



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 See How They Love One Another  
(*Forgiveness*, pp. 9-14)

### Suggested Article:

📖 The Heart of Reconciliation  
(*Forgiveness*, pp. 78-84)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to:  
[Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu)

Christian Reflection  
Center for Christian Ethics  
Baylor University  
PO Box 97361  
Waco, TX 76798-7361  
Phone 1-866-298-2325  
[www.ChristianEthics.ws](http://www.ChristianEthics.ws)

© 2001 The Center for Christian Ethics

# See How They Love One Another

The church, especially through congregational worship, can provide us with practice and conditioning to become forgiving people.

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

### Reflection

Paul was not a Pollyanna; he knew that it would be extraordinary for the Corinthian church, or for that matter, any congregation, to be a mutually forgiving community. The forgiveness would flow from one member to the next, and it could not stop at the community's perimeter. Metaphors come tumbling out as he tried to describe it. It is as though we would begin to see other folks with fresh and Christ-like eyes: "we regard no one from a human point of view." The entire world would become brand new again: "there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" It would be like God making us "ambassadors for the Messiah" to go to every person, empowered to continue God's work, through Jesus, of "reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them". Behind all of the Apostle's metaphors lies this truth: forgiveness will be incredibly difficult, both to offer to others and to receive to ourselves when needed. A "ministry of reconciliation" will never be natural to us, so it will require that we get new eyes and a divine appointment; it will be a work that we neither initiate nor can sustain. The forgiving community will form, the reconciling begin, and the forgiveness continue to flow from one person to the next only because "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (5:18).

Through worship God can shape us into communities of forgiveness:

- ▶ "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," writes Paul; "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3:16). Each Christian worship service re-presents God's forgiveness to us. We rehearse, week after week, the words and gestures that offer release from bondage to the past. We confess that we are sinners in a prayer spoken in unison with some of the very folks whom we have betrayed—folks who also have betrayed us. We receive assurance that in Christ we, and they, are forgiven. We hear the Bible read and the Word proclaimed, and we are convicted of our sin and shown the possibility of new life.
- ▶ At the Lord's Table when we share the one body and blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), we become "one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:5). We are reminded of how, through Jesus' death, God forgives our sins against one another (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, directs The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2001 The Center for Christian Ethics

► Each time that we witness a new baptismal robe it should jog our memories that we were given new selves in baptism. As we overcome barriers that divide races, genders, and social classes, and as we learn to forgive one another, we are growing into those new selves (Colossians 3:9-14 and Galatians 3:27-28).

The forgiveness that worship engenders will spill over into the rest of our lives as we begin to see one another with new and Christ-like eyes. "We no longer regard each other as we once did, or from a worldly point of view," write Dorothy Bass and Fred Niedner. "No matter what happens among us, we see in each other not only a fellow sinner, but also one of the redeemed for whom Christ died. Within the fellowship of the church, we see each other in baptismal garments, the working clothes of the new creation, each and every day. In our sanctuaries as well as around our tables at home, we break bread that comes not only from our own labors, but also from Christ who is our true host."

### Study Questions

1. Read Matthew 26:20-30 and notice the failures, betrayal, and abuse that are present when Jesus institutes the Lord's Table. Does Jesus know all that mess is going on? What does this suggest to you that we should be remembering about Jesus when we eat the bread and drink the cup of communion?
2. Study an order of service that your congregation uses. Which elements of worship will shape members into a forgiving community? Are there elements that you would like to add?
3. Read Colossians 3:12-13. How important to our moral formation is worshiping with other people? Would a Christian develop as easily without a church community all of the traits that Paul mentions?
4. Comment on this passage in Martin Luther's *Large Catechism*: "Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and signs, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the grace of the Holy Ghost does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but continuous, uninterrupted forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other."

### Departing Hymn: "Forgive us, Lord"

Forgive us, Lord, and set us free  
To love each other joyfully,  
To worship you abundantly  
To be what we are called to be. Amen.

*David G. Miller*

*suggested tunes:* OLD 100<sup>TH</sup> or TRINITY COLLEGE

Text © 2001 The Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor University, Waco, TX

# See How They Love One Another

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>	<i>Dual Session (# 1)</i>	<i>Dual Session (# 2)</i>
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading	Matthew 26:20-30
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)	Reflection (skim all)	Discuss Matt. 26:20-30
Question 2	Questions (selected)	Question 2	Questions 1, 3, and 4
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To reflect on how worship—singing, teaching, the Lord’s Table, and baptism—shapes those sensitivities of forgiving people that were discussed in the previous study.
2. To appreciate the centrality of reconciliation to the church’s ministry.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Forgiveness* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. Locate music for the departing hymn; the tunes suggested are the ones that many congregations use for “The Doxology”.

## Begin with a story

Share the scene from the film “Places in the Heart” as retold by Dorothy Bass and Fred Niedner, Jr. on pp. 9-10 of *Forgiveness*. It is a powerful commentary upon the meaning of the Lord’s Table. An alternative is to tell Tom Long’s story, on pp. 34-35 of *Forgiveness*, about the minister who must offer a dying stranger forgiveness. The minister recognizes that this has always been the church’s ministry.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently, and then voice a request that your group will be a forgiving community for its members.

## Scripture Reading

Ask a member to read aloud 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 from a modern translation.

## Reflection

Encourage members reflect upon the startling metaphors Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. In my Baptist tradition this passage is reduced to a motto for “Royal Ambassadors”, a mission group for boys; as adults we may miss the richness of its vision.

Ask members to read all of the Bible passages in this section. For Paul, both the Lord’s Table and baptism have implications about how we should see one another as “members”. Point out that Colossians 3:9-14 and Galatians 3:27-28 draw powerful lessons about overcoming distinctions that are significant in the world.

Ask for reactions to Bass and Niedner’s comment in the last paragraph of the Reflection material.

## Study Questions

1. Matthew says that Jesus knew more about the failures and betrayal than any of the disciples at the table, including the ones who would fail Jesus. The Lord’s Table *addresses* problems that the disciples don’t fully appreciate, rather than avoiding or disguising them. Jesus was offering and creating a fellowship, rather than celebrating one that already existed.

2. Encourage members to brainstorm. They may mention also worship practices that other churches use.
3. Allow honest responses. Some members may discuss churches that have been dysfunctional and have deformed their members with bitterness, envy, self-conceit, or impatience at changing the world. If they have been blessed by a church fellowship, encourage them to reflect upon the importance of community encouragement, teaching, and correction.
4. The passage comes from the great 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer's instructions for people who would become confirmed Christians. "Word and signs" means Bible reading and preaching, and communion and baptism—the very elements discussed in the lesson. Notice the close connection that Luther draws between God's forgiveness and the forgiveness that flows among church members.

***Departing Hymn***

Your group may use their favorite tune for "The Doxology" here. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a closing prayer.