

Matthew 18:15-20 The Precepts Concerning Sin

We are starting a new section this morning, Matthew 18:15-20. Study guides are in the back if you want to follow along.

In this section of Matthew chapters 5 - 25, Matthew presents five sermons with supporting chapters in between. The first sermon was Matthew chapters 5 -7, the second Matthew chapter 10, the third Matthew chapter 13, and the fourth sermon, which is what we are in chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18, The Precepts of the Kingdom: A Sermon on Relationships Within the Kingdom of God.

Last week we took 14 verses. Probably a record for us in one sitting to take 14 verses. The Precepts of Greatness. The disciples were in an argument as to which one of them would be the greatest so they came to ask Jesus which one of them would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus took a small child, a **παιδία** (paidia) in Greek, a child of disciplinary age, a child old enough to be in submission to parents. Jesus took this child and said that except you become like this little child you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.

We know from verse 6 that Jesus in mentioning the little child was not just presenting children for the kingdom of Heaven, but someone who is childlike. He was speaking to adults about what it is like to be childlike in their dependence upon their parent, and their dependence on discipline. **And so Jesus took this little child** and verse 6 tells us that the child represented all believers. All believers must become like little children. Not immature like children, but rather childlike in their approach to the things of the Lord and their approach to life. So He told them, "You must become like this child," but then He gave them warning.

He gave them warning that anybody who should offend one of these little children, meaning any believer. The word *offense* as we studied last week means *to put something in the path to cause someone to trip over or be diverted in another direction from where the path leads*. So Jesus said, "If you offend one of these little ones," if you put something in the path to divert one of these little ones in a different direction and not coming to the truth of Christ, "it will be better for you if you had a millstone hung around your neck and you be cast into the sea, than you offend one of these little ones." And He was not talking about just children, He was talking about all believers who approach the Lord in a childlike faith. And He says, "You have to take responsibility," that you do not lead people astray who are making their childlike approach to Christ, total dependency upon Him. So He says, "It is better for you if that millstone were hung around your neck than you were to offend one of these little ones." So He made it very serious. A very serious offense to offend people making their approach to Christ.

But more importantly how important it is to make the approach to Christ in childlike faith. It is difficult to be an adult and yet approach the things of the Lord like a child. There is a lot of ego and a lot of pride involved. And for those who have gone to Bible school for many years, maybe have a degree or two, it is very difficult to take a childlike approach when you are so filled full of head knowledge and status, you know, within the church. But that is the difficulty. That is why it takes people like that - educated, degreed, has position and status

within the church, the body of Christ - it takes them so long to become humbled. Jesus said, "You must become humble like a little child. You must choose to take the low road." Jesus chose to take the low road from His birth on. He did not present Himself as the worldly king, but He humbled Himself, even to the death on the cross, that we just celebrated just a moment ago.

In verses 15 through 20 - so that is The Precepts of Greatness in verses 1-14. In Matthew chapter 18 verses 15-20, The Precepts Concerning Sin. We are in verses 15- 20.

In verses 15 -17 we have what we have called The Confrontation of Sin. How are believers supposed to handle the sin problem when someone has sinned against you? We just got through discussing about offending one of the little ones. What happens when you offend one of the little ones? How do you repent? How is the sin problem taken care of? Some great verses here.

In verses 15-17, The Confrontation of Sin, and verses 15, 16 and 17 are three conditional clauses, each one starting with the word *if* and they are progressive. One conditional clause leads to the next, and then to the next, the final clause.

So he starts out in verse 15 with the first conditional clause. Jesus said, and I gave you the literal translation here, **And if your brother should sin against you, you go and reprove him between you and him alone. If he should hear you, you gained your brother.** Four things I want to point out to you:

(1) Notice, *If your brother should sin against you, you go.* I had always thought for years that if somebody sinned against me, they owe me. They need to come to me, and they need to apologize or repent because they have sinned against me. In fact, I will talk about their sin against me with many people for many weeks, if not many years about the sins that they have committed against me. But it is interesting, the person who has been sinned against that person is to go to the person who sinned against them, which puts a whole new dynamic on relationship.

In fact, the third element we are going to talk about, you go and discuss it with him alone. You do not bring other people into it. You do not discuss it with other people and then go discuss it with him because there is a process here where sin is being established, not only taken care of, but established.

(2) **If your brother should sin against you, you go**, and secondly, **and reprove him.** The word *reprove*, ἐλέγχω (elenchō) in Greek is a legal term, and it means *to present evidence to bring about conviction.* So if I was an attorney I would go into a courtroom and it would be my job to present evidence to bring about a conviction if I was the prosecuting attorney. I have to present the evidence. I just cannot walk in and say, "He's guilty." You have to prove it. In this instance it is represented by the word *reprove*, *to present evidence to bring about a conviction.*

Not just an *accusation*. It is not just coming to somebody and accusing them of sinning against you, you have to present evidence. Not just an opinion. Not just someone's feeling that you have sinned against me, you have to present evidence.

So, **You go**, first of all, the person who has been sinned against goes to the one who sinned. And secondly, **and reprove him**.

(3) Thirdly, **between you and him alone**. You do not take anybody with you. You do not include anybody else because, again, there is a process that is being established here; not just by the guy who has been sinned against but the person who has seemingly, possibly, committed the sin because it has not been established yet that indeed they have sinned.

So it says, **If he should hear you**. If he agrees with you. You go to him and you present to him and he agrees with you and he repents over his sin. He apologizes and says his sorry, you guys pray together. **If he should hear you, you have gained your brother**. Unity has been restored.

Remember that word for this section, it is all about *unity*, which you cannot find very much within the body of Christ. The point is - and Paul said this in his letter to the Ephesians - **Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. But we as believers, we are always at each other's throats, we are always in disagreement. Go share yourself with them and if he has heard you, your unity has been restored. And that is what it is all about.

Second condition, verse 16, **But if he should not hear, take with you one or two more**. Take one or two people. And then the quote from Deuteronomy 19:15, **In order that upon the mouth of two or three witnesses every word might be established**. So God, even in the Old Testament, said that evidence is proven and established by two or three witnesses, not just because you say so. There has to be witnesses. Even Paul, in I Timothy 5:19 Paul mentioned, do not receive an accusation against an elder in the church unless it is at the mouth of two or three witnesses. Very, very important. Establishment. Facts are established by witnesses, not by accusations. So bring two or three with you.

Now here is where the problems arise, because usually when people do this, they take two or three with them that already know what the problem is and have already sided with the person that is bringing the complaint. They think this text means that two or three people are there to pressure the one who is accused to repent. But the whole process and the whole purpose for taking two or three is to establish the facts. The facts have not been established so take two or three with you so that by two or three witnesses everything can be established.

And then verse 17, the third condition. **And if he should refuse to hear them**, that is taken for granted that they agree that he is guilty and that he stands accused and evidence has been presented, **tell it to the assembly**.

Most biblical translations use the word *church*. We did a special study on that a few weeks ago. The Greek word for *church* is not found in the New Testament. It is the word *assembly, the assembly of believers*, not the word *church* the way we use it today. Out on our sign we have the word *church*. That does not come from anything in the New Testament. It is a religious phrase that came into vogue back in the 300 ADs when people put together organizations, religious organizations.

Tell it to the assembly. So when the assembly of believers come together, tell it to the assembly. So now you have got more witnesses. You have to tell them the facts and tell them that he refuses to repent.

And if he also should refuse to hear the assembly, let him be to you as the pagan and the tax collector. He is not talking about the IRS. The tax collector to the Jew was a traitor. Someone who worked for the Roman government and was considered unclean and not able to participate with them religiously. So excommunicate him. That is a lot of authority for an assembly of believers. They do not take much of today.

The Conclusion Concerning Sin. What we just discussed, **Let him be to you as a pagan and the tax collector,** this is called *binding* in Biblical terms. Because look what verse 18 says. This has to do with the decision making and binding of the assembly. **Truly I say to you, whatever you should bind upon the earth will have been bound in Heaven.** Notice the literal translation, a little confusing but I will unravel it for you. **And whatever you should loose upon the earth will have been loosed in Heaven.** There are two verb forms here. One is the future tense: *will*, and one is what is called the perfect tense: something that has already been done. So it is something in the future that will happen but has already been done in heaven before the future got there. So in heaven it has already been declared. This is the process and God has already declared this is how you deal with sin in the body of Christ. When someone comes and says, "Who do you think you are, you church people, you assembly of people, that you have found me guilty, and you have cast me out as a pagan and a tax collector because I refuse to repent? Who gives you that authority?" God in heaven. Period.

We saw the same phrase back in Matthew 16:19 when ~~Paul~~ Jesus was talking with Peter, **Whatever you should bind on earth shall have been ~~loosed~~ bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.** And He is talking there about the gospel message of the church. What gives me the right to go out and tell people, "If you do not repent of your sins, you will be lost in your sins throughout eternity?" I mean, who do I think I am? God? Only God can make that kind of a judgment. But if you read the scripture God has already made that kind of judgment in heaven before so that when I come to people with the gospel message and it is given under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the decree has come from heaven by God already. I did not make it up, it is not my opinion, you will be lost throughout eternity if you do not repent and come to Christ.

So the man in his sin, if he refuses to repent, he is bound on earth to his sin. But if he is loosed, if he repents of his sin, he will be loosed upon the earth, because in heaven - heaven says if you repent you are loosed from your sins, you are forgiven, you are brought back into unity and released from your sins.

Verse 19, **And again I say to you**, and many of you have probably heard this verse but look at it in context, **And again I say to you, that if two of you should be in agreement**, but notice I translated it *harmony*, **if two of you shall agree on earth concerning any matter, whatever they should ask, it will happen for them from My Father Who is in Heaven**. The misuse of this verse is to take it out of context and present it as a function or practice of psychology. That if I get together with another person and if you agree with me that God should give me a new car by tomorrow, it is going to happen because we agreed on it and we make it happen. Or agree on anything because that is what it said.

In reality the word *agreement* does not mean *to agree*. We should probably realize that already. In fact the Greek word is **συμφωνεῖ** (sumphōnei) - *symphony*. It is a musical term. What a beautiful picture to tell the body of Christ is that all of you as believers, you are in symphony together, you are playing the same song, but you have different parts; and your parts must fit together, come together in unity.

And so Jesus says, **If any of you should be in a harmony upon the earth concerning anything**, playing the same song and in the unison of the spirit, God is going to do it. God will do whatever you ask especially if you are dealing with this man that has not repented of his sin. That is why the assembly has to get together. That is why there has to be unity between the man who is sinned against and the two or three witnesses and then the entire assembly. There must be unity there. It is like the orchestra agreeing this man needs to be removed from the orchestra because he is throwing off the whole song. It is important that there be harmony and unity within the song.

Now I will make a statement to you. It might sound like I am badmouthing the church, and just to comfort you I am. That is why in so many churches there is such disunity, why the function of the church is so dysfunctional: because there is so much sin that is not being dealt with, there are so many people that have different opinions from one another, there is no harmony. There is no unity in the spirit in the church.

Going back even to the section before this, *you must become like a little child*. If you want things done your way and you are causing problems in the church, you need to give it up. It is not going to be done your way. It is going to be done the Lord's way. You need to seek what the Lord wants. Remember that the Lord has not turned the church over to us when He left. Jesus Christ is still head of the church and His Spirit is still dwelling within every born-again believer that believes in Him. The Holy Spirit does not share my opinion. I am sure He is not even interested other than I am sure He is very surprised at some of the opinions that I have. Unity, harmony.

And then in verse 20, **For where two or three are gathered together into My name, there I am in the middle of them**. The condition that makes all of this possible, all of this unity and all of this harmony, the condition that makes all of this possible is that where two or three are gathered together Jesus Christ is in the midst. And literally over the years we have taken this verse very comforting, because sometimes we only had two or three for church. And had to take comfort that Jesus Christ is here in His fullness in spite of how many people are here. In fact we

could probably feel kind of spoiled that two or three of us have Him all to ourselves, you know, rather than sharing Him.

This is also the reason why over the years I have been truly blessed, more so than going to church. I have been truly blessed with getting together with other believers, just another believer, whether it is across the lunch table or breakfast table or dinner, or Christians have other Christians over for a barbecue and then sit around and talk about the Word. I get more ministry and more blessed from a fellowship with another two or three people than I do in formal church. Many times I go to church and I leave church and I go, "Uh, I came to see Jesus but where is He? I am still waiting, and you have dismissed." It is people.

It is the relationship of people. That is what Jesus is talking about here. You must become like a little child. You must take other people into consideration, how you are influencing them and the life that you are living and how you are influencing them. And if you sin against someone and they come to you and they tell you about it, you must humble yourself if indeed you have sinned. You must confess your sin. You must repent of your sin for the sake of unity, not for the sake of your ego, or for the sake of your opinions.

In the body of Christ today in church we are so disunited and yet at the same time we are united. We are united spiritually, but we are all going in different directions. And yet Jesus lays this out for us, here is the blueprint for relationships within the body of Christ.

Next week we will take the next section on The Precepts of Forgiveness. We have seen The Precepts of Greatness, The Precepts of Sin, and then we are going to study the rest of the chapter, The Precepts of Forgiveness.

Let's close with prayer.