

Matthew 18:15 - 35

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[0 : 00] And Jesus here lays down certain principles that I believe we would do well to consider and take on board. And the first principle that he lays down is this, that when such a thing happens, if at all possible, the matter must be kept private.

Look at what he says in verse 15. If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you.

If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. Go and tell him his fault just between the two of you.

Don't leave it public. Don't hang the dirty washing out for all to see. Go to your brother.

Go to your sister. And speak to your brother. Speak to your sister in private concerning the fault that may be laid at their door.

[1 : 19] And the other great emphasis that Jesus is making here is that the motive must always be the restoration of the offender and the rectification of what may be a broken relationship.

The emphasis is on the positive. One goes to one's brother in private. And the other great thing. Not in order to make one's self out to be better than one's brother.

That would be going contrary to the teaching that we were considering this morning. But to go in the hope and with the fervent desire to win the brother over.

Love covers a multitude of sins.

And God's word tells us that if we are rebuked by a righteous man, we should consider that a kindness.

[2 : 32] And we ought not to recuse it. If at all possible, then Jesus would say, let the master be dealt with in private.

But if you will not listen, choose one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

And there, of course, Jesus is quoting from the law, given in Deuteronomy chapter 19 and verse 15. Perhaps what Jesus is saying there is this, if you fail to deal with the matter adequately to begin with, don't give up at once.

And don't go any more public than you have to. Until you have to. Take two others with you. And do that, still with the desire, to keep the matter under once.

Still with the desire, to win your brother over. Do it in order that everything might be above hold.

[3 : 48] Do it in order to give your allegedly errant brother every opportunity to repent.

And if it be the case that you've got it wrong, and that your brother has not, in actual fact, sinned against you at all, then let the fact that you have brought one or two witnesses with you clear things up, resolve the issues, and leave them there.

Let that be your great aim. Let that be the way you go about dealing with any offense that you may be of the mind has been committed against you.

But, Jesus says, if the errant brother refuses to listen to them, if it's evident, if it's demonstrably the case, as far as you and these witnesses are concerned, that this brother has sinned, that this sister has offended, if the brother, if the sister, still persists in refusing to listen, still persists in continuing to give offense, tell it to the church.

That's when the matter becomes public. That's when the church becomes involved. that the church is full in dealing with such a situation must again always be positive, must always be pastoral, must always be motivated by the desire to see the offending brother repent that he, that she, the offending sister, might be restored.

[5 : 56] And it's only if all these measures fail, and only then, that the church is to regard the persistent wrongdoer, the unrepentant wrongdoer of an outsider.

If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. But even having said all that, Jesus is still at pains to point out here that the enactment of that kind of discipline, of that kind of approach must always, must always be pastoral and be done with the authority of God.

It's not the opinions of men, it's not the opinions of a local congregation or succession or presbytery or denomination that must be taken on board here, but the principles that are laid down by God himself in his word.

Enactment of this kind of discipline against a brother who refuses to repent and receive the forgiveness that is being offered to him.

Any enactment of discipline must be done pastorally, be done with the authority of God behind it.

The authority of heaven is what counts.

[7 : 37] Jesus said, I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Now, it's so easy to misunderstand what Jesus has said to you.

It's so easy to misread Jesus there of saying that it's that the church decides that then God accepts and approves them. The actual truth of the matter is that the church must only enact that which she has authority from God to enact.

it is only as we act in accordance with the authority of heaven that we are demonstrating real affection towards.

And that must always be emphasized. That it must always be done in love. And it is only when we really have the authority of God behind us that we can act with the love of God in our hearts towards any, whoever he or she may be, who from within the Christian family, has offended us and sinned against us.

And if these principles are to be taken on board, then the other matter that Jesus highlights here ought almost to be taken as right.

[9 : 02] And that is the necessity of prayerfulness in connection with the way one deals with such an offending.

Jesus said, again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

For if the two or three come together in my name, there am I with them. Now, as we know, these verses are often taken in isolation and out of context and applied in many different ways.

And we may justifiably take these verses and apply them in the ways that we often apply them in.

For example, we may change verse 19 and we may say that there are times when God gives us a particular concern for some individual or for some situation and enables us along with other like-minded brothers or sisters to bring these matters before God.

He lays certain people, he lays certain circumstances on our hearts and on such occasions we are encouraged by a verse such as verse 19.

[10 : 28] If two of you are next agree about anything you ask for it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. And we take verse 20 so often especially in our own circles and in congregations where we are more conscious of empty pews than of full pews.

And we take it and we appeal to God and we say to God Lord you be among us tonight or today according to your promise.

But for two or three come together in your name there you are with them. And again there's nothing wrong with applying a verse such as this in relation to that kind of circumstances.

things that is a context on the context in which we find these two verses is in this context of what do we do when our brother sins against us.

and I believe that we can take this truth to heart that everything that we do in reaction to a brother or a sister sinning against us must be done in the spirit of prayer and with a sense of fellowship and of the importance of God's people being set together and of praying together for the good of the whole Christian community.

[11 : 54] Jesus is emphasizing here the necessity of prayer and of coming together in his name with his authority as those who represent him on earth.

And surely that is one of the main reasons why we seek the restoration of the offender and we show a spirit of forgiveness towards any such person that we have the influence of Christ's church and therefore of God's glory at heart and that we pray together that the whole body might be kept in

order that the church as a whole might show the love and the unity that God may have her show as she seeks to glorify him in the world.

So Jesus lays these principles down and all of us can apply them passionately to ourselves and congregations right across the Christian community again can apply the principles to the way that we deal with any whom we may feel or even know to have sinned against ourselves.

We must always adopt this kind of attitude in relation to the errant brother to the errant sister. So Jesus lays down these principles.

And having laid them down Peter comes to Jesus. And Peter asks Jesus in verse 21 Lord I mean just heard everything that he's had to say Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against him?

[13:47] up to seven times? Now poor Peter still has a lot to learn. And that comes across from the way in which he asks this question.

Peter makes no mention of the possibility that he himself might sin against his brother. But he takes what Jesus has been saying on board and it is right Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against him?

He doesn't even say if he sins against me. Peter takes it for granted. But there will be occasions when a brother will sin against him.

Peter seems to take that ahead and he comes to Jesus and he says when that happens when he sins against me how many times should I forgive him?

and he even suggests an answer he says up to seven times. Now the rabbis many of them told that you had to forgive a brother up to three times.

[15:06] But that once you've forgiven him a third time you weren't really required to forgive after that. so Peter thinks he'll go a bit further than the rabbis and Peter says up to seven times and left behind the question.

I believe there may very well have been this thought that he was going far too far even in suggesting that he forgives seven times.

He says if we're stretching the limit as far as he thinks he can't stretch it. By asking that question Peter is showing that he believes that there must surely be some limit to the measure of forgiveness that he is expected to show his brother.

And so he asks this question of Jesus. And Jesus answers straight away and says I tell you not seven times but seventy seven times or seventy times seven.

What does Jesus mean by that? But once we've been offended by our brother seventy seven times plus one that we should then forget all of his forgiveness.

[16:41] But when our brother offends us on the seventy eighth occasion or if we take the other possible rendering on the four hundred and ninety first occasion if my arithmetic is all that it ought to be should we then consider that we have no more duty to forgive our brother.

And I don't believe for a moment that that's what Jesus is suggesting. I believe what Jesus is suggesting is this that we should put no limits to the number of times that we should be prepared to forgive our brother but at the same time let's remember that Jesus isn't talking here about blind forgiveness about turning a blind eye about forgiving when no confession or no acknowledgement of guilt has been made.

Jesus is speaking here against the background of those principles laid down in the verses that we've just been looking at in the first part of the sermon.

Jesus is negating here the importance of repentance on the part of the offender. He's not for a moment suggesting that we should just forget that we've been sinned against where no repentance has been shown.

That would be to go contrary to the teaching that he's just been giving. It's necessary for the offending brother or sister to listen and to be won over.

[18:18] And it is then that this forgiveness must be shown by us towards such a brother, towards such a sister.

And Jesus is saying never cease to have a forgiving spirit. Watch your spirit so that you never cease to have this spirit of forgiveness towards those who sin against you.

That's what Jesus was saying of the answers to this question. And that's what Jesus then goes on to illustrate by means of this parable of the unquenchable fire that I just want to go over with you briefly in what is left of this sermon tonight.

The main point that Jesus is going to make here, and that will come out, I hope, is that if we ourselves have received God's forgiveness because of Christ, then the measure of forgiveness that we will want to show others will be of that same nature.

Paul teaches that we are to forgive each other just as in Christ God forgave us. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

[19 : 56] Forgive us the Lord forgave you. And of course, perhaps the best known death of all in relation to this whole subject is to be found in Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount where he teaches us to say to pray, forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And we are having chosen what we refer to as the Lord's prayer. He has replied us for if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men the sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Now again, it's so easy to take that the wrong way. And to imagine that we will only be forgiven if we ourselves are forgiven. The truth of the matter is that we take these pleasures in the context of the whole of the church, but what we have been taught is that if we ourselves have received God's forgiveness in Christ, we will have a forgiving disposition towards us, aware of our own unwellness, of God's blessings, and yet having received these blessings, we ourselves will want to be and cannot but be merciful to others. And if we do not show that kind of purity, if we are not of that kind of nature, if we are not willing to forgive, then we ourselves in truth have never really experienced the mercy and the forgiveness of God in Christ, whatever we may profess even as people.

[22 : 00] So against all that, Jesus now uses this illustration, Jesus now brings this parable before Peter and no doubt before all the rest of those who are listening, but they might learn from it.

And I want to look at the parable with you in the next few minutes, in order that we ourselves, hopefully by God's grace, will have these principles firmly embedded in our own minds and hearts. Jesus here speaks of the kingdom of heaven as being like a king who wanted to settle a sort of servant. And I want to make a comment on that point before going to look at the parable.

The king was the one who wanted to settle his accounts. God is far more willing to forgive us than we are to receive his forgiveness.

It is God who takes the initiative in providing forgiveness for our lost mankind. mind. If we will not receive God's forgiveness, the false does not lie with God.

[23 : 16] The false lies with us. We are the ones who are unwilling to receive, but God is willing to give.

Were it not for the divine willingness for him, men and women that sin, that be no gospel, that be no salvation, that be no hope. But because God is willing, because God in Christ has set us the account for all who will accept salvation on his term, there is hope, there is a gospel for you and for me.

And if we come to know the grace of God in Christ, then we must show that grace towards one another. And we must not be like this poor soul, of whom Jesus speaks in this parable.

There are three things about him that I just want to highlight. First of all, this man was a debtor. Listen to what Jesus states.

Verse 24. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had he sold to repay the debt.

[24 : 41] The servant fell on his knees, begged him, be patient with me, and I will pay back everything. The servant's master took pity on him, cancelled the debt, and let him go.

Probably in today's money, he owed millions of pounds, perhaps the equivalent of ten million dollars, whatever that is, in pounds still.

More in amount. I don't have anyone here tonight, if you were that kind of money, could even contemplate paying it, let alone manage it. So he had run up this enormous debt, this debt that he was not able to repay.

and not being able to repay it, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had to be sold to repay the debt, and really, if truth be told, the debt wouldn't even be fully repaid then.

It was impossible father's debt to be settled in full. The servant comes before the master and he asks him for patience and he says, I'll pay back everything.

[25 : 57] he's still foolishly of the mind that somehow he'll be able to repay the debt that he owes. And the master took pity on him, cancels the debt and lets him go.

The master's pity, the king's mercy, shines through and comes across the clearly against the background of this poor debtor who was utterly unable to repay for the owed even though he felt still foolishly imagined that he couldn't.

So the man was a debtor but then he becomes a creditor. when that servant went out, having had his death cancelled and having been released, having been shown pity by his master, when he went out he phoned one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, which only amounted to maybe no more than a pound of two, in comparison with the millions that he himself had previously owed his master.

What did he do when he found this fellow servant who owed him this measly amount of money? What did he do? Did he take pity on him and cancelled the debt and let him go?

No, no, he grabbed him, took him by the scruff of the neck, as we might say, he grabbed him and he began to choke. Pay it back was the demand that you owe me he demanded.

[27 : 53] This fellow servant fell to his knees and gave him be patient with you and I will pay you back and he could have. But he refused. Steady went off and the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

And when the other servant saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told everything to their master. This man was utterly and willing to show the slightest modicum of mercy to the man who owed and leased to him twice he himself had had millions of pounds written off by the one whom he himself had been identified.

And the message that Jesus is putting across here is so glaringly obvious. he said to us that if we ourselves have truly received God's mercy and had the debt that we owed him cancelled because of what he has done for us in Christ, how can we then adopt an unforgiving mercy-less attitude like this towards those who comparatively speak to us or very, very, very, very little.

It cannot be Jesus' thing that that kind of consistency is to be found or accepted among the people of God.

So this man was a debtor. This man was a creditor. But sadly, oh so sadly, this man ends up a prisoner.

[30 : 00] When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed. And they went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. You wicked servant, he said.

I cancelled all that debt of you because you begged me. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?

In anger, his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured till he should pay back all he owed. And of course, that would be never. The day would never dawn.

The night would never fall when he would be able to pay back all that he owed. He became a prisoner for life, a prisoner forever.

And Jesus says, this is how my heavenly father, the God of mercy and of grace, the forgiving father that we have in heaven, and he demonstrates that forgiveness and what he's done for us in Christ.

[31 : 09] this is how he will treat each of us unless we forgive our brother from our heart.

Jesus is saying, if we don't forgive our brother from our heart, we're only proving that we've never really been forgiven ourselves. And you know what?

We imprison ourselves in chains from which there can be no relief for as long as we retain an unforgiving act.

Someone said, I'm not sure who, the worst prison is the prison of an unforgiving heart. So this man found himself in that prison of an unforgiving heart before he found himself thrown into a literal prison from which he would never be set free.

And what Jesus is surely teaching us is this, that if we have received God's grace, if we have been forgiven, then we must not only express verbal gratitude to God for what he's done for us in Christ, but we must be prepared to show how grateful we are by being ourselves gracious towards those who sinned against us.

[32 : 45] Human forgiveness must always be against the wonderful background of God's forgiveness. The Bible teaches us that we're all God's selfish, that all have sinned and come short of his glory.

The Bible teaches us that none of us can pay back the debt we owe, whether it be millions or whether it be pennies.

Whether our sins be great or small, none of us can pay back what we owe. The Bible teaches us that the debt must be paid.

And the Bible teaches us that the debt has been paid for all who will accept salvation on God's terms. And the Bible teaches us too that if we ourselves have been forgiven, we will be forgiven.

And the Bible teaches us that if we are not forgiven, we ought to ask if we ourselves have ever been forgiven at all.

[33 : 56] May God grant by his grace this evening that having just looked together today at this chapter, where Jesus speaks of the necessity of humility and of having a forgiving mindset towards the church, that all of us must be able to say that we have put on humility and that we have a forgiving spirit towards whoever he may be or she may be who have sinned against us, whatever the nature of who for her sin against us may be, that we may forgive even as God, for Christ's faith, has forgiven us.

And if we adopt that kind of attitude towards one another, even within the Christian fellowship, our fellowship with God and with one another, will take on a whole new dimension.

how can we be in fellowship with God unless we be forgiven? How can we be in fellowship with one another unless we be of a forgiven spirit?

May God give us that kind of spirit for the good of his church and for the glory of his.