

Title: Humility, Longsuffering & Forgiveness

Text: Matthew 18: 1-35

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Our subject is: Humility, Longsuffering & Forgiveness.

In Matthew 18, verses 1-35, our Master teaches us true humility, the importance of not offending a fellow believer; he teaches us longsuffering in the steps to take toward a brother who has offended us and he teaches forgiveness is a state of the heart, unlimited like love, never stop forgiving. We can't cover every verse but we will touch on all three together because:

Proposition: Humility, longsuffering and forgiveness is the gracious fruit of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of grace of the new heart and the key to a happy church family.

I. HUMILITY (Mt 18: 1-14) Matthew 18: 1: At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

True Greatness in the Kingdom of Heaven

Answering this question in Mark 9: 35. The Lord said, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all."

Some teach this as punishment—as if, you will be permitted into heaven but because you wanted to be first you will be last of all and have to serve all. No one will be punished in heaven. The Lord was answering this question concerning true greatness.

"If any man desire to be first". If you truly desire to be what God regards and loves as first, "then be last of all and servant of all." Apply that to Christ. (Read Philippians 2)

What a reward heaven itself will be! In heaven, there will be only true righteous humility. All will love to be last and to serve all. And all, loving to be last and to serve all, will all be first. All in heaven will have Christ, with a total absence of pride, only desiring the other to be first and Christ to be All!

Child-like Humility

The Lord illustrated humility by setting a little child in their midst.

Matthew 18: 3: And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

The vain teaching of rewards in heaven—that some will be greater than others based on the believer's works—promotes pride which God hates. It teaches the exact opposite of how Christ made himself the very least and doing so, fulfilled the very spirit of the law's precept, which is love, and by doing so saved his people from our sins.

Those converted by God's grace from that vanity are given a heart of humility which desires Christ to have all preeminence, brethren to be first, faith which serves all by love. Except a sinner be given this new heart in the new birth, he will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Believers are One with Christ

Then Christ declares our brethren are so one with Christ that receiving or offending them is the same as doing it to Christ himself.

Matthew 18: 5: And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

Christ has put away the sin of his people, made us complete, and Christ abides in those born of the Spirit and they dwell in Christ—oneness.

Now it is impossible to exalt self over a brother without lessening our brother. And because the Spirit of Christ dwells in our brother, it is impossible to exalt self over a brother without doing so to Christ.

Application: That ought to humble us! Do you love Christ? Desire to serve Christ? Knowing what Christ has done for you, what would you do for Christ if he walked this earth now? Well, Christ dwells in each one our brethren. Our brethren are our opportunity for doing what we would do to Christ, for showing our love and gratitude to Christ!

We will skip verses 6-7 but there Christ encourages us that though offenses will come from the world, offenders shall receive due recompense from God. We will skip verse 8, but there Christ reminds us that offenses come from our sinful flesh—so put off the old man with his offensive deeds.

God the Father's Care so that None Shall Be Lost

Now look to verse 10, Christ shows us how precious brethren should be to us by reminding us how precious to God our brethren are.

Matthew 18: 10: Take heed that ye despise not [contemn not, do not think little of] one of these little ones; [brethren]

First, God the Father gives his angels charge to protect your brethren. **V10:...for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.**

Secondly, God himself came in human nature, served, suffered and redeemed each one. He seeks and finds each one. He rejoices over each one like a man finding his lost sheep. **Matthew 18: 11: For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.**

Matthew 18: 14: Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Application: So seek a spirit of humility, be diligent not to offend one of your brethren—to be first is to be last and serve one another. Now, having taught us true humility, to serve one another, bearing one another's infirmities, knowing we will yet offend each other, he teaches us...

II. LONGSUFFERING WHEN WE ARE OFFENDED (Mt 18: 15-20)—(The key here is longsuffering)
Matthew 18: 15: Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee,...

Not Nit-Picking Offenses

Believers are not looking for reasons to take offense with brethren.

Illustration: Head lice, you examine extra careful to pick the eggs, the nits. This is not nit-picking.

In many things we offend all. Likewise, our brethren are sinners still.

Romans 15: 1: We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2...for his good to edification

Colossians 3:13: Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

So we are not talking every little thing, but only a truly serious offense.

True Offences

What is truly offensive to us who believe on Christ? If we consider ourselves last with Christ preeminent and our brethren first then chiefly, that which diminishes the glory and honor due to God our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ offends us. Secondly, things hurtful to fellow brethren for whom Christ died and whom we love offends us. What hurts them hurts us. What draws their affection/focus from Christ draws our focus away. Things that will divide brethren disrupt the unity of God's church.

Four types of offenses worthy to be addressed are given in scripture:

1. Offences between brethren in business dealings with each other; (I Cor. 6:1-8). Paul gave a word on those who were unwilling to work, support their family
2. Offenses causing division among brethren—backbiting, malicious words (I Cor. 3:17; Eph. 4:29-5:1).
3. Confirmed, Publicly Known Moral Offences—Incestuous Man (I Cor. 5:1-5).
4. Heretical, Doctrinal Offences: Denial of limited atonement, blasphemy of free will works religion, doctrines of men—if it exalts man it denies salvation by God by grace through faith, apart from works we have done (I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 2:17-18; Tit. 3:10).

Longsuffering Demonstrated by the Steps We are to Take

The first step: **Matthew 18: 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.**

True love seeks good for one we truly love, **Ex.** God the Father to his children.

Hebrews 12: 6: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7: If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

Illustration: Correcting our children, “I am doing this because I love you?” Love corrects. Same is so between brethren...

Leviticus 19: 17: Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him

Application: So remember, if your brother comes to you about a serious offense, he loves you, so hear him. And when you go to your brother, the motive must be God's glory and unfeigned love for the brother. The object is to win your brother, not to punish, not to reproach, not to drive him away—to restore.

The first step is between thee and him alone: Christ bore our sins away, covered us in his righteousness. He teaches us to seek to cover the faults of brethren. So we don't broadcast his offense. We go to him alone.

If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

James 5: 20:..he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.

The second step: **Matthew 18: 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.**

You see how this is for serious matters that could truly jeopardize this brother and/or the unity of the church? Do you see the longsuffering, the great carefulness? These witnesses are not witnesses to build a case against the offending brother but witnesses of Christ who can establish every word that you have already discussed with the brother concerning Christ's glory and the good of fellow brethren. Hopefully, hearing the truth from one or two more will help the offending brother.

The third and fourth step: **Matthew 18: 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.**

It does not mean we bring him up before the church and we all sit like judge and jury in a courtroom. But we let other brethren know the matter in hopes that as others pray for him and speak to him one-on-one, hearing the truth from all in agreement will wake him up to acknowledge his offense. But if he will not hear, then **let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.**

Consolation

It is sad for his sake who insists to exalt himself above the whole church and falls away but as sorrowful as it is to see someone fall away, the Lord comforts the church with three words of assurance.

Matthew 18: 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.

This does not mean that whatsoever the church decides on earth, God will then do in heaven. Let me give you a translation easier to understand—"whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall have already been bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall have already been loosed in heaven."

Get this: When the church follows Christ in these steps the outcome is the church conforming to that which God has already done in heaven. He gives us the same comfort and assurance again.

Matthew 18: 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.

The prayer of our prayer in matters of discipline, as well as all matters, is, "Father, thy will be done." That being the soul of our prayer, we have the assurance that the final outcome is the Father doing his will. Again Christ gives us great reason for carefulness and consolation in the outcome. He declares the final Authority governing the whole matter in the midst of his church is Christ himself.

Matthew 18: 20: For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

These are those matters—that “salvation”—we work out together in the church family amongst ourselves which Paul refers to when he said “workout your own salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God which worketh in you both to will and do of his good pleasure.” (Php 2: 12-13)

Application: Knowing Christ is in our fellow brethren, knowing Christ is in our midst doing his will, oh, how humble, how longsuffering, how slow and careful we should be toward one another—that is the point Christ is making here—not to be hasty but extremely careful and longsuffering in matters of discipline.

We err—and need loving correction at times—but to you doing the correcting remember, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect, it’s God that justifieth.”

And if we be the offending party—if our heart is truly broken and contrite by grace then always remember: this is Christ’s instruction and this is love being shown you by your brethren

James 1: 19: Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and [sinful excess], and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. 22: But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

III. FORGIVENESS (Mt 18: 21-35)

Having been taught the importance of child-like humility, of not daring to offend our brother; having instructed us to be longsuffering toward an offending brother, Peter comes to the Lord with this question

Matthew 18: 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. (It means unlimited)

Put No Limit on Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a state of the heart as love and sympathy. A forgiver delights to return good for evil. Forgiveness does not dwell on wrongs done to us but forgets them. Remember what Christ has accomplished for you.

Hebrews 9: 17: And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. 18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

We know seventy times seven means no limit but I found this worth repeating, it is copied and paraphrased--“The sum seventy times seven equals four hundred and ninety. Now the proper definition of offense is that which is done without ANY PROVOCATION. If we examine ourselves we will not find, over the whole course of our entire life, that we have received four hundred and ninety offences in which we did not provoke at least half.”

Christ’s Motive is Best

Consider what Christ has done for us who rest solely in him. His illustration is found in verses 23 to the end. Let us not be as the unthankful, wicked servant.

Matthew 18: 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.

Believer, do we continue to offend Christ? We do more than we know or can count. Yet, Christ who put away our sins, stands as our Advocate with the Father—so we ought to pray for our offending brother as Christ does for us? And Christ forgives us, giving us fresh remembrance that he is our Righteousness with the Father—so we ought to be quick to forgive and to rejoice with our brother in the great things Christ has done for us both?

We who are abundantly forgiven by Christ bearing abundantly the stroke of justice for us should be most abundant in forgiveness toward one another.

Review: 1) Cultivate a humble spirit—to be first in the kingdom and church of God is to be last, desiring our brethren to be first to serve all; 2) when offended be longsuffering, prayerful and careful with the offending brother and 3) forgive one another without limit.

Humility, longsuffering and forgiveness is the gracious fruit of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of grace of the new heart and the key to a happy church family.

Amen!