

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning
Week 27 (June 28-July 4)

This week, we will study the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness in Matthew 18. I hope we all take these lessons to heart since growth in our spiritual journey depends on our response.

Sunday, June 28 (read Matthew 18:15-17)

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. (Matthew 18:15)

Today's printed verse tells us what to do when a Christian brother or a biological brother sins against **us**.

From the context of the passage, this strained relationship could have a negative effect on the church. Jesus wants us to start by keeping the matter as private as possible. We are told to approach the person who offended us one on one. That way, no one else will know about it and it will be much easier to solve the problem. The more people we involve in the disagreement, the tougher it will be to resolve it. In our sin natures, we are prone to talk it up among family members and friends, giving only our side of the story. Jesus commands, "Don't do that!" The more it is talked about, the tougher it will be to find mutual peace. I confess that this is not one of my strong suits. By nature, I do not like confrontations, but I ask you to join me in setting aside our natural tendencies in order to follow the Word of God.

Monday, June 29 (reread Matthew 18:15-17)

But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Matthew 18:16)

Jesus teaches the next step because He knows that pride, stubbornness of heart and human weaknesses often prevent reconciliation without His help, but the Lord is still trying to keep the matter as private as possible. Two or three mutual friends or family members can intercede to help to find an acceptable resolution. Jesus is quoting from an Old Testament law that declares that no one can be convicted on the testimony of only one person (Deuteronomy 19:15). Hopefully, between the four or five of you, a workable solution can be found. Here again, the tendency of our sin nature is to tell **everyone** we meet, not only of the offense, but also of our personal effort to make peace with the brother who offended us. However, once the matter becomes **public** information, the odds of resolving it peacefully are greatly diminished. We will look at the final step in tomorrow's devotion.

Tuesday, June 30 (reread Matthew 18:15-17)

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:17)

In case the conflict has not already been resolved, Jesus gives the third step in the process (v. 17). Many Christians think that Jesus in giving them a license to tell everyone in the church about how he/she has followed Biblical guidelines, and yet, the offender has not repented. The Lord is still trying, however, to keep the problem as private as possible, so next, He instructs the person to go before the elders or deacons, depending on the church organization. These leaders should be spiritually mature enough to intercede on behalf of the offended brothers. If the offender is still unwilling to resolve the matter peacefully, the leadership council has no choice but to remove him from their fellowship by excommunication. This sounds harsh, but the Bible proclaims, "Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character" (1 Corinthians 15:33). The situation that should have been **privately** settled has now become a **public** problem. Follow the Words of Jesus to avoid splitting a church over a small disagreement!

Wednesday, July 2 (read Matthew 18:18-20)

For where two or three come together in my Name, there am I with them. (Matthew 18:20)

Today's printed verse is often taken out of context. I have even quoted it when a small crowd shows up for the service. However, the entire reading today is meant to amplify the previous three lessons we have studied. Verse 18 proclaims that if we let go of a grievance by following His prescribed method, God will also erase it from His heavenly records. Likewise, if two of you agree to pray together over the matter that caused the offense, God is quick to answer and to bring about a spiritual solution. Do you know of two brothers or sisters in the church who cannot resolve a conflict? Instead of taking sides, encourage these fellow believers to follow the pattern taught by Jesus in v. 15-20. You'll see how important this is to the Lord when you study The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant starting tomorrow.

Thursday, July 2 (read Matthew 18:21-35)

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times? (Matthew 18:21)

Take the time to read this entire parable before beginning today's study. Peter probably has someone in mind when he asks his question printed above. Jesus shoots down his self-righteousness by saying that forgiveness must not be reduced to a definite number of times; instead, it must be **infinite** just like God's forgiveness for us (v. 22). Seventy-seven (or seventy times seven) is our Lord's way of expressing this truth. Jesus then tells a story to illustrate the difficult teaching about the kingdom of heaven. A man who owes a debt beyond his ability to pay comes before the king and receives his judgment (v. 23-25). He begs for **time** to raise the money even though it is obvious that his debt is far too much to ever be repaid (v. 26). The gracious king forgives the tremendous debt and sets him free (v. 27). Likewise, God paid a debt He did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay! When was the last time you fell to your knees and thanked Him for the gift of salvation? We will continue this parable over the next two days.

Friday, July 3 (reread Matthew 18:21-35)

But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. "Pay back what you owe me!" He demanded. (Matthew 18:28)

Read the entire story again today so that you can feel the impact of this parable. The man who has received **mercy** from the king goes out looking for **justice** from his fellow man (v. 28). This combination will not work! If we demand **justice** from others, we will get **justice** from our Holy God! If we accept **mercy** from our Heavenly Father, we must extend **mercy** to our fellow man! The debtor's request (v. 29) is almost identical to his own request to the king (v. 26). Unfortunately, his reply is vastly different from his gracious king's reply (v. 30). Others are watching to see if you really believe the message of salvation through Jesus Christ alone (v. 31). What are they observing in your interactions with others? Are they witnessing the same **mercy** and **grace** that God extends to you? If not, make a new commitment today to deal with others in the same way God is dealing with you!

Saturday, July 4 (Matthew 18:21-35)

"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:35)

The rest of this parable is a strong warning to all professing Christians. Jesus receives us into His kingdom just as we are, but He never leaves us that way! His Holy Spirit begins a work within us to mold us into His image (see Philippians 3:20-21). I do not believe this parable teaches that a true believer can lose his/her salvation; instead, I believe He is warning that a genuine Christian will **desire** to offer the same **mercy** and **grace** that he/she has received from God (v. 32-34). The Lord makes His point absolutely clear in v. 35. As citizens in the kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3:20), we must offer **mercy** and **grace** to those who have wronged us. How are you doing in your earthly dealings with others?