

Matthew 18:15-20 "The Ministry of Restoration—part 5"

The Church is a Body. We are all members of one another (Rom 12:5-6). We are connected to one another. We need each other. We are responsible for one another. When one rejoices, we are all to rejoice. When one grieves, we all grieve. And when one falls into sin, it affects us all.

Sometimes cancer enters the Body, the cancer of sin. If the Body is to remain healthy, the cancer must be dealt with. But how?

What is our responsibility when a brother falls into sin? We've sought to answer that question for the past month or so. Tonight, we come to a familiar, yet often-neglected text.

**Tonight: Matthew 18:15-20**

Often we say Matthew 18 is about church discipline. Yet in the broader sense, it's about the ministry of restoration. It's about recovery work. What responsibility do I have as a Christian when my brother sins? What is our responsibility as a church? How do we restore them for Christ? Jesus gives us specific instruction in Mt 18.

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The Context:

1. What question by the disciples provides the setting for Jesus' teaching? See v 1

V 1 "Who is the greatest in the kingdom?" The disciples were influenced by the world's outlook: "God helps those who help themselves. Blow your own horn, no one else will."

2. How did Jesus answer their question, according to v 2?

He set a child in front of them. Why? To remind them that the most insignificant in the kingdom are great. If you aim to be great, you will never be. We all enter the kingdom the same way, with child-like faith.

3. Who is Jesus referring to by the phrase "little ones" in vv 6, 10, 14?

Children? Yes, but specifically to children of the Father. A "little one" is any person who humbles himself as a child, and becomes a follower of Jesus (see v 4).

How should we treat other "little ones"? The point in vv 6-10 is this. Don't offend "little ones." It is a dangerous thing to cause a follower of Christ to stumble.

4. What did Jesus say was His purpose for coming to the world, according to v 11 (also in Luke 19:10; note: verse 11 doesn't appear in all manuscripts, hence omission by NIV)?

V 11 "To save that which was lost."

To illustrate how much each of His followers mean to Him, Jesus told a brief story about 100 sheep (vv 12-13). One was lost, and the shepherd did what? He went after it.

5. According to v 14, what is the point of the story of the lost sheep that was restored?

V 14 "It is not the Father's will...that one of these little ones should perish."

Notice it's the "Father's will." The reason we must do the ministry of restoration is that it is the Father's will. The Father doesn't want His little ones to be lost.

Application: How does it affect you when a little one in the family of God goes astray? Does it matter to you? How much does it matter?

I see the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints here. The Father is "not willing that any little ones should be lost." And He accomplishes what He wills. If He doesn't want them to be lost, we can be sure that He will do whatever is necessary to what? Restore them. Bring them back. He will do that.

The question is this. How? How does the Father restore a stray sheep? First, we must ask, what does it mean to be "stray"? A stray sheep is a sheep that has gone where it's not supposed to be (12), and is therefore in danger.

Sheep aren't the only creatures that go astray. So do Christians.

How does the Father restore a stray Christian? That's Jesus' topic in 18:15-20. As we'll see, His plan is to use His children to restore His children.

### The Process of Restoration

V 15 begins in the KJV, "Moreover." In the following, Jesus is building on the truth of verses 1-14. In verses 15-17, Jesus gives us both the conditions and the steps involved in the restoration process.

6. Notice the word "if" in v 15. What are the conditions that Jesus says warrant the need for the restoration process?

Condition #1: "If your brother" (not a non-Christian; a family matter)

Condition #2: "sins" [KJV "shall trespass;" not merely a difference of opinion)

Condition #3: "against you" (not against "Sam" or "Sally")

Note: Matt 5:23 gives direction for the opposite ("If your brother has anything AGAINST YOU, go...be reconciled.")

Note: Some manuscripts do not have "against you." There is a sense in which a brother in sin is each of our responsibility.

7. A parallel passage is Luke 17:3. What are we told there is the goal of the restoration process?

The goal is repentance and forgiveness. Let that sink in. When we go to a wayward brother, in humility, what are we after? What's the goal?

--The goal is not an apology, "I'm sorry." When a guilty person says, "I'm sorry," what is he doing? He is merely describing how he FEELS. He feels bad. Repentance is not a feeling, but a change of mind and life.

--The goal is repentance. The aim is to hear the brother say, "What I did to you was wrong because it displeased God. I sinned against God. I sinned against you. Would you forgive me?"

Note: Keep this in mind when disciplining children.

Note: What is our responsibility when he repents? V 4 "Forgive him"

Don't miss this. The goal is repentance. It's not to make your brother look bad, and certainly not to gloat or get even. The goal is to restore a brother to God, to the church, and to yourself. The goal is to gain back your brother, to see your Father's will accomplished who doesn't want any of His little ones to be lost. (see Leviticus 19:17)

Objection: "I'm too busy to get involved in this kind of recovery work." We are all busy. We all lived 168 hours in the past week. We all filled up 168 hours in the past seven days. Our days were full. But full of what? Look back. I watched several hours of football games and basketball games that filled up part of my 168 hours. I read the newspaper and a magazine for part of it. I need this reminder, to see again what is on the heart of our Heavenly Father and to make sure it's on my heart.

Discuss: Why is the recovery of wayward sheep so important to our Father? True, it's the good of the sheep, but there's a greater motivation. It's the glory of the family name.

John Piper reminds us... The chief end of man is to glorify God. But that's also the chief end of God, to glorify God! God is passionate about His name, His reputation, His honor, His glory.

Discuss: What happens to God's reputation when one of His children sin?

8. In Matthew 18, Jesus elaborates on the process of restoration. Identify four steps that are to occur when a Christian sins against you.

Step #1: "Go to your brother, alone."

Step #2: "If he doesn't repent, go again, this time with 2 or 3 witnesses."

Step #3: "If he still doesn't repent, tell the church."

Implication: Church members are to pray and go to him seeking repentance.

Step #4: "If he still doesn't repent, view him as an outsider, a pagan, in other words, an unbeliever."

9. In step 2, we are to take 2 or 3 witnesses. Why?

Because they witnessed the trespass? Not likely. The witnesses serve two purposes. First, they underscore the need for the person to repent. Second, they are needed in the event that the matter goes before the church (Deut 19:15).

The witnesses verify that it's not a personal issue, but the Father's will that is at stake (v 14). It's not that two Christians can't agree on petty matters like the color of choir robes, but that a brother has violated God's Word.

10. In step three, the matter goes before the church (lit. "assembly"). Why? So people can gossip? No. What is the entire church to do?

Go to the person. Overwhelm him with his urgent need to repent, and be restored.

11. What does Jesus mean when He says (17), "Treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector."?

The KJV puts it, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector." How did followers of Christ treat tax collectors? Did they snub them? No. Were they unkind to them? No. How then did they treat them? They sought to reach them for Christ. They urged them to repent and flee to the Savior. They looked for ways to influence them for righteousness. Did they have fellowship with them? No, they couldn't. For two reasons... One, the basis of fellowship is Christ. And two, there was a huge barrier between them, one created not by them but by the tax collectors.

So let's reiterate this point...

12. How were tax-collectors viewed by Jews in Jesus' day?

As outsiders. No one socialized with tax collectors. You didn't have them over for coffee. Did you snub them? No. Were you rude to them? No.

What is a church to do with a person who refuses to repent? They are to be removed from the assembly of God's covenant people. In actuality, they have removed themselves. They are to be viewed as an unsaved person. Though cordial and polite, we don't socialize with them.

Why not? So they will realize the severity of their way, and be brought to their senses. The goal is still restoration.

13. What does Jesus say is the serious implication of such disciplinary action, according to verses 18-20?

The decision on earth has heavenly consequences.

14. Suppose the guilty person repents, is restored, but falls again. How often are we to forgive him, according to verses 21-22?

There is to be no limit to our forgiveness.

15. According to the parable of the unforgiving servant (verses 23-35), why is it so important that we forgive one another without limit?

Because all of us have been forgiven far more than we will ever forgive.[\[1\]](#)

16. Do I have any responsibility to get involved if the guilty person didn't sin against ME personally?

Eventually, yes, when the sin becomes public knowledge, when it goes before the church.

17. What is my responsibility when...

eg--A fellow Christian borrows \$100 from me, promises to repay, but doesn't

eg--I find out a fellow-Christian has left his wife

eg--I hear a fellow-Christian slandering another church member

eg--A fellow-Christian stops coming to church. Is that sin? Who is he hurting? Himself, the Lord, the rest of the church (Heb 10:25; Rom 12:5)

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[\[1\]](#)See Carson , 405.