

Matthew

A Careful Study of Matthew

May 25, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 18:11-20**, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. [12] 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? [13] 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. [14] So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish (*believers, especially young or new believers*). [15] If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. [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. [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. [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. [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. [20] For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”
- B. **Matthew 18** begins with the disciples asking Jesus, “Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Jesus responds by calling a child to Himself and saying, “Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” **Matthew 19** begins with, “When Jesus had finished these words.” This indicates that all of what Matthew fits into **chapter 18** is part of Jesus’ response to the disciples’ question of who is the greatest.
1. Last Sunday we saw that those who are greatest maintain a mindset and an attitude of being less than or the servant of those around them. They also carefully consider the effect of their behavior on others so as not to ignore or become a stumbling block to anyone – especially to those under their authority or those who the world deems less important or insignificant.
 2. Today we are going to see that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven humbly and lovingly do what they can to seek, and if possible, restore the believer who has gone astray.

C. Pray

II. The greatest seek and humbly try to restore any believer who goes astray

A. [11] “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”

1. Luke puts it this way, “For the Son of Man has come **to seek** and **to save** that which was lost” (**Luke 19:10**).
2. This statement makes Jesus (*the Son of Man*) the supreme example of all that is written in **Matthew 18**. For example:
 - a. Though He is the greatest, He is humble, submissive to His Father, and a servant to us as if He is less than us.
 - b. Though stumbling blocks are inevitable, He has never been nor will ever be a stumble block to anyone.
 - c. He searches for, finds, and restores the wayward, straying believer.
 - d. And if we seek His forgiveness, He forgives – fully and completely.
3. There are other scriptures that show the extent of His humility and sets the example for our attitudes, ways of thinking, and behaving.
 - a. Jesus is patient with sinners because He doesn’t want any to perish (**vs 14; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4**).
 - b. His love for all of us is such that He willingly chose to die in our place while we were still making ourselves His enemies by living an ungodly life (**Romans 5:28**).
 - c. Though He is God, He humbled Himself, left heaven, and came as a servant to serve us (**Philippians 2:5-8**).
 - d. Though we deserve condemnation, He came to save us, not condemn us (**John 3:16-17**).
 - e. He rejoices over every sinner who is found, repents, and restored to a right relationship with God (**Like 15:7**).
4. Who is the greatest among us? Anyone who is like Jesus, and in this context, like Jesus in humble submission, in humble service, in love and compassion for both the godly and ungodly, in seeking the lost and pursuing the wayward with the goal of restoring them, and in giving full and complete forgiveness to those who seek forgiveness after sinning against us.

B. After saying, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost,” Jesus tells a story to demonstrate the way in which God values and loves everyone who belongs to Him – which explains why He doesn’t want to lose any of them, and why He is so strongly condemns stumbling blocks, and why He exuberantly rejoices when He finds and restores one who has gone astray.

1. [12] “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? [13] 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. [14] So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”
 2. You might think that rejoicing more over the restored believer than over the 99 who are safe and sound in their faith means God loves the restored believer more than the those who had not gone astray. But that is not what this means. Rejoicing over the one more than the 99 is about the depth of joy over not losing any one of them because God loves every one of them.
 3. Jesus’ purpose in telling this story is to show us the kind of mindset we are to have, and how we are to view, and how we are to relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ – including those who are going or have gone astray.
 4. Therefore, to summarize **vs 1-14**: It is vital that we do not cause any believer, young or old, to stumble. It is vital that we care about the spiritual health of every believer. And it is vital that we go after and seek to restore the believer that is going or has gone astray.
 5. From here, Jesus gives us a three-step process for calling a believer who is going astray back to the way of godliness.
- C. [15] “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. [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. [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.” Let’s consider each part of this three-step process of winning and restoring a wayward believer.
1. The **first** effort at restoration is to be a private, personal, one-on-one effort (*just between the two of you*).
 - a. Notice that this first step is not addressed to the church leadership, but to you and to me – fellow believers of the wayward believer. In other words, restoring a wayward believer is as much your responsibility as it is the responsibility of those in leadership.
 - b. The spiritual health of the church and each individual in the church is the responsibility of every adult believer who attends. And though there are various reasons for this, one reason is, you

may see what the church leaders do not see. If you do not act according to this process, then the wayward believer may stray far enough that they will not come back.

- c. This first step is to be personal and private, and some of the reasons for this are:
 - (1) to reinforce the love and commitment believers have for one another,
 - (2) to give the wayward believer an opportunity to repent and return without having more people than necessary know about the sin,
 - (3) to hopefully prevent shame from driving the straying believer further away by limiting the number of people who know,
 - (4) to protect against gossip and inaccurate stories being passed around of the sin or the sinner,
 - (5) and to protect the future reputation of the believer who went astray but repents and returns.
 - d. Remember, this is not about condemning the sinning believer, but restoring Him.
2. **Second**, if the wayward believer rebuffs the private effort, the believer who came to him is to return with two or three others (1) who are able to support the reasons the wayward believer ought to repent and return, and (2) who can give fair and accurate witness to the response of the wayward believer.
- a. Though this second effort includes more people, it still significantly limits the number who know about the sin – and in so doing continues to work against gossip and unnecessarily harming the wayward believer’s long-term reputation. As most of us know, scandalous details travel fast and far.
 - b. It is my opinion that when possible, it is best if the two or three others are people the wayward believer respects, or at least are worthy of respect because of the quality of their Christian life and spiritual maturity.
 - c. Finally, the goal is not to team-up on the wayward believer, but to present the best possible case in the best possible way in urging the wayward believer to repent and return to God and godly living.
3. **Third**, if the wayward believer rebuffs this second effort, then the matter is to be presented to the church so that the congregation can implore the wayward believer to repent and return.
- a. Without question, bringing the matter to the church brings public shame and congregational pressure upon the wayward believer.

- b. Yet it also brings group affirmation of love and genuine concern for the wayward believer's spiritual health and his relationship with God. And it affirms that God and the church places a high value on each believer, their spiritual health, and their relationship with God and the rest of the believers.
- 4. If the wayward believer rebuffs this third effort, then and only then are the consequences to be applied. And the consequences are:
 - a. The loss of standing in the church as a fellow believer who is committed to living according to the will and word of God;
 - b. Being seen and treated as an unbeliever, as an outsider, as someone who doesn't want to be part of the universal Body of Christ or a part of this local assembly of believers.
- 5. There are two goals here:
 - a. **First**, to put the wayward believer in a situation where he might realize what he has lost and choose to repent and return.
 - b. **Second**, to distance the church members from continued exposure to the wayward believer so that others do not come under his influence and follow his wayward path.
- 6. Finally, only after the wayward believer rebuffs the pleas of the congregation to repent and return are we to deny him "standing" as a believer among believers, and enforce some form of separation or alienation. This part of the third step is to be implemented only by the group, and not the individuals in step one or step two.

D. A few final thoughts on this process.

- 1. James clearly states the goal of seeking and trying to restore the wayward believer: **James 5:19-20**, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, [20] let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."
- 2. Because each believer is precious in the sight of God and the church, losing even one is a tragic, unwanted loss. Therefore, the goal is to rescue and restore the wayward believer, not condemn and ostracize.
- 3. There is no room for spiritual pride, or a critical attitude, or a condescending tone when calling a wayward believer back to God. Such things make those who are seeking to restore just as wayward as those who are being sought.
- 4. Of course, we are to speak the truth in as clear and straight-forward a way as possible. Yet we are to speak the truth in a way that calls and invites, not attacks and demeans.

5. Paul affirms this in **Galatians 6:1-2**, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. [2] Bear one another’s burdens (*this is a mutual activity where we are the restorer now, and possibly the one needing to be restored at another time*), and thereby fulfill the law of Christ (*to love one another*).”
6. If the church is like a country club that you join to have a sense of belonging and to provide companionship with people you know and generally enjoy, then the value it provides is best maintained by keeping conversations shallow and relationships at a safe (*don’t rock the boat*) distance.
 - a. However, this is not the purpose of the church. The purpose of the church is (1) to build up the body of Christ, inwardly and outwardly, spiritually and socially so that we mature to the level and extent of Christ’s maturity, and (2) to speak truth to each other from the compelling motive of love, and (3) to contribute what we can for the good of all, and (4) to do our part in helping each other love each other as we ought (**Ephesians 4:11-16**).
 - b. It is in this kind of environment that relationships are able to go deeper and become more meaningful and have their God-intended effect on the whole group.
 - c. As should be obvious, we cannot have this depth of relationship with a wayward believer. We cannot gain spiritual help from a wayward believer. And, they are not of the mind nor in the place spiritually where they want this depth of relationship and this kind of spiritual help. This is one of the reasons to call them back, and if they don’t want to come back, it is one of the reasons to treat them as an unbeliever.

III. Conclusion

- A. **Hebrews 10:23-25**, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; [24] and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [25] not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.