I want to read to you an extract from a book written by Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch lady who was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp (called *Ravensbruck*) during World War Two because she and her family were discovered hiding Jews. She was a Christian, and she suffered terribly in that camp – her sister, Betsie, and her father died in the camp.

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him—a balding, heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving

along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown. 'When we confess our sins,' I said, 'God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. ...'

The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin. *Betsie, how thin you were!*

[Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent.]

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!'

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying, 'I was a guard there.' No, he did not remember me.

'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein,' again the hand came out—'will you forgive me?'

And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.'

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. '... Help!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.'

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart!'

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then.

## **Conclusions:**

There are several highly practical lessons that we must apply in our own situation from this chapter (the teaching of Jesus is always highly practical):

- 1. Child-like faith is the key to being great in the Kingdom** *we must humble ourselves*
- 2. We must not cause God's children to stumble** *we must examine ourselves*
- 3. God loves even sinners, enough to rescue them** *we must repent & seek Him*
- 4. Sin in the church should not be ignored** *we must aim to restore our brother*
- 5. Forgiveness is vital to Christian life** *we must forgive from the heart*