

*The Great Sayings in the Gospels*  
*Message 85*  
*If Your Brother Sins*

Matt 18:15-35

- 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.
- 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.
- 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.
- 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
- 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.
- 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.
- 21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?
- 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.
- 23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.
- 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.
- 25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.
- 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.
- 28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.
- 29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
- 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.
- 31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.
- 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:
- 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?
- 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.
- 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. KJV

**Introduction:**

Quite obviously this text is too long for us to go verse by verse through it this morning and expound every truth and element of it. It will suffice, I trust, for us to seek to glean the essence of it.

The central thought and teaching is found stated in the negative in v.35. We might state the positive in this way, “You, as a Christian, are under the injunction of God to forgive, from your heart, your brothers in Christ who trespass against you.”

The scriptures envision a fellowship of the saints that is far different from that in which we have been immersed since we were children.

That fellowship was based in several important elements: True Conversion, Genuine Repentance from sin *on the part of all*, Real Faith, Humble Gratitude toward God for His Grace, Unpretended and Earnest Love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.

One of the important manifestations of those elements is that the children of God, particularly the members of one of Christ’s churches, should live together in harmony and spiritual fellowship that does not allow for unresolved grievances between the individual members.

This teaching is a continuation from the discussion that we studied together last week. That general theme was, “how horrible it is to sin against a child or cause a child to ‘stumble,’ to sin because of the words, teachings, treatment, or influence of an adult.”

The word “moreover” chosen by the King James translators to begin v.15 reflects the words in the Greek which make this a furtherance of the same discussion and a segue into a different, but related, topic.

We might summarize this way, “it is wrong to sin against a child, and, while we are on the topic, there are responsibilities that you have to one another concerning sins of adults against adults.”

The ideal, of course, is that no Christian ever sins against anyone, beginning with God and extending to all of humanity. The reality is that we do sometimes sin against one another. **WHEN WE DO SIN**, there are responsibilities all around.

**I.Let me begin in this way. The discussion today is limited to real sin not the imagined sins that our culture deals with and to which we have become conditioned.**

There is nothing here that concerns “*how I make you feel.*” You will notice that when there is news concerning some event there is an inevitable question that will be asked over and over, “*and how did that make you FEEL?*” The American people have been sold a bill of goods over many things but one of the most annoying, if nothing else, is this idea that one person can make another person *feel* some particular way and that if someone “*makes*” someone else “*feel bad*” then a great sin has been committed.

Let me see if I can illustrate. Suppose, as you are coming out of the building today, that I slap each one of you hard on the cheek. There is one thing that you will all *feel* and I will be the cause of it. Each of you will have a stinging cheek.

Other than that, each will react and *feel* somewhat differently. Some of you will be hurt emotionally. “Why would Brother Larry treat me that way?” they will rightly ask. Some may even go to their car and cry over such treatment. Others will be angry. “How dare he do that to me!” they will say. Others will be mystified. “What is wrong with our pastor?” and they will ponder different reasons why I might have done such a thing. There may be other and varied responses from different ones. At least one, I hope, will react this way. “Brother Dean must be having a horrible day to be treating us all this way, I am going home and pray that God will help him.”

The same event would have a different emotional impact on different people. The question is, which of those reactions did I cause? I caused stinging cheeks to everyone, but did I cause the different *feelings* that everyone had?

Ready for the answer? **No!** I did not cause the reactions. All of the reactions, all of the *feelings* were *chosen responses*. And each person who chose the response is, therefore, accountable to God for the choices. I didn’t make anyone *feel* sad, mad, mystified, or compassionate. Therefore, ready for this?, ***I am not responsible for how they felt.*** I am responsible for my actions and for the motivations that I acted upon. And, I am responsible for sinning against you and against God by treating you unkindly. Oh, and I am responsible for your cheeks hurting.

The reason that I say this is because this topic of sin and the responsibilities that each carry causes people to get lost in this modern quicksand of *how it made me feel* rather than dealing with concrete sins.

So, let us begin with this principle in mind, that we are dealing only with concrete and definite sins, not the way that we project the responsibility for our reactions upon others.

**II. First of all, Jesus has already taught that when one Christian sins against another, the one who sins has the first responsibility.**

Matt 5:23-24

23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. KJV

Jesus here was speaking in terms of Jewish worship but the principle applies to NT worship as well. When a Christian comes to pray, to sing, or to consider a message from God’s word, he/she has a responsibility before God to come in repentance of all known sin.

If there is an issue with another person in which we have sinned against them, we are to make that matter right *before* worship. It is so important, Jesus said, that all attempts at worship should stop until that matter is resolved. Understand, please, that we are talking here about the *person who has committed the sin*. The first and primary duty lies with the sinning one and not the one sinned against.

The matter that Jesus was discussing in the text before us today begins with a problem. Someone has sinned and has not made it right.

I think that people generally do not understand the kind of spiritual problem that this causes.

Ps 66:16-20

16 Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.

17 I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue.

18 ***If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:***

19 But verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer.

20 Blessed be God, which hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me. KJV

The word David used in v.18, "*regard*" means, literally, "to look," but it has the idea of looking with approval or at least *not looking in repentance* at the sin. The idea is that we hold on to iniquity, refuse to turn from it, refuse to repent of it, and then undertake to lift up worship to God.

Our avenue to worship is cut off to the degree that we hold on to, and refuse to make right, sins that we have committed against others.

I have seen people undertake to make the one sinned against hold the primary responsibility. They do not and this text does not make them hold primary responsibility. But, sin has occurred. The one bearing primary responsibility had not done his/her duty. *Now what?*

**III. In such situations, as Jesus taught here, the one sinned against now has a responsibility.**

And, why is that? It is because there may be elements of the situation that the offended one may not have considered.

So, Jesus said, "go have a private conversation with the person over the matter." Do not discuss it with anyone else, do not let it get any larger than your own hurt or offense, until you have spoken with the person who has 'done the wrong.'

Reasons for this: misunderstanding, care not to embarrass or criticize the other in public, the harmony and fellowship of the church, *jealousy for the reputation of the brother/sister*, and..... it is just the right thing to do.

The hope, according to Jesus, is that the matter can be resolved between the two brothers and not ever go any further, that the relationship can be mended and all be restored without anyone else ever knowing that there was a problem at all.

That being said, the desire for reconciliation should guide the attitude and demeanor of the offended one as he/she approaches the one who has sinned. A belligerent, offended, harsh approach is not very likely to produce positive results and it is the positive outcome that we long for.

This means that the offended one must do some earnest soul-searching before he/she approaches the other. “Do I truly desire fellowship in Christ with this person?” “Is my heart right with God in this matter?”

And, then, this one, “if this doesn’t work, will other people see it as I do or will they suggest that I let it go and move on?” You see, the kind of “offense” that Jesus was talking about is one of the order that if others heard it they would agree that repentance is absolutely necessary.

This is not an issue for petty grievances and imagined offenses. Those things that are small and of little consequence we are to let go, dismiss, actively forgive if necessary, and move on without letting them in any way disturb the harmony of the fellowship of the two brothers or sisters in the church.

Things that are slightly larger and yet fall below the bar for serious church action or the involvement of others should be handled in godly, reasonable, kind and gentle conversation. Failure to deal with any offense in the church without a gentle conversation is doomed to bring harm to the relationship and, thus, some sort of harm to the church itself.

The grievances and sins for which a person may be dismissed from the church are quite clear and plain in scripture.

Gal 1:8-9

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. KJV

Titus 3:10-11

10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

11 Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

1 Cor 6:9-11

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. KJV

2 Thess 3:6

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. KJV

And why are such admonitions given? For one and only one reason: ***The people of God are to be people who stand in repentance of sin and the failure to repent of sin or the active involvement in that which is patently forbidden in scripture identifies anyone as one who has not repented and, therefore, is not to be recognized as a child of God.***

IV. Conclusion: One of the surest tests as to whether a religious person is a Christian is this: ***will he/she repent of sin when confronted with it by fellow Christians, the leadership of the church, or by the church herself?***

Let me ask you this. How would you handle it if a brother or sister in the church approached you to have a conversation about something that you may have done to cause offense?

What if I and the deacons came to call over some issue?

Could you hear or would you instantly be offended and defensive? ***How dare you say that I have sinned?***

Are you willing to be instructed? Is your heart open to correction?

How about your willingness to forgive, the third part of this discussion Jesus had with His disciples.

One of the key elements of this entire discussion is found in one of the last lines of the parable.

Matt 18:32 ..... O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: KJV

We have, supposedly, been forgiven a massive debt.

Those of us who have been baptized have publicly identified ourselves as a people determined to repent of all sin.

How is that working itself out in your life?