

Biblical Forgiveness Conflict Resolution by the Book

Introduction

- We have thus far studied the science of God's forgiveness towards us and an ideal model for human forgiveness.
- Of course, dealing with imperfect men means that not every interaction is ideal.
- In this lesson we will look at Christ's model for resolving conflict in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18 in Context

- Events that preceded Christ's discussion in Matthew 18:15-20
 - Peter made his great confession and was given the keys of the kingdom – Matthew 16:13-20
 - Peter was reprimanded for rebuking Christ speaking about His coming death – Matthew 16:21-23
 - Disciples told they must bear their own cross – Matthew 16:24-28
 - Peter, James, and John witnessed the Transfiguration while the others did not – Matthew 17:1-8
 - Christ would suffer as did John the Baptist – Matthew 17:9-13
 - The other nine disciples had been unable to heal the possessed boy – Matthew 17:14-21
 - Christ tries to counter growing their growing pride by again speaking of His coming death – Matthew 17:22-23
 - Peter is questioned about tribute and Christ illustrates humility – Matthew 17:24-27
 - Christ uses a child to show what true greatness was – Matthew 18:1-5
 - During this time, John wants to stop others casting out devils – Mark 9:38-40
 - Discussion about offenses – Matthew 18:6-10, Mark 9:41-50
 - Parable of the lost sheep – Matthew 18:11-14
- Observations
 - Christ was preparing to go to Jerusalem to be crucified but His disciples were busy squabbling.
 - Christ was trying to get the disciples to not look upward toward being great but instead to look below them at the lost and hurting.
 - The priority was not in lifting righteous men up, but in strengthening the lost and struggling.
 - This is illustrated in the concern of the shepherd for his lost sheep.
 - This love for the brethren and caution against offending begs the question: what do I do if I am wronged?

The Model for Resolving Offenses

- There must be an offense to being with – vs. 15
 - This is not about bullying people into submission with no purpose.
 - The underlying goal is to forgive and restore
 - This model only works if this is the heart of the victim.
- STEP ZERO
 - The best-case scenario is that the injurer comes to the victim and seeks forgiveness without proceeding with this model.
- STEP ONE – The victim speaks to the injurer privately – vs. 15
 - This keeps the ordeal out of the public eye.
 - It allows for private reconciliation – Psalm 141:5, Proverbs 25:9-10
 - Hopefully, this will resolve the matter, and the relationship will be restored and even strengthened.
- STEP TWO – The victim takes one or two unbiased, respected third parties to aid to meet with the injurer. – vs. 15
 - This fulfills one of the foundational concepts for justice in having multiple witnesses – Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:5
 - This allows for additional input, even against the victim – Proverbs 11:14
 - Hopefully this will resolve the matter, the relationship is restored, and all involved keep it private.
- STEP THREE – The victim takes the case before the church – vs. 16
 - Who is “the church”?
 - This is only the second mention of the church after Matthew 16:18
 - It is definitely local and visible, not universal or invisible.
 - Though this predates the Book of Acts by about 6 months, I think this is both practical and preemptive in its scope and speaks of a local community of believers.
 - This form of church discipline puts community pressure on the injurer to repent.
 - Hopefully this extreme step brings them to repentance and restoration.
- STEP FOUR – The injurer is to be made an outcast from the community of believers.
 - Why? Because they have violated the fundamental law of love – John 13:34

Bonus!!!

- The theme of forgiveness and restoration continues through the end of Matthew 18.
- This includes Matthew 18:18-20 which are often ripped out of context.
 - In vs. 18-19 the authority of the church body is described.
 - In vs. 20 Christ promises to guide such a body in situations such as conflict resolution.