

PURSUING CHRIST THROUGH RESTORATION

If the average church member in America were asked, they could probably point to Matthew 18:15-17 as *the* passage in the Bible dealing with church discipline. If the average church member were asked about the remainder of the 18th chapter of Matthew—and how the remainder of the chapter bears upon the issue of discipline—he would probably draw a blank. Contributing to this problem may be something as innocuous as the fact that the New American Standard Bible, for example, breaks down Matthew chapter 18 as follows; verses 1-6 “Rank in the Kingdom,” verses 7-11 “Stumbling Blocks” verses 12-15 as “Ninety-nine Plus One,” verses 15-20 “Discipline and Prayer,” verses 21-35 “Forgiveness.” While chapter sub-headings can be helpful, they can also lead readers to the unfortunate impression that each of these sections has little or no bearing upon the others for the purpose of understanding the whole. This document will work upon the presupposition that the Holy Spirit placed each verse of chapter 18 in the Gospel of Matthew in the sequence and order in which it appears for a specific purpose, and that the passage should be interpreted as a whole. “Matthew’s juxtaposition of passages regularly suggests that they are grouped as they are for specific reasons.”¹ This document is an exegesis of verses 15-20 which takes the *immediate context of Matthew 18 heavily into consideration.*

¹ Craig Blomberg, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, Matthew*, vol. 22, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 23.

SETTING THE CONTEXT

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’” (Matt. 18:1, NASU). This question seems almost psychotic.² These are the same disciples who heard Jesus’ forerunner—John the Baptist—preach repentance, and they heard Jesus preaching repentance from the early stages of His ministry. “From that time Jesus began to preach and say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matt. 4:17, NASU). They were there when Jesus preached His flagship Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matt. 5: 3-9, NASU)

This psychotic response to Jesus by the disciples never relented. Luke 22:24 tells us that even on the eve of the crucifixion His followers were still bickering over worldly status. To confront the disciple’s extreme misunderstanding of the Kingdom, Jesus “called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’” (Matt. 18:2-4 NASU). This simple illustration used by Jesus could not be more antithetical to the desire behind the question the disciples asked in verse one, and could hardly be more confrontational. In the culture of that day, the young child in the family was considered the servant of all, who was assigned the most menial and demeaning of chores (Matt. 10:26, Mark 9:35, 10:43, John 13:5, 13:14). In other words, the

² “Characterized by defective or lost contact with reality.” Merriam-Webster, Inc. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. electronic ed of the 10th ed. Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 1993; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996.

disciples came to ask a question on how to gain *worldly* status in *God's* Kingdom—how to climb to the top of the proverbial ladder and get status over the others. Jesus basically points out that the ladder they are so intent on climbing is leaning against the wrong wall. *Jesus is calling for repentance.*

The phrase “are converted” translates an aorist passive of *strephō*, which elsewhere in the New Testament is always translated with an idea of “turning” or “turning around.” It means to make an about face and go in the opposite direction. Jesus’ use here of the passive voice indicates that the disciples could not be converted from sin to righteousness by their own efforts but needed someone else to turn them around. Although the response of a person’s will is required, only God has the power to convert.³ This aorist passive form is translated “to turn” or “repent” throughout the New Testament—“to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9 NASU). Turn from the deceitful promises of sin and turn in faith acknowledging God in the person of Jesus Christ the supreme value in all of creation and beyond.

Repentance is an internal change of mind and heart rather than mere sorrow for sin or mere improvement of behavior. First, the meaning of the Greek word behind the English “repent” (*metanoeo*) points in this direction. It has two parts: *meta* and *noeo*. The second part (*noeo*) refers to the mind and its thoughts and perceptions and dispositions and purposes. The first part (*meta*) is a prefix that regularly means movement or change.⁴

So the basic meaning of repent is to experience a change of the mind’s perceptions and dispositions and purposes, which in turn produces visible fruit on the outside. The God-given ability to see, interpret and respond to life with the perspective of Christ.

Next Jesus plants Himself as the locus and reference point of the entire discourse. “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me” (vs.5). How does one enter and exist

³ MacArthur, John F. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew*. Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1985.

⁴ Thoughts on Jesus' Demand to Repent *Letters from Cambridge* #2 By John Piper April 19, 2006
http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1780_Thoughts_on_Jesus_Demand_to_Repent/ Web accessed 10-25-06 at 7:22 am.

in the kingdom? Be converted; repent or turn from the deceitful promises of sin and by faith turn to Christ as the surpassing treasure and value of time and eternity.⁵ From that position in Christ, pursue greater degrees of intimacy with Christ by being an instrument of receiving others into the Kingdom. One gets into the Kingdom when God converts him / her, through the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ, and grants repentance and faith. One exists in the Kingdom as a pursuer of Christ through the activity of receiving others on His behalf. This “line of sight” cures the natural human disposition toward a contextual psychosis like the disciples exhibited in 18:1.

This spiritual psychosis is not simply an inconvenience. It is deadly. “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea” (v. 6). If one sees other children in the kingdom as ladder rungs to his own advancement, “it would be better . . . to have a heavy millstone hung around your neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” This thrice death that Christ speaks of here was a special, dreaded form of execution in which the criminal was drowned, strangled, and the neck was broken. Finally, the body was lost and forgotten forever in the depths of the sea. This horrific punishment was reserved for those who killed their own family members or an entire clan.⁶ This destiny is so horrible that one should consider no act too drastic to avoid it: “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell” (vs. 7-9

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ MacArthur

NASU). This *is* physical hyperbole it is *not* spiritual hyperbole. This is the same yet opposite view of buying the field (Matt. 13:44). It could be seen as with the Rich Young Ruler in Matt. 19 who clings to temporary treasure and with it purchases eternal condemnation. *To not cause others to sin; is to make any sacrifice, any adjustment, any concession necessary to protect one's self from sin*: "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:27).

Not to do *anything possible* to protect one of Christ' little ones is to despise; "See that you do not despise one of these little ones" (v. 10a). Jesus was telling them that their bickering about who was greatest in the kingdom was a form of despising God's little ones, in this case, each other. *They each saw the other as a ladder rung to their own position, rather than seeing themselves as a welcome mat to Christ.*

Jesus then gives some *models for believers to pattern their lives after*. First, the angelic model: "For I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (v. 10b). The angelic model is not watching with suspicion, waiting for someone to stumble, and then pouncing on him / her. (This is what people assume Matt. 18:15 teaches, and if the text is taken out of the context of the entire chapter, that is what it looks like.) No! The holy angels never take their eyes off *God*, lest they miss some direction from Him regarding a task they are to perform on behalf of a believer. Don't be a man watcher. Use the Word to let your mind meditate and dwell on God and all His glorious attributes. "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers" (Psalm 1:1-3). *Those whose countenance is reflective of God respond to stumbling brothers with servant responses not*

pouncing reactions. Nothing so blinds us spiritually as being a man watcher—a situation watcher—rather than a God watcher. That’s the angelic model.

Now the Christ-like model—“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost” (v. 11). To see the basis of the Christ-like model Matt 20:28 is instructive; “just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” *Seeking and saving of thankless, selfish, spoiled rotten children defined His life, his ministry and His death*. “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21 NASU). “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:38-40 NASU). *The cross becomes the foundation and the locus of teaching for all believers and the basis for all interactions in the Kingdom*: “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matt 16:24-25 NASU). What’s the teaching of the cross? Believers daily renounce claim to their life, opinions, preferences, taste and will, for the purpose of ministering to Christ’ little ones (Col 1:24, 2 Tim 2:10).

To support and sustain the two models given, Jesus explains the Father’s will behind them: “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish” (vs. 12-14). The Father sovereignly seeks out and saves His lost and

erring sheep, and uses His people to do so. *God does not react to wandering sheep out of surprise or exigency as if His eternal plan could be somehow thwarted* (Rev. 13:8). *Rather He ordains the wandering, the seeking and the restoring* (John 10:28-30). As a result, believers should enter into the process of restoration with the unmitigated joy produced by knowing that it is the will of the Father that none of His little ones perish. This certainty produces shepherd-like boldness. A shepherd would fight off wolves, bears, lions, thieves, or any threat to the sheep. Once found, the shepherd would care for any wounds and bind up any broken legs. He would then place the sheep on his shoulders and carry it back to the fold.⁷ On the other hand, if one has contextual psychosis like the disciples had, when confronted with the sin of another, they may get angry, feel ‘put out’ and ignore the wandering one because they see it all wrong. They see it as an inconvenience, a burden, messy and uncomfortable. Members of the Body of Christ often look down on their spiritual brothers and sisters, treating them with disdain and indifference. Others are simply not worthy of their time or effort to pursue. This is where *a church and individuals set themselves in opposition to the holy angels, to the Son of God, and to God Himself!*

By now, the disciples, taking into account the context of the entire chapter, should be asking themselves, “How does one bear the fruit of repentance and demonstrate a . . .”

1. Converted heart, childlike, humble disposition (1-3) that
2. Keeps me from stumbling, which in turn keeps me from causing others to stumble (4-5)
3. Displays a commitment to do anything to not be the cause of stumbling (6-9)
4. Shows no disdain for others in the Kingdom (10a)
5. Reflects the Angelic model (10b)
6. Reflects the Christ like model (11) and
7. The Father’s will to pursue the lost and erring (12-14) so that one can
8. Avoid the dreaded millstone punishment

What extreme, gargantuan effort on their part will satisfy all these expectations and fulfill the law of Christ to love one another? “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private.”

⁷ MacArthur

MATTHEW 18:15-20

Verse 15

"If your brother sins go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." Jesus' statement here contains several self-correctives implied in the wording. First, it is important to note that Jesus begins His statement with "if"—a conditional particle that suggests that the condition is hypothetical.⁸ The first implied self-corrective then is "if." The self-corrective refers back to 18:1 and 7:3 and asks the question: "Am I trying to create an occasion for self-exaltation by looking at the speck in another's eye?" If so 18:2-4 is the call to repentance. "Am I believing, hoping, enduring all things and keeping no record of wrong?" (v. 22 along with 1 Cor. 13) if not, again, repentance is called for (vs. 2-4).

The next word that creates a self-corrective is "brother", from the Greek "Adelphós."

Adelphós came to designate a fellowship of love equivalent to or bringing with it a community of life (Matt 12:50; Mark 3:35; 10:29,30; Acts 12:17). In this manner Jesus speaks of His brethren (Matt 25:40; 28:10; John 20:17; Rom 8:29; Heb 2:11,17). The members of the same Christian community are called brothers (John 21:23; Acts 9:30; Rom 16:14; 1 Cor 7:12).⁹

This "community of life" would draw the hearers once again to verses one through three. The disciples desired to obtain Kingdom status through worldly means. They saw each other as steppingstones or ladder rungs to their own status, but instead, Jesus points them to family relationships and the responsibility of childcare in the Kingdom. *The self-corrective calls one to examine how one sees others.* If others were seen as mere steppingstones to greater status; "it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt 18:6, NASU). Christ also eliminates the possibility of shirking responsibility by claiming the person is not a believer. Believers are not to pre-judge other

⁸ The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament © 1992 by AMG International, Inc. Revised Edition, 1993)

believers. The *process*, not *prejudice*, is to prove the Kingdom status of others (v. 17). Believers are charged to assume the best of all in the Church by treating them as a ‘brother.’

The word translated “sins” is a commonly used word in the New Testament for sin:

hamartano (ham-ar-tan'-o); perhaps from NT:1 (as a negative particle) and the base of NT:3313; properly, to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize), i.e. (figuratively) to err, especially (morally) to sin: KJV - for your faults, offend, sin, trespass.¹⁰

Referring back to verse 7—the child one has been charged to care for is stumbling! The self-corrective is to be prostrate before God with deep concern to not *be the cause of another stumbling into sin*. It is worth noting that in the context of chapter 18, if Jesus has a type of sin in mind, it is *Pharisaical self-righteousness*, which leads to an unforgiving, judgmental attitude toward others (18:3-10, 21-35 compared with Matt. 7:3 and Luke 18:9-17). Pharisaical self-righteousness is the very sin into which those who know of other’s “publican type” sins (Luke 18:9-17) are likely to stumble, thus causing others to stumble (Matt. 18:7-10)! So, in the context of Matthew 18, Jesus is calling the status-seeking, selfishly ambitious disciples to repentance *and* giving the model of how to call future self-righteous, prideful, Pharisaical sinners to repent.

The next word worth looking at is “go.”

hupago "togo," translated "depart" in James 2:16, KJV, primarily and lit. meant "to lead under" (hupo, "under"); in its later use, it implied a "going," without noise or notice, or by stealth.¹¹

This “going without notice” implies that one must not wait for the stumbling brother to come and ask to be restored. It also brings in another self-corrective. One must resist the natural temptation to talk *about* a stumbling brother, rather than to go and talk *to* a stumbling brother.

⁹ Ibid. NT80

¹⁰ BibleSoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003 BibleSoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc. NT:264

¹¹ Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers. NT:5217

With the dismal portrait that God's Word paints of a gossip, the concern is amplified to not cause others to stumble by stumbling into gossip one's self—*cut it off and throw it from you!*

The next phrase to be considered is “*showing* the stumbling brother his *fault*.” This is strong language—“*elégxœ ...to reprove, rebuke, admonish...*”¹² Fulfilling the law of Christ to love one another (Gal. 6:1-2) requires courage. In this context, courage cannot be separated from love. In New Testament thinking, the opposite of courage is not fear. Fear is simply the emotion that is overcome by love. The opposite of courage is indifference or a lack of love, because love overcomes indifference and casts out fear¹³ (1 John 4:18). That is why Jesus brings the reality of Kingdom relationships and responsibility into this discourse early on (vs. 1-5) and that mindset continues throughout the chapter. While someone might generally be too afraid to confront evil, if that person's child was in danger, the love and concern for the child would overcome fear and make the parent fearless. *To be too afraid to face danger in order to protect one of Christ's little ones is to demonstrate indifference and disdain for Christ and his disciples* (v. 10). The self-corrective implied here is: “Am I exercising courageous love in all my interactions with believers?”

The last phrase to look at in this theology packed verse is “won your brother.” Winning and restoring the erring brother is the goal of the restoration process and the phrase should be understood in light of verse five! “And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.” *Christ must be the ends and the means of the restoration process*. In other words, Christ is the goal of restoration for both parties (v. 5 and 15) and Christ is the means of restoration as the only legitimate basis of repentance (compare 18:2-3 with Luke 18:13 and 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

¹² AMG International NT:1651

¹³ Gus Lee, *Courage: the Backbone of Leadership*, Jossey-Bass San Francisco, 2005; 35. Lee does not tie his thoughts on courage to the NT and love, but his writing caused me see the connection.

Verse 16

"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED."

Adam Clark believes that the text implies the ones taken for the follow-up interview should be people whom the offender esteems. These same people may later confirm what was said and if required, bearing witness of what was spoken to the church (vs. 17).¹⁴ This seems to be the best understanding.

Others believe that those taken must be witnesses to the alleged offense. This position is untenable; it would leave 'little ones' stumbling in their sin unless their happened to be multiple witnesses to their sin. It would leave sin between two believers—for example a husband and wife—with no possibility for the restoration process. The direction of the passage is restoration for the individual and protection for the Body of Christ, not some type of safeguard against the Christ honoring, Church protecting process of restoration. The witnesses rather should be more like impartial jurors who have *not been tainted by gossip*. In other words they should not be told of the 'sin' until in the presence of the accused. These witnesses could likely end up calling the accuser to repentance if they find that he/she has violated the implied self-correctives in the text; (see the "if" correctives above).

Verse 17

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." There is some debate as to what Jesus was referring to with the word translated "church."

The problem here is whether Jesus has in mind an actual body of believers already in existence or is speaking prophetically of the local churches that would be

¹⁴ Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

organized later (as in Acts). There are some who think that the Twelve Apostles constituted a local ekklesia, a sort of moving church of preachers.¹⁵

For the purpose of this document, a simple understanding seems to be the best as to not confuse the issue; “the church or congregation as the totality of Christians living in one place”¹⁶ The goals of telling the church is to put ever increasing pressure on the unrepentant sinner to repent and to protect the church from the recalcitrant.¹⁷ So again, the ultimate goal of restoration is Christ shepherding His people back to Him, and protecting His flock for Him.

Verse 18

"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." The word translated “bound” is worth looking at closer.

DEŌ (δέω , (1210)), to bind, is used (*a*) literally, of any sort of binding, e.g., Acts 22:5; 24:27, ... The Lord’s words to the Apostle Peter in Matt. 16:19, as to binding, and to all the disciples in 18:18, signify, in the former case, that the Apostle, by his ministry of the Word of Life, would keep unbelievers outside the kingdom of God, and admit those who believed. So with regard to 18:18, including the exercise of disciplinary measures in the sphere of the local church; the application of the Rabbinical sense of forbidding is questionable.¹⁸

Once again the singular concept of Christ protecting and keeping His church is seen. The important issue to see here is the way in which the church discovers what was already known by the Sovereign Lord of the church. Once the process is seen, the church can act in accordance

¹⁵ Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1997, 2003 by BibleSoft, Inc. Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright © 1985 by Broadman Press.

¹⁶Arndt, William, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur.* electronic ed. of the 2nd ed., rev. and augmented. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996.

¹⁷ MacArthur

¹⁸Vine, W.E., and F.F. Bruce. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words : W.E. Vine ; Old Testament Edited by F.F. Bruce.* electronic ed. Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996.

with the Lord's purpose to protect and keep His church. *It is obedience to the process laid out in scripture that reveals the plan and purpose of Christ.*

Verse 19

"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." This verse obviously emphasizes the fact that unity in prayer precedes effectiveness in prayer. "Unity in prayer is emphasized. If a group of Christians who have the mind of Christ pray in the Holy Spirit their prayers will be effectual."¹⁹ But this *unity must not be divorced from the process through which the unity was obtained.*

- 1) Humble repentance before Christ (v. 1-4).
- 2) Commitment to the pursuit of Christ (v. 5).
- 3) Uncompromising commitment to the concerns of Christ (v. 6-9).
- 4) Wisdom from the model of the angels and the model of the seeking Christ (v. 10-11).
- 5) Conformity to the will of the Father of Christ (v. 12-14).
- 6) Obedience to the Word of Christ (15-19).

Christians could conceivably get together and agree about almost anything, isolate the text and claim almost anything—"Shorthand summaries like these have provoked bizarre theories of prayer where people have violently isolated these passages from everything else Jesus and the Bible say about prayer."²⁰ Rather, the context of Matthew 18 as listed above provides the source of the effectiveness promised in this verse.

Verse 20

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

¹⁹Douglas, J.D. *New Bible Dictionary*. Includes index. electronic ed. of 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1982; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996.

This verse summarizes the reason for the effective prayer promised in verse 19. Just as each of the six points (showing the progression of obtaining effective prayer in the context of Matthew 18) point *to* Christ; so the capstone *is* Christ. "...My name, I am there in their midst." Christ, once again, is the end and the means of all that the church does. Any method that does not have Christ as the ultimate goal and means is simply a scheme of man, regardless of how it is disguised.

APPLICATION

Reject Pragmatism

The methodology that seems to most confuse and diffuse the efforts of the church is the ever-pressing popularity of pragmatism. Entire church movements have sprung up around the motivation to find and do what works.

In the early years we had nothing to lose, so we tried all kinds of ideas...most of our successes have been the result of trial and error and some of our discoveries were purely accidental....To design the right strategy you must ask the right questions...I didn't know enough to call my survey of the community a "marketing" study...²¹

If the church approaches Matthew 18:15-20 with the burning question of "*What works?*", the current culture of our world would give a resounding thumbs down to the process described in these verses.²² On the other hand, if the church approaches Matt. 18:15-20 and isolates it from the remainder of Matthew 18, it would come away with a distorted view of what restoration is all about. It is all about Christ. To review a previously stated paradigm from Matthew 18: 1) Humble repentance before Christ (v. 1-4). 2) Commitment to the pursuit of Christ (v. 5). 3) Uncompromising commitment to the concerns of Christ (v. 6-9). 4) Wisdom in the model of the angels and of the seeking Christ (v. 10-11). 5) Conformity to the will of the Father of Christ

²⁰ Sproul, R.C.(Robert Charles). *Following Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 991.

²¹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 28, 30, 40.

(v. 12-14). 6) Obedience to the Word of Christ (15-19).

These are the issues that bring Matthew 18:15-20 into the true light of Scripture. The application is to shun the cultural pining for pragmatism and to embrace the totality of what the Lord taught in Matthew 18, thus fulfilling the Law of Christ to love one another (Gal. 5:14, 6:1-2). This seems like a feeble application point but it is huge—Believers are often trapped into thinking something like this: “That may work for others, but _____ is really a tough case, they would not respond well to this process.” From this perspective they are sent on a journey into pragmatism looking in all the wrong places for all the wrong things. The goal is Christ, the means is Christ and the process is given by Christ. One enters into the process by faith (Heb. 11:1-6) and leaves the results to the sovereign will of God (18:14). *The quest for; “what I think will work” is a death march away from the Kingdom of God and the mind of Christ* (Matt. 6:19-34).

Embrace Forgiveness

Matt 18:21-22 “Then Peter came and said to Him, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” Peter is as struck by the implication of an event or teaching as he is with the event or teaching itself. Most people take things at face value and do not think through the implications. Peter sees an insinuation and jumps on it. Peter is just like all men. When someone is sinned against the flesh automatically:

- Wants to “fix” them so that they don’t inconvenience you anymore (Matt. 7:3-5)
- Desires a sweet morsel of gossip (cf. Prov. 18:8)
- Is tempted to be filled with righteous pharisaical indignation (Luke 18:9-14)
- Wants to ‘look the other way’ in self importance and not get involved (like the Priest and Levite who passed by the other side of the road in Luke 10 when seeing the injured traveler)
- Burn inside for revenge, justice, fairness, or a pound of flesh (Matt. 18:28).

²² Mohler.

Peter is like a man who has just been sentenced to a lengthy prison term; he has done the math and realizes that his life (of getting revenge, getting even and pinning for status) is basically over. He instantly wants to know when his flesh is eligible for parole. “Do I get parole after forgiving seven times?” No, seventy times seven—this is the death of the flesh! *The flesh will be crucified or it will be tortured.*

Rom 6:11-14 Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

The only process that scripture gives in order to release our flesh from the bondage of sin is to consider it dead, or consider one’s self to be of the lowest social status (Matt. 18:3). As Paul explains further in his letter to the Colossians our minds are to be set on Christ, because we have died and are alive in Christ.

Col 3:2-6 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (NASU)

As is seen, the consideration of death deprives the flesh of force and also eliminates its ability to be tortured.

nekróœ; contracted from nekρός, dead. To put to death; pass., to be put to death, to die. Used metaphorically meaning to deaden, to deprive of force and vigor, e.g., the members, in which case the meaning is to mortify (Col 3:5).²³

Peter is like all men. Forgiveness is a rare commodity among those of the world, but it ought to be different for Christians.

²³ The Complete Word Study Dictionary, NT:3499v

Christians need to forgive because they themselves need forgiveness. They are spiritual children and, like all children, are ignorant, weak, selfish, disobedient, and regularly in need of forgiveness, both from God and from each other. Forgiving is a necessary give-and-take issue of life.²⁴

All Christians need to realize that our sin is the basis of Christ's relationship with us. Christ does not provide for a relationship *in spite* of our sin, but *through* our sin. The foundation of this relationship through sin is forgiveness. "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt 6:14-15). And that is exactly what Christ points out in the following account, which summarizes His teaching on restoration.

Matt 18:23-35 For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you everything." And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?" And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

King Louis XII of France articulated the feeling of many people when he said, "Nothing smells so sweet as the dead body of your enemy."²⁵ *You can have your pound of flesh, you can*

²⁴ MacArthur

²⁵ MacArthur

long to smell the sweet odor of your enemy's rotting flesh—or you can have Christ, who is your life!

Unfortunately, much untold misery is brooding beneath the surface of many smiles on Sunday morning and many pews remain empty because of un-forgiveness. Current research on brain functionality has apparently come across a physiological phenomenon within the brain that creates an internal reality reminiscent of the torture described by our Lord in verses 32-35.²⁶ As human beings, we live with a natural disposition to have a Pharisaical,²⁷ self-righteous, contemptuous attitude toward others.²⁸ Indeed, it would appear as if Moses' warning about God's Word being intrinsically woven into Israel's survival on a geopolitical level is also true on an interpersonal level for believers (Dt. 32:46-47). Matthew 18 directs each and every believer to experience freedom and joy in Him through *the restoration process. It begins with repentance, is fortified by forgiveness, and has Christ as the ends and the means.* The final summary is best stated by Christ Himself and recorded in John 8:31-32 "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."

²⁶ Dr. Daniel G. Amen has reported on problems when a portion of the brain he calls the cingulate becomes over active. "When the cingulate system is abnormal, people have a tendency to get stuck on things, locked into things, to rethink the same thought over and over and over (Luke 11:46). They may become worriers and continually obsess on the same thought. They may hold onto hurts or grudges from the past (Matt. 18:28, Luke 18: 9-11), unable to let them go. They may also get stuck on negative behaviors or develop compulsions such as hand washing or excessively checking locks" (Matt. 23:23-26). Change Your Brain Change Your Life: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Anger, and Impulsiveness. Daniel G. Amen, M.D. Randomhouse, NY.

²⁷ Obtain a free audio copy of "The Pharisee and the Publican" Luke 18:9-14 preached 11-15-06 by Jack Colwell, from Faith Community Church, Kansas City, Missouri. www.faithcommunity.com

²⁸ Gen. 3:12, Matt. 18:1 & 28, Luke 18:9-14, 22:24, Romans chapters 1-3 [see especially 3:13] and chapter 7, James 3:2-5

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