

**Pursuing Biblical Unity, Part 2**  
A Topical Lesson  
David Adams – Date: 1/21/24

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**I. Introduction**

- a. Read **John 17:20-23**
- b. Jesus prays before His death that:
  - i. we may be one as the Father and Jesus are one
  - ii. that the glory that the Father gave to Jesus would be in us
  - iii. The love the Father had for the Son would be in us.
  - iv. That this unity would bring nonbelievers to faith in the Son.
- c. Story about Charlie: prophecies and love/unity of Christians.
- d. This type of unity is a big deal! Extremely difficult to achieve, within a church and with other churches.
- e. Unity is difficult for several reasons: we sin; we have an Enemy seeking to destroy our unity and the church.
- f. Fortunately, Jesus did not just pray for us and say good luck with that! He gave us His Holy Spirit, He gave us specific instructions on maintaining unity, and He demonstrated by example.
- g. Last week we looked at what the Scriptures teach about the power of the tongue:
  - i. A fire that can burn up all of nature, a deadly poison (anger, gossip, slander); bar and bolt the door of our mouths!
  - ii. We can master our whole bodies by mastering our tongue (bit with a powerful horse, rudder on a large ship)
  - iii. With our tongue, we can do good: a stream of fresh water (that brings life), edify one another, the Word of God that brings truth, love, and life.
- h. Today, we will cover what Jesus commands us to do when someone sins against us.

## II. What Jesus Commands When Someone Sins Against Us

- a. I don't think we are a church full of unresolved conflicts! But we certainly have had conflicts, and let's get ahead of future conflicts by understanding and being ready to put into practice what Jesus teaches!
- b. **Matthew 18** contains one of Jesus' most foundational teachings on conflict resolution.
  - i. Many difficult "kingdom teachings" (divorce and remarriage, nonresistance, etc.). This ranks right up there as the most challenging!
  - ii. Many of these teachings I don't have to practice in my day-to-day life. This one we are provided plenty of opportunities to put into practice!
  - iii. As we grow in numbers and new people come in, we all need to put into practice Jesus' teachings on resolving conflict and pursuing unity.
  - iv. If we can't resolve conflict and reconcile when sinned against, we will not achieve the unity Jesus prayed for.
  - v. This passage has been abused, misused, misapplied, and probably causes some spiritual PTSD! But Jesus is good and His teachings are good. Let's reclaim this passage!
  - vi. Read **Matthew 18:15-17**
  - vii. Before we work through this passage, I want to go back to the beginning of **Matthew 18** to incorporate other teachings of Jesus that give us insight into the "Matthew 18 process".
  - viii. **Challenge:** as we study through this chapter, consider an unresolved conflict you have with a brother or sister, or a situation from the past when a brother or sister sinned against you. Consider that situation as we work through the principles and instructions Jesus gives us to resolve conflict and pursue unity.
- c. Humility.
  - i. Read **Matthew 18:1-5**
  - ii. Jesus redefines greatness: the humble.
    1. We are to become like a child (in humility, foolishness!).
    2. "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." (**James 4:6**)

- iii. When resolving conflict with one another, we need to bring a humble spirit.
- iv. **Question:** What does humility look like in conflict?
  - 1. The opposite of what it doesn't look like!
    - a. (defensiveness, eager to point out the other's fault, quick to speak, slow to listen, not eager to understand)
    - b. Acknowledge your own sin (if appropriate), without a "but". Own your own stuff.
  - 2. What is God trying to teach me in this conflict?
    - a. We can fall into sin when others sin against us!
  - 3. What can I learn from this brother or sister, even if they are in the wrong?
- d. Conviction About Sin.

- i. Read **Matthew 18:6-9**

- 1. Jesus is really serious that we address sin:
  - a. In our individual lives, but also....
  - b. In the body of Christ (the body is made up of many parts, need to cut off the diseased part to save the rest of the body – discussed this several weeks ago).
  - c. "Do you now know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." (**1 Corinthians 5:6-8**)
    - i. In context, putting the immoral, unrepentant brother out of the church. All sin spreads: greed, gossip, anger, etc.
    - ii. We don't ignore this. We deal with it.

- d. Better to suffer even significant pain (cut your eye out) than to have the whole body destroyed (in everlasting hell fire).
2. Love demands that we help our brother (not ignore it/pull back)!
- a. We don't want to see our brother or sister be ensnared in sin, hurt others, or be led to spiritual death.
  - b. "Open reproofs are better than hidden love. The wounds of a friend are more trustworthy Than the voluntary kisses of an enemy." (**Proverbs 27:5-6**)
    - i. I want/need friends like this! Let's be that type of friend for each other.
    - ii. A real friend will address your sin. Be thankful when you find a friend like this.
  - c. **Question:** Is there a nice way to wound someone?
    - i. Do your best to be direct, honest, and gentle.
    - ii. As we go to our brother to address sin, speak to him/her as you would want to be spoken to.
    - iii. But, let's inflict pain (as needed) out of love, not anger or revenge.
- e. Searching for the Lost Sheep (the heart of the Good Shepherd when addressing sin in our brother or sister's life.)
- i. Read **Matthew 18:10-14**
  - ii. Theophylact, born around 1050 AD, a bishop and student of the early church fathers.
    - 1. 100 sheep = angels and God's people, the one is fallen man. Jesus leaves the safety and glory of Heaven and the angels to search for and find the lost sheep (all mankind), sacrificing his own life out of love for us.
    - 2. I can see this: Jesus came (to earth) to seek and save the lost (mankind) so that no one would perish.
    - 3. **The Matthew 18 process** is about being like Jesus: rescuing our brother and sister (spouse, son/daughter) from sin and restoring him/her to the Father.

4. Sense of dread and foreboding (when in conflict), but the goal is to restore the joy of the angels and Father.
- iii. Being like the Good Shepherd requires great courage
1. “Your servant used to tend the flock for his father, and when a lion or a bear came and took a sheep out of the flock, followed it and struck it, and delivered the sheep from its mouth. And as it arose against me, I caught it by its throat and struck and killed it.” **(1 Samuel 17:14-15)**
    - a. The picture of going after the sheep that had been dragged off by the lion (Satan) and rescuing the sheep out of the lion’s mouth.
    - b. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
    - c. Messy. Might get a few scratches, cuts, or bites helping your brother or sister repent of sin!
    - d. Also, expect to experience spiritual attacks when you engage in restoring brothers and sisters back to Christ!
    - e. We need to be courageous when we address sin in each other’s lives.
- iv. Being like the Good Shepherd also requires a spirit of gentleness
1. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you are to restore such a one **in a spirit of gentleness**, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” **(Galatians 6:1-2)**
  2. This passage follows the passage about the flesh vs. the Spirit
    - a. Works of the flesh include: hatred, contentions, outbursts of wrath, dissensions, envy
    - b. Fruit of the Spirit is characterized by love, joy, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control
  3. Consider these requirements of a Shepherd/Bishop **(1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1)**
    - a. Not quick-tempered, not quarrelsome, gentle, not being puffed up, not violent, lover of what is good, just, self-controlled

- b. Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict
  - c. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is imperative as we come to conflict, including addressing sin in other's lives. This is what I want if someone is addressing my sin!
  - d. Without this, you can do great harm. Also, people may likely be defensive: fight or flight.
- f. Jesus' instruction on what to do when a brother or sister sins against you. Let's first touch on what comes after this teaching.

g. Forgiveness

- i. Read **Matthew 18:21-35**
- ii. Peter asks how many times must we forgive our brother when he sins against us. Answer: 7 X 70, followed up by the parable of the unmerciful servant.
- iii. **The punchline:** "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his trespasses." (**Matthew 18:35**)
  - 1. The Master was quick to forgive the servant, who repented and begged for forgiveness.
  - 2. But the Master revokes His forgiveness because the servant did not forgive his fellow servant.
  - 3. **Hard stop: we must forgive from the heart, or we will not be forgiven!**
- iv. We are to forgive our brother/sister from the heart, even before they acknowledge it!
  - 1. Jesus: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (**Luke 23:34**)
  - 2. Stephen: "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." (**Acts 7:60**)
  - 3. "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." (Lord's daily prayer)

4. Get rid of the anger, bitterness, hurt. **This is tough prep work!** You have to do it. Really a problem if you don't and then approach your brother or sister.

### III. The Matthew 18 Process

- a. Intro:
  - i. The Lord provides us with a powerful teaching to restore unity in conflict.
  - ii. Let's read **Matthew 18:15-17** again.
- b. "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault"
  - i. This is really, really simple and when done well, usually resolves the issue. But so many people mess this first step up!
  - ii. Step 1: We are to go to our brother and point out his fault/sin.
    1. We go with a spirit of humility, conviction of sin, courage, gentleness, and a heart of forgiveness.
    2. There is hard work to be done before we go! (But you don't have to be perfect.)
  - iii. **Question:** How do we square "pointing out someone's sin" with **Matthew 5:38-48**?
    1. (Do not resist an evil person, turn your other cheek for another slap, let him have your cloak and tunic, go the second mile, etc.)
    2. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, **love your enemies**, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...."
    3. There's no command here to point out the person's sin!
  - iv. "If your brother sins against you...."
    1. "He says, 'I want you who have been offended, that is, harmed, to admonish those who have dealt unjustly with you and harmed you, **if they are Christians.**' See what He is saying: 'if thy brother,' that is, a Christian, 'shall trespass against thee.' But if an unbeliever wrongs you, then concede to him even what is yours."

- a. (Theophylact, born around 1050 AD, bishop, student of early fathers.)
  - b. Point he seems to be making: **Matthew 5** is for your enemy. **Matthew 18** is for your brother, to help him deal with his sin so it does not destroy him. (He is called to follow Jesus, while the non-Christian is not.)
- v. "Go tell him his fault"
1. We need to have a conviction about addressing sin in each other's lives: so it does not destroy that person and it does not spread.
  2. This is the loving thing to do.
    - a. Sin is deceptive. We all have blind spots. Need people to help us see.
    - b. It is not loving to see sin in someone's life and let it grow and spread!
  3. Conflict in the church is always due to sin. When people repent and reconcile, you restore unity. It's that simple.
    - a. You can't be a peacemaker without addressing sin! Restoring peace with God and with one another is going to require repentance and true reconciliation.
    - b. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (**Matthew 5:9**)
    - c. This kind of peacemaker (like Jesus), will be hated and persecuted.
  4. Let's be real; for most of us, we are a bunch of conflict-avoiders!
    - a. "They dress the wound of my people as if it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace." (**Jeremiah 6:14**)
    - b. **Question:** When someone has food on their face, do you say anything? What if they have toilet paper on their shoe? What if they have some weird habit? What if they have a character weakness, immature, obnoxious, selfish, proud, etc.? (We all reach a level of some level of discomfort to raise an issue with someone!)



- c. Let's care for each other. Let's not let things slide that are important. Help each other be our very best!
- 5. However, let's not be the sin police! Jesus was incredibly serious about sin but created an environment of mercy, learning, growth. For example:
  - a. Samaritans will not let the disciples pass because they are Jewish. James and John ask Jesus if they can command fire to come down from heaven and destroy the Samaritans. (**Luke 9:51-56**)
    - i. Jesus rebukes them ("For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.")
    - ii. I'm impressed that they felt free to say this, and the rebuke did not crush them.
    - iii. Jesus renames them "Sons of Thunder" (**Mark 3:17**). This is hilarious – and must have been so humbling, in the best of ways for them.
    - iv. John becomes the disciple of love.
  - b. Jesus created an environment where His followers could be honest, free to be real, not fearful of making a mistake. But, included rebukes from time to time – but these guys were not shut down. They knew Jesus would be honest with them and cared for them.
  - c. Parents with your kids: pray for wisdom!
    - i. Don't freak out when they say or do things that are "unspiritual"!
    - ii. So good to have the freedom to be open, "good new/bad new" (to share weakness and victories), and share sin (and victories) at the dinner table.
- 6. **Question:** When to address sin?
  - a. We may not!
    - i. "Good sense makes one slow to anger, and **it is his glory to overlook an offense.**" (ESV, **Proverbs 19:11**)
    - ii. One-off, bad day, etc. Simply forgive. A hug, serve, encourage.

- iii. We are called to bear with one another in love.  
(**Ephesians 4:2**)
  - b. If appropriate (serious, or consistent sin that hurts others), address right away.
    - i. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (**Matthew 5:23-24**)
    - ii. “It’s easier to kill the cub than the lion.”
    - iii. The burden is on us if we know someone has something against us (for whatever reason).
- 7. **Question:** Which brothers or sisters do you use this process with?
  - a. **Answer:** anyone who sins against you! No favoritism.
  - b. “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor admire the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.” (**Leviticus 19:15**)
  - c. Read **Galatians 2:11-13**
    - i. Paul withstood Peter to his face for separating himself from the Gentiles, for being a hypocrite!
    - ii. This led even to Barnabus (the apostle of encouragement) to sin!
  - d. “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest may also fear.” (**1 Timothy 5:19-20**)
- vi. “Between you and him alone.”
  - 1. Beauty of this process. Starts very private, moves to public.
    - a. God’s kindness. Privacy shows respect.
    - b. But discipline ramps up if no response.

2. Test: for each, answer A) Go to your brother between you or him alone, or B) Talk to someone else about your brother's sin.
  - a. He borrowed your car, spilled coffee on the seat, and did not tell you or clean it up.
  - b. He disclosed a secret you confided to him.
  - c. You see a video posted on YouTube that appears to be your brother in Christ; he kicks someone's dog and appears to be intoxicated.
3. "Processing" with others (before going to him directly) is usually gossip (depending on the heart).
  - a. "I have some concerns about brother A..."
  - b. "I have some concerns about the church..."
  - c. "How do you think sister B is doing?"
  - d. Processing should not be with people but in the Scriptures and prayer. (Writing can help.) This can be hard work!
4. **Question:** What if you need advice and support? (simply not sure what to do, or do not feel safe)
  - a. **Answer:**
    - i. Often, we know what to do, simply being lazy or cowardly.
    - ii. Get advice from someone you trust spiritually who will not be swayed by your version of the story, who will give good advice, and challenge you as needed.
    - iii. Do this one-on-one, not in a group.
    - iv. Present your worst side when getting advice.
5. **Question:** What should you do if someone comes to you sharing concerns about brother A or sister B?
  - a. Answer: Direct them to go to that person!
  - b. **Question:** what if they are unwilling to go to that person?
    - i. Explain there are two options:

1. Option 1: go to the brother/sister and be reconciled.
  2. Option 2: forgive and move on.
  3. Talking to others about this is NOT an option. That's called gossip.
    - ii. Follow up with them to make sure they are reconciled.
6. **Question:** What if you go to the brother/sister one-on-one and it goes badly (escalates, anger, etc.)?
- a. Okay to stop the meeting. (my experience in Central)
  - b. "I recognize this is becoming a difficult conversation. I share this out of love, but I see this is no longer a healthy conversation and I feel we should stop. Let's plan to connect on this later and bring another brother/sister in to help us resolve this."
  - c. There is no shame in a failure to reconcile at this stage. Jesus gives us the next step; He knows we may not get there one-on-one.
- c. "If he hears you, you have gained your brother."
- i. The goal: to gain your brother.
  - ii. One-on-one reconciliation is beautiful. Really powerful in a relationship. Brings you closer. In my experience, when done well, these conversations often end here!
  - iii. But, okay if it does not happen. There is a next step.
- d. "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.'"
- i. You bring in 1 or 2 others.
  - ii. Bringing in someone to help is NOT:
    1. Failure.
      - a. Sometimes we need an objective perspective, someone else to help us come to unity. That's okay. Jesus anticipated this.
    2. A gang-up session.

- a. Heart of the Good Shepherd.
  - b. Ideally, you bring in someone who both parties feel is wise and honest, Godly, will not show favoritism, etc.
3. Splitting the baby in two.
- a. Address sin, no matter where it is.
  - b. Maybe both in sin, maybe just one.
  - c. Example: you are walking down a road looking at your cell phone and about to be hit by a car. Someone charges into the road and pushes you out of the way, saving your life, but causes you to hit your head and get a bruise.
  - d. **Question:** Do you go after your friend who pushed you out of the road because he caused you to get scraped up because he applied too much force to save your life?
    - i. NO! You are grateful for him. Thanks for saving my life!
  - e. “And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.” (**Matthew 18:17a**)
    - i. We bring the sin into the light with the local church body.
    - ii. Desire is that people are aware, can pray, and realize this is a problem.
    - iii. Helps the brother recognize the seriousness of their sin.
  - f. “But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” (**Matthew 18:17b**)
    - i. We put someone out of the fellowship. But Jesus loved the tax collectors! We still love and desire for our brother and sister to be restored to our heavenly Father.
  - g. A few concluding observations/insights:
    - i. We need many spiritual brothers and sisters with great wisdom to help others resolve conflict and be restored when caught in sin.
      - 1. “Is it so, that there is no a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!” (**1 Corinthians 6:5**)

- a. Paul is really shocked that this church filled with all these “gifts” is so unspiritual and carnal.
- ii. **Question:** Are you required to implement the **Matthew 18** process if your brother sins but not against you? (He sins against God, or against another?)
  - 1. Examples:
    - a. I find evidence that a brother is looking at pornography or is causing conflict, but not with me.
    - b. Concern about a brother or sister’s doctrine.
  - 2. Not sure. But why would we not?
    - a. respectful, loving thing to go 1 on 1, often things get resolved here;
    - b. how it escalates, other Scriptures give us insight into how leadership is to address
      - i. What is the humble heart? (If someone brings something against, me, fine to bring in another brother if I don’t see it)
- iii. False accusers.
  - 1. **“Do thou therefore consider diligently the accuser, wisely observing his mode of life, what, and of what sort it is; and in the case thou finds him a man of veracity, do according to the doctrine of our Lord, and taking him who is accused, rebuke him, that he may repent, when nobody is by. But if he be not persuaded, take with thee one or two more, and so show him his fault, and admonish him with mildness and instruction; for ‘wisdom will rest upon a heart that is good, but is not understood in the heart of the foolish.”**
    - a. From *On Accusations, and the Treatment of Accusers*, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, ANF Volume 7, page. 414.
    - b. Some people will bring false accusations. (elders in the story of Susanna and Pharoah’s wife who accused Joseph falsely).
    - c. When someone raises an accusation, we should look at the life of the accuser.

#### IV. Conclusion

- a. The unity and love of the body of Christ was what Jesus was praying for in the garden before He went to the cross.
- b. Let's recognize that this is a spiritual battle, that we have a powerful enemy at work seeking to divide us. Don't be surprised if/when conflict arises.
- c. We must have the heart and follow the teachings of the Good Shepherd to pursue the unity that Jesus prayed about.
- d. Let's be full of the fruits of the Spirit (humility, mercy, kindness, and gentleness) as we address sin in each other's lives.
- e. This is going to require the courage of the Good Shepherd. Don't be a conflict-avoider! Don't say "peace peace" when there is no peace!
- f. Know God is really pleased as we put this wonderful teaching from **Matthew 18** into practice!