

Matthew 18:12-20 - The King's Unity!

Scriptures:

12 "What do you think? If a man has a hundred

sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he

G4105 – "to
wander v. – to
move about
aimlessly or
without any
destination."

not leave the ninety-nine and go to the

mountains to seek the one that is straying?

G2212 -

Notes:

The context for verses 12 to 20 are verses 6 to 11. Read those first. This is the parable of the Lost Sheep. This parable also appears in Luke 15:1-7. In Luke's gospel Jesus applies this parable to lost sinners. But here in Matthew, He applies it to wandering believers. This reminds us to always interpret Scripture based on its context.

"Jesus used a similar metaphor in two different parables, in two different contexts, to make two different (albeit similar) points." (Moore, 2011) page 327

In that text (6 to 11) was a warning about causing one of God's little ones to stray. Here is instruction for when one chooses to stray.

These verses are often interpreted to apply to God's desire to save the lost. God does want to save the lost, but these sheep are already His. This suggests that this verse applies to believers and God's desire that the vulnerable ones are not lost.

We are a community of forgiven people. All of us were lost sheep that Jesus found and rescued from our sins.

Some sheep will choose to wander away from the flock. And even the best shepherds might lose some. Even Jesus lost one.

This is about keeping the flock together. When someone gets saved, they become a part of God's flock – His one flock. Jesus created one church. This implies God's design for the church includes unity.

Unity: the state of being united or joined as a whole.

The nature of God is unity. God is One, represented by three Persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity.

Scriptures:

13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to

Notes:

you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than

G5463 – be glad,
be delighted.

over the ninety-nine that did not go astray.

Scriptures:

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father who

Notes:

'little ones' can refer to children, but the context seems to imply vulnerable or immature believers.

God cares about every person who puts their faith in Him. He is especially sensitive to those who lack of faith or experience who are more vulnerable to wandering away from Him.

is in heaven that one of these little ones

If one of these 'little ones' goes astray or is led astray, they are more vulnerable to attacks by the vicious beasts that they are defenseless to guard against. It is much safer for the sheep to be in the flock with the other sheep. That is why we stress being in real fellowship with other believers. It helps to keep you spiritually safe.

should perish.

G622 – ruin,
destroy. But also
lost, unaware of
location.

Scriptures:

Galatians 6:1 - Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Matthew 22:37-40 - Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

James 5:19-20 - Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

Leviticus 19:17-18 - You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am

15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you,

G264 - do wrong, i.e., to act or intend contrary to the will and law of God.

go and tell him his fault between you and him

G1651 - "to sternly admonish v. - to admonish someone strongly; likely using argumentation to convince and refute."

alone. If he hears you, you have gained your

G3441 -

G191 - "to heed v. - to listen, hear, or pay close attention to, and usually respond in conformity."

G2770 -

expect that from the world. What sometimes shocks less mature believers is when it happens inside the church.

brother.

Notes:

Sin breaks unity. Verses 15 to 17 are often referred to as church discipline. The purpose of these verses is not to punish the sinner, but to restore unity, first with God and then with one another.

'brother' = another believer.

When a believer sins against another believer, it is the first step to that believer wandering away from Christ's flock. These verses are meant to engage the body in doing the hard work with Christ of keeping the flock together, so they do not wander too far.

This is complicated by the fact that we live in a 'mind-your-own-business' culture.

We might be tempted to turn away from or reject someone who sins against us. The question we need to answer is, 'Am I responsible for the spiritual welfare of that believer?' We might automatically respond, 'No!' All sin separates. Sin separates us from God and from other people. If unity is God's ideal, then rejecting a sinning believer cannot be the right response. God may have put you in that sinning believer's life to help them back (Galatians 6:1).

'gained your brother' - The point of going to your fellow believer is to restore unity.

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:37-40). It is not loving to let a wandering believer stay separated from their Savior God. We should do everything in our power to restore that believer into the flock. God's will is unity. The wandering sheep cannot be expected to find their way back to the flock on their own. Someone must seek them and lead them back (James 5:19-20).

It might be easy to point out someone's sin and rebuke them for causing disunity, but it is much harder to do so in love (Leviticus 19:17-18).

Unity in the body of Christ, the church, is achieved through biblical faith and obedience and submission to the will of God as He reveals it. Unity can be broken by weakness of faith, or by disobedience, either through ignorance or willfully following one's own desires. All sin damages unity. It separates the sinner from God and other people.

Because of our fallen nature, it is impossible to go through this life without sinning against someone or someone sinning against you. We

Scriptures:
Deuteronomy 19:15 - One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or

Notes:
'will not hear' = refuses to acknowledge their sin and repent.

This is not meant to gang up on the sinning believer.

This also should be done privately. The one or two more should be people who are spiritually mature enough to help reconcile and restore unity.

This is an important step. Just because you believe someone has sinned against you doesn't mean they have.

Illustration: Say Chuck says that I am not a very good singer. I go to him privately and he will not repent of his terrible attack on my character. I ask David and Larry to meet with us. They could then let me know that having an opinion that I am not a very good singer is not a sin. And, he is right, you don't sing well.

two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three

witnesses every word may be established.'

Scriptures:

17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the

G3878 - "to not listen v. - to hear what is said, but ignore or take no heed of it."

Notes:
'tell it to the church' - If the sinner remains unrepentant, they should be brought before the leadership of the church. This could be to the pastor or in some cases to the Board of Elders. The purpose is to seek reconciliation for the purpose of restoring unity.

We might question why Jesus is making such a big deal about this. Disunity is like leaven in dough. It may start out small but it will grow and affect the whole church.

'like a heathen' - Treat them as you would an unbeliever. That doesn't mean you reject them. You treat them as someone who needs to meet their Savior. This might keep them out of certain kinds of ministry.

We have to be careful about trying to turn this into a system for correcting wrong behavior. You can't create a formula that determines when or how these verses are applied. The Holy Spirit must be our guide and source of wisdom.

'refuses to hear' - unrepentant.

We must make the distinction between someone who hears what is said and refuses to respond and someone who is repentant but weak in the flesh. The believer who is weak in the flesh will repent of their sin but then they may be tempted to

church. But if he refuses even to hear the

church, let him be to you like a heathen and a

do it again. They should be treated like one of the little ones Jesus is talking about here.

tax collector.

Scriptures:

18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind

G12310 –
prohibit.

Notes:

The context of verses 18-20 are the previous verses regarding striving toward unity in the body.

If the church decides on a course of action in disciplining an unrepentant sinner who claims to be a believer, they can do so with the understanding that they have God’s agreement. This presumes that they are submitted to the leading of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit.

on earth will be bound in heaven, and

whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in

G3089 – permit,
allow.

heaven.

Scriptures:

19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree

G4856 – be in
harmony.

Notes:

‘agree’ = To be in unity.

This is often applied to prayer but the context has to do with decisions made regarding maintaining unity and purity in the church.

on earth concerning anything that they ask, it

will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

Scriptures:

20 For where two or three are

gathered together in My name, I am there in

G4863 -

the midst of them.”

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Notes:

‘in My name’ – This speaks of the authority of Christ or in the execution of His will. It can be applied to gathering to serve Christ, or to pray or praise Christ, or in obedience to Christ.

It gives the sense that gathering together is intentional to glorify God. God is always everywhere – omnipresent.

Next time, we will discuss the one thing that makes unity possible. It applies to all areas of life, with God, in marriage and the family, in the church, community and government.

True unity with others happens when we are all in unity with Christ. Without Christ there cannot be unity.

This is a very clear declaration of Christ’s deity. Only God is omnipresent. Every day, in every part of the world at every moment there are people gathering in the name of Jesus and He is there. Jesus is God!