

- ***READ Matthew 18:15-22*** This morning during our time of study together, we considered how it is that we can become skilled at handling ourselves well during conflict with one another. The conflict we considered was more along the lines of disagreements, differences of opinion, or things that didn't reach all the way to the level of actual sin, yet that is a conflict none the less.
 - This evening, we want to build upon that study by looking at conflict that is a result of actual sin being committed against one disciple by another. The text we read just a minute ago focuses on this very issue of sin being committed by a disciple and how other disciples ought to respond to it. Some translations include the phrase "against you" following the opening state of "If your brother sins." The NASB includes a footnote that this phrase is mostly found in later manuscripts and isn't found in the earlier ones which is the reason for its exclusion in some translations. Nevertheless, we are going to approach this lesson from the standpoint of what we are to do if we are sinned against by a fellow Christian.
 - Honestly, it would be nice if this sort of lesson didn't have to be considered, but the truth is that as fallible people, we sometimes slip up and sin against one another. When we are sinned against, we must know how it is that we ought to respond. There is a reason Paul commands that we not repay evil for evil in **Romans 12:21**. It is almost human nature for us to respond to those who hurt us with equal or greater ferocity, but Paul says that we ought to be better than that. The teachings of Jesus demand that we be better than that, so this evening we will consider from this text of **Matthew 18:15-22** how it is that I ought to respond if my brother sins against me.
- I. **Be sure that I have actually been sinned against.**
- A. It can be very easy for us in our pride to believe that anything done against us by another constitutes sin. However, if we will practice Paul's instructions to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to (**Romans 12:3**), then we will realize that just because someone makes us mad, hurts our feelings, or does something we don't like...that doesn't mean that person has sinned against us and is in need of repenting for what happened between us. Think with me to a couple of examples of people who might have thought that they had been done wrong, but it was simply their pride that made them think so. Think firstly about Joseph and his brothers and how they hated him simply because he was their father's favorite and he had dreams of them serving him one day. (**Genesis 37**) Then think also about Saul and his imagining that David had done something that was worthy of hunting him down and killing him out of jealousy. (**I Samuel 18**) Both of these examples show people who thought more highly of themselves than they ought to and they wrongly accused others of wrong doing out of their jealousy and insecurity.
 - B. Sin isn't something that we ought to take lightly. **I John 3:4** tell us that "*everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.*" Sin isn't something that we simply don't like, but sin is a transgression of God's law, and those who practice lawlessness will not inherit the kingdom of God. (**Matthew 7:23**)
 - C. So what we are doing when we bring an accusation of sin, is saying that someone has done something that has put their soul in jeopardy of being condemned to hell for all eternity. We are saying that their actions have warranted a judgment of death per **Romans 6:23**, "*for the wages of sin is death.*" The context of our text here in **Matthew 18:15-22** is actually focusing on the issue of sin and causing others to sin. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus focuses on the seriousness of putting stumbling blocks before others. (**Matthew 18:6,7**) Then Jesus switches focus to those things within ourselves that might cause us to stumble and how we ought to be willing to put all of those things away from us if we can't control them. (**Matthew 18:8,9**) Then finally before our verses for this evening, Jesus focuses on the depth of love that the Father has lost in the fact that he would leave the ninety nine in order to find the one. (**Matthew 18:10-14**) All of these different discussions are simply pointing towards the serious nature of sin, and how we ought to take it seriously and not just throw accusations of it around haphazardly. If we are going to accuse someone of sin, then we best be sure that we have done our due diligence to make sure that something sinful has actually taken place, and that it isn't simply our own self that has been offended.

II. Prepare my heart to forgive.

- A. Once we have firmly established that we have actually been sinned against and someone is in danger of being condemned, then we need to make sure that our heart is prepared to offer forgiveness to this person once they are made aware and have opportunity to repent of what they have done. **(Matthew 18:21,22)** Out of everything that is discussed this evening, this very well might be the key point to it all.
- B. This might be the key point because our willingness to forgive will affect the way we go about everything in this situation. If we are not willing to forgive then we might not ever seek to make the person who has sinned against us aware of what has happened. This would do nothing but possibly lead to further issues down the road, or this person might never realize their error and repent of what they have done, and they might even do the same thing again in the future.
- C. Furthermore, our unwillingness to forgive those who might wrong us will lead to God being unwilling to forgive us of our wrongs against Him. This is the point of Jesus's parable that He goes straight into after answering Peter's question about how many times we ought to forgive our brother who sins against us. **(Matthew 18:23-35)** This servant had been forgiven of such a great debt, yet he was unwilling to forgive others of such lesser debts. So is our standing before God and our interactions with others. Nothing anyone else can do to us can equate to the wrongs we commit against God. Therefore, if God is willing to forgive us every time we sin and repent, then we ought to be willing to forgive others when they sin against us and offer up repentance. This is the goal of our dealing with sin against us. We ought to desire for the repentance of the guilty person so that they might most importantly be made right again with God and be wiped clean of the guilt and eternal consequence of their sin.
- D. Then let me also point out that our willingness to prepare our hearts to forgive will help prevent us from falling into the trap of repaying evil with further evil. **(Romans 12:21)** Some would say that this text demands that we automatically forgive those who sin against us, but it isn't logically possible to forgive those who don't request forgiveness. If we are to forgive as God forgives then that means that we are always ready and willing to forgive, and as soon as that forgiveness is requested then we are ready and willing to forgive and move on without a grudge. But even if that request never comes, our prepared hearts don't seek to repay the evil done to us with further evil. This, I believe, is the point that Jesus is getting at in His teachings. So if we are sure that we have been sinned against, and we have prepared ourselves to be willing to forgive the sin done against us, then it is time to put into action the steps that Jesus details in this text.

III. Go through Jesus's steps:

1) Go to my brother privately.

- a. Much like we discussed this morning, we need to be willing to first and foremost go privately to the brother who has sinned against us and be willing to sit down and discuss the matter. One thing I failed to mention this morning was the fact that we often shy away from going to the one we have conflict with simply because it is uncomfortable. It isn't fun in any way to have these kind of conversations with people, but Jesus says this is what we must do so we must be willing to do it.
- b. The way we approach this conversation will more than likely go a long way in determining what the outcome will be. Remember, this is to first be a private conversation so as not to embarrass or abuse anyone, and then we also need to keep in mind the wisdom of **Proverbs 15:1**, "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*" If we go into this conversation with vitriol, anger, and malice in our voice and our demeanor, seeking to attack and embarrass, then we shouldn't be surprised when things don't go well. **(Galatians 6:1)**
- c. Hopefully, we will handle ourselves well and the brother will recognize the error of what he has done and will repent so that he will be won back, as Jesus says in the text.

2) Return with witnesses.

- a. If the brother refuses to repent or is unwilling to listen or to have this needed conversation, then Jesus tells us that the next step is to bring one or two into the situation who will have the ability to hopefully move this situation towards a swift and peaceful resolution.
- b. Notice, if you will, that Jesus says that the purpose of these witnesses is simply to establish the facts and encourage the brother in error to repent and make things right. What this means is that this step isn't one where we just go and get a crowd of people on our side so that we can bully the brother into repenting. That isn't what Jesus is talking about. More than likely Jesus is expecting for these accompanying witnesses to have some sort of influence or maybe even knowledge of the situation so that as Jesus says, **"every fact may be confirmed."** (**Matthew 18:16**)
- c. Again, through carrying ourselves in the correct manner and bringing these witnesses to confirm what needs to take place, our hope is that the brother repents so that he might be forgiven of his wrongdoing by ourself and most importantly God.

3) Tell the matter to the church.

- a. However, if the brother remains obstinate in his refusal to acknowledge his sin and repent, then Jesus says that the matter should at this point be made public so that by the mouths of the entire church the guilty brother might acknowledge his sin and repent.
- b. Again, it is important to emphasize throughout this entire process the fact that the goal of all of these efforts should simply be the repentance of the individual. These steps are not to be taken so as to pile on or embarrass or ridicule this brother. The desired goal is only for him to repent so that things can be made right between his brethren and his God.
- c. We should only want for this brother to be won back. We want to be able to experience the words of James from **James 5:19,20**, **"My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."**

IV. Once a resolution has been reached, move on and continue in work for the Lord.

- A. Once this goal has been accomplished, it is important for us to then move on. One of the things that can quickly destroy any relationship or even a congregation is the inability of one to forgive and move on once repentance has been put forth. Sometimes, individuals seek the repentance of others simply to validate that they had been wronged in their own minds. This type of mindset is just as sinful as the original sin committed because it is not an attitude that truly forgives those who sin against us.
- B. Our type of mindset ought to be like the mindset that Paul puts forth in **Ephesians 4:31,32**, **"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."** That malice that some people have towards others who have wronged them is itself wrong and Paul says that we ought to put that away from our hearts.
- C. It might not be the easiest thing to do, but God demands that we truly forgive those who sin against us when they seek to make things right. This willingness to forgive and move forward is a sign of God's love having found a strong place in our hearts. This type of love is the kind of love that God demonstrated when **"while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"** and **"while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son."** (**Romans 5:8,10**)
- D. This is the type of forgiveness that we ought to put into practice because this is the type of forgiveness that allows for us to move forward to do good work for the Lord. Anything less will only hinder our efforts for the kingdom. In fact, Jesus says that our worship to God will be hindered if there is issue between us and our brother, and that we must seek to reconcile such issues. (**Matthew 5:23,24**) We must give every effort to love and forgive as our God and our Lord Christ Jesus loved us and forgave us. If the guilty brother can see his error and repent and we can forgive, then we can all move on from that place in unity and in peace.

- V. If the guilty brother refuses to repent, then he must be treated as one who is unfaithful.**
- A. We want for every situation of this kind to end in peaceful resolution where repentance and forgiveness are present and strong, yet we know the sad reality that this doesn't always happen. Unfortunately, some disciples get completely overcome in their sin and they refuse to repent, but instead they would deny their need for repentance and instead continue in their sin.
 - B. If the brother who is guilty of sin isn't willing to listen to us, others, or even the entire church then Jesus tells us that this brother is to be to us as a Gentile and a tax collector. This is to say that this person should not be someone that we have any sort of close association with while he continues to live in his sin and refuses to repent.
 - C. Of course, this is the last ditch effort and final resort for this sort of situation, and while some might frown at the idea of the church enacting corporate discipline of this nature, we must again keep in mind that it is not done to embarrass anyone, but it is done to show the guilty brother just how serious of a situation this is. The truth is that souls hang in the balance, and we want the gravity of the situation to be recognized.
 - D. This wasn't just something that Jesus said, but this teaching was something that He informs the Apostles that they ought to hold to and teach themselves moving forward into the time of the church existing. **(Matthew 18:18-20)** In fact, we can actually go to see this very situation where sin has been committed in **I Corinthians 5**, and according to Paul, this person was not to be associated with until he repented. Thankfully, we can go on to see in his second letter to the church that it seems as if this brother did indeed return and repent for what he had done, and this point forgiveness and love were to be employed. This is the goal, yet sometimes the goal is reached only after difficult steps are taken, even if that means marking someone as unfaithful because of their refusal to repent of sin against us.

If we are all honest with ourselves and others, we will all more than likely admit that these are the types of situations that we dread. We dread the thought of others sinning against us and we having to deal with it. Quite honestly, we would probably rather just ignore it, but we must remember that the sin hasn't just been committed against us, but it has been committed against our God. May He give us the strength and courage to confront these situations with proper motives and attitudes so that repentance and forgiveness might be had, and so that His kingdom can continue to be strengthened through our efforts to work together towards that goal.

PRAYER *Our gracious Father in heaven...we humbly approach you recognizing that there are times in this life when there is great conflict between your people. Father, help us to conduct ourselves in a Christ-like manner. Help us to not repay evil with evil, but help for us to have hearts ready to forgive. Help us to follow the teachings of Your Son in an effort to achieve this ultimate goal of reconciliation. Lord, if there is one here this evening that is in need of being reconciled to you, we pray that he or she might humble themselves before You and come to experience your awesome grace and mercy. Strengthen us through this upcoming week and may all things be done to Your glory. In Jesus our Savior we pray, amen.*