

Matthew 18:10-20 | Jeffrey Smith

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Preacher: Jeffrey Smith

[0:00] I love Christmas music. I love singing the Christmas songs. Is anyone with me where it's like this time of year you are playing 102.5 more on the radio! And you're listening to more of that Christmas music. And as soon as Christmas passes, I'm like, nope, no more of that. There's nothing like, though, going from singing a wonderful Christmas song like that to the passage we had this morning, which focuses on church discipline.

It is one of the most unnatural transitions here, but we're going to do that. You know, a couple weeks ago, Tom and Nikki Grass's neighbor gave a message on Thanksgiving. That's Ted, actually, if you don't know. He's not here to pick up on the joke. But every time he says that, I laugh when he talks about his neighbors and he's referring to his in-laws. But he shared a message on thankfulness and, you know, specifically on just kind of this gratefulness on just the general kind of unity that we have in the church here. And he read from Proverbs 6, which talks about, you know, the six things that the Lord hates and the seven that are, you know, an abomination, you know, that are just offensive, detestable things. And the last of those seven items, it says that the Lord hates one that sows discord among brothers, that stirs the pot, stirs the pot of conflict in the community. And I agree with that. I mean, that is a huge blessing. But I think it's also fair to say that that will not go on forever. And that will not always be the case. Whether here at this church or just even in your general life and relationships and dealing with family and friends and just those that you come across, there will be conflict. There's sin. I mean, that's just the, you know, foundation of it. There's sin, there's brokenness, there's conflict.

[2:07] Like, so these things are bound to come up where that unity is broken. And so today, this morning, I want to use our passage here in Matthew 18 to prepare us for that.

Again, the context is going to be kind of within the church, and I'm going to kind of talk about what that means. But I think this just broadly applies to a lot of life in general. Okay, just broad principles. Thankfully, the Lord has given us pretty clear instruction on, you know, what to do and what the truth and what, you know, His Word says to handle these. So let's go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll jump into it. Lord, we just again thank you for this morning, and thank you for this season of the year. It is a blessing, Lord. You made no mistake in orchestrating things the way you did, Lord. And so we just appreciate this time to be able to remember your son coming to this earth and being born, and ultimately what that kicked off. You know, we celebrate his arrival, Lord, but we ultimately just say thank you for the perfect gift that your son gave in his life, paying for sin. So we just thank you for that, Lord. Thank you for your Word here, and we just pray that it will be imparted here, and we will walk away with just a greater understanding of truth and what your Word says. Amen. So before I get into it, I just, I do want to say, you know, conflict between relationships, between people, it's not everyone's favorite thing, if I can just kind of state an obvious point. I'm a little odd on the one hand where I do genuinely like some healthy conflict.

You know, I don't mind it if someone comes to me and says, I think you're wrong, and this is why, and like, it's like a legitimate point. I'm like, okay, I'm listening, like, tell me why, help me understand. Maybe I'm doing something wrong, and I need to adjust. Like, that's appreciated. So those situations where kind of the emotion is stripped out, and you're kind of looking at the fact of what is going on or what that point of conflict is, I personally don't mind it. Kind of weird. But I can also think of situations where it's like, and this is mostly the case, where there is emotion involved. Think of like one of the biggest conflicts you've ever had with someone.

How does that make you feel? There's probably a pretty high level of discomfort there. How do I handle this? What do I do? There's a lot going on.

So, thankfully, the Lord kind of walks us through how to handle these situations in Matthew 18. So if you want to open your Bible, we'll go to Matthew 18, and we're going to start in verse 10.

[5:17] It says, See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think?

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

So it will not, so, I'm sorry, so it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. And this is just a beautiful picture of the Heavenly Father as this loving shepherd.

He leaves the ninety-nine, and he goes to find that one that has gone astray. You think about just the references to the Lord as the shepherd in the Old Testament.

You know, what's the most popular one you probably think of? Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

[6:24] He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff.

They comfort me. That's a wonderful picture. Above my parents' mantle, fireplace in their house, there's a picture, and you guys may have seen this.

I think it's fairly popular, but it's kind of a picture zoomed in of this tiny lamb at the front of the picture, and it's muddy, and it's dirty. You can tell it's a baby.

And behind it, there's a man that looks like Jesus. I don't know, but looks like Jesus, and he's running after this lamb. And it's like, that's a very powerful picture of this little helpless baby lamb that is dirty and lost and obviously away from the flock.

And there isn't this guy coming that's like, man, I'm going to discipline this lamb. If he walks away one more time, that's it. This guy is running to the lamb. And the picture of Jesus running to us as that one that has gone astray is a beautiful picture.

[7:33] Think about the prodigal son. We all know the story, but it says when that prodigal son came to his senses, and he's like, my hired servants, or my father's hired servants eat better than I do, or the pigs eat better than I do, and I'm over here eating the pigs' food.

It says he arose and came to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion. And they always talk about this. What did he do? No, he didn't do that.

He ran. This old man ran and embraced his prodigal son and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe and put it on him. And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate for my son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found and they began to celebrate. I don't believe if you're looking at 13 that the Lord is implying like, hey, he really prefers if you go astray and then you get brought back and he's going to celebrate more than, you know, the 99 that stayed.

[8:50] But simply for the Lord to see his son or his daughter come home, for them to be lost and now found, there is just something so special and there can be no other response but to be just rejoicing in that and to be celebrating.

So let's just continue. We're going to mostly focus on verses 15 through 17. So looking down to Matthew 18, it says, For 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, whoever 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 the Father in heaven.

[10:11] For when two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them. So again, the focus, what we're going to really talk about this morning is going to be that those steps within church discipline.

Like I know it's not our favorite subject. I'll just state the obvious. We were at a dinner party last night and it came up that I had the message this morning and everybody's all excited.

What are you speaking on? It's a church discipline. They're like, ugh. Okay. What? Did you choose that passage? I'm like, no. It was given to me. And so, you know, they kind of sparked an interesting conversation.

I'm like, what does your church do? What does our church do? You know, and it's like, a lot of interesting answers there. I will kind of get to like what I think one of the bigger differentiators between how this passage is interpreted.

It's really kind of at the end. But to start, you know, Christ's desire for his bride and for the church is to what? It's to be pure and undefiled.

[11:20] Okay. Paul says this in Ephesians 5. He says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present the church to himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish.

So the church is to be this this this bride, this spotless bride. And you know, when you start to allow sin that goes unaddressed, it begins to spread amongst the group and it really begins to defile that that bride, that church.

So what happens when someone sins against someone else? It's real simple. I kind of say that jokingly. It's not that simple. But it starts off with a simple first step.

It says, you go to that brother or go to that sister and you tell them what that fault was or what that sin was. But just between you and that person, one on one, mano y mano.

Do it alone. the Greek word show him his fault is elencho, which means to convict in the sense of producing an awareness of guilt.

[12:55] So you're trying to bring awareness to what that sin is, but it's not in the sense of like lording it over someone. You're not trying to like, hey, I got, I got, you know, some blackmail.

I got something I'm going to kind of dangle over you and make you feel guilty about this. It's not that. You are just bringing awareness to what that sin is to that person. At the end of this, I'm going to give you just a practical checklist of a few things that, hey, if you are in this situation, just kind of mentally go through some of these things.

It'll help kind of, you know, give you a gauge of like, where are you at in this? Is this something that I'm, you know, prepared to do? But in the end, you are to do this with love and humility.

Okay? That is like, you are blanketing this situation with love and humility because the ultimate goal is to restore that person, is to see a change in that person and to see them walking with the Lord.

The wrong way to go to someone is with a sense of pride or a sense of holier than thou. Okay?

[14:12] I love to like, sprinkle in personal stories in my messages and I'm really refraining here because it's just not, it's just not the right thing to do in this situation. But we can all think of situations where something was brought up and I'm like, listen, I hear what you're saying but like, I think there's just a little bit too much pride here that we're like, adding layers of legalism or whatever it may be.

Like, I don't think that's right. I think we're carrying too much of a holier than thou kind of attitude. You obviously don't want to rebuke someone out of anger or malice or jealousy or some other selfish attitude.

The goal is also not to rebuke someone for the purpose of injuring or shaming someone, you know, as a brother or sister.

And quite simply, if that person listens to you and they change that, you know, they address that sin in their life, I'm not saying they're going to suddenly be perfect but they suddenly recognize, yes, this is a sin.

This needs to be brought before the Lord and confessed and to see that desire to walk with the Lord. If that happens, you have gained that person back.

[15:29] Okay? One important note, just again from my own personal view of seeing this, is go to that person. The real easy thing to do is if someone sins against you, is to go to someone else.

Maybe you feel like, hey, well, I've got to go tell the elder what's going on here. I've got to go tell the leader of the camp, hey, I just saw someone. Go to that person. Okay? That is like, it is one of the most clear steps and it is often the most missed step.

Don't go around spreading rumors. Don't jump to steps two and three here. Just go to that person one-on-one. There's a quote that I read that says, if it is hard to accept a rebuke, even a private one, it is harder still to administer one in loving humility.

So, think about the humility that it takes to, like, be rebuked. That's hard to do. You know, it's hard to admit, yeah, I am wrong or I have offended you. I have done something wrong to you.

It's really hard to be the one going to someone to, again, blanket that with love and humility. So, recognize that. Recognize that. This is, while I say it's a simple thing, it's not easy.

[16:49] Okay? Going on, it says, but if he does not listen, step two is, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

And this is, like, a common thing going back to the Old Testament and Deuteronomy. It says, you know, in the legal system, Deuteronomy 19 says, a single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime.

Only the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses shall a charge be established. There is strength in numbers. Why is that?

Well, you get multiple perspectives. You have some accountability. Sometimes going one-on-one, you know, you need some of that backup in round two.

But in general, bringing one or two additional witnesses would allow for a broader observation.

What did this person say? Okay? Because if that person does not respond, then you have multiple people that you're going to the church and saying, hey, this is not just coming from me, it's coming from one or two others as well.

[18:02] Another quote that I read, it says, if we have a difference with anyone, there's only one way to settle it. And this is a really good one for myself for a lot of reasons. And that is face-to-face.

The spoken word can often settle a difference which the written word would have only exacerbated or worsened. We live in a culture where, I think about this, David, for work, I mean, we send a lot of emails at work, you know?

Sometimes it is just better to pick up that call, pick up that phone, and work it out with words. We live in a world of texting, of social media, of writing, and it just, things can get so twisted in that written word that it is sometimes better to just pick up the phone or to say, hey, let's meet at a coffee shop.

There's just something I got to share with you. Okay? And I've been in those situations, and again, they're not fun. No one loves to go to, you know, Breadco and sit in that corner and have a really tough conversation with someone.

But that is what needs to happen. Okay? Going to that person one-on-one, and if they don't respond, bringing two or three with you. Again, in that private setting.

[19:19] Verse 17, if that person refuses to listen to that group of two or three, tell it to the church. Tell it to the church. And this is a tough one. It can be awkward. Let's just call it for what it is.

It can be awkward. Sometimes you wonder, like, hey, if we have a visitor, how is this going to be perceived? Going back to what the purpose of this is, there's a few purposes of church discipline. You know, one of them is protecting the church. It is keeping the church pure in that sense. Another purpose is, again, restoring that believer to a right walk with the Lord.

And a third one is to restore that believer in fellowship with the local believers, with the local church. remember what Paul said, Christ's desire for his bride, the church, is that she might be pure and undefiled.

There's also, like, a reputational thing with this. And there was an interesting kind of connection in my study just with David and Bathsheba. You know, in 2 Samuel 12, it says, you know, when David sinned with Bathsheba, one of the consequences of his sin was that the name of the one true God was blasphemed by God's enemies.

[20:50] And I think about every time there's a headline of a, you know, a well-known church pastor or some kind of, like, crisis in the church, the unbelievers around me are quickly pointing to that.

And I remember specifically with one church locally that happened, you know, several years ago. And folks at work were like, hey, what's up with that? I thought that was your golden boy. You know, it's like, well, no, he's not. We're all sinners, first of all. And we can be very hypocritical, just kind of call it for what it is. And, you know, a church is a collection of broken people, of sinful people.

But for the outsider, you know, there's a lot of people that have been burned by legalism and by just the layer of law and you are doing things wrong and you are wrong and you are wrong. And they get this view of the church as hypocritical, you know.

And so we have to, there's this balance of recognizing we are sinners. We are a collection of sinners. But the Lord does call for the church to be pure in that sense.

[21:58] So how do we balance those two things? You know, and again, it comes down to humility and handling things in love. You know, it's really interesting here.

So, if it, you know, if they, in 17, it says, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. What era are we in here in the Bible?

Are we in the church era? That's kind of interesting. We're not, not really. So this, this term, ecclesia, is only used one other time in all of the Gospels.

And that is, if you go back to Matthew 16, where Jesus says of Peter, on this rock, I will build my church.

And so, I think the Lord is using kind of this, this wider sense of the word church here, but like in a practical sense, I think it's like this, this group of disciples that are following the Lord.

[23:05] But here, you know, kind of in the church era that we're in now, this can be directly applied to us as a church. So, as a church, we are to humbly, at this point, implore our brothers and sisters who are, who are in this sin to recognize their sin, to turn to the Lord and this is done out of gentleness and love.

You know, Paul instructed Titus, an overseer of the church, to speak, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. All three things carrying equal importance. So, then it gets to the tough one.

So, if you go to that person individually, no response. You bring one or two others, no response. You take it to the church and you say, here's where we are.

Okay? These are the steps that have been taken. And, you encourage the church to pray and to reach out to that person, again, in love, in care, in, in true support for that person.

And, if that person refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. This, this last step is where I think a lot of churches vary in that interpretation.

[24:27] I told you about the dinner club. Like, I think this is where it goes many different directions. Like, what does it mean to treat someone like a tax collector and a Gentile? You know, 1 Corinthians 5, you know, Paul addresses someone that, that was being disciplined.

this man was sleeping with his stepmother. And, it was not being addressed.

It says, Paul says, this is something the pagans wouldn't even tolerate. And, you guys are just letting it slide. And, Paul says, let him who has done this be removed from among you.

And, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. These are really strong statements.

Treat him like a Gentile and a tax collector. Remove them from among you. Deliver this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. These are drastic measures required because, what?

[25:42] just a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. Think about all of our Bethel moms that are doing their sourdough bread. You know, they're mixing their water and their flour.

I know it's a little bit different of a yeast, but, like, you are mixing that in. Okay? And, if that were to be contaminated, you've got to toss out the batch.

And, Paul is saying, you are literally just perpetuating this issue by leaving this unaddressed. I mean, the dude's sleeping with his stepmother.

like, you know, the term excommunication, which we hear a lot, is not, I don't think it's, like, directly mentioned in the Bible, but it's defined as the formal process of removing someone from membership or participation in the church, you know, from a relationship in the church community. And, you know, the Jews saw both groups that Jesus mentioned. You could say, hey, well, Jesus hung out with tax collectors and Gentiles. I don't think that's what he was talking about.

[26:55] The disciples knew what Jesus meant when he said treat him as a tax collector, as a Gentile. The Gentiles were considered these pagan idolaters. And, the tax collectors were in collusion with Rome.

Okay? So, kind of traitors and kind of, you know, stealing in a way. And, in Jesus' day, religious Israelites would not, associate beyond what was strictly necessary with Gentiles or tax collectors. This is just a paragraph from the commentary. They would have, they would not have meals with them, for instance, or invite them to social gatherings. So, when Jesus says to view the unrepentant sinner in the church as a Gentile and as a tax collector, he is instructing the church to officially and with clear communication stop having close-knit fellowship with the unrepentant sinner. The sinner is to be put out of the close-knit community of Christians. This is excommunication. So, again, this person is addressed by the one, takes two or three, takes it before the church, and if all else, if all this fails, then, then it is, it is this last step of treating them like a Gentile or tax collector.

I could get into, like, the detailed application of this. It would be very difficult to do because, quite frankly, there are so many different scenarios, and I recognize that.

[28:30] I recognize there are situations that involve family. I recognize there are situations where this person may not go to the church that you attend. there's a lot of, like, you know, tough interpretation of this.

Okay, let's just say that. And I don't, we just don't have time, frankly, to, like, come up with a bunch of hypotheticals and, like, how to address these, but, like, the text is clear that we are to treat these individuals as pagan idolater Gentiles or as kind of backstabbing, stealing Gentiles, or tax collectors.

So, from a church's perspective, I think it's pretty clear, kind of, the steps. My point is, there's, when you're kind of applying this more broadly, there can be tough situations. I do think about scenarios where you have a friend that is a believer that doesn't go to your church, and you're like, how do you bring this up to that person?

Like, how do you address the sin that is there? you know, you guys with me? It's just tough. It's tough.

But please remember, the bottom line goal is straightforward. The bottom line goal is restoration. In all of this, the Lord disciplines those he loves.

[29:59] I always kind of, you know, I like to just remind people, especially young parents that are like, how do I discipline my kids? Like, I don't want them to hate me. No adult that I know brags about how they got to do whatever they wanted as a kid.

What do people brag about? Man, oh, you got spanked by a wooden spoon? That ain't nothing. I got spanked by a bell. I mean, even last night at the dinner club, Teresa's talking about, you know, how you were disciplined, okay?

Why do we so fondly think of that? Because we deep down appreciate the guidance and instruction and discipline that our parents gave us.

There is no excitement in, oh, yeah, I got to do whatever I wanted. I got whatever I wanted for Christmas, anything that I ever wanted, it was given to me. No one wants that, okay? In the same sense, as believers, the Lord instructs us and guides us and disciplines us and is leading us on this path of sanctification, okay?

And when we get too far off that path, this is what the passage addresses. This is how you are to handle that. Some believe that later in 2 Corinthians, I mentioned the story of the 1 Corinthians chapter 5 passage where the guy was sleeping with the stepmom, there is, in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul brings up a man who had been restored to the body.

[31:31] And I don't know if it's the same guy or not, it may be. It says, now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure, not to put it too severely to all of you.

This is Paul speaking to the church. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so that you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him. Or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. Okay? So whether it's this guy that we talked about initially or someone else, Paul is, again, bringing this back to restoration.

That is our goal. Our goal is not to, like, again, hang this over someone's head to make them feel bad about, you know, it is restoration. And there's some tough love involved in that.

Okay? There is truth that is to be imparted. But ultimately, to reaffirm your love for him. Proverbs 27, 5 through 6 says, and listen to this, better is open rebuke than hidden love.

[32:41] Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Wounds from a friend can be trusted. But an enemy multiplies kisses.

It's another way of saying, if this person truly matters to you, if that relationship really matters, sometimes it is that rebuke, it is that discipline that displays that true love.

If someone's just all about flattery, quite frankly, I think it's a pretty shallow relationship. The real relationships are hard sometimes.

It's not all rosy. Sometimes you have to bring up the tough things. We need the honest truth. We need that tough love. If the musicians want to come up, I just want to go through a couple just, this is a simple checklist that may help you when you're considering a situation like this.

And I pray that you're not, but if you are, again, this should never be a hasty thing. This should never be a rash decision to like, well, hey, I got the message.

[33:54] You go home. You make a call on the way home. Hey, we got to talk about a big rebuke I got coming. Take, this is not something to be entered into, you know, quickly.

Evaluate each situation carefully and prayerfully. ask yourselves these questions. One, is my life free from this similar sin?

And I'm not saying that in the sense of you have to be a perfect person to bring up an offense, but I think it's just, you know, an important thing from just a humility and pride standpoint to just ask yourself, like, is this something I'm struggling with?

Two, do I have a relationship with that person that allows me to bring this up? Three, is my motive that of restoration or is it that of condemnation?

Four, if I go to this person and they do not respond, am I willing to bring one or two with me? And am I willing to bring this to the church and elders on my behalf or on this person's behalf?

[35:11] Five, am I willing to just commit to praying for this person?

Six, is the offense truly a sin or is it more of a just a preference that I don't really like?

Because that can be something as well. And lastly, am I acting in love? Again, I hope you guys kind of get where I'm going with this, that again, this is all to be done out of love and humility.

But love and humility is again, not all hugs and kisses and rosy feelings. Sometimes that involves doing hard things.

And what we see here in Matthew 18 is not the easiest to do. But I do appreciate the Lord giving us this instruction and this very kind of clear step-by-step process.

So let's close in prayer and we'll sing a song. Heavenly Father, again, your word is truth. And, you know, sometimes we look at things and say, man, that doesn't feel right.

[36:20] That doesn't kind of line up with what I want to do. but it is truth. And Lord, you are far more wise and knowledgeable than we are.

And as we heard in the Lord's Supper this morning, like, you are God and we are not. And so we are simply looking at your word. And as a church, I pray that we would just have a humble approach to this.

Just recognize that we are sinners ourselves, that we all sin daily. But Lord, this desire should be to bring that before you in just confessing and repentance.
Lord, in just seeking to walk with you. And I pray that we would just apply that in our own lives and just in our prayers for our brothers and sisters. So we just thank you for that.
In your son's name, amen.