

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 18 (PART 2)

Matthew 18:11

This is another instance of a verse that is present in some manuscripts but not in the oldest (and presumably most reliable). The NASB puts this verse in [brackets] or *italics* and gives a translator note while other translations do not include verse 11 (ESV, CSB, NIV, etc). However, this phrase and heart is reliably present in Luke's account (Jesus' interaction with Zaccheus in Luke 19:10) so we know it is something he said.

Matthew 18:12-14 - Missing Sheep

Jesus is turning the corner from caring about people causing stumbling blocks to caring for people who might have fallen. He uses language/imagery that certainly would have been understood by his audience.

Sheep are easily pulled away and distracted. They are vulnerable and simple. They need shepherding. They need care. They need oversight. They need rescuing.

You'd do it for your sheep - will you do it for your brother? You'd do it for your cell phone - will you do it for your sister? You'd do it for your car keys - will you do it for your fellow Christian?

Matthew 18:15-18 - Dealing With Sin

Situation - brother/sister sins against you

Sin is the issue at stake here. Not differences, preferences, annoyances etc. You might want/need to talk about those, but what Jesus is talking about is sin. And sin that has likely become obvious enough for someone else to see it or experience it.

Step 1 (v. 15) - go and show him or her their fault in private

Desired result - "listens" implies the offending brother/sister hears you out and acknowledges and repents of the sin. Jesus calls this "winning" your brother/sister. This also gives some direction as to the approach - we approach our brother/sister in a way that will foster listening.

Q - What are some of the reasons why step 1 doesn't happen?

Q - What are some alternative steps that happen instead?

Q - What are some of the potential benefits of dealing with each other the way Jesus commands?

Q - What do you think Jesus means when he says "if your brother sins..."

Undesired result - your brother/sister doesn't "listen" to you for whatever reason. In such cases, Jesus points us to the next step so as to win our brother/sister.

Step 2 (v. 16) - go again to your brother/sister, this time bringing with you one or two more people.

Desired result - though it is not mentioned here, the desired result remains the same - the winning of the brother/sister.

Q - what kind of people should you bring with you for step 2?

Q - What kind of people should you probably not bring?

Jesus cites an Old Testament verse here to bolster his point.

Deuteronomy 19:15 - "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.

Deuteronomy 19:15 (NLT) - "You must not convict anyone of a crime on the testimony of only one witness. The facts of the case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

In other words, if someone is going to be accused of something, there can't simply be one person making the accusation. This text supports the idea that a second/third person brought in for the "step 2" process should be someone who is aware of the sin that the accused person has committed (and not just a random person). If the person who has sinned is unwilling to be confronted about the ????????

Deuteronomy continues on to speak about instances when a false or malicious witness accuses someone of wrongdoing. These are cases where it's one person's word against another (and in this instance one of the people is accusing the other with malicious intentions).

Deuteronomy 19:16-20 (NLT) - "If a malicious witness comes forward and accuses someone of a crime, 17 then both the accuser and accused must appear before the LORD by coming to the priests and judges in office at that time. 18 The judges must investigate the case thoroughly. If the accuser has brought false charges against his fellow Israelite, 19 you must impose on the accuser the sentence he intended for the other person. In this way, you will purge such evil from among you. 20 Then the rest of the people will hear about it and be afraid to do such an evil thing.

I think the context of this gives some support to the idea that at times the additional person involved needs to be an impartial person who can help bridge the divide between the two people.

Undesired result - your brother/sister doesn't "listen" to the pair/trio, then Jesus points to a next and final step.

Step 3 (v. 17) – if they don't listen, tell it to the church

What does this look like?!! In the early church there was only one church. In the modern church someone who leaves one church can bounce to the next and have a fresh start. I don't think this is the way it is supposed to be.

I also think the understanding of "church" for Jesus and the apostles is slightly different than what we mean too (I'm not saying that's necessarily good, just acknowledging the reality). For the early church, for the most part everyone assembled together had believed the gospel, repented, been baptized and filled with God's spirit. In other words, in most cases, everyone in the room was a Christian. Evangelism took place outside of the gatherings rather than the gatherings being the place where evangelism was done.

Today in the western world (esp. America), most protestant churches have open meetings on Sunday and have visitors or seekers or nominal Christians present. Not everyone in the room is a Christian. Now church services are used as evangelism opportunities and people "invite" their friends and neighbors to church (all good things).

My point is, the "church" isn't always the assembled body on a Sunday morning. And in that case, I think it would be confusing and potentially offensive to have step 3 carried out during an open-meeting Sunday service. Instead, I think a good way to practice step 3 in our modern context is to bring the matter and bring the involved parties before the church elders and leaders and have the final step processed there. Bringing it before the church would be the leaders who shepherd and represent the church body.

This fits with the Deuteronomy passage which calls for the people to bring the matter before "the LORD by coming to the priests and judges in office at that time. 18 The judges must investigate the case thoroughly...20 Then the rest of the people will hear about it and be afraid to do such an evil thing." (Deut. 19:17b-18a, 20)

Desired result - win brother.

Undesired result & what happens next - if the person still does not respond to the confrontation, and thus wants to persist in their sin or deny it, then things do change. There is not a fourth step of attempting to have them listen. Next steps - *"let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"*

For the religious leaders, this would have meant shun and hate the person. But Jesus Christ is speaking, not the Pharisees or scribes. I think the disciples would have known exactly what this meant. Jesus spent time with Gentiles and tax collectors - and those individuals continued to be loved by Jesus and even listened to him speak. But his relationship was different than it was with his intimate close followers.

Someone you pray for! Someone you love! Someone you no longer interact with in the same way you once did. Ultimately they are unrepentant of sin that has been lovingly and prayerfully brought before them with the help of others.

v. 18 - Jesus now extends to the whole church what he spoke to Peter in Matthew 16:19. Here's what we said at the time:

As for the binding and loosing, this would have been something Jesus' disciples would have been familiar with in a way we aren't. In Jewish rabbinic language, the terms "*bind*" (רָסַק, *asar*) and "*loose*" (הִתִּיר, *hittir*) were well-known legal idioms. Binding was a way for a rabbi to prohibit or forbid something and loosing would have meant to permit or allow.

The church would now be the determiners of what was allowed/forbidden, not the old Jewish system - and it would all be based on the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God, and not some other cornerstone. Jesus extends this to all believers in Matthew 18:18 and re-confirms this after his resurrection:

John 20:21-23 - So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." 22 And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."

In light of the fact that someone may be removed from the Christian community as a result of unrepentant sin, this language is now being used to say that if things ever reach this point, the decision of the church is not to be taken lightly. Of course the church ought not to take this responsibility lightly either.

We are called to take a few things seriously. First, we need to take sin seriously. We just heard Jesus use highly exaggerated imagery (millstone necklaces, cutting off limbs, removing eyes) in our own war with evil and sin and those who cause stumbling blocks. Here we are called to not ignore when someone in our community is sinning.

And we are also called to handle confronting the sin seriously too - we need to address it in a Christlike way and follow all the steps. This isn't easy, but it is important. Jesus is ultimately not trying to show us the path to remove someone from the community but the way to keep the community united and holy!

What This Does NOT Mean:

1 - We all become sin policemen and investigators. Or that we notice everyone else's issue and neglect our own.

Matthew 7:3-5 - "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck

out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

2 - This is not addressing how we deal with the world. There may be wisdom in personal and prayerful confrontation in the workplace or in your neighborhood - but we shouldn't expect the world to live holy lives.

1 Corinthians 5:9-11 - I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10 I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world,...for then you would have to go out of the world. 11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person,...

I strongly believe that most instances of sin or offense will never rise to the level of step 3. I think that too often people don't do step 1 to begin with. Those that do will likely win their brother/sister! In cases where they don't, step 2 needs to be followed!

This is an excellent example of Jesus already telling us what we should do in situations that we will face in this life. We don't need to pray for wisdom about what to do when our brother/sister sins against us - Jesus has already told us how to proceed. We certainly should pray for the right heart and approach - and certainly for the other person - but far too many leave things unresolved out of fear and plain disobedience, sadly using "*I need to pray about this...*" or "*I'm not ready and I need some time...*" as delay tactics and spiritually sounding excuses for cowardice. The worst part is that dysfunction and disunity slowly become normalized for a people that are called to be united as we represent our Lord!

Remember what Jesus has already taught us:

Matthew 5:25 - "Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

The sooner the harder, but the sooner the better.

Matthew 18:19-20 - Power In Unity

This section of verses are often used in light of the assembled body of believers in a worship gathering or in a small group. It's encouraging to highlight the fact that Christ is spiritually present as two or more are gathered together in his name. We should rejoice in this.

But, let's consider the original context for this wonderful promise and truth. It is spoken by Jesus immediately after he speaks of the way his followers ought to deal with confronting sin in each other's lives. All that we have looked at so far is certainly easier said than done. But, Jesus specifically says that when "two agree on anything" and where "two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst".

In other words, even in these difficult moments, moments we may feel inadequate or lack the words or skill to have these hard conversations, we're not alone! Jesus is there with us and wanting and working for unity.

This requires love. This requires courage. This requires a rebellion against the flesh and the way the world deals with things.

Jesus envisions his followers forming a spiritual community that resembles a healthy and loving family much more than it will resemble the cut throat corporate world. One model has been united by deep and innate ties and fights for each other while the other looks at people as expendable and only as valuable as the service or impact they provide.

We're reminded that Jesus is building a community marked by radical love, humility, and accountability. In a world that often avoids confrontation or cuts people off without grace, Jesus calls His followers to do the hard and holy work of pursuing the lost, confronting sin with gentleness and truth, and striving for unity even when it's messy. This is not about power or control. It's about restoration and reconciliation. Jesus isn't just giving us rules; He's giving us a vision for what it looks like to be his people, people who value each other enough to speak the truth in love, and who take sin seriously because they take love seriously. In this kind of community, even conflict can become a doorway to deeper grace, greater healing, and more powerful unity, because Jesus himself is in the midst of it all.