Matthew Lesson 10: "A Caring Community"

Written by David Self
Sunday, 28 October 2007 18:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 28 October 2007 19:28

Explore the Bible Lesson Preview
November 4, 2007
A Caring Community
Background: Matthew 18:1-35
Lesson: Matthew 18:6-7, 10-22

Motivation:
William Barclay writes that Matthew 18 is "a most important chapter for Christian Ethics." (Matthew Vol. 2, p. 172) He identifies seven personal qualities needed by every Christian: 1) humility (1-4), 2) responsibility (5-7), 3) self-renunciation (8-10), 4) individual care (11-14), 5) discipline (15-20), 6) fellowship (19-20), and 7) forgiveness (23-35).

Examination:
I. Humility in the Community (1-14)
Jesus uses a classic object lesson to respond to a key question "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

A. The Qualities of a Child (1-4) - In this passage Jesus says that we must "become as little children"; in I Corinthians 13:11, Paul says "I put childish ways behind me." We must differentiate between childishness and childlikeness:

Childishness
Childlikeness

- shallow
- sense of wonder in learning
- stubborn
- humble
- selfish
- dependent
- skeptical
- trusting

18:3 is analogous to John 3:3; it requires turning and trust. The disciple’s question “Who’s the greatest...” revealed their utter lack of understanding; Jesus projects a vivid word-picture to alter their thinking.

B. The Protection of a Child (5-10)
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Protection From the Outside (5-7) - Child in this passage also can refer to an immature believer; in this sense, three warnings are give:

a. Warning to receive with open arms (5) - Our church should be open to receiving all types of people.

b. Warning to teach correct doctrine (6) - Our church should never have teachers or preachers that would lead anyone to stumble.

c. Warning to avoid sin (7) - Our church as individual believers should live in such a way as to provide upright examples.

The Protection of a Child From Within (8-9) - Not only does the church have a responsibility to protect immature Christians; they have a responsibility to make the kingdom of heaven their primary focus. Every Christian, in fact, is called to cut away from their lives improper motives, attitudes and actions that would detract from their kingdom calling.

The Protection of a Child in Heaven (10) - Guardian angels are often thought of in the context of little children. If, in fact, Jesus is speaking of immature believers as well, then the idea of assigned angels would apply to us all.

a. Angels imply care

b. Angels imply access

The Importance of a Child (11-14) - Verse 11 gives the purpose or mission statement of Jesus Christ "to seek and to save that which was lost." Verses 12-14 explain the purpose in the context of a shepherd. William Barclay comments on pp. 185-186 of his commentary "The Gospel of Matthew" (vol. 2):

1. The love of God is an individual love. The ninety-and-nine are not enough; He searches for the one absentee.

2. The love of God is a patient love. Lostness is not God's fault; it's humanity's. No matter how many times a person wanders, God is willing to search. (I John 1:8-10)

3. The love of God is a seeking love. The shepherd was not content to wait for the sheep to come back; he went out to search for it.

4. The love of God is a rejoicing love. There are no recriminations, only joy.

5. The love of God is a protecting love. His love not only seeks, it saves.

Reconciliation in the Community (18:15-20)

Explore the Bible Commentary (JFM, 1997) p. 17: "What is our responsibility toward God's children when one of them trips over the stumbling blocks of life? The following verses can be a helpful guide. As we apply them, we should remember some important points. First, these verses assume that the church is responding to persistent sinful behavior of one of its members, not the occasional transgression common to all believers (see I John 1:8-10). Second, the ultimate goal of such discipline is to restore the individual, not to punish (see 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 2 Thess. 3:15). Third, every attempt is made to keep the confrontation as private as possible (vv. 15-17)."

Believer's Study Bible: p. 1368: 18:15-17 &quot;Here and in 16:18 are the only references to 'the church' in all of the four Gospels. Government is charged with jurisprudence in civil
matters. In the ecclesiastical arena, each local congregation must assume the exercise of its own discipline. Jesus provided a program whereby the local assembly could protect its own sanctity and admonish an erring brother. The system involved three possible encounters with a brother overtaken in a fault. After the individual approach by one brother, one or two additional brethren are to be taken to confront the wayward brother. Only if this failed was the matter to be brought before the entire congregation. Furthermore, this last action involved two steps, the first being an appeal and admonition from the church, and the second, the exercise of the ban. The entire procedure is designed to prevent this exclusion from the church. Few cases would ever proceed beyond the first and second provisions. Even when a case demanded the ultimate drastic action of exercising the ban, the intent was redemptive. The disbarment from fellowship would hopefully awaken the rebellious person. On the other hand, the reputation of God's people would be protected if no disposition for repentance was forthcoming in the erring brother. (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Gal. 6:1, 2).

A. Believers Have the Right to Be Confronted Face to Face (15) - Gossip, backbiting and slander are prohibited in the church (2 Cor. 12:20). The offended person has the responsibility to try to make things right. The direction is to "go to him."

B. Believers Have the Right to Have Accusations Confirmed (16) - A matter is not to be made public until two or three fellow believers confirm its correctness.

C. Believers Have the Right to Appear Before the Church (17) - The intent of Jesus' teaching is to prevent conflict from progressing this far. Unfortunately, some congregations in the past have used this as a starting point, thus giving church discipline a bad name.

III. Forgiveness in the Community (18:21-35)

A. Dilemma (21) - Peter's question was meant to be generous. The scribes taught that a person should forgive three offenses but not the fourth. This formula was based on Amos 1 & 2. For three transgressions and for four. Based on all that he had learned from Jesus, Peter obviously thought that forgiving a person seven times was the equivalent of going the second mile.

B. Debt (22-34) - The major point of the parable is the disparity of the debt. It's difficult to imagine how much 10,000 talents is worth:

1. Putting it into equivalents, 10,000 talents is equal to about 60,000,000 denarii; therefore the servant's debt to the king was 600,000 times larger than that owed him.

2. The entire revenue of the combined provinces of Idumea, Judea, and Samaria was only 600 talents annually. Ten thousand talents was literally a King's ransom.

3. One writer suggest that if the sums involved were converted into coins, the 100 denarii could be carried in a pocket. The ten thousand talents would require an army of
8,600 men each carrying a 60 pound pack full of coins; placed single file, a yard apart, the line of soldier's would stretch for five miles! (Barclay, *Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 194)

The servant's plea that "I will repay you all" (26) was an outright lie. The King's generosity in releasing him and forgiving the debt was incredible. The grace of the master is in stark contrast to the servant's severity in demanding punishment to the fullest extent of the law (28-29).

C. Decision (35) "So my Heavenly Father also will do to you." leads us to several applications:

1. We're Not to Keep Track of Offenses. Peter's original question.
2. We're to Be Mindful of All God Has Forgiven Us. When we're tempted to collect a debt against a supposed offense, we must remember God's love and forgiveness to us.
3. We're to Realize That God's Grace is His Only Plan For Forgiveness. The servant's foolish boast "I will pay you all" is exactly the position people put themselves in when they try to gain heaven with good works. It's not just difficult; it's impossible.
4. We're to Forgive Others as Evidence of God's Forgiveing Us. Matthew 6:12 (cf. 13-15)

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

One who truly realizes the extent to which he/she has been forgiven will be quick to forgive and will not harbor animosity.

5. We're to Understand the Price of Unforgiveness. The servant's lack of forgiveness actually put him in a worse situation than his prior indebtedness. In verse 25, he was to be sold along with his family which would have effectively wiped out the debt. In verse 34, his master delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

Failure to accept the master's terms meant:

a. separation from his family and society
b. torture for his wrongdoing
c. an accumulating debt with no means to repay

Application

1. We're to have a childlike faith and sense of dependency upon our Father.
2. We're to follow Biblical steps in reconciling a difference.
3. We're to freely forgive as we've been forgiven.

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10/13
- Golf Tourney for Food Pantry;
10/25
- Leadership Commitment Event;
10/31
- Fall Festival;
11/4
- Celebration Sunday (churchwide event);
11/18
- Christmas Store Gift Collection Day;
11/25
- Thanksgiving - 10 a.m. worship (SS opt.) Ascend @ 6:30;
12/1
- MTC Christmas Store 9-4;
12/1
- Kingdom Kids Winter Event;
12/1
- Preschoolers Christmas Party;
12/14-15
- Christmas Presentation;
12/23
- Christmas - both a.m. services (no SS, no Ascend).