

Jesus Taught About the Importance of Forgiving

In our last topic, we saw that we want to show our physical and spiritual children how to help weak and struggling Christians that have gone astray and bring them back into the fellowship of the church. In this topic, we will see that Jesus taught about the importance of seeking to bring about reconciliation between Christians in conflict.

Christians do have conflict, because we still sin as long as we are here on this earth. We saw, in the previous topic, that a sheep can go astray. After giving that parable, Jesus went on to say in Matthew 18:15-17, “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.” And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” The word translated “moreover” is used nearly twenty-nine hundred times in the New Testament and is usually translated “but” or “and”. As a result of the use of this word, this verse points out the fact that some who sin against others do so because they have gone astray. These verses give us the process to seek restoration of the person.

The first step in the process to restore a brother that has gone astray is to go and talk to the person alone. The word translated “his fault” is used in seventeen verses in the New Testament and this is the only verse where the word is translated this way. The word is normally translated “reprove”, “rebuke” or “convict”. In John 16:8, we see that this is one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit to one who is not yet a Christian. That verses says, “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” In this verse, the word is translated “convict”. In John 8:9, Jesus used this word as He talked to the men condemning the woman caught in the act of adultery. That verse says, “Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.” Here, we see that their consciences convicted these men.

James used the word to give a rebuke to many in the church when he said in James 2:8-9, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Here, we see that the law itself convicts those who show partiality and favor the rich over the poor. Deuteronomy 1:17 told the judges of Israel, ““You shall not show partiality in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great; you shall not be afraid in any man’s presence, for the judgment *is* God’s. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me, and I will hear it.”” This verse indicates that the rich were taking advantage of the poor in the early church. In such a case, the rich person would be sinning against the poor person. Ideally, the sin can be corrected by just the rebuke of the individual.

However, if the person will not listen to you, verse 16 says, “But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”” Here, we see that if the person who has gone astray refuses to hear you, you are to take one or two others with you to talk to the person. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, “One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.” If the person refuses to hear the two or three witnesses, then those witnesses are to tell the entire church of the refusal of the person to repent. Finally, if the person refuses to listen to the entire church, that person is to be removed from fellowship with the church until the person repents. 1 Corinthians 11:31-32 says, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

Matthew 18:18-20 says, “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ‘Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.’” In this case, the church would be binding a person on earth. 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 explains, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” Here, we see that a Christian who goes astray and refuses to repent is actually turned over to the Lord to bring the person to repentance. The previous paragraph and these verses say that the Lord will chasten (discipline) the person, and if necessary, even allow physical death, so that He can take the person to heaven, in order to restore that person to fellowship with Himself.

This is a reminder of the fact that absolutely nothing can separate a true believer, even one who goes astray, from the love of Christ. Romans 8:35-39 says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In these verses, we see that no created person or thing can separate a true believer from the love of Christ.

The purpose of this discipline is always to restore the person to the fellowship of the church. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Here, we see that a Christian may be committing any trespass or sin, but the goal is always restoration. This restoration and love is illustrated in 2 Corinthians 2:6-8 where we read, “This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him.” Here, we see that as soon as there is repentance,

we are to loose the one who has been bound for discipline by the Lord. Here, we see that even a leadership team of only two or three elders can gather together in the name of Christ and know that the Lord is present with them as they loose the one who has been bound for discipline. This allows even the leadership team of a very small church to publicly reaffirm their love for the person disciplined and to publicly restore the person.

Jesus had just given the parable about the sheep that had gone astray and the rejoicing that followed when the sheep was found. Then, in the verses above, Jesus said that those who repent are to be loosed and restored by the leadership of even the smallest church. This caused Peter to ask a new question. Matthew 18:21-22 says, “Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘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 thought that he was really being generous when he asked if he should forgive a brother up to seven times.

The Jewish rabbis had developed a tradition that a person should only be forgiven three times. They based that tradition on the book of Amos. Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13 and 2:1 all say the same thing about various enemies as only the name used is different in the following statement from each of these verses, “Thus says the LORD: ‘For three transgressions of _____, and for four, I will not turn away its *punishment*.’” In the various verses, the blank includes the name of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon and Moab. The rabbis said that if God would punish these people for the fourth transgression, they should only forgive a person three times. Of course, there is a major problem with that interpretation because in Amos 2:4 and 2:6 the same statement is used with the names of Judah and Israel, instead of an enemy. By their unforgiving spirit, the rabbis were actually condemning themselves.

Here, we see that Jesus showed that the tradition of the rabbis did not show the heart of God. Instead, it showed the rabbis own unwillingness to forgive. That helps us to understand why Peter thought that he was being very generous to offer to forgive seven times. Jesus said to Peter in verse 22, “...I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” By this statement, Jesus made it clear that, as Christians, we are to continue to forgive. The reason that we should continue to forgive is the fact that God, in Christ, has forgiven us all of our sins. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” In Christ, God forgave us all of our sins. Now, Christ lives in our hearts and He tells us to be kind to one another. 1 Corinthians 13:4a says, “Love suffers long *and* is kind.” As a result, the definition of love is that it is patient and kind. Christ has also given us the Holy Spirit as our Helper, so that as we yield to Him, we are given the strength of God to show this patience and kindness by forgiving others.

This is a key lesson that we want to show our physical and spiritual children, by our example. We show our love as we forgive others. By providing our children with our example, we help them to realize that the Holy Spirit can give them the strength to forgive others regardless of what others might do to them. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children, by your example, the importance of forgiving others.

