

Matthew 18:15-35 | “When Other People Sin Against You”

*Preached on January 28, 2024 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 18 today, as we will be looking at verses 15-35. *[pause]*

In the late 1800’s, a major feud went on around the Kentucky-West Virginia border that claimed at least 20 lives, and possibly up to 100.

It was the famous Hatfield and McCoy family feud.<sup>1</sup> *[pause]*

These two families absolutely hated each other, and fought with one other for a couple decades. *[pause]*

It all started possibly because of one person stealing a hog from the other family.

But thereafter, there were repeated skirmishes, kidnappings, and killings.

Talk about animosity, grudges, and retaliation! *[pause]*

The one family would do something to the other family and then the other family would retaliate back, and it just kept going back and forth for a while. *[pauseeee]*

The Hatfield’s and McCoy’s are prime examples of what NOT to do when someone sins against you.

And they show us a clear, extreme example of what happens when you don’t deal with relational conflict in the right way. *[pauseeee]*

Now you probably don’t deal with others the way the Hatfield’s and McCoy’s did with each other.

Atleast, I sure hope you don’t go that far!

But I wonder if we, too, handle those who sin against us in wrong ways. *[pause]*

What do *you* do when others sin against you? *[pauseeeee]*

Now responding in the right way isn’t easy or else we would all do it more often, wouldn’t we?

But it’s hard! *[pauseeeee]*

The truth is that knowing how to respond to being sinned against is something that each of us needs to know like the back of our hand because *you are going to be sinned against!* *[pause]*

Some of you were sinned against this morning before church!

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<sup>1</sup> Information found at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hatfields-and-McCoys> & <https://time.com/5672415/hatfields-mccoys-feud-cause/>.

It happens most days, if not everyday, depending on your situation.

Especially if you live with others or work closely with other people, you will sin against each other. *[pause]*

In fact, the Bible assumes that we will sin against each other.

That's why Peter here asks if there's a limit to forgiving the same person because it happens so often.

And the Bible gives us clear instructions on what to do *when* it happens. *[pauseeee]*

Let's READ verses 15-20 to begin. *[READ]*

*The first thing we see is...*

### **I. What to do when someone sins: seek reconciliation!**

Now these verses are often called the verses about the process of church discipline, and they are...

...But the problem is that we like to just pull these verses out and use them, without regard to their context.

But looking at the context really opened my eyes to the nature and beauty of what's said here. *[pause]*

First, Jesus told us that we should all be humble like children back in the beginning of the chapter, so humility should characterize our approach to others when they sin against us. *[pause]*

But also, notice what follows these verses...

It's the whole teaching on forgiveness, and so we should be people who readily forgive others. *[pause]*

So when we approach others who sin against us, we are to be humble and ready to forgive.

That sheds some light on how we are to do this, doesn't it? *[pauseeee]*

But there's one more thing that I want to bring out that I never noticed until I just recently studied these verses.

Yet what I saw has really made this passage stand out to me. *[pause]*

What comes *right before* these verses?

It's the illustration of how God is like that man, who pursues the 1 sheep who wanders away from the 99 other sheep. *[pause]*

In that illustration, we saw the love and care of God, who is the pursuing, search-and-rescue God, who seeks to find that 1 wandering sheep, in order to bring it back.

And He rejoices over that sheep being restored. *[pause]*

Well right after that, Jesus shows us that we are to imitate our pursuing God, and pursue those who sin against us and stray. *[pauseeee]*

This is amazing!

So often people think the process stated here of confronting someone in sin is mean and off-putting.

Yet what do we see when we look at it in light of the previous verses?

It's a wonderful thing that reflects what God does for His sheep! *[pauseeee]*

When we pursue wandering believers, we are reflecting the love and care of God, who does that for us! *[pause]*

To lovingly pursue others in sin to bring them back is to mirror our Heavenly Father's loving pursuit of us! *[pause]*

So this is a loving thing to do! It's a God-imitating thing to do this! *[pauseeee]*

How is it that we view it as such a loving, caring thing to hear about that shepherd who searches for that 1 wandering sheep, but we think it's a mean, unnecessary thing for us to do it?

Because the process stated here is someone in pursuit of someone who has sinned.

That's why in the first step it says, "go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have *gained your brother*." *[pauseeee]*

The idea is that you are winning him back, reclaiming him back into the fold, like the joy of a rescued sheep. *[pauseeee]*

What a wonderful thing!

The process laid out here is a loving, rescuing, and God-reflecting thing to do, yet so many of us balk at the idea of confronting those in sin.

Yet this is what we as a church, and as individuals are to be doing. *[pauseeee]*

A friend of mine said that the church is to be like a search and rescue team, and I liked that description.<sup>2</sup> *[pause]*

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<sup>2</sup> Pastor Matt Mitchell, <https://matt-mitchell.blogspot.com/2005/10/matts-messages-search-rescue-church.html>.

We don't pursue people in judgmentalism, looking down upon them, ready to condemn them in a moment's notice.

**We don't pursue people needlessly, in order to make ourselves look better.**

We pursue people, imitating the loving, pursuing heart of the Father for His sheep.

**And He uses us as a means of bringing back His wandering sheep. [pauseeee]**

What an important role we have, and so what an important thing not to neglect! [pause]

Wouldn't it change our minds about this passage, if we remembered that we are to be like a member of a search and rescue team?

We aren't seeking to be rude, we are seeking to rescue. [pauseeeee]

**Now let's look at the process described here...**

It starts out with someone sinning against you, and you are called to go to that person privately and tell him or her their fault.

**If they listen (that is, repent), then great, you have gained your brother. [pause]**

But the process moves on, if they refuse to repent.

**For then you are to take 1 or 2 others with you, so that there are witnesses to the matter. [pause]**

If the person still doesn't listen to these people, then you are to bring the matter to the church, who pursues the person. [pause]

**And finally, if they still don't listen to the whole church, that is a huge deal, and they are to be treated as a Gentile and tax collector, meaning you treat them as an unbeliever. [pause]**

The reason you do this is that by their continual unrepentance, even when the whole church is calling them to repent, they are reflecting the character of an unbeliever. [pause]

**But here's the thing, how are we to treat unbelievers?**

With love!

**We love them, and desire for them to repent and turn to Christ! They need the gospel! [pauseeee]**

Now if I had unlimited time, I could go on to talk further about this process in great detail, but just as a summary...

**We see that we are to *do* this process, it's not optional.**

We see that this process is an orderly, just, and purposeful process...

Its purpose is restoration and it provides the person who sinned with a process that is orderly and just.

And this step-by-step procedure is God-given and God-backed, for when the church does this Biblically, they are working in conjunction with the Lord, having the endorsement of Heaven itself. *[pauseeee]*

Now we don't often think this way, but I want you to consider how this process is actually a very *gracious process*. *[pause]*

So many times people don't view this procedure as gracious, but as harsh, cruel, and unkind.

Yet think about how gracious this process really is. *[pause]*

First, there are many chances given.

It's not like you do the first step, the person doesn't repent, and you say, "OK buddy, you're done!" *[pause]*

No, there are many chances given, and with each chance there is an expanding circle of people involved.

That shows us that this procedure is not quick to condemn or quick to judge, but gives them chance after chance to genuinely repent, with many witnesses involved. *[pauseeee]*

The second reason that this is a gracious process is because the expectations aren't high, but only simple repentance is needed. *[pause]*

Think about that.

We aren't calling this person to fill out mounds of paperwork and red tape before things are resolved.

We aren't calling that person to do this many good works and crawl on their knees all the way up the mountain, and then they can be restored.

We aren't calling this person to do a 10-step plan to get back in our good graces. *[pause]*

We are simply calling them to repentance.

To admit that what they did was sin, and to show a desire to turn away from that sin - that's it.

We aren't calling them to get a 100% on a theological test, but simply to repent. *[pause]*

Every true Christian should be a repentant person, and that's why the final step is to treat them as an unbeliever because a genuine believer is a repentant person, especially when a whole church calls them repentance. *[pauseeee]*

And thirdly, this is a gracious process because it's to be done with gracious care for that person's soul.

We reflect the pursuing God, and we pursue those who are in sin and wandering. *[pauseeee]*

As I said earlier, some people see doing this as mean, harsh, and unkind, but if you think about it, it's actually mean, harsh, and unkind to not pursue that person.

To just let them continue in their sin is to essentially say, "I don't care about your soul. Keep going down that wrong path, it's fine."

And if you think that is loving, then you are downright deceived. *[pauseeeee]*

This is a gracious process that the God of all grace<sup>3</sup> has given to us! *[pauseeeee]*

Now let's go back to step 1 because this is where most of our issues come, right?

Most of our problem is that we don't do step 1.

We don't go to the person that sins against us and seek reconciliation. *[pause]*

What do we do instead?

For some of us when we are sinned against, we seek to retaliate or get revenge. *[pause]*

We may have outbursts of anger towards them, we spread malicious gossip, or we are rude to them.

But all of those responses are sinful responses, and are not what Jesus calls us to do.

Instead, we are to go to them in a spirit of love and a desire for reconciliation. *[pauseeee]*

Another common way to respond when someone sins against us is to simply do nothing.

We don't go to that person, but we sure do fume inside.

We become bitter and resentful, or we wallow in self-pity. *[pauseeeee]*

There are some of you in this room, and someone has sinned against you, but you haven't dealt with it in the Biblical way.

You haven't gone to the person, but resent them.

You are bitter towards them, or maybe in your case, you are seeking to find a way to get them back. *[pauseeee]*

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<sup>3</sup> A phrase used in 1 Peter 5:10.

Let me encourage and challenge you, based on the Word of God -- go to that person and seek to be reconciled. *[pause]*

Don't go to put them down and don't go and be mean to them, but go in a way that shows you lovingly want to be reconciled with them.

Follow what God's Word says in how to handle those who sin against you, and go to them. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe that means you need to meet up with someone today or this week, who has sinned against you, and you need to talk to them.

If they don't live in the area, maybe that means you need to call them up. *[pauseeee]*

Let me tell you, it won't be easy, but know that it's good, for you are following the Lord's ways. *[pauseeee]*

That's the way we handle those who sin, but what about those keep on sinning against us and repent?

Is there a limit to our forgiveness? *[pause]*

*The passage shows us next...*

## **II. What to do when someone repents: forgive!**

Let's READ verses 21-35. *[READ]*

This section on forgiveness relates well to what we just learned before.

Because it shows us that even if someone has gone through the church discipline process, if they are repentant, we should have open arms in forgiveness.

We don't become resentful or unforgiving towards them, but if there is repentance, we gladly and willingly forgive. *[pauseeee]*

But really, this passage relates to *any* person who sins and repents, for this whole sin and then reconciliation process seems to get Peter's mind thinking, for he's wondering if there's a limit to our forgiveness.

Is 7 times the limit? *[pauseeee]*

To Peter that was a lot to forgive someone 7 times, but Jesus raises the bar and says, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times." *[pause]*

His point isn't that you count up to 77 or seventy times seven (like some translations say), but that our forgiveness should have no limit. *[pauseeee]*

He gives a parable about a king and his servant. *[pause]*

The servant owes this absolutely massive debt, and yet the king extends forgiveness to him and forgives the whole thing. *[pause]*

Some commentators believe that this debt that was owed would be the equivalent of 6-12 billion dollars today.

That's an immense debt! And yet it's fully forgiven. *[pause]*

But this servant goes and finds someone who owes him a smaller debt, and is harsh with him. *[pause]*

The smaller debt that this other person owed him would be about 100 working days worth.

So in comparison to the huge debt that he got taken away, this other man's debt was *miniscule*. *[pauseeee]*

So when we see this, we are left thinking how absurd it is for this man to be so harsh with someone who owed so little compared to what he was just forgiven.

And that's the point. *[pauseeee]*

Due to this man's unwillingness to show mercy to someone after having received such great mercy, the master delivers him to the jailers, who torment him, until he should pay all his debt.

And the conclusion is, "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." *[pauseeee]*

The man who was unforgiving showed that he minimized his own debt, and had not consciously seen the magnitude of the grace and mercy of his master.

And someone like that I believe is an unbeliever, who has not genuinely seen themselves as a sinner in need of grace, and experienced the joy of forgiveness.

And that's why there is such severity from the master. *[pauseeee]*

Going back to the parable, we see that it points to the amazing grace of the infinite forgiveness of God.

Like that man, we owed an infinite sin debt that could never be paid back. *[pause]*

Think of the amount of times that you have sinned against God.

It's hard to count, isn't it? Because throughout our lifetimes we have sinned so much. *[pause]*

All we deserve is the consequences for our sin, but out of the deep compassion of the Lord, He has forgiven us fully through Christ's death on the Cross.



For Christ took our sin, every single sin that we committed and will commit, upon Himself and paid for it, by dying in our place, and satisfying the wrath of God against our sin. *[pause]*

Now through simple faith in Him, we get to receive full forgiveness, once and for all.

We walk free and forgiven like that man who owed a zillion dollars. *[pause]*

What great grace of God!

Like that master in the parable, He didn't have to do this, but out of His compassion, He did. *[pauseeee]*

Our hearts and minds must never forget what God has done for us through the Cross.

We must never fail to remember how huge our sin debt was, and how abundant the forgiveness of God is.

For when we bring to mind that infinite forgiveness, how could we ever be unforgiving people? *[pauseeee]*

That's what this parable is showing us.

In light of God's incalculable forgiveness, we are to forgive.

In light of God's deep mercy, we are to show mercy to others. *[pauseeee]*

Whenever someone sins against you, you can think, "I can forgive this person because compared to what I did to God and was lovingly forgiven, this is nothing compared to that." *[pauseeee]*

You see, we forgive because we were forgiven *everything*.

That's why in verse 33 it says, "And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" *[pauseeee]*

May we always remember that anyone who sins against us is a "fellow servant".

We aren't better than others, but we all need grace. *[pause]*

That wicked servant treated the man who owed him a little bit like he was horrible, all the while he was just forgiven billions.

And that's how we act when we refuse to forgive - we become hypocrites, who won't show grace to others, all the while we have been shown untold grace.

And isn't it interesting how we love being forgiven, but we can't stand forgiving others. *[pauseeee]*

Let's remember that any sin committed against us is tiny compared to the sin that we have committed against God.

Any grace that we show to others is microscopic compared to the grace we have been shown.

So how could we not show mercy and compassion to that person in light of what we have been forgiven for? *[pauseeee]*

It is absolutely ridiculous for us to be unforgiving towards another sinner, do you realize that?

How preposterous it is to think, "I want the grace of God, but I can't stand showing grace to that guy!" *[pause]*

That shows that we haven't truly been stunned by the grace of God. *[pauseeee]*

If you are struggling to forgive, remember the Cross and let your heart be re-impacted by the grace of Christ.

Think of your sin debt that was wiped clean forever.

Think of the mercy and compassion of the Father's heart towards you. *[pauseeee]*

We are to forgive others like our King has forgiven us, so who do you need to forgive? *[pause]*

Has someone sinned against you, and have you been unwilling to forgive them from your heart? *[pause]*

Are you bitter and resentful over what they did? *[pause]*

Really think about it, and be honest with yourself.

Are you wallowing in self-pity or steaming in anger?

Are you thinking about how to get them back? *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you are withholding forgiveness, thinking, "Before I forgive them, they must do this or that."

Or you say to them, "You have to work your way back into my good graces." *[pause]*

No, no, no - Jesus shows us that we *must* forgive the person who comes to us and repents.

This is not an optional thing, where only if you feel like forgiving them, you can, but not if you don't feel like it.

No, you must forgive, Jesus says in the gospel of Luke.<sup>4</sup> *[pause]*

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<sup>4</sup> See Luke 17:3-4, which is very clear on this point.

There is to be no limit on our forgiveness of others, for there was no limit on God's forgiveness of us. *[pauseeee]*

*So who do you need to forgive today? [pauseeee]*

There are some of you who haven't reconciled or forgiven someone, but you just pushing everything down and it has made you a bitter person.

*You haven't experienced the relief, joy, and peace of forgiveness and reconciliation. [pause]*

Let me encourage you, follow God's way.

*It's not always easy, but it's good. [pauseeee]*

*This passage shows us that...*

**We are to pursue and forgive others like our Father has done for us!**

The Bible doesn't assume that we will have sinless, perfect relationships, but it teaches us what to do when we sin against each other.

*Because we will sin against each other. [pause]*

Not that we don't care or don't strive to *not* sin, but we must be ready to know what to do when sin does happen.

*And let me tell you, First Baptist Church is not a perfect place. [pause]*

We will sin against each other, just like any church you could ever go to.

*So the question isn't, will we sin against each other?*

Rather, the question is, what will we do when we sin against each other? *[pause]*

*And what a beautiful picture it would be, if we followed God's ways...*

When we sinned against someone, we were lovingly confronted and we willingly repented and were reconciled.

*When we are sinned against, we readily go to that person and talk to them about it and then extend forgiveness, and there is peace. [pauseeeee]*

Yes, there is the hurt of sin, but when you follow God's ways, that hurt of sin is overcome by the tears, hugs, closeness, and love of forgiveness and reconciliation. *[pause]*

*That's the beauty of what Jesus is calling us to...*

Repentant and forgiving relationships that even amidst the pain of sin proclaim the beauty of what the grace of God can do in a church. *[pause]*

And when we pursue and forgive others who sin against us, we reflect our great God and Father, who has pursued and forgiven us.

And there's no one greater to imitate and reflect.