

Matthew 18b

What subject does Matthew address next (vv. 15-17)? How to deal with a brother who sins against you. These are the classic verses outlining the procedure and authority for a church to practice effective church discipline.

What practical instructions does He provide?

18:15. First, the matter should be handled privately between the two parties. If the offender acknowledges his guilt, reconciliation is achieved. The trouble is that we often don't do this. We gossip to everyone else about it. Then the matter spreads like wildfire and strife is multiplied. Let us remember that step number one is to, ***"go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."***

18:16 Secondly if the guilty brother does not listen, then the wronged one should take one or two others with him, seeking his restoration. This emphasizes the mounting seriousness of his continued unbrokenness. But even more, it provides competent testimony, as required by the Scripture: ***"so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"*** (Deuteronomy 19:15). No one can measure the trouble that has plagued the church through failure to obey the simple rule that a charge against another person must be supported by the testimony of two or three others. In this respect, worldly courts often act more righteously than Christian churches or assemblies.

18:17 Thirdly If the accused still refuses to confess and apologize, the matter should be ***taken before the local church***. It is important to notice that the local assembly is the body responsible to hear the case, not a civil court. The Christian is forbidden to go to law against another believer (1 Corinthians. 6:1-8).

If the defendant refuses to admit his wrong before the church, then he is to be considered in the same light as a heathen or a tax collector. The most obvious meaning of this expression is that he should be looked upon as being outside the sphere of the church. Though he may be a true believer, he is not living as one, and should therefore be treated accordingly.

Though still in the universal church, he should be barred from the privileges of the local church. Such discipline is a serious action; it temporarily delivers a believer to the power of Satan, ***"so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord"*** (1 Corinthians 5:5). The purpose of this is to bring him to his senses and cause him to confess his sin. Until that point is reached, believers should treat him courteously but should also show by their attitude that they do not condone his sin and cannot have fellowship with him as a fellow believer. At the same time, the church should be prompt to receive him back as soon as there is evidence of godly sorrow and repentance.¹

The ultimate objective of all church discipline is reconciliation and restoration, not exclusion.

What does Jesus mean by v. 18? This verse is identical to 16:19b. The *"whatever"* again seems to include people and privileges. The disciples would determine God's will in each particular instance of rendering judgment in the church. Hopefully they would consult the Scriptures and pray when they did this. Then they would announce their decision. With their announcement, they would give or withhold whatever the judgment might involve, but they would really be announcing what God, the divine authority, had already decided. Their decision would be God's will for the person being disciplined, assuming they had obtained the will of God before announcing it.²

What is the promise of vv. 19-20? Here "anything" refers to any judicial decision involving an erring disciple that the disciples might make. God has always stood behind His judicial representatives on earth when they carry out His will (cf. Psalms 82:1). This is a wonderful promise. God will back up with His power and authority any decision

involving the corporate discipline of an erring brother or sister that His disciples may make after praying and determining His will.³

What question did Peter raise (v. 21)? Peter raised the question of how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him.

What was Peter's suggested answer? He probably thought he was showing unusual grace by suggesting seven as an outside limit because the traditional Rabbinic teaching was that an offended person needed to forgive a brother only three times. Jesus answered "*not ... seven times but seventy times seven.*" He did not mean a literal 490 times; this was a figurative way of saying "Indefinitely."⁴

Jesus then gives a parable of the kingdom of heaven to warn against the consequences of an unforgiving spirit by people who have been freely forgiven. **What were the specifics laid out by the parable (vv. 23-34)?**

vv. 23-27 The story concerns a certain king who wanted to clear his bad debts off his books. One servant, who owed him ten thousand talents, was bankrupt, so the king ordered that he and his family be sold into slavery to pay the debt. The distraught servant begged for time, promising to pay him all if given the chance. When the master saw the contrite attitude of his servant, he forgave him the entire 10,000 talents. It was an epic display of grace, not justice.

vv. 28-30 Now that particular servant had a fellow servant who owed him one hundred denarii. Rather than forgive him, he grabbed him by the throat and demanded payment in full. The hapless debtor pled for an extension, but it was no use. He was thrown into prison till he paid the debt—a difficult business at best, since his chance of earning money was gone as long as he was imprisoned.

What was the reaction of the other servants (v. 31)? The other servants of the king, who were aware of the situation and deeply distressed by it, reported everything to their master.

How did the master respond (vv. 32-34)? He was furious with the merciless lender. Having been forgiven a big debt, he was unwilling to forgive a pittance. So he was returned to the jailers' custody until he repaid his total debt, which he could never do. Thus his torment would be endless.

The application is clear. God is the King. All His servants had contracted a great debt of sin which they were unable to pay. In wonderful grace and compassion, the Lord paid the debt and granted full and free forgiveness to all.⁵

Jesus drew the crucial comparisons in applying the parable to His disciples. He pictured God as forgiving mercifully, yet punishing ruthlessly. God cannot forgive those who are devoid of compassion and mercy, because He is so full of these qualities Himself. Those whom God has forgiven must forgive—as God has forgiven them—from the heart. This demonstrates true humility.⁶

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1273.

² Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition* (published by Sonic Light), 482.

³ *Ibid.*, 483

⁴ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1274.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1275.

⁶ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Matthew, 2025 Edition* (published by Sonic Light), 488.