

# Matthew

A Careful Study of Matthew

June 01, 2025

## I. Introduction

- A. Over the past two Sundays, we have worked our way from **vs 1** of **Matthew 18** to **vs 17**. Today, we will finish **ch 18**. As you may recall, it began with the disciples asking Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus answered by saying the one who humbles himself like a child is the greatest. He then went on to explain that this humility shows itself by (1) making every effort to **not** be a stumbling block, (2) by embracing everyone – even those the world calls the least among us, (3) by seeking and if possible restoring wayward believers, and (4) by forgiving as God has and continues to forgive us.
- B. Pray

## II. Church agrees with God and God supports the church

- A. **Matthew 18:18**, “Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall (*already*) have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall (*already*) have been loosed in heaven.”
  - 1. If we consider what Jesus meant within the context of **ch 18**, then He meant that the decision of the church to either restore the wayward believer (*because he has repented*), or to treat him as an unbeliever (*because he has rebuffed the churches efforts*) – that decision has already been made in heaven. In other words, when done right, the church will do what God has already decided should be done.
  - 2. This should give us the confidence that when we deal with wayward believers according to God’s prescribed methods and with a godly, humble attitude, we are doing His will and have His support.
- B. **Matthew 18:19-20**, “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.”
  - 1. It is common for Christians to take these two verses out of context, and that is okay because they affirm that God is in the midst of His people, and that when we pray with other believers, we can be confident that God hears our united prayers and will answer.
  - 2. However, if we want to understand these two verses within the context of **Matthew 18**, then it appears Jesus is urging prayer (1) for the

wayward believer, (2) for the process of restoration, and (3) for those engaged in seeking to restore the wayward believer. And Jesus is encouraging us to pray by affirming that God is with us in such prayer meetings, and that such prayers will be answered.

3. And what should we be praying for? For the Holy Spirit's conviction of the wayward believer. For the wayward believer to have a softened heart and open mind to hear truth and give it careful consideration. For the power of God's word to penetrate the wayward believer's heart and mind. For wisdom, insight, sensitivity, godly attitudes, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit for those speaking to the wayward believer, and for the wayward believer to respond before it gets to the church.
4. In my experience, there is great value in praying often for wisdom and insight for myself, and for receptivity and understanding on the part of the one being talked to. This includes praying silently during the conversation, itself, whenever prayer is needed. I am urging you to pray this way.

### III. Forgiveness

- A. **Matthew 18:21-35**, Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother **sin against me** and I forgive him? (*How long do I have to maintain a relationship with him if he repeatedly hurts me?*) Up to seven times?" [22] Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven (*490 times*). [23] For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. [24] When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents (**\$200+ million** – *an impossible amount to repay*) was brought to him. [25] But since he did not have the means to repay (*had no possible way of repaying*), his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made (*he faced the loss of everything because of his huge debt*). [26] So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' (*a promise he could not keep*) [27] And the lord of that slave felt compassion and **released him** and **forgave him** the debt (*freed him from any obligation to repay his insurmountable debt*). [28] But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii (*dih NEHR ih eye* – *about \$16,000* – *less than one-hundredth of a percent of what he owed*); and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' [29] So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead

with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ (*an amount possible to repay*) [30] But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. [31] So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened (*NOTE: the forgiven slave was still subject to his lord after being forgiven, just as we are to God*). [32] Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, **I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded** with me. [33] Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ [34] And his lord, **moved with anger**, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. (*Since the debt was insurmountable, he would be in the hands of the torturers forever*) [35] My heavenly Father will also **do the same to you**, if each of you does not **forgive his brother from your heart**.”

- B. Unlike some parables, this one is easy to understand: God will withdraw His forgiveness of our insurmountable, eternal debt if, after being forgiven, we withhold forgiveness from those who sin against us. However, there are two primary ways today’s Christians tend to fall short in applying this parable to themselves.
1. **First**, the popular understanding of eternal security and imputed righteousness negates what Jesus is saying about God withdrawing His forgiveness of our insurmountable debt and handing us over to eternal torment.
    - a. In other words, we need not fear God’s anger or the loss of His forgiveness if we fail to forgive an evil, toxic person who in some way mistreats us.
    - b. Though this does not mean God is happy with us if we do not forgive, it does not mean our eternal relationship with God is in jeopardy if we don’t forgive. This seems to be a popular view.
  2. **Second**, too often Christians see their own sins as small in comparison to the sins committed against them. When forgiveness is viewed from this perspective, it seems reasonable to believe God will forgive us while not expecting us to forgive the more heinous sins of others.
  3. However, the humble Christian sees himself more nearly as he is, and mourns over having treated God so badly. From this perspective, the humble Christian knows that those who sin against him deserve his forgiveness since he has been forgiven so much more and so freely by God. Therefore, valuing relationships, the humble Christian forgives in order to heal or restore a damaged or broken relationship.

- C. Before talking about what forgiveness is, I want to point out what it isn't. According to popular thinking in the world and the church, many believe forgiveness is the path to personal, mental, and emotional health when sinned against in some way.
1. For example, people say, "I am not forgiving you for your sake, but for my sake. It is the only way I can heal and get on with my life."
    - a. The belief is that forgiveness is letting go of anger, grudges, resentment, bitterness, ill-will, and a desire for retribution in order to calm the mind, soothe the emotions, reduce stress, and regain an overall sense of well-being – as opposed to remaining bound by hurt, anger, resentment, and all that goes with it.
    - b. Yet because this idea of forgiveness is for your own sake, it does not require reconciliation. You can fulfill your duty to forgive without having to see or deal with the person again.
  2. However, this not forgiveness.
- D. True forgiveness requires the participation of both parties – the one wronged and the one doing the wrong – and results in a reconciliation that either heals or restores the relationship.
1. If the process of forgiveness does not include a sincere seeking **and** sincere giving of forgiveness, if it does not bring healing to a damaged or broken relationship, then it is not forgiveness.
    - a. Of course, for both parties to be sincere, they must value the idea of relationships and the specific relationship that has been damaged or broken.
    - b. Is this not a primary reason God forgives us? Therefore, if we are to forgive as God forgives us, we must value relationships in general as God values them, and with each individual – just as God values His relationship with you and me.
  2. So once again, forgiveness requires the sincere participation of both parties – the one wronged and the one committing the wrong – so that reconciliation can take place.
    - a. The word *reconcile* comes from the word *conciliate*. To conciliate is to bring together, or unite – such as uniting a man and a woman in marriage on the day of their wedding. However, if after their wedding day a rift in their relationship occurs, they need to reconcile, that is, they need to come back together, to be re-united.
    - b. Therefore, reconciliation takes place through confession, working out differences, and giving forgiveness. When this happens, the

two parties are able to restore mutual love, mutual trust, harmony, and goodwill. They re-united in spirit and in truth.

3. Because forgiveness takes two, you cannot restore a damaged or broken relationship with one person forgiving while the other continues their relationship damaging behavior. To make their confession and seeking forgiveness real, the sinner must show observable and reasonable progress in putting an end to their hurtful ways. Without this, there can be no healing or restoring of the relationship.
  4. In a similar way, you cannot restore a damaged relationship with the offender changing their ways while the offended withholds forgiveness. The offended party must want a reconciled relationship (*as Jesus said, "forgive from the heart"*), and in so doing, open the door to restoring trust. Trust may have to be re-earned, but the opportunity to re-earn it can only come from a reconciled relationship.
    - a. This means the one forgiving, must relinquish any claim to repayment, or any demand for punishment, or any feelings of anger, resentment, bitterness, and desire for alienation or revenge.
    - b. Where the law requires repayment or some form of punishment, than the one seeking forgiveness must act according to the law, while the one forgiving must act according to God's will and word regrading forgiveness.
  5. To summarize:
    - a. The motive for seeking and giving forgiveness is love, love that places the highest possible value on shared relationships built on mutual love and trust.
    - b. The purpose of forgiveness is to heal a damaged relationship or restore a broken relationship.
    - c. The outcome of forgiveness is the restoration of mutual love, mutual trust, harmony, and goodwill between the parties involved.
- E. Now you may be wondering, if one-sided forgiveness is not God's solution, then how do we deal with the hurt, the anger, and the resentment and bitterness over being mistreated again and again? Those who repeatedly sin against us may want forgiveness, but they do not yet want to forsake their sinful ways. So what do we do with those strong, pervasive thoughts and feelings of wanting nothing more to do with the offensive person who is unrepentant? God provides the solution in His word.
1. **Ephesians 4:31-5:2**, Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

- [32] Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. [5:1] Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; [2] and **walk in love**, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
2. **Colossians 3:12-14**, So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; [13] bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. [14] Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.
  3. **Ephesians 6:10-12**, Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. [11] Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. [12] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
  4. These scriptures show us the reason for and the path to right thinking and feeling – regardless of the offender’s continued behavior.
    - a. Consider, who gets the victory in your life when you hold on to angry, bitter feelings – God or the devil?
    - b. Consider, how does letting go and trusting God, or hanging on and remaining resentful and bitter effect your character, your attitudes, your peace of mind, and your commitment to godliness?
  5. We can, if we will, trust God to take care of us in spite of being hurt and mistreated by those around us – which includes those who ought to love us because of the nature of our relationship with them (*parent, spouse, sibling*).
    - a. One way to trust God is to ask for wisdom regarding how to relate to the unrepentant person who keeps sinning against us – wisdom to deal with them with love and godliness while not being swayed by their bad behavior, and without despising them.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. As **Romans 12:9** says, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil, cling to what is good.” And **Romans 12:21** says, “Do not be overcome by evil (*driven to do evil in response*), but overcome evil (*by responding*) with good.”