

This morning last message in cutting straight God's word- take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 18- saved this for last- and before I went on vacation- yes it was on purpose- my introduction to this is little different than normal- have Allana to thank for that- the reason is a conversation that occurred between Allana and me- I could go into all the details but I'll sum it by paraphrasing her, I don't think you're right- it was about a 30 minute conversation but that was the basic idea- what verse are we talking about- that would be Matthew 18:20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them- the debate was not over the truthfulness of that verse or promise that Jesus is with us and with his church- the question concerns the context- let's read the passage beginning in Matt. 18:15-22- the debate centers around vs. 18- the specific question being is does Matthew switch topics here- my answer is no- remember say this often the chapter numbers, verse numbers, and headings though helpful are not inspired- if you had copies of Matthew it begins with Biblos genesis and ends with Amen- the chapter headings start to appear in 1200's- verse numbers are added 1550 to the Textus Receptus and the first time they appeared in an English Bible was the 1560 Geneva Bible- not until study bibles are the section headings added- now to establish my argument I have to use the very numbers I just told you were not inspired-

vs. 7 temptation to sin and then the consequences- vs. 10 lost sheep is a believer who wanders off into sin- vs. 15 when a brother sins against you- vs. 21 Peter asks the question about sin and forgiveness- vs. 23 a parable about forgiveness- if you didn't have verses or topic headings I don't think anyone would conclude a topic changes occurs in vs. 18- with that in mind that is how I'm going to approach the passage this morning- following that I argue

the promise in vs. 20 applies to sin, reconciliation, discipline, and forgiveness as the church engages in its God ordained act of redemptive discipline-

1. The process of forgiving one another- vs. 15 states when a brother sins against you-a believer sins against you- notice first this about church relationships- this is not if an unbeliever sins against you- this sections instructs how we interact with someone else who has confessed Jesus Christ as Lord- second notice it's not speculative- a clear offensive has been committed against you- brother Bob lied against brother Bill- sister Sally slandered sister Sophie- third notice the solution is placed on the injured party- your immediate response is mine as well- I shouldn't have to confront the person who sinned against me- it feels like God is adding to our pain- it is how biblical forgiveness and justice by the way is to be handled- the injured person is the one who files suit- not the defendant- fourth this is not an instruction to confront a believer for every sin committed against you- told in Col. 3:13 and Eph. 4:2 that we bear with one another in love- it is possible for someone to accidentally sin against you- not downplaying your hurt, at the same time, sometimes the correct course of action is to bear with that person in love- forgive them without confronting them- not to mention there is not enough time in your life to keep track of every single sin committed against you- the instructions given here are for a believer who persists in their sin against you, doesn't seek you out to apologize, and refuses to repent- to achieve forgiveness a clear process is outlined- it has four steps- each step becomes more intense, yet the desire is to solve the problem at the first step- notice the steps are reversed concentric circles- don't start with the largest and work toward the smallest- start with the smallest and work to the largest-

1. Private plea- step one is the easiest at the same time is viewed with dread- you alone go the person alone and inform them what happened- this step neither leadership nor the church body are involved- this is you and the person who sinned against you- you go to them, inform them of their sin against you, give them a chance to repent- the dread is we don't like confrontation- I get it's not fun- at the same time this is one person in Christ talking to another person in Christ- we're talking to our brother or sister- each is accepted by Christ- we are one- we are on the same Christian journey- we have the same hope- we should be able to have difficult conversations without fear of being rejected by one another or by Jesus- this first step is so important- if we can get this step right, then the problem is solved and there is no need to escalate the problem- if the sin stops here then it does not affect the church- if that doesn't work then

2. With Witnesses- the sinned against person takes 2 or 3 people- the circle of people involved is still small- 4 to 5 people- the 2 or 3 requirement comes from **Deut. 19:15-** requires 2 or 3 witness for a crime- 2 or 3 witnesses lessens the probability of a conspiracy at the same time adding to the veracity of the accusation- notice it neither recommends or prevents church leaders from being involved- absolutely enlist the deacons or pastor, at the same time it might be better to get 2 or 3 people who know that person and cares for that person- make the conversation easier- because the goal is not to gang up on the person- it is to help both parties think through the situation biblically with an attitude of humility and grace- if that doesn't work then

3. Church Counsel- at this point the church is involved and becomes a church discipline issue- there is an aversion to discipline- it's hard- can be emotionally painful- not fun- people to walk around going yay church discipline- no matter the church is given clear instructions to engage in church discipline- the person involved in the sin refuses to listen- no longer possible to contain the sin- the church is involved- the desire here again is the person will see the church is opposed to their behavior- if the whole church is against your behavior then surely the behavior is wrong- what if that doesn't work then the last step is

4. Congregation action- told to treat the offenders as vs. 17- gentile and a tax collector- side note here- again credit to Allana here- she looked at me and asks how do you think Matthew felt when he wrote that verse- what was Matthew- a tax collector- treat them as someone outside the community- they are no longer part of God's people- that sounds like an extreme step it is because it is an extreme step- this is not where the process starts- it is where the process ends- nothing else has worked- the sinner has said I hear and I refuse to repent- at this point the church says we disagree with but respect your decision- since being a member of a church is mutual decision the church has the authority to remove someone from the community- **1 Cor. 5:1-2** the Holy Spirit instructs Paul to write there is a member in the congregation at Corinth engaged in sexual immorality and you need to remove him- this step is to maintain the purity of the church for God's glory- it is not a vindictive activity- it is a purifying activity against an unrepentant brother or sister- second notice

2. The purpose is restoration of the sinner.- going through all this the question is what is the goal- why are we told to deal with a

sinning brother this way- it keeps us from other responses- we could choose bitterness- mad that the person hurt us- we could chose retaliation- I'll get back at you for that- we could chose gossip- tell everyone I come in contact with about what you did- we could choose avoidance- perhaps even leaving the church- none of those are commanded- some are sins and that is not an option- those actions don't do you or the one who sinned against you any good- the problem is not solved and you're still hurt- the goal is restoration- from step one all the way to step four is to restore the one who has sinned- vs. 15 you have gained your brother- the relationship once broken by sin is restored- that's the goal- you don't want a relationship that is important to you to be permanently destroyed- nor do you want the sinning person to be left to their sin- look at how this section is introduced- vs. 10- is the parable of the lost sheep- we know it better from Luke's account where it is part of three lost parables- here Matthew records the parable in the section of church relationships- a shepherd has 100 sheep, one strays- the shepherd leaves the 99 to find the missing sheep- with the goal of restoring the 1 back to the flock of 99- thereby making his flock whole again- the wandering sheep is a believer who strays from God- one way a believer strays is through sin- break of fellowship- instead of letting the person continue straying, we are commanded to find them to bring them back to the congregation- to make the congregation whole again- that's what Jesus does and that is what we are to emulate- we want restoration- restoration brings great joy- the shepherd rejoices over the one who was lost and brought back- the church rejoices of the sinner who is restored back to God and to the congregation- the gospel is the gospel of restoration- Jesus died on the cross to redeem us from our sins which restores the fractured relationship with God- while it would be great to not sin again, we still do-

when we sin the goal of the gospel is still restoration- not to redeem us again but to recovery the sweetness and intimacy of our relationship with Jesus- and if He desires that restoration should we as the church not also desire restoration with a brother or sister who strayed- yes- which is why we are told how to achieve restoration- then finally

3. The promise of Jesus during the process- the process of restoration is difficult- Jesus makes three promises to us as we go through the process- vv. 18-19

1. He promises us his authority- binding and loosing speaks to authority the authority we have to act as a church comes from Jesus- it is his church- he is in control of it- what we do in church is a reflection of what Jesus does in heaven- if a person refuses to repent- the church can say ok, you are enslaved to your sin, and your sin is not forgiven- say that not because we judged it to be true but because Jesus said so- conversely if the person says I repent then the church can say you are forgiven of your sins because Jesus said so- 1 John 1:9 addresses both of those situations- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness- no confession no forgiveness- confession then forgiveness-

2. He promises us His support- vs. 19 there is agreement between heaven and the church- this isn't a blank check where two people agree and therefore forces God to agree with us- when the church confronts sin, to uphold the purity of God and His church we do so with the full support of God the father in heaven- ambassador analogy works well here- the ambassador speaks with the support

of the president- the church speaks against sin we speak with the support of the Father-

3. He promises us His presence- finally we get to the vs. 20- this is about the difficult work of dealing with sin, discipline, and restoration- I'm not sure what could be a more difficult situation that the church must engage- all kinds of situations we would rather be involved in- mission activities, baptisms, celebrating victories in Jesus- in those joyful moments we never doubt if Jesus is with us- we know that he is- great promise of Psalm 23 of Matthew 28 is the promise of his presence with us- this extends to his church- **Col. 1:17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church-** the great promise of Matt. 18:20 is that in the middle of the most difficult of possible church situations, Jesus is right there with us-

Want to end this morning with this- look at vs. 21-23- vs. 23 begins a parable- demonstrates the extravagant grace Jesus extends to sinners- our sin is like the man who owed 10,000 talents- it is an impossible sum of money to comprehend- this is our sin- reminds us of our infinite sinfulness- stands in contrast to God's infinite holiness- there is no way for us move from one end of infinity to the other to repay the debt of our sin- but God had a plan- Jesus left heaven, took the form of a human, humbled himself to the position of a servant, died on the cross for our sin, endured God's wrath thus creating the way for our infinite sin to be repaid- since Jesus has extended such extravagant grace toward us, should we not also extend that grace to those who sin against us- should not Red Bank be known as a church who by Jesus' strength operates with the same compassion and forgiveness that characterizes our Savior- yes we should- Jesus promises he will be with us-

