

## Exegetical Notes, Matthew 18:15-35

### “Get Over It: The Method”

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## Matthew 18:15-35

### Verse 15

***“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.”***

- The word “brother” means one who is a fellow believer not just one who is a relative.
- The word “sin” means that this person has morally wronged you in some specific way. It is important to note that the fault belongs to them entirely and is no way attributed to the “you” mentioned in the text. The “brother” is clearly wrong.
- “Go and show him his fault,” means that you go to the person who has wronged you and you talk to them in such a way as to expose their error to them. Literally, you tell them what they did and why it hurt you. The text implies that you are to do this in such a way as to “win your brother.” Therefore, the approach should be as inoffensive as is humanly possible.
- “Won your brother,” means that if you are successful in talking to your brother, he will understand your point of view and be sorry of his hurtful immoral behavior. He will understand your point of view about the matter and embrace you as his brother.

### Verse 16

***“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”***

- If your brother refuses to listen to your point of view, assumes that you went to him privately as outlined in verse 15 and did not win your brother, then you are to go to him again with several other people so

that all of the details can be established by witnesses. See Deuteronomy 19:15.

- The purpose of this procedure is to convince your brother of his error so that the two of you can be reconciled. The implied opposite is true. If the witnesses hear the story, but believe that your brother did nothing wrong, you must accept their opinion so that there can be reconciliation.

### **Verse 17**

***“If he refuses to listen to them; tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”***

- If your brother will not listen to the witnesses, the matter is to be taken to the church. Here the word “church” refers to a local congregation of believers. Because the brother has refused to be reconciled, either through direct conversation or the advice of others, the congregation is to be informed. There is no indication that they are consulted on the matter. It is simply to be exposed to their attention.
- After this the congregation must attempt to address the matter with the offending brother, either the original moral failure or the fact that this person will not listen to reason or both.
- If the brother refuses to listen to the congregation he is to be treated as if he were a “pagan,” the word means one who is not of the faith, that is, those who need to be reached with the Gospel message, or a tax collector, one of whom Jesus included among the disciples. See Matthew 9:9-12.
- This verse is often presented as a case for excommunicating a brother who refuses to be reconciled. However, I believe that it argues for treating the offending brother as a sinner who is in need of repentance, not as a subject for excommunication. Certainly, someone who was in this position would not be considered fit for an office in the congregation, nor should such a one be made a teacher. However, they are in clear need of hearing the Gospel. Therefore, we should not cut them off but treat them as we would any other person who needs to know the full love and mercy of God, but does not.

### **Verse 18**

***“I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”***

- See John 20:22-23. We need to be careful not to resist the authority of the church. A local congregation has the authority to determine the spiritual status of a brother based on the brother's response to the process outlined above. To refuse to listen to the voice of the congregation is dangerous.

### **Verse 19-20**

***“Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”***

- Scripture must be laid beside Scripture to determine the truth of a difficult passage. That is true here. In this and several other passages Jesus tells us that we will receive anything that we ask for from the Father. However, other passages of Scripture further define this amazing offer. Matthew 7:7-12 tells us that, even if we ask for it, God will not give us anything that would be harmful to us. 1 John 5:14 tells us that God will give us everything that we request from God that is in accord with the will of God. John 14:13 tells us that God will grant only that which brings glory to him. Within these boundaries, everything that we ask of God will be granted.
- The Scripture always confirms God's presence in the gathering of the saints, even if the gathering is only of two or three.

### **Verse 21**

***Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”***

- With this question, Peter introduces the other side of the question. In verse 15-17, Jesus deals with the problem of a brother who has morally offended someone. His responsibility is to listen and be reconciled. But suppose that the brother does not repent of the moral offense. How many times must the one wronged forgive the brother who has wronged him?
- Notice that this implies a serial offense. The assumption is that the brother keeps doing the sin over and over again.
- The Rabbis taught that one was required to forgive a serial offender up to three times. Therefore, Peter's suggestion of up to seven times was very generous.

## Verse 22

***Jesus answered. "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."***

- The actual number that Jesus gave is translated in various ways because of the ambiguity of Greek numbers. The answer that Jesus gave, regardless of the correct number, was intended to imply times without number. A serial offender was to be forgiven as often as the sin was committed.
- Thus, the responsibility of those who are sinned against, regardless of the response of the sinner, is to forgive.

## Verse 23-25

***"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt."***

- Jesus told Peter a story to illustrate his point about a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. There was a particular servant who owed the king 10,000 talents. A talent equals 15 years' wages for the ordinary man of the time. Thus 10,000 talents would equal 150,000 year' of wages. Given the size of the amount owed, the servant could not repay the debt.
- Consequently, the king order that the man and his wife and children be sold into slavery and all their property be sold so that he could recover some portion of what was owed to him. This was within his rights.

## Verse 26

***"The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'"***

- It was most likely impossible that such a debt could ever be repaid. The enormity of the debt is supposed to stagger us.

## Verse 27

***"The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go."***

- The king took pity on the servant and forgave the entire debt!

### Verse 28

***“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.”***

- A denarius was equal to one day’s wage for the average man. So this servant owed 100 days’ wages.
- The servant’s demand for repayment was far more violent than was his master’s.

### Verse 29-30

***“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.”***

- The servant who had been forgiven so very much by the master was unwilling to forgive the debt that was owed to him. Instead, he had his debtor put into debtors’ prison, making it even more difficult for the man to repay what was owed.

### Verse 31-34

***“When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.”***

- The master was angry with the servant that he had forgiven because the servant did not follow his example and forgive his fellow servant.
- He inflicted a much worse state of the servant he had forgiven for not forgiving than that servant had inflicted on his debtor.

### Verse 35

***“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”***

- Like the servant, we owe the master a huge debt that can never be repaid. Yet, like the master in the story, God forgave us.
- If we do not forgive others we are acting like the forgiven servant who would not forgive.

- If we do not forgive those who have sinned against us, we will offend the Father just as the servant in the story offended his master by not forgiving his fellow servant.
- Under such circumstances, we will experience the wrath of the Father and be held accountable for repaying the debt we owe but can never repay.

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