

## Matthew 18:15-20 | Humble Enough to Confront

### Introduction | CONFRONTATION

We have been examining Jesus' fourth of five sections of concentrated teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:15-20 must be read in the context of the entire discourse. Jesus is continuing to speak about Christians as children and the church as a family. Jesus reveals the Father's desire for how his children to relate to one another in community. Jesus not only commands His children to care, protect, and pursue one another. Jesus commands us to **confront one another** about our sin.

The process in Matthew 18:15-20 serves as an **overall outline for carrying out church discipline**. The concept of church discipline carries with it a pile of connotative baggage. Most of that stems from *misinterpreting, misapplying* or otherwise *mishandling* this text. I prefer to use the word confrontation because of the negative connotations associated with discipline. The negative connotations are not biblical as, more than once, discipline is described as loving. **Hebrews 12:6 <sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.** This passage is embedded in a text about kingdom relationships, preceded by passages that speak to the seriousness of causing others to stumble and the importance of pursuing the one lost sheep. We would **do well to view church discipline less like a punitive process and more like a paternal pursuit**. Discipline is an essential part of our lives together as family.

**While this passage is been given to protect families, it has been used to destroy families more than any other.** Its abuse has caused many to abandon the practice. But the abandonment of church discipline is just as bad as the abuse of church discipline—we must avoid extremes. **A church can become GREAT in the eyes of the world without any of the holiness that our great God requires.** A family, or a church, where children are *only comforted and never confronted* is unhealthy. **Without confrontation, there is no purity; without purity there is no strength.** The Bible teaches us that we were made in the image of God, designed to reflect Him in all that we do. The Bible also teaches us that sin has deformed us we do not live as we were designed to. But God rescues His children from sin through faith in the person and work of Jesus, and, by grace, adopts those who believe into his family to help us become conformed to His image.

**Confrontation must exist as part of a gospel-saturated culture, not simply the nuclear option for unrepentant sin.** It is a grace of God to help us fight sin, believe the gospel, and mature in Christ.

### PREPARE D CONFRONTATION | Nature of CONFRONTATION

It is loving to confront a sinning brother or sister, who is hurting themselves or others, through their sin. **If I didn't love the individual or the family, I will say nothing.** In Galatians 6:1, using family language Paul writes: **Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.** It is not just our opportunity, it is our responsibility to help conform, help restore, help warn, and help protect. **The necessity of discipline is obvious. The motive of discipline is love. The goal of discipline is restoration. The process of discipline is messy. The result of discipline is purification for the individual, the church, or both. And, the preparation for discipline is essential.**

Confrontation that is truly restorative requires much prayer and wisdom to avoid spiritual abuse and unnecessary hurt through unloving and overbearing confrontation. **Essentially, we are praying for humility.** One commentator noted, *"It has hard to accept a rebuke, even a private one, but it is even more difficult to administer one in humility."* **2Corinthians 5:14-15 <sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ controls us, because we**

have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; <sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Before I can confront a child of God, I must become one. I need God to assume a position of dependence. I need confession. I need forgiveness. I need courage. I need wisdom. I need gentleness. **I need to reveal to me the right words, the right time, and the right way.**

#### V. 15 PERSONAL CONFRONTATION | one on one

A family committed to one another's holiness is also committed to one another's dignity. That is why discipline always begins with confrontation that is *personal*. <sup>15</sup> "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."

Personal one-on-one confrontation is both loving and protective. Even though we may counsel with others about the right words or the right way, we must be careful that our "sharing" doesn't turn into gossip. The phrase, "if he listens to you, you have gained your brother" reveals the purpose of this confrontation—restoration. Unfortunately, **a culture of humble-speakers will not help any church if there we are not a family of humble-listeners.** Whenever someone speaks "hard words" to us, in our flesh, we become defensive. We cannot believe that confrontation is "GOOD" or that a "FRIEND" would ever say such painful things even though the Bible says: **Proverbs 27.5 <sup>5</sup> Better is open rebuke than hidden love.** <sup>6</sup> **Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.** Some of us are not humble enough to confront. Most of us are not humble enough to receive confrontation.

Our prayer should be: **Psalm 141.5 <sup>5</sup> Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.** **The depth of love in our church will rise and fall with the depth of humility that exists in giving and receiving confrontation.** We must hear the heart BEHIND THE WORDS of someone willing to do the hard, uncomfortable, and risky work of confrontation. **Before this is instruction regarding the FIRST STEP in a process, this kind of confrontation is a description of what must characterize our kingdom relationships.** Whether the sin is actually against you, themselves, or others is irrelevant. What is relevant is that we are confronting unrepentant sin—a series of actions in contrary to Christ's commands, and not just character imperfections in people we don't enjoy/appreciate.

#### V. 16 PRIVATE CONFRONTATION | a small group

If the brother refuses to listen to a personal confrontation, the Bible says we are to take one or two others for a private group confrontation. The second step demonstrates a loving patience. We do not immediately reject our brother who chooses to keep wandering—as the Spirit works—we pursue again and again. This is love. **1 Corinthians 13.4-7 <sup>4</sup> Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.** Love tries again. **Brothers come together to help brothers helping brothers.** Without question, the pressure of a small group is greater than the individual. But sometimes, pressure is not needed as much as perspective. Sometimes we need counsel to ensure our confrontation is necessary. **If we cannot get one or two others to help confront, that either says something about my family or me.**

#### V. 17 PUBLIC CONFRONTATION | share with the church

Jesus teaches that what begins as personal and private may become public. <sup>17</sup> **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.** Remember, if we continue view church discipline less like a *punitive* process and more like a

*paternal* pursuit, then we see the grace of another chance for repentance and restoration. The church is not told in order to shame; they are informed so as to release an entire community to help.

Obviously, there is some formality here. This is where elders must be involved. Up to this point, the process of confrontation has taken place organically within community. At this first phase of formal discipline, we understand the command “tell it to the church” to mean to FIRST inform the elders who are the God-appointed leaders of the church—it is hopeful that 99% of these issues never get to this point.

Though all members of the church bear the responsibility for mutual encouragement and rebuke in the gospel, the elders bear the responsibility “to bind and loose” based on the authority of God to determine repentance. **Hebrews 13.17** <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. The elders lead the church in the formal disciplinary process as they work with those already involved. If, after additional investigation, the small groups findings are confirmed then the church engages in the confrontation as a community. THE ACTIONS OF DISCIPLINE IS SHARED AS A CHURCH. This is not the ELDERS against a member. This is a family decision. **We all receive one another. We covenant with one another. We all participate together.** It is shared with the church so that the church can keep ALL accountable. It is necessary, therefore,

- All church members should understand the purpose of church discipline
- All church members should understand the process of the church discipline
- All Church members should understand the preceding (path that go there)

If the offender is present, the unrepentant person will be admonished publicly and encouraged to confess and repent. If the person is not present, the church will still be informed. **Why say this publicly?**

- (1) it conveys to the unrepentant person the weight of his/her sin and its influence on the body of Christ
- (2) it gives each person in the church the opportunity to encourage and call the wayward brother or sister to repentance and faith in Christ as they encounter the person in the various realms of life, and
- (3) it protects the witness of the church, avoiding confusion with those outside the body of Christ, and with those inside the church by providing a warning that such willful rebellion is not tolerated by God and is detrimental to the health of the body (1 Tim. 5:20). *When the church disciplines Christians, she will more effectively disciple non-Christians (Bruner)*

If a person refuses to listen to **the entire family**, then the Scriptures command the last step of the disciplinary process—treating the unrepentant person as an unbeliever (pagan or a tax collector). The term “pagan” was used to refer to Gentiles, those outside God’s covenant fellowship while the term “tax collector” was used to refer to a Jew who was an outcast, a traitor to his own people. Bottom line—a person who once professed faith in Christ, but currently refuses to repent, should be treated as an outsider and not as a brother or sister in Christ—they are excluded from enjoying Christian community—and any form fellowship must be in an effort to call them back to Jesus. **If the church is a family, it will hurt.**

#### **V. 18-20 JESUS ENDORSED CONFRONTATION**

Some might be tempted to argue that this is not how Jesus would act, ignoring the fact that this is exactly what Jesus commands. Jesus endorses, empowers, and expects this kind of confrontation. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

This is one of the most abused passages in Scripture. Jesus is not saying that, **if you can get one or two people to agree with you** then you can do what you want. Jesus is not saying that, **if two or three of you are gathered together, there is a church.** On the contrary, Jesus is upholding the authority and responsibility of the church to deal with unrepentant sin in the family. **We must be HUMBLE ENOUGH to confront, humble enough to believe that Jesus knows better than us, and Jesus goes with us.** Jesus makes some promises to those HUMBLE ENOUGH to CONFRONT. We have his authority. We have his support. We have his presence.

And even though our flesh wants us to believe that this is anti-Jesus, it is quite the opposite. The church that embraces humble confrontation and discipline: 1) **Believes in the authority from Jesus** 2) **Believes in the need for Jesus to rescue** 3) **Believes in the power of Jesus to restore.**

Ephesians 4.15-16 <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.