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An Outline for Reconciliation; Matt 18:15-20
GPBC
2.14.21

Introduction – The central topic of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 18 is sin. Sin is a universal experience and it is also dreadfully serious. It’s seductive, deceptive, destructive, and ultimately can cost your soul. In this life, we will face the presence of sin and its consequences on a daily basis. So we really need to hear biblical truth about it.

In vv1-6 Jesus issues a stern warning for causing believers to sin. In vv7-9 Jesus instructs believers to take drastic measures to remove habitual sin from our lives. In vv10-14 Jesus explains what lengths the Father will go to rescue one of His sheep who have strayed into sin. These first sections address our own sin. But what are we to do when a believer sins against us? How are we to react to that situation? Our gut inclination is either fight or flight. When someone sins against us, our natural response would be to sin against them in return. To either seek to retaliate or go the passive aggressive route and cut them out of our lives.

Jesus instructs us here to seek reconciliation rather than separation. Sin separates us from God and from one another. When family members separate, sin wins. When a brother leaves a church upset, sin wins. When congregations dissolve into disunity or split in confrontation, sin wins. When reconciliation occurs, the gospel wins! Sin separates what God puts together! God unites what sin separates. So Jesus provides us here with steps for reconciliation. In other words, this is how the Father pursues the straying sheep of v12. He does so through the humble, obedient pursuit of reconciliation by His people.

- I. The Process is for Repentance
 - a. There is a 4 step process outlined in these verses that allows the erring brother ample opportunity to repent.
 - b. First, we are to go to the one who has offended us and make our case to him/her privately. The sin occurred between us, therefore, it should be addressed first between us.
 - i. We are to go with biblical truth, meaning, if our feelings have been hurt, we should only pursue this process if indeed our brother has sinned against us.

- ii. Sometimes we get our feelings hurt because we needed to hear the truth or face the truth. Rather than try to turn the tables and point fingers, sometimes we need to repent.
 - iii. But when someone actually sins against us in word or action and their offence has caused separation in our fellowship, we should seek to make it right.
 - iv. The key is to make sure our own hearts are right, the Bible is applied, and truth is spoken in love.
 - c. Second, if our brother refuses to admit wrongdoing and rather justifies or makes excuses or dismisses us, we are to then approach them with one or two witnesses.
 - i. Sometimes it can't be left in the foggy, shadowy haze of he said/he said. Sometimes you have to push farther to get to the truth. None of us enjoy admitting wrong. Sometimes it takes several people, people we know who love us and have our best interest at heart, coming to us and pleading with us to repent and reconcile and make things right.
 - ii. We can't just leave sin unchecked and swept under the rug. It's not fun, it's not easy, no one loves confrontation, but the best things are never easy.
 - iii. Separation is the easy road; reconciliation is the hard road. But oh how sweet it is when brothers dwell in unity!
 - d. Third, if repentance still does not occur, we are to involve the entire church family. A brother who is clearly guilty of unrepentant sin is living in a spiritually dangerous place. We can't excuse it. We can't just reason that everybody sins or that we shouldn't get involved or that it's none of our business.
 - i. The church then should pray for and plead with this brother to see the error of his ways and turn from sin and return to the fellowship and the joy of his salvation. He must be warned that no sin, no matter what it might promise, is worth clinging to and letting go of Christ.
 - e. The fourth and final step that must occur if the professing believer remains unrepentant is that the church must remove him from membership and consider him an unbeliever. Repentance is a mark of true faith; unrepentance is a mark of unbelief.

- i. The church must love this individual enough to share with him the biblical truth that his determination to cling to his sin has proven he is not a follower of Christ.
 - ii. If we fail to do this, we are guilty of reinforcing a false profession and security. The brother must be saved, and the church must seek purity.
 - iii. If sin is allowed to run unchecked in the church, we first lose our brother, then our witness, and eventually we lose the true gospel. There is no other way, Jesus commands it.
 - f. We see an example of church discipline in 1 Cor 5. Paul confronts the church at Corinth for allowing an unrepentant man to continue as a member of the church. The man is guilty of sexual immorality, and the church has refused to deal with it. Paul urges them to remove him. He cannot continue to think he is right with God while living in known, public sin, and the church cannot tolerate reflecting the morals of the world and not the transforming power of God.
 - g. The process allows for ample opportunity to repent. That is why several steps are required, each step involving more witnesses. It is an increasing urging for the guilty to repent.
- II. The Purpose is for Restoration
 - a. If your brother listens to you, you have gained your brother! Not only has reconciliation occurred between two brothers, but also between the sinner and God.
 - i. This is not a witch hunt. It's not a nit picking at every little deviation we can uncover. It's not a pattern to stick it to the one who hurt you. It's a path towards restoration. Healing. Forgiveness. Reuniting.
 - b. If he doesn't listen to you, maybe he will listen to three friends pleading with him. And by the way, when you involve more people, who are after the same goal of restoration, Jesus says that the charge may be established. More witnesses may uncover that both parties involved need to repent. The purpose for bringing in spirit-filled brothers is to mediate, arrive at truth, and find restoration. It's not to twist and manipulate and get your way. It's to get to God's way.
 - c. And then if the situation necessitates the involvement of the entire church, just imagine an entire fellowship pleading with God and

pleading with this individual. And if he repents, there is joy and restoration.

- d. But even if you have to take the final step, the purpose is still for restoration. The purpose is not to condemn someone to hell. The purpose is to reveal to them that their unrepentant heart has already condemned them. They need Jesus. They need a new heart. One that does not love sin but loves the Savior. One that is quick to repent.
- e. In fact we believe this is what happened to the unrepentant man in 1 Cor 5. In 2 Cor 2, Paul urges the church to welcome and receive the one who had caused so much pain.

III. The Promise is for Revelation

- a. V20 - The promise is that the Lord Jesus Himself is especially present when the church is obediently, humbly following His commands. When we are gathered in His name – according to His will, according to His Word, He is present with us in a special way.
- b. V19 – the promise of Jesus’ special, attentive presence is the foundation for the promise issued in v19. Is it any two? No, He’s speaking to believers, the church. By anything, does Jesus mean any and every thing you can possibly think of? No, v20 says the promise is for those who are gathered in His name.
- c. V18 – when the church through humble, solemn, prayerful heart have urged a member to repent and found them defiant, and left with no other option than to consider this person an unbeliever who is not a member of the church – heaven verifies and validates the church’s decision. After all, the church is the body of Christ and Christ has been right there with them through the entire process.
- d. Cf. 16:17-19
- e. The church is given the awesome responsibility to identify those who are true believers from those who are not. That my friends is actually what church membership is all about. It’s not about where your grandma went to church. It’s not about where you’ll be buried when you die. It’s not about a sentimental attachment to where you grew up. It’s about whether or not you are truly a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we have allowed church membership to mean anything else, we have not been good stewards of the keys that Christ entrusted to us for the care of His people, His body, His Bride.

Conclusion – It all comes down to this – sin is deadly serious and the pursuit of reconciliation is our only course. It's how the Father rescues the straying sheep!