



The King's Ransom

Matthew 20:28

Text

Matthew 18:15-20

Topic

Jesus instructs His followers how to go after a brother who sins in the hope of restoring him to fellowship

Title

"To Boldly Go Where One Man Can Be Restored"

Introduction

A father walks into his teen aged son's room holding a small box. He confronts the boy, asking him, "Is this yours?"

At first the boy denies any knowledge of the box - even though his dad tells him that his mom found it in his room.

It's a box of weed, along with other drug paraphernalia.

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Matthew 18:15-20

"To Boldly Go Where One Man Can Be Restored"

After several lying denials, the father, now agitated, asks, "Who taught you how to do this stuff?"

There is a dramatic pause, and then the boy exclaims, "**You, alright; I learned it by watching you!**"

In this 1987 public service ad by *Partnership for a Drug Free America*, the dad's authority to confront his son was compromised by his own behavior.

Let me ask all of us a question: Is our authority to confront other believers who are in sin compromised by our own behavior?

It's an important question to ponder as we approach our text. We are in the well-known passage about church discipline - about how to deal with believers who are deliberately sinning.

As we will see, it all begins, and therefore in some sense depends upon, each of us as individuals being not just willing but **able** to go privately to a sinning brother or sister and confront their sin.

We need to be like those described in Galatians 6:1, where we read, "if a man is overtaken in any trespass, **you who are spiritual** restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness..."

"You who are *spiritual*," meaning walking with The Lord, in the Spirit. If we are, we may hope to go and gain back a brother.

If we are not "spiritual," we may not even feel the Spirit's prompting "go" in the first place.

Let's be among the spiritual God can use.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: You've Been Appointed To "Go" And Thereby Gain A Brother Who Is In Sin, and #2 **We've** Been Authorized To "Go" And Thereby Gain A Brother Who Is In Sin.

#1 You've Been Appointed To "Go"
And Thereby Gain A Brother Who Is In Sin

(v15)

Jesus had just told His disciples a parable about the value God the Father puts upon every child of God. He compared our Father to a shepherd who will leave ninety-nine sheep in order to go after the one straying sheep, to bring it back to the safety of the shepherd and the flock.

Our text describes one of the primary ways God goes after those who stray in the church age in which we live.

The remarkable thing - the thing to sit up and take heed of - is that He sends **you** and **I** after them. We are His first plan of action.

Don't miss this: The process we call church discipline depends first and foremost upon **you** and **me** as individuals. Before two or three others get involved, and way before the whole church gets involved, it's just you and the sinner - *mano y mano*.

(Or *womano y womano*).

Mat 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.

The issue is sin - something the Bible clearly and unmistakably defines as sin. If it's something else, say, a personality issue, or some other disagreement - for sure, get together and try to sort it out.

But if there is no sin, the resolve is, as much as lies in you, to be at peace with the other person. It's not a matter for getting others involved, or for church discipline.

Someone who identifies as a brother or a sister in Jesus Christ is committing sin; or you suspect very strongly they are. **You** are appointed by God to "go" to them and "tell" them.

This is a responsibility that falls on each and every believer. It's not just for the pastor, or an elder, or a deacon. **All** of us are so appointed.

The words, "against you," might not be in your translation. They are not in all of the old manuscripts we have from which we translate the Bible.

The context argues for a broader application than a sin or sins against you personally. Jesus wasn't talking about a personal offense as if you could ignore the fact a brother or sister is in sin if it isn't directly against you.

All sin by other believers *does* directly impact the body of Christ - including you.

- It can impact the body of Christ by being a terrible testimony to nonbelievers.

- It can impact the body of Christ by grieving the Holy Spirit and thereby hindering His work in the church.

The "tell[ing]" of the sin is to be done privately, and that means without consulting others or asking their advise or counsel by first telling them about the person's sin.

"If he [or she] hears you, you have gained your brother [or your sister]." The goal, and your desire, ought to be to "gain" the person. The word is borrowed from the world of commerce, where it is used to described accumulating wealth.

A brother or a sister in Jesus Christ is far too valuable to let alone in their sin. It will endanger them; it can destroy them - and with them, those around them.

No, they have strayed and need to be told in order to be restored for their own good as well as everyone else's. They need to be accumulated, as it were, back into the fellowship of believers.

So you, and I, are to "go" to them. And, you know what? Why wouldn't we "go" to them, since we love The Lord with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and we love them.

- One reason we might not "go" is because we've been taught, or we assume, it is the job of a church leader. Nope. Not at step one; not at ground zero.
- Another reason we might not "go" is because we hate confrontation; we're not wired for it. That's not a valid excuse.
- And then there just might be the reason I alluded to earlier. If I am sinning, I'm afraid the person I'm going to tell their sin will turn it back on me and, in a way, say, "I learned it from you!"

None of us are sinless, but there is a difference between being a sinner and habitually committing deliberate sin. We need to get it together, confess our sin, let The Lord cleanse us from all of our unrighteousness, and then "go" tell our brother or sister their "fault."

God wants to use **you**, to use **us**, to restore a brother or sister; to "gain" them back. Each of us is far too precious for any of us to ignore sin - either in our own lives, or in the lives of others.

#2 We've Been Appointed To "Go" And Thereby Gain A Brother Who Is In Sin

(v16-20)

Let's say you "go" and the person won't hear you - meaning they refuse to repent of their sin. Now what?

Mat 18:16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD MAY BE ESTABLISHED.'

While we can identify at least five distinct 'steps' in this process, that does not mean we must rapidly move from one step to the next; or that we always go in order.

- You may, for example, "go" privately to the sinning brother or sister multiple times before you realize that they are refusing to repent.
- Or it may be that the sin is so obvious, so blatant, that there is no need for a one-on-one, but rather you start with a larger group to seek the sinners repentance.

In the textbook case, if they continue in sin after you privately "go" to them and "tell" them, you are to enlist the help of others who are spiritual.

The "one or two more" are to function as "witnesses." I take that to mean that, ideally, they do not know about the person's sin. You haven't prepped them ahead of time; you haven't stacked the deck against the brother you're confronting.

They may, in fact, determine that your claims are without merit. Remember, there needs to be actual, deliberate sin - not just a personal offense or hurt feelings.

But if there **is** sin, taking a witness or witnesses amps up the confrontation as the sinning brother or sister now starts to see that this is really serious.

The witness or witnesses will also be needed if things don't get resolved and they proceed to "tell[ing]" the whole fellowship. They can give testimony that things have been handled biblically, with grace and love.

Mat 18:17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

"Hear them" means that the witnesses agree that there is sin and they, too, urge the person to repent. If the person still refuses, then the "church" must be told.

Again, there is no rush to get to this point; not usually, anyway. You might make several attempts with the witnesses before "tell[ing] it to the church."

There is a wide diversity of biblical scholarship on exactly how to "tell the church."

- Some say it is during a regular service of the church, with believers and nonbelievers in the assembly.
- Some say it is at a special meeting of the church's believing members called specifically to deal with the discipline.
- Some suggest it can be a smaller group within the larger church - comprised of those believers who have regular contact with the sinning person, e.g., their Bible study group or their fellow ushers.

There is also scholarly disagreement on exactly *what* you "tell" the church.

I can only say that, for me, there are a variety of ways you might "tell it to the church," depending upon the person and the particulars.

Since the goal, at this point, is still to see the person restored, the principle to follow is to keep the number of people who know as small as possible but as large as is necessary.

What do you tell the church? You tell the church their sin, and the steps taken to restore them thus far.

You tell the church in order to enlist everyone who needs to know that the person is in sin, in order that everyone told might urge them to repent and thus be deputized as agents of restoration.

Throughout this process we are all to be thinking and acting as one in order to gain the person who is sinning.

Mat 18:17 ... But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

I don't need to tell you that this, too, is a source of disagreement and controversy. Here is my take.

Jesus was talking to Jews, and from a Jewish perspective, a "heathen" was a Gentile - a person who was never a member of God's spiritual community.

A "tax collector" was a Jew who deliberately chose to abandon God's people in order to live like a Gentile.

That's helpful to me in this sense. I don't know if the sinning brother or sister is refusing to repent because they *can't*, or because they *won't*.

- I don't know if they are like a heathen - someone who never was saved, a tare among the wheat, and *can't* repent of their specific sin because they first need to come to Jesus to be saved.
- Or if they are a genuine believer, who has the Holy Spirit, but who *won't* yield to Him, but instead choose to continue in deliberate sin.

Either way, I am to treat the person who continues unrepentant in deliberate sin as I would treat an unsaved person.

But not *just* like I would treat any unsaved person. Listen to this passage about church discipline from First Corinthians 5:9-13.

1Co 5:9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people.

1Co 5:10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.

1Co 5:11 But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person.

1Co 5:12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

1Co 5:13 But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "PUT AWAY FROM YOURSELVES THE EVIL PERSON."

You are to treat a professing Christian who is sinning as an unbeliever, but with a good deal more caution than someone who doesn't claim to be a Christian.

What did Paul mean by, "put away from yourselves?" It's not as obvious as you might think. Most scholars say it means removal from the church; they say it means excommunication.

Dr. Jay Adams, revered by some as the guru of church discipline, says of "removal,"

Some think that [the disciplined person] is not to be allowed to attend worship services of the church. That is a wrong reading of the passage. What Paul means is that he is removed from the care and discipline of the church; he is no longer to be considered a member... But since he is to be treated as a heathen, and [since] heathen are permitted to attend the services of the church, unless he is acting divisively he should be allowed to hear the preaching of the Word and should be witnessed to by the members, treating him like any unbeliever who enters.

Regardless what we think "removal" means, whether at a church service, or in public, or in private, we are to continue to urge the person to repent, treating them as we would treat an unbeliever, but keeping the passage I quoted from First Corinthians in mind, which tells us to be more guarded against them than we would a person who has never confessed Jesus Christ.

Another writer says,

Not to have fellowship or even social contact with the unrepentant brother does not exclude all contact. When there is opportunity to admonish him and try to call him back, the opportunity should be taken. But the contact should be for the purpose of admonishment and no other. [You therefore] put [him] out and call [him] back - to keep the sinning brother out of fellowship until he repents, but also to keep calling him back in hopes that he will.

I don't have to tell you how very hard, and sad, all of this is. But the difficulty and the grief doesn't excuse us from obedience.

The question that always comes up, and might be on your mind, is, "Why don't we see more church discipline?"

Meaning, of course, why aren't we "telling the church" on a more regular basis.

As a practical matter, by the time we get to that point in the discipline, usually the person has already left the fellowship, and most or all the believers he or she had fellowship with know about their sin. It's therefore unnecessary to "tell it to the church." The whole church is protected, since the person is gone and is not affecting them; and the smaller part of the church that needs to know, knows.

There are always conversations going on at the earlier one-on-one and two-or-three-on-one stages. Whenever we hear about sin, we deal with it, as graciously and mercifully as we can.

By "we" I now mean "me," and the leadership in our church.

- If you don't see us doing anything, it may be that we don't know about it.
- Or it may be that we know something more about it than you do.

Verses eighteen, nineteen, and twenty are familiar to us, but usually are taken out of context and quoted as stand-alone promises. In fact, they reveal how and why the church on earth has authority to deal with brothers and sisters who sin.

Mat 18:18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

This was a Jewish saying of the day that Jesus' disciples would have understood to mean that, when the church follows God's principles for disciplining its members, it can be assured they are acting with the prior authorization of Heaven.

I've confronted folks over the years and a common retort by them is, "it's none of your business." Another is, "it's between me and God."

That's not true. We are all connected, as a human body is connected. And God has given us instruction on how to deal with sin in our midst. It's *never* a none-of-your-business, private thing. It's not just between them and God.

Mat 18:19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.

This certainly can have application to prayer in a general sense; but we need to be careful and temper it by everything else the Bible says about answered prayer, e.g., it must be according to God's will. Otherwise this verse gives the false impression that God is bound to do anything and everything "two" of you demand of Him.

In context, if "two of you," referring back to the witnesses in verse sixteen, "agree on earth," they are representing God, and their decision that the sinning brother or sister has either repented or has refused to repent, is authoritative.

Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

First I want to point out something we sometimes overlook in this verse. Jesus claims an attribute of deity; He claims to be everywhere believers are, or as we say, *omnipresent*.

He **is** omnipresent because Jesus is God.

Certainly it is OK to claim this as a promise that whenever we pray together, Jesus manifests Himself in a special way. Nothing wrong there.

In context, this is referring to the "two or three" witnesses we spoke of in the discipline process. Again, it is a word about our authority as believers to carry-out what God has commanded. The Father **and** the Son have delegated us their authority to "go" and try to "gain" the straying sheep.

My desire today is to present this text, and this subject, in as precise a way as I can so as to, on the one hand, make us understand that the process of church discipline is not as cut-and-dried - not so 'mechanical' - as some would have us think; but, on the other hand, that it is incredibly important we apply church discipline, both in order to try to "gain" the sinning brother, as well as protect the members of the fellowship.

My theme, however, is something more individual. It is for us to understand that church discipline is **me**... and it's **you**... loving The Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, keeping ourselves spiritual so that we are ready and able to "go" after the stray and "tell" him or her their sin and "gain" them back.

Church discipline isn't just what the "church" does officially, at a service, through its leaders.

It is me and you loving someone enough to want to do what God says in order to restore them.