

“First Steps: Forgiveness that Restores”

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Scripture

Matthew 18:15-22

“If your brother sins, **go and show him his fault in private**; if he listens to you, **you have won your brother**. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED**. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, **let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector**. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

19 "Again, I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For **where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.**"

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? **Up to seven times?**" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but **up to seventy times seven.**"

Introduction

Forgiveness

Defined as:

“Letting go of past grudges or lingering anger against a person or persons.”

A Teen’s Definition: “When you are mad at someone, but you then accept his apology and are no longer mad, this is an example of forgiveness”

Divine Forgiveness:

“**God's restoration of relationship** that entails the removal of objective guilt.”

Thus, to forgive the offense against God's holiness or the perpetrator of the offense are synonymous.

Biblical Forgiveness:

“Forgiveness is the act of pardoning an offender.”

In the Bible, the Greek word translated “forgiveness” literally means “to let go,” as when a person does not demand payment for a debt.

The word picture is a wrestler releasing a stranglehold on an opponent.

Forgiveness is “a process”

I posted a blog on the website last month about forgiveness called “To Forgive, Divine?”
<https://cbccne.org/to-forgive-divine/>

“Forgive and Forget”?

We rarely will be able to forget the trespasses against us as there are too many reminders. We can only hope to see the emotion related to the transgression lessen over time.

Do we ask for Forgiveness?

Not a word we use often

God is a God of Forgiveness

Psalm 86:5

“For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon You.”

Hebrews 8:12 (quoting Jeremiah 31)

“For I will forgive their iniquities and will remember their sins no more.”

1 John 1:9

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”

“You are never more like God, then when you forgive someone”

As a child under punishment for a mistake, we long **for it to be “OK again”**

Is our Matthew 18 passage about “Church Discipline”?

The Goal of Matthew 18 is Restoration and Reconciliation

You have won (or gained) your brother!

This passage comes right after Jesus's teaching about the lost sheep.

Matthew 18:15-18

"If your brother sins, **go and show him his fault in private**; if he listens to you, **you have won your brother**. But if he does not listen to you, **take one or two more with you**, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. "If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

It's a Three-Step Process

Step #1: Private Conversation

It's a one-on-one conversation with the goal of individual correction and restoration...

Greek word *elégxō* – "show him his fault" -> "to convince with solid, compelling evidence"

Success is "to win or to gain" your brother

Greek word *kerdainó* -> "to win" applied to this verse, "to win to Christ in salvation"

1 Corinthians 9:19-20

"For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, **so that I may win more**. To the Jews I became as a Jew, **so that I might win Jews**; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that **I might win those who are under the Law**;"

If the individual does not listen to your individual counsel, then...

Step #2: Two or Three Believers

History of Misuse of this verse

Is Jesus at a prayer meetings of 2 believers? -> We'll hit this a little bit later on today

Deuteronomy 19:15-21

“**A single witness shall not rise up against a man** on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; **on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.**” If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. “The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother.” Thus, you shall purge the evil from among you. “The **rest will hear and be afraid** and will never again do such an evil thing among you. “Thus, you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

This was an Old Testament legal mechanism -> a jury system.

If the individual will not hear you, disregards the group’s counsel, then...

Step #3: Public Conversation

Bring it before the church as a whole

Treat him as a Gentile or a tax collector

What does that mean?

Expulsion from the church -> excommunication

“To make the individual an evangelistic target” since they are not a brother or sister in Christ

The rationalization here is that IF the individual was in Christ, they would have “gotten the message” if three stages of confrontation had occurred.

1 Timothy 1:18-20

“This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which **some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.** Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.”

These two were turned over to Satan, largely because they belonged to him already. Jesus said the same in John 8:44 in regard to a set of Jews who belonged to “their father, the devil”

Believers Reflect Heaven's Decision

"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

Matthew 16:13-19

"He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. "**I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.**"

What are these "keys to the kingdom of Heaven" that we have?

Kath and I were at the Vatican in St. Peter's Square

The key point here is that believers, not just Peter personally, have the authority to pronounce or withhold forgiveness

Matthew 18:19-20

"Again, I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For **where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.**"

It is not a phrase for the faithful few at a prayer meeting

Do we actually think that Jesus only is with us if we have someone else there? Like we are totally alone unless we get a brother or sister in Christ to come see us?

Of course, not...Jesus is with us, individually, all the time in the Person of the Holy Spirit if we are a believer in Christ. "I will never leave you nor forsake you," right?

So, what is Jesus saying here?

This refers back to the Old Testament legal system of evidence and justice.

*If we are going to make a determination of serious sin in someone, we need to have more than a single individual making an accusation and **the group decision** needs to be baked in prayer ("anything that they may ask") and with Jesus's wishes in mind.*

What are Jesus's wishes here?

We Are to be Seeking to and Longing to Forgive!

As I said earlier: "You are never more like God, then when you forgive someone"

Jesus taught the disciples in The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And **forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.**

And do not lead us into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen'

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

"But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."

This is a principle, not a threat...

If you are part of God's kingdom, this should be reflective of a daily prayer.

One of MY consistent prayers: "Jesus, let me see others like you see them!"

In reality, some individuals who are frequently in church are simply still lost, never having committed their life to Jesus.

They may do odd things, violate our common practices, say evil things from time to time.

They're lost so shouldn't we expect that?

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

The Corinthian church was littered with many attendees still living under Corinthian practices. It's not a positive letter to them. Paul was saying, "Let me put you guys on the straight path!"

Some individuals in the church are selfish and inconsiderate of others at times.

James 3:16-17

“For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, **there is disorder** and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy”

Selfishness in the church brings disorder...and can lead to a lot of evil stuff.

Anyone here remember some selfishness in this church?

Philippians 2:3

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but **with humility of mind** regard one another as more important than yourselves”

The guy in the church who tells a visitor that they're “in his seat”

Humility and understanding should be our response.

Matthew 18:21

“Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? **Up to seven times?**" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but **up to seventy times seven.**”

The priests taught that God forgave Israel's enemies up to 3 times (teaching from Amos 1:3 -> “for three sins and for four”)

Peter is being magnanimous, doubling that number and adding one for good measure to get to seven.

Jesus said “up to seventy times seven” which is not 490 times but meant to be an unlimited amount of times.

Some Selected Scriptures about Forgiveness

Matthew 5:7

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”

Romans 12:17

“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men”

Luke 17:3

“If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him”

1 Peter 4:8

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins”

We Have Been Forgiven Much

John 1:16

“For of His fullness we have all received, and **grace upon grace.**”

Do you remember our definition of “Christian Grace” from last month?

It is the “**Free, Unmerited, Favor of God**”

How many times have we been forgiven by God for transgressions?

I shudder to think at the number of impure thoughts, accidentally harmful words, or evil wishes I have considered against others thinking that “they deserved it”

Jesus’s response to Peter would have been shocking to him

“Really, Jesus? Unlimited grace?”

Luke 5:4-8 – “Jesus tells them to drop their nets for a catch”

“When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” Simon answered and said, “**Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.**” When they had done this, they enclosed a great quantity of fish, and their nets began to break; so, they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus’ feet, saying, ‘**Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!**’”

Peter expresses remorse for doubting the Lord’s provision.

How many of you, when you considered what you had done or said, couldn’t even pray?

And yet, Jesus said “Father, forgive them...”

Luke 23:33-34

“When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. But Jesus was saying, ‘**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**’”

Which group of individuals performed the crucifixion? -> The Romans.

They were lost, duped into being part of plot to kill Him.

One of them said after Jesus’s death: “Truly, this was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

And yet Stephen, as he was being stoned to death, said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” (Acts 7:60).

If these who are being killed and yet showed forgiveness, what excuse do we have for holding on to a grudge or thinking evil of someone who wronged us by an accidental harmful word, or sitting in our chosen seat?

To those of us who have received grace upon grace and forgiveness upon forgiveness?

Some of us may need to sit in ashes next to Job for a while...

How Important is Forgiveness and Restoration to Jesus?

Matthew 5:23-24

“So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar. **First go and be reconciled to your brother**; then come and offer your gift.”

The Basket of Forgiveness

So, I want to end with a type of Communion I call the Basket of Forgiveness.

Think of a person right now that if they would walk through the doors of the church and come right down the aisle and sit on the first pew, that you would be miffed or even angry or even make you walk out of the sanctuary -> who would that person be?

Prayer for the Church

Special Prayer for Healing

Benediction