

Matthew 18 // Conflict and Forgiveness

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[0:00] So I have a fun little exercise here. Well, maybe it won't be that much fun, but I'm going to do it anyway.

! All the time!

Right? And it would be right to say. If I were to say marriage is between a man and a woman, yeah, right, yes, I believe that. And then if I were to say that Jesus has given us clear, red-letter instruction of how to deal with forgiveness and conflict, I bet you there'd be crickets.

Because we don't like to think about that Jesus gave us direct instruction of how to deal with stuff. And yet here we are. And you know, I thought I'd just kind of lighten it up after the holidays and talk about conflict resolution and forgiveness.

So here we are. We're giving you Matthew 18, verses 15 to 35. And we may only get to verse 20. We'll see how it goes. But these are instructions given to us by Jesus.

[1:23] And I love how, when you read this, you don't get any sense that Jesus is surprised that there will be conflict and difficulty in the body of Christ.

He's not fazed by that at all. It's when, not an if, he speaks. And I appreciate this so much. All of this leads us to consider that conflict among Christians in church, in families, in communities, anywhere humans exist, in groups, is going to happen.

And that's okay. Conflict is normal. It can be seen as a breakthrough, actually, from a certain perspective. Two people coming together and saying, hey this and hey that.

And all of a sudden, they either agree to disagree or they have a meeting of the minds and things are different and better. I think that's a good thing. That's a victory. It doesn't mean that there's a failing in a church or failing in a body of people when there's conflict.

That doesn't actually mean failure at all. But it can mean a failure if it's not handled at all or if it's not handled rightly. And this is where it gets a little sobering.

[2:37] Because it would be one thing if I just kind of came out with like, you know, a little piece of paper and said, here's some instructions on, you know, conflict resolution. I would tell you myself, take that with a grain of salt. I have no idea what I'm talking about.

I'm still trying to figure that out. Okay? But it's another thing when we read the Bible and in red letters, Jesus is saying, do this. That's a different kind of approach that we have to take.

Especially if we can read the red letters in other places and say, yeah, I believe that. So, here we go. How do we deal with conflict? Well, verse 15.

Let's start there. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault. Between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you've gained your brother. There's no other reason at this point to bring other people or another person into it.

When I say this, please understand I wholeheartedly believe that if you encounter a bump or a bruise along the way, it is perfectly okay to say to your spouse, hey, something weird happened today.

[3:41] Okay? This isn't about keeping secrets. All right? This is about preserving integrity. So, when something like this happens, when someone steps on our toes, it's better to go to the person and just say, hey, you know, this happened.

There's so many things that could have happened to that. Maybe the person is having a bad day. Maybe in this metaphor of stepping on toes. Maybe they just bought new shoes and they haven't broken in yet. We don't know. It could be something really simple and easy to get over like misunderstandings.

And I'll share a funny one. So, we were here on Monday. You know, there was a funeral. And I was at the back and Tyra was there and Aaron from Bunch Roberts.

And I think Adelia was there who was playing piano for it. And I said, you know, like, and Adelia asked me, how do you want to fill in a few minutes of this? And I said, well, you know, just noodle

around on the piano. Now, from where I come from, when you're playing guitar or something like that, you just kind of noodle around a bit.

You're not playing anything specific. And, of course, you know, Aaron and Tyra are looking at me. And they said, that's not what it means here. And I'm like, so what does it mean? Apparently, it means when you wiggle your finger and you go into a body of water and you bring up a catfish.

[4:56] I had no idea. I'm never going to use noodling in the context of a musical instrument again. Right? It was a misunderstanding just because literally a language difference, a culture difference.

Right? Sometimes when we have those bumps and bruises, it can be as simple as that. What if we went away, though? And all of a sudden, they were saying, well, I'm not noodling.

Gross. What's happening there? Why doesn't he know where we, you know, like, figure this out?

But they were gracious and they laughed. And we had a good joke over that. Right? But if it becomes something that's just a little match, just like this lighter lit this candle, if it becomes a forest fire, then it's damaging.

And this is why I believe Jesus gave us very clear set instructions. If something happens, go directly to that person as an individual and say, something's weird about this.

I need some clarity. Okay? It may be put out like that. If they listen. If they listen. We shouldn't be making a list of sins for people, either.

[6:11] I had a friend of mine do this at his workplace. His boss. It wasn't me. I'm not saying, oh, yeah, I knew a guy. No, this really was some other guy. His boss was being really hard on him. And instead of going and dealing with it, he simply printed out a list of errors the guy has made, put it on his office window, and closed the door, locked the door, and walked away for the day.

The worst, most passive-aggressive thing they've possibly have done to handle this conflict. It was really bad. It was a bad example. There was a lot of reparation that needed to happen that way. So we don't want to make a list of sins for people and come on a Sunday morning and say, I'm going to point out all of these difficulties that these 12 people have with me right now, and I'm just going to do that because this is what we're supposed to do.

Well, there comes a time when you have to release and you let go because someone's had a bad day, and that's okay. And we can forgive and we can release without having to go and approach every single person over every single little wrong that they've done.

But there is a time when confrontation is necessary. If you wake up at 3 a.m. in a cold sweat because you're thinking about what happened, you know, if it's causing you to gossip, if it's causing you to have this little wildfire start to go, go to the person and figure it out.

That's a good time to go. But if it's a little mistake like, oh, you know, they spelled my name wrong here. It's like, let it go. It's okay. Things happen. I type too fast sometimes, you know, and it's like, it just happens.

[7:40] So there are certain things we have to let go of. But the most important part of this process is that you go alone. There's much that can be dealt with just between two people.

And as I was saying in the Bible study earlier, you know, ultimately I think church leadership should never hear about conflicts. And it's not because we want to put our head in the sand. It's not that.

It's just simply that it should get dealt with within the congregation, within themselves.

If two people have an argument, that they get through it the best they can. But if they need help, there is a process for this that Jesus gave us himself. But this alone part's important because if we've told a few people, if we've set a wildfire ablaze, then it gets into a very nasty area.

And this is something we have to be careful of. Because if we have sinned in gossip or even allowed hatred to grow, then that's become something else and something more difficult.

Matthew 5, verses 21 and 22 says, You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

[9:06] Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council. Whoever says, You fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. There's different ways we can hate.

And when I say that, our mind, I hope, our mind automatically goes to pretty extreme examples of hatred. And you might think, you know, I've never hated anybody in my life.

You know, good for you. Good for you. I have hated. And I know the poison that it is. I have been hated. And I know that poison as well. So let's look at hatred just for a second.

Okay? Just open the door a bit and take a look. Because there are obvious hatreds and there are subtle hatreds. Obvious hatreds would be verbal and physical aggression. You're not loving if you beat somebody up. That's not a loving gesture. You're not loving someone if you're verbally aggressive with them.

[10:04] Yelling and swearing and calling them names. That's not a loving gesture. That comes from a hateful place. It's really hard for someone to argue and say, well, I'm just being unkind.

No. No. No. Unkind is not offering to make someone a coffee when they come to your place. Hatred is something else. Okay? Because the subtle hatred is different.

It can mean avoidance and exclusion. The silent treatment. If you look into conflict resolution, that is actually a form of hatred. It's basically saying, you don't exist.

I'm just rubbing you out of this situation. I don't want to acknowledge you. You don't exist. That is actually a form of hatred. Excluding them from social gatherings. Let's invite everybody but them. They just make a mess. We hate them. Right? That's hatred. That it's subtle. It's insidious, even to say. Disrespectful behavior.

[11:05] If you ignore someone or if you lie to them or you humiliate them in public. Right? That's hatred. It is. And it can be infectious, unfortunately. I've known some families where it's like...

I'm not... Sorry, Adelia. I asked permission for this. There was a great example where, you know, little jokes, right? Little poking fun became public humiliation.

And you were hurt. Right? And there was moments like that where you can see that, witness that. And it becomes harmful. That's not an act of love. It isn't. There's also dehumanization.

So treating someone less because it justifies your opinion. Right? Well, they don't really count. You know, I can say what I want. That actually is a form of subtle hatred.

Desiring failure is another one. Oh, I hope they fail. That's not a loving attitude. It isn't. So you see the thing?

[12:10] If we don't actually go to the person and say, ouch, then we're left with a couple of choices. We can release them and forgive them.

And I mean genuinely forgive them. And go about our days. Stop, drop, and roll. Catch and release. If you're into fishing, right? It's that whole idea. We can release people from whatever's happened. And that's great. If you can do that and if the situation warrants it, great. But if your situation is one where you really should go to the person because you're feeling this seething hatred inside of you. And it's not about murder. But Jesus likens it to murder. Right? Because you're essentially wishing the person wasn't there. And it's heavy. It's difficult.

I hope it's sobering. Okay? Because it should be sobering. When Jesus is teaching us this, there's a reason. It's because we don't want things to fester and get in the way of our relationship with Him.

[13:09] He has forgiven us much. And we should work at forgiving much. So, verse 15 again.

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. And if he listens to you, you've gained your brother. Here's a kicker with this. If you've ever been harmed by someone or hurt by someone, and what you want, which would be totally natural, is for them to come and in some way grovel and say, I'm sorry.

Right? And that's what we want. We think that it will be concluded if they come to us and say, I'm sorry. Did you realize that's not what Jesus is saying here? If they listen to you.

Listen. If they hear you. That doesn't mean agree. I was sharing a story earlier, too, where there was a guy, it was probably about seven years ago, and he said and did some really stupid things, you know, and it was directed at me.

And I, you know, water off a duck's back. If a 12-year-old tells you you're ugly, you don't really listen to it, right? It's one of those things. You just kind of have perspective as an adult, you know? But this guy, he kind of said some things, and it was like, okay.

[14:24] And, like, it was about seven years goes by, and I get this email, and it followed up with a phone call, and he was so apologetic. And I was like, oh, it's okay. Like, I forgave you back then.

Like, really? I haven't held on to this at all. Like, I said, tell me about your life. Tell me what's exciting you right now. How's the Lord moving, you know? We got into this really nice conversation and stuff, but for him, that was important. It was in his time.

It was in God's time to bring about that reconciliation. Now, imagine if I had spent seven years seething with hatred over this guy, right? I'm the one in prison, because he wasn't ready to bring that apology.

And even though I did approach him, and even though he did hear me, he wasn't feeling that apology. I don't want to force that. So when Jesus is saying, if he listens to you, then you might be able to find common ground.

And sometimes that common ground is to agree to disagree. It's that simple. We may not see things eye to eye, but that doesn't mean we have to be hateful towards one another.

[15 : 25] It doesn't mean we have to be difficult. We could just have two different opinions, two different perspectives. Noodling, to me, will always be just messing around on the guitar.

Apparently, if you're catfishing, it's something else, right?

So, anyway. If the person being approached will be calm, take the matter to heart, then it's both parties' responsibility to admit that they may disagree.

And they can leave it in an understanding that the issue is out in the open now, and that's okay. Let that be our victory, that we've been heard. Let that be the victory.

And let the Holy Spirit do His work in bringing about conviction if conviction is needed to happen.

So, what if the person doesn't listen? What if we go one-to-one, and it's just like talking to a brick wall?

I actually have said it before. There's sometimes when you're talking to somebody, it's like trying to tell a fish to take a bath. Right? It's pointless. And sometimes that's the way it goes. So, Jesus gives us the next step.

[16 : 29] Verses 16 to 18. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

So, if your brother or sister will not listen, that's when the circle of awareness can grow. At that point. If they call you names or they just won't listen to you or it's just like telling a fish to take a bath, you know, sometimes it's just our communication style.

At times it can be that we just aren't able to get the words across. Maybe we're too emotional. And it would be helpful to have somebody, you know, interpret for us. Okay? That can be a very, very helpful thing.

And maybe at this stage, that's what it is. And there are some people we know, and maybe it has been us at times, where they seem to be in conflict all the time. It's just like the drama llamas, right?

[17 : 37] Like they're just always in a dramatic situation in one form or another. And we have to look ourselves in the mirror and it's like, if we're seeing conflict everywhere we go, maybe the problem is us.

And maybe we need to just take a step back and be a little less prickly. Or a little more forgiving. Or a little more understanding. But when you get to this place where someone isn't going to want to be any of that, when you get to this place where somebody isn't listening to you, then widen the circle and take a couple of people.

And it's not to say, all right, we got a gang. We're going to beat this guy up. It's not like that. It's simply because one or both of you could be wrong.

I said it last week. I have to look in the mirror often and ask myself. I don't talk to myself, by the way. That's not what I mean. But figuratively speaking, okay? And ask myself, what if I'm wrong?

I feel so right about this. What if I've got it backwards? What if they're right? And we have to be able to ask ourselves these hard questions.

[18 : 43] Because when we bring a witness or two into a situation like this, it's not to gang up on the person. It's to seek truth. Because you might be wrong. And that has happened before to me.

I've had somebody sit in with me and they said, you know, I think actually you need to repent of this. And I was like, wow. I had never seen it from that angle before. I've had it the other way around.

Where a guy came to me with a witness. This was 2010. A little while ago. And he was so sure that he was right. And the guy said, actually, after hearing the whole story here, like, dude, you're really wrong.

And we prayed together. And, you know, we weren't besties after that. The guy that initiated this, we weren't. But we had peace. And that was enough. So here's the thing.

If they're stubborn and unrepentant, then the result is that they should be refused fellowship among the believers. This level of church discipline almost never happens today.

[19:48] And it's not that it's like, you know, we're not getting along with you, so get out. That's not what this is. It's that the church in the early church was so awesome, wonderful, accepting, and beautiful with its fellowship that to be removed from it for a day would cost you.

You'd feel it. But I miss my family. I miss my people. Okay, I got to get right in the head. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it like that. I didn't see it like that.

That was the heart behind this. And unfortunately, what happens now is that if something goes wrong, we just go to a church down the highway. Right? I don't want to be told I'm wrong.

I think I'm right, so I'm just going to leave. But the red letters. We say we're mature Christians, we're maturing Christians, but if we're not listening to this, then why are we listening to the other red letters that Jesus has said?

No, this is awkward. It's difficult because it means we might be wrong. And it's important to put ourselves in a place where we can be told that we're wrong sometimes.

[21:01] That's an important place to be. Now, how should they be treated? Should they be hated?

No. Should they not be invited to anything anymore? No. Jesus hung out with hookers and tax collectors, street people and bums.

He did. He shared the gospel to people that weren't necessarily welcome anywhere else. So just because somebody's having a rough time trying to fit into church, it doesn't mean that we kick them out and we say, good riddance.

No, it's actually a call to love them in a different way. The question that you have to ask sometimes, and it's a hard one, is this your church? You seem to hate everything and everybody.

Is this your church? There's no wrong answer to that. But you're going to be really frustrated, really frustrated, if you say yes and you keep acting this way.

There have been times where I've given people two weeks off of church. There was one situation that was happening. It was like I wasn't actually involved. It was brought to me. But it was very clear this person was being a public nuisance.

[22:06] And they were. And I said, you know, why don't you take a couple weeks off a Sunday? And their reaction was pretty strong to that.

And I said, no, I'm dead serious. Just pray, because we love you. But what I'm finding is the first hour of every Sunday is dealing with everything that you bring in here against this person and that person.

And maybe just figure out if this is your church or not. They left for six weeks and then they came back and as far as I know, they never left. You know? Sometimes people just need a reality check. Church and community is not a right. It's a gift. It's a beautiful gift. We have to handle it rightfully. We have to handle it the way Jesus would have us handle it.

And that's why this conflict resolution, this going through these steps is so vitally important.

Because we could shortcut it. Instead of going to the person one-on-one, we go to everybody.

[23:06] And that shortcuts it. It makes a situation bigger, worse, especially if there's just a misunderstanding. So, we love. We love.

The question we have to ask ourselves as well, if you were to be confronted on sin, if someone was to call you on someone, would you receive it from them?

Spouse doesn't count because in my experience, spouses are really good at saying what we've done wrong. Okay? It's not, that's not what I mean. All right? But if someone was going to say, you know, I noticed this and it's troubling me and it looks like this thing that's not good, can you run me through what your logic was?

Is there some way I can pray for you right now? Right? We need people in our lives like that to keep us in check. We really do. We need brothers, we need sisters that will walk alongside us, not in judgment, but just so that we can become more like Christ day by day.

And sometimes that's just saying, you know what? You're walking a little weird right now in your life. You're saying one thing, you're doing another, or whatever. I mean, whatever it may be, we have to ask ourselves, do we have someone in our life that can say we're wrong?

[24:30] We are blessed with people here where that would be safe to do so. We really are. This is a beautiful, beautiful community, church. And I know, based on getting to know as many people as I possibly have been able to in my short time here already, that there are lovely people that are

Thank the Lord, oh my soul. So let's not stop that. Verse 18, truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

And it's just simply this. When you're working the church, when we're working the community, I mean all of us, okay, when we are leading, when we are gathering, all right, what we agree with one another, the Lord recognizes that.

[25:55] But if there's something that's happening where someone is causing such a problem, right, and we say, hey, take a couple of weeks off of Sundays, you know, and we do that rightly and in love for the right reasons, I do believe that's honored.

Unity is a command. It's not an option. And I was reminded of this. And I have, again, I've asked permission of this, of Adalia of this too, because I believe consent is important.

Okay. I feel comfortable saying that, you know, Adalia bravely escaped an extremely abusive situation and we welcomed her into our house and our home.

[27:10] There were decades of very deep and I'll say very dark secrets that they did not want to have made public. So they tried to angle and work around and I, you know, they were big titheers, right?

[illegible]