

A question of rights

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[0 : 0 0] Alright, so our reading today is from Matthew 18, starting at verse 15 and finishing at 35. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 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, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them. Then Peter came up and said to him, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? As many as seven times, Jesus said to him.

[1 : 1 1] I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants.

When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made.

So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, Have patience with me and I will pay you everything. And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But when the same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii and seized him. He began to choke him, saying, Pay what you owe.

So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, Have patience with me and I will pay you. He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

[2 : 1 3] When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all that your debt because you pleaded with me.

And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you? And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from your heart. Good morning.

Good to see everyone again this week. Also welcome to those who are online as well. As Sam has said, we are doing, or we are reading, and considering the book of Matthew, chapter 18.

And today we are in the second part of it. So last week we talked about how in the church, or in the group of people, we seek to be important, to be somebody.

[3 : 2 8] And this week we are coming to the part where we seek to protect our rights. So, we will, yeah, consider that.

Let's pray first before we stop. Father God, we are so thankful that we can come together to worship you as we sing songs, as we listen to your word.

How does, Father, not to concentrate on ourselves, to consider how good we are, or how bad we are. help us to be able to see the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, the founder and the perfecter of our faith.

For we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. For those of us who have watched many movies, you might notice that a lot of movies are about vengeance.

The story will start with somebody, or the main actor, or actress, was bullied by someone, I mean, the bad guys, or persecuted by the bad guys, and then we will, as we, we will wait for the

development of the story, and we will predict that at the end, the ugly duckling will become a swan, and then it will take revenge, and the bad guys suffer for what they have done.

[5 : 07] That will be in our mind, but I wonder whether we would also wait at the same time to hope that the bad guys would say sorry, and repent, and get forgiven, and then they become good friends again.

I think that is not very common, we don't think so much about it, because if the movie is like that, nobody will watch it, I suppose, because it's not entertaining very much, because in our culture, personal rights, human rights, is very important, and if we dare to violate it, you will be punished, and you should be punished, and we expect that to be.

And so we are not very culturally, we are not good at seeking forgiveness, or giving forgiveness.

So today, we are considering this, especially in our, as a church, as God's people, how we should interact with one another, and this, because as we gather, there will be conflicts, for sure, even husband and wife, I mean, conflicts happen all the time, and how do we handle that, right?

And so, today, we will, with the question of rights, I will talk four things about rights. The first one is about personal rights, and when a personal right has been violated, why should I, or why should we forgive?

[6 : 34] The second one is about the right actions. If the conflict is not resolved, what do we do? And the third thing is the right to take action.

How, who has the right to say, finally, what is, what is right and wrong, and take further action? And the fourth thing is right relations, right relationship.

That is the end goal of chapter 18, I think. So, we'll start with, I will start with verse 21, so, I will come back to 15 later.

So, on verse 21, that is the famous question that Peter asked Jesus, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, will I forgive him?

As many as seven times? You see, what Peter is asking is, if somebody has been infringing on my rights, how many times should I forgive the person, that person is a brother, take note there, before I stop, I can stop forgiving.

[7 : 56] That is, because if we live in the world, he suppose if I forgive one time, I will be very generous, but because in the church condition, church circumstances, maybe seven times is enough, that's what is in Peter's mind.

And then Jesus said, not seven times, but 77 times. Don said 70 times, seven times, seven times, which is, you can translate that as well.

It means that there's a lot of times, 70 times, or 490 times. I mean, it basically means that Jesus is saying, you don't keep a record of how many times people have sinned against you.

Because, as you know, I mean, like in a church situation, if there's 100 people, if you can remember each one, how many times each person has sinned against you, seven times is a lot of number to remember.

But 70 times, it's just impossible, unless you take a notebook and just record every week, who has sinned against me, and whether I've forgiven the person. So, I mean, life becomes unlivable like that.

[9 : 18] So, what Jesus meant was not, don't record, don't count. So, we can then imagine, Peter would ask the question that it's not fair.

Don't I have my rights? I mean, how, why, why should I just keep copying the insults on people, or people being taken advantage by people.

And, in anticipating Peter having this question, then, Jesus told him and the other disciples that the parable of the unforgiving servant, and we know that the servant owes the king, owes the king a last sum of money, and it's so large.

I mean, in today's term, it's calculated to be six billion dollars. Six billion dollars, I mean, it's the number that we can hardly imagine. And, but, obviously, he couldn't pay for it.

He begged for mercy, and the king had mercy on him, and canceled his debt. And, the next minute, he went out and saw a fellow servant, again, his fellow servant, same servant who was serving the king, who owed him a small debt, which is about \$12,000.

[10 : 36] I mean, it's still a lot of money, \$12,000, but compared to six billion, it's nothing. He demanded the fellow servant to repay him the debt, and the fellow servant pleaded for mercy, he couldn't pay, and then he put it in jail.

And so, when the king found out about this, the king then put this unforgiveness in jail as well. So, we can, I mean, Peter thought that by forgiving seven times, he's already doing better than the Jews.

The Jews who forgive, a good Jew, who forgive their fellow Jews three times. And, so for Peter to say seven times is very generous.

But in this parable, Jesus is reminding Peter that even if you're the best servant of God, you still all got a large sum or a big debt, because the Jews or the Pharisees or the disciples who think that they are giving God a service, they are contributing to the kingdom of God.

But Jesus is reminding Peter that it's not so. Because even if we serve God perfectly in terms of following the law and doing things, but our hearts would normally not be serving God.

[12:07] We are serving our purpose like the Pharisees. I mean, we do all the things for our own reputation or position. And so all the service that we appear to give service to God is actually for our own glory.

And so we are stealing glory from God even as we serve him. So we can imagine Jesus is telling Peter to imagine one day God will come to you and demand you to pay back all the glory that you have stolen from him.

and also all the neglect that you should have given to your brother and you have not. What will you do? Peter and Peter will think, I don't know what to do.

I won't have any way to repeat that debt, but I will plead for mercy and promise that I will do better next time.

I will love God as I should and love my brothers as I should. okay, I mean, God hears you and forgive you.

[13:20] But the next minute Peter, you meet a brother who owe you a small debt. And you already given this brother seven, extended the debt line seven times.

I mean, this time is the eighth time you said, I won't extend it anymore, you must pay me back. And this brother couldn't pay you back, you take him to court. And put him to jail.

So, Peter, you have broken your promise. What do you think God does for you? So that is basically what the parable is about.

And Jesus is telling us that in the kingdom of God, people do not think in terms of personal rights. Because they are so overwhelmed by the forgiveness that they have received from God that they basically lose themselves in that amazement.

So you can imagine if you borrow \$6 million from the bank, from a bank, and you couldn't repay it, and the bank cancels your \$6 million debt.

[14:30] Would you care if your brother all used \$12? for any person of logic and heart, you won't care about how much other people owe you if you know how much you owe God and how much debt God has cancelled.

So if we are not forgiving, that means we have not tasted the forgiveness of God, or we have not understood the forgiveness of God, I understand that sometimes, as Don just announced, that sometimes it's actually very hard for us to forgive, because the hurt is so deep.

But I think the important thing is that we do have a desire to forgive. We may not be able to do it straight away, but at least the desire is there to tell God that I want to forgive, but I find it hard.

If we do have that desire, I think the Holy Spirit is already working in our hearts for it. Sometimes people who ask for forgiveness may not be sincere.

We know that. They say, I'm sorry, but they are not actually sorry. What do we do then? Or sometimes people, just like in this story, just keep sinning against you.

[15:58] What do you do then? so we will come back to verse 15 to look at the actions that we should take if we are suffering or we have been wrong, what do we do if the other party has not come to apologize?

So there are, I will put down in five points just quickly, because verse 15 to 17 will take the whole sermon at least.

So I was, first of all, initiative. So if we find that our relationship has been strained, we should be the one who take initiative to reestablish the relationship.

So we should talk to the person that has wronged us or have not sincerely apologized. we should help the person to understand the damage that's done to the relationship, the hurt that's caused.

It's not easy, okay, to do that. Unless we do it often enough, we just don't know how to do it, but we have to start somewhere. We need to have the right place, so we don't just in the public area and talk about this.

[17 : 20] Right timing, like if the person is busy with something else, occupied with something else, it's not a good time to talk about it. And the right attitude, the attitude will be the next thing that is, we talk about, this is not to protect our rights, but to restore relationship.

If you have this in mind, then the way we talk will be gentler, not coming down as someone aggressive, and also the attitude of caring for the other party, not so much condemning.

So we also want to consider, not only our rights have been infringed, we want to talk about, if you see a brother sinning against somebody else, somebody who's weaker and unable to defend themselves, I think we should still talk to the brother as well, or the sister, about this.

Or even if you see somebody who's harming himself, himself, herself, by addiction, alcohol, pornography, babbling, all these things, I think we should, even though it's not sinning against me or ourselves, then we should still talk to the person.

So that is our attitude. And then there's the steps that we take, that is privacy. So the third thing would be privacy, that is when we try to settle conflicts, bear in mind privacy because we do not want to publish the whole thing to everyone.

[19 : 07] So as the Lord say, it's one to one to start with. If it doesn't get resolved, you get some weaknesses, so small group leader, or another elder, or somebody else who is appropriate to talk to the person.

And only if it's not resolved that you bring the whole matter to the church. And then so the church can make the decision or make a judgment on this case.

And there is the, we also need to consider the cause of doing it. sometimes we try to resolve the conflict that it may not be resolvable. We thank God that most of the time it is resolvable, one to one level.

Sometimes you go to one to, many to one, some two or three to one. But in reality, in the church situation, it's very rare for the case to bring up to the whole church.

For my last ten years being involved in the eldership, there's none of these cases ever come to this. Just because by the second stage, when there are two or three talking to one, if it doesn't get resolved, the person usually leave the church and they just go to another church.

[20 : 38] church. And that's the cause of it, when there's not resolved on both sides. And the other cause would be reputation, because the person who leave the church would usually get asked, why did you leave the church?

So then he would talk about the hurt that he received by somebody in the church. But those who left in the church, who are involved in it, because of privacy, they don't tend to talk about their side of the story.

And so whoever tries to resolve problems, sometimes they will be the ones paying for the price for doing it. Just be mindful of this as well when we try to resolve conflicts.

Sorry, I need to hurry. So we will go to the next, from 18 to 20. It's talked about here, the church has got the final authority to decide on a conflict.

Who gave the church that authority? So that's 18 to 20. Jesus is saying that God has given the church authority to decide in terms of the binding and losing.

[21 : 58] And of course, if the church went through a trade, gather in Jesus' name, and God will guide the church for the decision. The question would be, would the church, even as the church make a decision, to make a judgment, would the church always be right?

It depends on what you define as right. How do you know something is right or wrong? Sometimes we don't actually know or can never know. in 1748, Jonathan Edwards, the famous preacher in America, was dismissed by his own church.

Because the church, by that tradition of the church is that the Lord's Supper was open to anyone, whether they are Christian or not. So this is a means of the church to attract non-Christians who come to church and start joining the church.

But Jonathan Edwards insisted that only Christians, people who have repented of their sins, should take part in the Lord's Supper. So the church came together and out of the 230 people, only 10% voted for Jonathan Edwards.

The others were against him. So Jonathan Edwards was dismissed. Jonathan Edwards wasn't bitter about this.

[23 : 31] He was very calm. He gave a farewell sermon and in the sermon he told, advised the church to keep their unity. I mean, don't divide because of this.

And he just went on and do some other ministries. So is it a right or wrong decision? It's very hard to say. the church definitely have possibly the best pastor and preacher American ever had.

But in God's sovereignty, the church has set loose a very powerful missionary to the Indians because they dismissed Jonathan Edwards.

So we can never know in terms of right or wrong in there. But in God's sovereignty, things will always turn up right in God's plan in any case.

So why should we do all these things? That is the main point of the second half of 18. That is to have the right relationship.

[24 : 41] We try to reestablish relationship with people and with God. And so with the forgiveness and all those going on, we are talking about is about relationship.

You see the word righteousness is not only to do the right thing in God's eye, it's actually to have the right relationship. Relationship with God and relationship with man.

For example, in Psalm 112, verse 9, it says that he has distributed freely, he has given to the poor, his righteousness endures forever.

And his horn is exorbitant honor. Righteousness in here is saying that somebody is generous, distributed, freely, given to the poor, and so he established a relationship with people, the poor people, the needy people, and that's righteousness.

And so it is important for us to know that to be considered righteous, it's not only sort of living according to God's law, but more so is having the love towards God and other people.

[25 : 58] And that is the, I suppose, sum up the message of chapter 18. Then, from this understanding, I will go back to the parable of unforgiving Because I think there are many questions that we will have from this parable.

I will deal with three questions. The question one is, is the unforgiving servant a believer? Is he a sort of, according to a Christian?

If he's not a believer, how can he be a servant of the king? But if he's a believer, how can he be condemned by the king at the end? How do we resolve this, question?

We need to think about relationship. When the unforgiving servant asked for mercy, do you think he have, what did he have in mind?

Why did he ask for mercy? So he didn't want to be punished, obviously. Did he have in mind he want to reestablish his relationship with the king?

[27 : 10] Possibly not. So his mind is about himself, how he can get off the punishment. So the relationship is very important in here.

If we go back to, if we go to Luke 15, in Luke 15 we have the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son.

Remember Jesus was talking to the Pharisees in Luke 15 and he first mentioned the lost sheep, one lost sheep with 99 sheep who didn't think that they were lost.

The 99 sheep is actually referring to the Pharisees, people who think that they are right with God because they have followed the law, the diligently, but they are not actually, their heart is not with God.

And then we go to the lost son. The son is lost, the younger son, not because he lost his ways or his mind, but he lost his relationship with the father.

[28 : 22] When he demanded his inheritance, he's already considered his father dead. He didn't actually care about his father. So the lost son is about people who pay no regard to God, who who's got his pleasure.

He just focused on finding pleasure in life. But the lost son, when he realized that worldly pleasure did not last or did not satisfy, he remembered the goodness of the father.

So he went home and apologized. He said, I sinned against heaven and I sinned against you, the father. So it shows that he wants to reestablish relationship with the father.

In the story of the lost son, there's also the older brother who didn't think that he was lost because he had been serving the father faithfully.

But he was equally lost because he did not have a right relationship with the father or the younger brother. So the older brother represents people who are lost because his God is religion.

[29 : 31] religion to him is the most important. He worships, he's not worshipping God, he's worshipping religion.

It means that he's worshipping himself because by religion he's establishing his position, his reputation. And so if we look at this parable, we know that again, the right relationship is very important.

so we come back to this servant, is he a believer? Now, it is not easy to define a believer.

While it's quite easy to define an unbeliever, unbeliever is like the younger son who did not pay any attention to God at all and have nothing to do with God.

But to define believer is harder. You see, most of us, when we come to believe in God, we usually believe in God because God is useful to us.

[30 : 36] God can help us, God can make us happier, or suffer less. So that is still about myself when I come to believe in God.

Am I a believer then? Possibly. But if at some stage I can see the beauty of God and I want to know God and love him and love other people as well, then I'm coming to believe in God not because he's useful to me, but because he's beautiful.

And I think Jesus is talking to Peter in this level of belief, desire to have a right relationship with God.

And that is very important to the church definitely because if you have desire to have the right relationship with God and then you have desire to have the right relationship with one another. And that's how the church will grow and be attractive to other people as well.

So that is the first question. The second question would be, I imagine Peter asked Jesus, he said, Peter could say, Lord, I know that I need to love God for all my heart, all my soul, all my strength, all my might, and I should love my brother as myself.

[32 : 10] But I'm not confident that I can keep it up all the time. If I fell, would God put me in prison? That's from this, parable.

So we can imagine also how Jesus will answer this question. Jesus will say, Peter, I'm glad that you have no confidence in yourself.

You are always full of confidence, but it's good that you have no confidence. And it's not a question if you will fail, you will fail again and again. In the parable, the unforgiveness servant needed to pay all his debt before he can be released from the prison.

But in reality, one day you will understand that your debt has been paid by someone. Your debt in the past or in the future will be paid.

And it will be paid by me. And that's why I have been telling you about my debt on the cross. So that is the second question.

[33 : 22] The third question is Peter may then ask Jesus, oh, in that case, you have given me an hour of jail card. Then why should I worry to be unforgiving?

I mean, you have already paid my debt. I can't just go on and live my life and be unforgiving. I won't be a job. God will not put people into prison. Why would Jesus answer this question?

Jesus would say, Peter, you don't understand. When you are being unforgiving to your brother, you are putting yourself in prison, in a prison voluntary.

Many people in the world live in prison voluntary. We live in prison of bitterness, prison of jealousy, prison of hatred, prison of anger.

There's so many prisons that we build for ourselves. God doesn't need to put you in prison. You put yourself in prison. When you insist that you want to protect your own rights, you are living for yourself.

[34 : 39] The longer you live for yourself, the more prison you will build. and one day you might find that you cannot repent anymore. You can't even use that out of cut because you forget.

You are so lost in it. You are lost in your resentment, in your bitterness. You don't think that one day you can suddenly come back to me.

You might not because if you just live for yourself, you will lose yourself. but if you live for God and other people, you will find yourself.

Peter, I've come to set the prisoners free. Wouldn't you follow me? Wouldn't you trust me now?

Let's pray. Father God, we know that we are unable to love you as we should or our fellow brothers

and sisters as we should.

And so many times we insist of our own rights and demand to be respected. Father, help us to be free from such prisons.

[36 : 02] Help us to be able to say that it's no longer I who live. And therefore, I do not need to protect my own interests.

But it's Christ who lives in me. I already have Christ in me. So at times, I'm not confident that I can keep up with loving you other people because I still live in the flesh.

but I do not live by trusting myself. I live by the faith, having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who loved me and gave himself for me.

Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.