

Matthew Chapter 18 Continued

Verses 15-18: The setting of these verses fits into the context of church discipline. The responsibility of action is threefold:

1. Personal, "go and tell him;"
2. Private, "two or three witnesses:"
3. Corporate, "tell it unto the church."

"Tell him his fault": Means to honestly express the point of offense. This should not be done in vindictive anger, but it must be done in straightforward honesty. To fail to speak up is to be dishonest and will lead to harboring continued bitterness.

The last phrase of verse 16 is taken from (Deut. 19:15). "Neglect," better said, "refuse," "as a heathen man and a publican:" as those who would not be admitted into the church. The obstinate sinner is to be cut off, at least temporarily, from Christian fellowship. Examples of this are found in (1 Cor. 5:4-5 and 1 Tim. 1:20).

Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

The prescription for church discipline (in verses 15-17), must be read in light of the parable of the lost sheep (in verses 12-14). The goal of this process is restoration. If successful, "you have won your brother." Step 1 is to "show him his fault" privately.

You will notice here, that there had definitely been an offence committed. Notice also, the word "brother". This has to do with a fellow Christian who has done, or said something. This is not the world who has sinned against you. The best advice in the world is not to tell this to anyone, except the one who has sinned against you.

The best time to settle something like this is immediately. If you go to him in love, and not with an arrogant attitude, it will help also. Usually, just letting the person know that you love him, in spite of what he has done, will leave the door open for settling this.

If you can have a prayer together, it will usually settle the whole thing. Friendships that overcome this are usually much stronger. Sometimes, he will not accept you, and we see what we need to do in that case.

Matthew 18:16 "But if he will not hear [thee, then] take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."

"If he will not hear": I.e., if he remains impenitent, follow step 2: "Take one or two more with you," to fulfill the principle of (Deut. 19:15).

When you take a witness with you, you must be careful to take someone who won't spread gossip. This also, should be kept as quiet as possible, and try to settle it quietly. These need to be

level-headed people who would not get into a heated argument. Then in the next verse, we see what must be, if all of this fails.

Matthew 18:17 "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell [it] unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

“Tell it unto the church”: If he still refuses to repent, step 3 requires that the matter be reported to the whole assembly (verse 17), so that all may lovingly pursue the sinning brother’s reconciliation. But failing that, step 4 means that the offender must be excommunicated, regarded by the church as “a Gentile and a tax collector”.

The idea is not merely to punish the offender, or to shun him completely, but to remove him as a detrimental influence from the fellowship of the church, and henceforth to regard him as an evangelistic prospect rather than as a brother. Ultimately, the sin for which he is excommunicated is a hard-hearted impenitence.

All of these situations were between Christian brothers and sisters. If you cannot reconcile the situation even through the church, then you must separate yourself from these people. The Lord tells us not to fellowship with this type of people, just as we are not to fellowship with heathen (worldly), people.

Christians must be a separated people, sold out to God, living wholesome lives before God. We may witness to the worldly people, but must not get involved in their way of life.

Matthew 18:18 "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

All this must be understood in the context of (18:15-17, where Christ laid out specific instructions for dealing with sin in the church. The sum of it all means that any duly constituted body of believers, acting in accord with God’s Word, has the authority to declare if someone is forgiven or unforgiven.

The church’s authority is not to determine these things, but to declare the judgment of heaven based on the principles of the Word. When they make such judgments on the basis of God’s Word, they can be sure heaven is in accord. In other words, whatever they “bind” or “loose” on earth is already “bound” or “loosed” in heaven.

When the church says the unrepentant person is bound in sin, the church is saying what God says about that person. When the church acknowledges that a repentant person has been loosed from that sin, God agrees.

Matthew 18:19 "Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

“If two of you shall agree on earth”: This promise applies to the issue of discipline discussed (in verses 15-17). The “two of you” spoken of here harks back to the two or three witnesses involved in step two of the discipline process.

This is a very strong statement. When two Christians agree, it seems nothing is withheld from them. When Jesus sent the disciples out to minister, He sent them by twos, probably, because of the power of God that two of them have.

The next Scripture shows us that this power that they have, is because Jesus is in their midst. Notice carefully that it does not say it might be, but that it will be.

Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

“Two or three”: Jewish tradition requires at least 10 men (a minyan), to constitute a synagogue or even hold public prayer. Here, Christ promised to be present in the midst of an even smaller flock, “two or three witnesses” gathered in His name for the purpose of discipline.

The presence of God is not greater in a group of thousands, than it is in a group of two or three who are gathered in His name. God's Divine Presence is what we should be seeking, more than vast numbers of people.

Verses 21-22: All this teaching on forgiveness seemed overwhelming to the disciples, thus prompting Peter’s question: “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me?” Peter wrongly assumes that “seven times” are ample to forgive anyone.

Jesus responds that seven is not only insufficient but that one should forgive “seventy times seven,” in other words, unlimited forgiveness must characterize the true disciple.

Matthew 18:21 "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"

“Till seven times?” Peter thought he was being magnanimous. The rabbis, citing several verses from Amos (1;3, 6, 9, 11, 13), taught that since God forgave Israel’s enemies only 3 times, it was presumptuous and unnecessary to forgive anyone more than 3 times.

Matthew 18:22 "Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."

“Seventy times seven”: Meaning innumerable times.

Of course, this was not saying 490 times, but was rather saying, every time your brother asks you to forgive him. Seven is a spiritual number. Seven times seventy just means to the ultimate. He is not your physical brother, but your brother in Christ.

We will see in these next few verses, that if we expect God to forgive us, then we must forgive, also.

Verses 23-27: The parable of the unforgiving servant (verses 23-35), is used by Jesus to reinforce the power and importance of the principle of forgiveness. ‘A certain king’ represents God, the sovereign Father (verse 35), to whom the debt is owed. The “one” who “owed him” is a servant or satrap who had access to the king’s money, and represents the individual sinner.

“Ten thousand talents” was an insurmountable debt equivalent to millions of dollars in our currency. It represents the debt of sin, which the sinner cannot possibly pay by himself. The command that he be “sold ... and payment to be made” indicates his being placed in debtor’s prison.

In “compassion” the king releases him and forgives (cancels), the “debt.” The picture illustrates God’s total forgiveness when dealing with our sins at the point of salvation. The debt has been paid by Christ and we are set free from it forever!

Matthew 18:23 "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants."

“Servants”: Due to the large amounts of money involved, it is likely these “slaves” (servants), would have been provincial governors who owed the king the money from taxation.

Matthew 18:24 "And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents."

“Ten thousand talents”: This represents an incomprehensible amount of money. The talent was the largest denomination of currency, and “ten thousand” in common parlance signified an infinite number.

Matthew 18:25 "But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made."

“Commanded him to be sold”: A way to recover some of this loss was for the king to sell the family members into slavery.

The custom of the land was that if you could not pay your debts, you went into servitude. Ten thousand talents by our money could be an astronomical figure. In fact, so great an amount, that if the whole family worked their entire lives, there would be no way to pay it off.

This is the sadness of our debt we owe. If we worked every day of our lives, we could not pay off what we owe God. Our only hope is that Jesus paid the debt for us. We have been forgiven the debt.

We will learn a very important lesson about the condition of our forgiveness in the next few verses.

Matthew 18:26 "The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

“The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him”: This does not mean that he paid him religious homage, but that in a humble, reverent, and earnest manner he entreated him to have patience with him. He prostrated himself before his lord, as is customary in all Eastern nations when subjects are in the presence of their king.

Matthew 18:27 "Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt."

“Then the Lord of that servant was moved with compassion”: Or had compassion on him, he showed pity to him, and extended mercy towards him.

Not that he was moved hereunto by any actions of the servant, as his prostrating himself before him and his worshipping him. Or by his cries and entreaties, nor by his promises, which were not at all to be depended on, but by his own goodness and will.

For not to anything that this man said or did, nor to any deserts of his, but to the pure mercy, and free grace of God, is to be ascribed. Who “loosed him”; from obligation to punishment, and from a spirit of bondage, through the guilt of sin, and work of the law upon his conscience. And forgave him the debt; the whole debt of ten thousand talents.

This is the very same thing that has happened to us, our debt is so great that there is no way to pay it; so He frankly forgave us. This lord forgave the debt, because he knew it would be impossible for the servant to pay.

Verses 18-35: The contrast (in verse 28), where the “same servant” is unwilling to forgive his fellow servant a debt of “a hundred pence” (about 10 dollars), is deliberately presented as a hideous hypothetical situation. As unbelievable as this action would be, that is how unbelievable it would be for a Christian disciple, who has been forgiven a lifetime of sin, to be unforgiving of others.

In the story, such an unforgiving servant is called a “wicked servant” because no true believer would do such. A truly saved man would never behave like the man in the story, who was delivered to the “tormentors” (Greek (basanistes, “torturers” or “jailers”). This is certainly not a reference to purgatory.

One behaving in this manner falls into the condemnation of the lost. True forgiveness “from the heart” of a regenerate man is one of the signs of genuine salvation and conversion (Eph. 5:32).

Saved people are both forgiven and forgiving. Unforgiving people prove that they have never been born of God.

Matthew 18:28 "But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took [him] by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest."

“A hundred pence”: About 3 month’s wages. This was not a negligible amount by normal standards, but it was a pittance in comparison to what the slave had been forgiven.

Matthew 18:29 "And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all."

“Have patience with me ... I will pay thee all”: The forgiven man heard the same pleading he had given before his master, but was utterly without compassion (verse 30).

Matthew 18:30 "And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt."

“And he would not”: Have patience with him and give him time for payment, and forbear severity at present, as he requested; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

He had him before a proper officer, and proved his debt, and got him sent to jail, there to lie till the whole debt was paid; which as it discovered so great an ignorance and stupidity; for a prison will pay no debt.

This is not unlike some rigorous proceedings of some church members against their brethren, that have displeased them; who immediately bring the matter before the church, and will not be easy

unless some censure is laid upon them, or they are cast out, until full satisfaction is given them, whereby oftentimes a useful member of a church is lost.

In the prayer that Jesus taught the disciples to pray it says, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

Matthew 18:31 "So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done."

"Fellow servants ... sorry": A lack of forgiveness is offensive to fellow believers. Most of all it offends God, who chastens His unforgiving children severely (verse 32-34).

Matthew 18:32 "Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:"

"Then his Lord, after that he had called him": Or ordered him to be called and brought before him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant! Thou cruel and hard hearted man to thy fellow servant, and such an ungrateful creature to me. On whom my goodness to thee has not made any impression, nor taken any effect.

I forgave thee all that debt: all that vast debt of ten thousand talents and that freely, because thou desiredst me, not to forgive the debt, but to have patience, and give time. And therefore unasked, forgave the whole sum, every farthing of it.

This was such an instance of pure goodness, as was enough to have wrought upon a heart of stone, and engaged the most tender concern and pity for a fellow creature, as well as filled with thankfulness to the kind benefactor. The favor so lately bestowed on him is justly observed as an aggravation of his wickedness.

Matthew 18:33 "Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?"

"Shouldest not thou also have had compassion?": It is but reasonable, what ought to be, and may be expected, that such who have received mercy, should show mercy. And as the Lord had compassion on this man, and had forgiven him such an immense sum, and saved him, his wife and children, from being sold for bond slaves, the least he could have done after this, would have been to have followed such an example, and have had mercy.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

No one appreciates cruelty. This servant was quick to ask for forgiveness for the large debt he owed, but the small debt his fellow servant owed him, he would not forgive. To get forgiveness, we must forgive. Just as the Lord has forgiven us we too must forgive our fellowmen when they ask us.

This truly was a continuation of what Peter had asked about forgiveness. Not just once, but every time they ask us to forgive, we must; if we expect to be forgiven.

Matthew 18:34 "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him."

“His lord was wroth”: Because He is holy and just, God is always angry at sin, including the sins of His children (Heb. 12:5-11).

“Tormentors”: Not executioners. This pictures severe discipline, not final condemnation.

“All that was due unto him”: The original debt was unpayable and the man was still without resources. So it seems unlikely that the slave was saddled once again with the same debt he had already been forgiven. Rather, what he now owed his master would be exacted in chastening by his master until he was willing to forgive others.

Matthew 18:35 "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

“So likewise”: This verse contains the sum or moral of the parable. When Christ has explained one of his own parables, we are to receive it just as he has explained it, and not attempt to draw spiritual instruction from any parts or circumstances which he has not explained. The following seems to be the particulars of the general truth which he meant to teach:

1. That our sins are great.
2. That God freely forgives them.
3. That the offences committed against us by our brethren are comparatively small.
4. That we should therefore most freely forgive them.
5. That if we do not, God will be justly angry with us, and punish us.

“From your hearts”: That is, not merely in words, but really and truly to feel and act toward your brother as if he had not offended us.

“Trespasses”: Offences, injuries. Words and actions designed to do us wrong.

We must not even take communion, if we have not forgiven everyone. If you have anything against your brother, go and forgive, and then come back and take communion. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. We should ask no more from God than we are willing to do to our friends.

Matthew Chapter 18 Continued Questions

1. When you have a problem with a brother, who do you tell?
2. What might you gain?
3. When is the best time to settle a problem?
4. If he doesn't hear you, what is the second option you have?

5. If that doesn't work, what do you do?
6. What must you be careful to do, when you take someone with you?
7. If no amount of persuasion works, what should you count him as?
8. Who should we not fellowship with?
9. What does verse 18 say about binding and loosing?
10. How many must agree for a thing to come to pass?
11. Why?
12. Jesus is in the midst, when how many gather?
13. What should we seek more than numbers?
14. How many times did Peter believe was enough to forgive a brother?
15. How many times did Jesus say?
16. Is this a literal number? Explain.
17. If we expect God to forgive us, what must we do?
18. In the story Jesus told about the king, how much did his servant owe him?
19. How long would it take to pay that much?
20. When they could not pay their debts, what happened?
21. What did the servant do to make him cancel the debt?
22. How much did the servant's fellow owe?
23. Why did the king decide to throw his servant in prison?
24. What lesson can we take from this?