

15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

21 Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

28 “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

35 “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

### **Introduction**

Today we will complete the 4<sup>th</sup> teaching block of Matthew’s Gospel.

The theme of the passage is about **Church discipline**.

It is not a popular subject.

However before we deal with the how of Church discipline, we need to first understand the why of Church discipline.

There are four reasons; one of them is taken from our text and the other three are drawn from the surrounding context.

**1. The first reason for Church discipline is the value of one lost or straying sheep.**

We find in v. 10-14 in the teaching parable of the lost sheep, that every soul is valuable to Jesus. The Church must discipline their members because each believer is a soul that Jesus has died for.

**2. The second reason for Church discipline is the hope of forgiveness and family reconciliation.**

In the immediate context of our verses the theme is the forgiveness of a believer’s sins.

It is important to the family of God and to God that his children are disciplined to bring them back into a **right relationship** both **with God Himself** and the **Christian family**.

**3. The third reason is that if discipline is neglected then it affects the whole Church.**

We learnt in part one of this teaching block that committing sin is a bad witness for the whole Church.(18: v. 6-9) Christian discipline protects the purity of the Church.

**4. The fourth reason for Church discipline is that it is a command of Jesus Christ.**

It is **not an option to disobey** the commands of Jesus Christ. He is the Lord of the Church and we need to follow His teaching.

**Love is not tolerating sin; it is disciplining those who sin.**

Now that we have the reasons why we need to discipline within the Church, we can start to examine the text.

Jesus gives us His teaching in v.15-20 and then gives us a good illustration about forgiveness in the parable of the unforgiving servant. v. 21-35.

### **1. Dealing with sin in the Church – v. 15-20.**

The first thing that I need to say is that these instructions only apply to born again believers who are members of a local Church. When somebody is clearly not a Christian then you can't apply these principles.

Jesus gives us three stages that we need to follow.

**Step one is to go and gain a brother.**

The first instruction is found in v. 15.( N.K.J.) It is a private conversation between you and your fellow Christian. If the matter can be sorted out and they repent, then there is no need to proceed to the next stage.

Sometimes it can be a little more complicated where other people are involved in the situation.

However the idea is to make your brother see that they have not only sinned against you but also sinned against God.

Sometimes it is good to write things down clearly. Present the facts as you see them, and write down their replies.

Our memories are not always good and misunderstanding can happen.

To win somebody back to Jesus can take time and patience is called for.

The devil is always in a hurry, but God has plenty of time. He is patient with us.

**Step Two – Establish evidence.**

Verse 16 is important. It is needed if somebody denies the sin or makes excuses to cover up their sin.

Perhaps if you have gone back to the person a second time after much prayer and they are still in denial, then you need to move on to the next stage.

**What Jesus teaches here is based upon Deut.19: v. 15.**

**(Deut.19: v.15-20 in N.K.J.)**

<sup>15</sup> "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. <sup>16</sup> If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing,

<sup>17</sup> then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days. <sup>18</sup> And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, *if* the witness *is* a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,

<sup>19</sup> then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you. <sup>20</sup> And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

This is done for three reasons.

- a) To protect a Christian against a false accusation or perhaps an exaggerated accusation. It is quite common for Christians in some circles to judge another person harshly or wrongly. It is also quite common for the devil to put things into our minds that are not true.

It could be that the person making the allegation is lying?

There are lots of reasons why God has established this code of practice.

By establishing the facts, rather than opinion and have two other people's judgement upon the matter will make it much better in establishing the truth.

The whole idea is to help another Christian to repent.

When somebody is **confronted with sin**, it is **not easy to repent** and some people have **softer ways of confrontation** which enable a person to **more easily repent.**

b) To be public witnesses if the matter was to go further.

Twice Paul quotes in his letters that **everything must be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses.** – 2 Cor. 13:1, 1 Tim. 5: v.9.

If the matter goes further and has to be judged by the whole Church then these people will be important in establishing the facts.

When I was a police officer you always had to be careful when taking a witness statement to ask the questions;

“Did you actually see this yourself?”

“Did you actually hear the person say that?”

Quite a few times the person would say, no I did not actually see him or her but I know it happened because.....

Sometimes they would say, “ I didn’t actually hear him say that but my friend did and I know it is true.”

There may be a need for further visits when the person has had time to think through their actions.

Sin can seem attractive at that moment and the devil can try and blind us of the consequences.

However if over a period of time, the person does not repent and is clearly still in sin or has refused any help or counsel then the next stage needs to be implemented.

### **Step three – Official discipline from the whole Church.**

Firstly we need to understand why we have got to this stage.

The key word in the first two stages is listen or hear depending on your translation.

It is the **sinning brother who will not listen** to you or a group of mature Christians about his sin that has brought about the final stage.

If this happens, it is not easy but has to be done.

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament give us a picture of what is involved if you get to this stage.

(Gen. 17:14, Exodus 12: v.15, 19, 30:33, 38, and 1 Cor. 5:5, 11, 2 Thess. 3: v. 14-15, 2 John 10 and Titus 3: v.10)

**Practically speaking this would involve removal from Church membership, not being able to take Communion and anything else that would suggest that they are still part of the Church.**

Of course they are still open to repentance, and we must pray for them.

Before we close this section, **we mustn’t forget v. 18-20.**

It appears that **Jesus is anticipating an objection to His teaching** when he has returned to Heaven.

The person who is sinning might say, **“That’s your interpretation of the Bible, but not mine.”** Or they might say **“Who gives you the right to discipline me, you are not God.”**

Basically what Jesus is saying in v. 18-20 is that **He is giving the Church the authority to do this.**

Jesus delegates authority to the Church because He is the head of the Church. (Ephesians 5: v. 22-23 plus 8 other verses in scripture)

When we follow the instructions of Jesus, **we have the authority of Jesus.**

Having said all of this, the next section in v. 21-35 is very important because Jesus knows that there will be some Christians who will find it difficult to forgive other people, even after God has forgiven them.

## **2. Dealing with Forgiveness – A Parable from Jesus.**

Notice that Peter in v. 21 talks about **“my brother sinning against me.”**

Peter also says shall I forgive 7 times? Seven being the perfect number.

Jesus says immediately, no not 7 times but up to 70 times 7.

Here Jesus was not limiting the number to 490 times, He was saying that there were **no limits to forgiveness.**

Then Jesus began to teach the parable to explain what He meant.

The point of the parable is about appreciating our own forgiveness in Jesus and maintaining a good heart attitude towards others, being willing **to forgive from our hearts.**

We have to also realise that it is a parable. A parable is a simple story that **illustrates a moral or spiritual lesson**. The details are not as important as the **truth that they represent**.

Here is what the parable teaches.

1. **There is no limit to the times that we should forgive another believer who sins against us.** We can't say to people, this is the last time I forgive you!

2. **We all have a debt to pay back to God that we can't pay.**

Ten thousand talents would be equivalent to more than a billion yen or a zillion dollars, or any unthinkable amount in your currency.

It would be **absolutely impossible to pay it back.**

That is the point here. Our sin is like a debt to God that we can't pay back or earn any credits to balance out our sin. No good works will be credited to our sin account.

Our sin is like a bank account that has no money in it and whatever we do, we will never be able to get any credits to put into that bank account.

The burden will always be there, it can't be removed by anything you do!

3. **When we sincerely repent of our sin, God has mercy upon us because of Jesus. ( v. 26)**

Jesus is the key to our forgiveness because He has paid the penalty for our sins. There are two English words, DO and DONE. The first is present tense and the second is past tense. There is nothing that we can DO to save ourselves from the burden and punishment of our sin.

The reason for this is that God has already DONE it.

He loved us so much that He sent Jesus, His only Son into the world to pay the price of our Salvation.

4. **We should behave in the same way towards other believers as God behaves towards us.**

In v. 28-31 we read that the person who was wonderfully forgiven his enormous debt was not prepared to forgive even a small debt.

(100 denarii was about 100 days wages – if you work at 7/11 for 8 hours in a day you earn about 6,500 yen. So 100 times this would be about 650,00 yen.

Compared to his own debt, over a billion yen, this would be very small.)

This speaks to me about how big my debt was towards God before I became a Christian and how much God has forgiven me through Jesus.

#### **2 Cor. 5: v. 17-21 in N.L.T.**

<sup>17</sup> This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

<sup>18</sup> And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him.

<sup>19</sup> For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.

We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" <sup>21</sup> For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

If we profess to be a Christian then we are **God's Ambassadors.**

God is making his appeal through us.

Therefore we should have the **same heart attitude towards forgiveness that God has towards us.**

The man in the story soon **forgot about his own forgiveness** and the huge debt that he had been forgiven.

5. **God is not pleased, or even angry when we do not forgive people who sin against us.(v.32-34)**  
The parable tells us that God will judge us if we do not forgive from the heart those people who request forgiveness from us.

After Jesus taught the Lord's prayer in Matthew Chapter 6: v. 9-13 He says these words:

**v.14-15 in the N.K.J.**

<sup>14</sup> “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

What we need to remember in closing is that when we forgive people who sin against us, we are releasing them of the burden towards us.

However through our action we are **pointing them to Jesus** who is the only person who can **take the burden of people’s sins.**

When you are personally convicted of your own sin towards a Holy God, you must give your sin to Jesus.

Jesus will gladly receive it and forgive you.

**Matthew 11: v. 28-30.**

<sup>28</sup> Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light.”

**Jesus will take our sin away and then give you something better.**

**He will give you a part of Himself, through the Holy Spirit.**

As we walk with the Holy Spirit of God, there will be challenges, but they are not the same, because we do not have our sin and we look forward to eternal life in Heaven with Jesus.

Jesus will be **gentle with us in our new life.** He will only ask us to do the things He has prepared us for.

**Have you given your sin to Jesus? ( Pause )**

**Now is the time to say sorry to Jesus and give Him your sin.**

**Are you holding on to any unforgiveness in your heart towards another Christian? (Pause )**

**If you are, now is the time to confess this to Jesus and forgive the person.**

**Don’t receive Communion today if you are not a true believer in Jesus, or you have not forgiven another believer.**

**Prayer Time here.**