

Lesson 32

Reproving A Believer

Icebreakers:

How do societies deal with lawbreakers?
What is the primary goal in treating the lawbreaker this way?

Introduction:

Jesus held a child in His arms when He instructed the disciples about not causing stumbling blocks for others or themselves. And then, recognizing that children are prone to making mistakes, Jesus transitions His teaching to dealing with a believer who is straying from the truth by engaging in sin. He was not talking about petty offenses, the little things that so easily annoy us: a person's habits, social skills, manners or politics.

Reading The Scripture:

Don't Let a Straying Believer Perish Matthew 18:11-15

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost. What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."

Matthew 18:16-20

(Gospels forged together into one seamless story, in collaboration with New American Standard Bible,
authored by Michael Gibson, Founder of Spirit & Truth, dba Key 2 Changes: "Follow Me: A Message from God", a journey with Jesus)

"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. And 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-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

As a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Individuals who were considered as not being a part of the congregation of Israel with the benefit of fellowship.

If two of you agree. This statement pertains to individuals coming together to make a judgment, as to whether something is to be permitted or forbidden.

The Commands:

1. See to it that you do not despise one of these little ones.
2. Go and reprove him in private.
3. Take one or two more with you.

4. Tell it to the church.
5. Let him be to you as a gentile and a tax-gatherer.

The Lesson:

Jesus begins the teaching with this statement. *See that you do not despise one of these little ones,¹ for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

To despise someone means to look down on them or to think less of them. There are many reasons people despise others. For example, they are not smart enough, they are poor, they have failed in some way or their moral standards are not up to par. In each case, the despiser is behaving in a prideful manner and is in fact passing judgment on the other. Jesus had instructed the disciples previously on this issue. *Do not judge lest you be judged² and first take the log out of your own eye.³*

Group Discussion:

1. Why do you think this first step in dealing with an offending believer is important?
2. According to Matthew 18:11-14, what is the goal of dealing with an offending believer?

The Lesson Continued:

Having addressed the two issues of 1) judging one's own heart before reproving a fellow believer and 2) having as a goal to restore the offending believer, Jesus then outlines a four-step process in dealing with the offender. Each step in the process is based on the law of love. *"However you want people to treat you, so treat them.⁴* And as such, each step in the process is designed to give the offender an opportunity to repent. The **way** the offender is treated is based on whether he repents of his sin or not. This lesson deals with those who **do not repent** while the next lesson deals with those who do.

The first step involves the person who observes a believer sinning. He is to go to the offender and reprove him in private. From this we can see that it is always the **responsibility** of the offended party to reprove the offender. If he does not do this he is guilty of not fulfilling the law of love himself. In other words he would rather see the offender continue in sin and suffer punishment from God than reprove him. It also shows a lack of love and concern towards others who may be affected by the sin.

In approaching the offender privately the offended individual is demonstrating that he desires to prevent further **embarrassment** to the offender by covering his shame. Two Old Testament examples of covering another's shame are: 1) When God provided animal skins for Adam and Eve to cover the shame of their nakedness after they had sinned⁵ and 2) when Japheth and Shem covered their father, Noah's nakedness.⁶ Wisdom from the book of Proverbs supports this action as well. *Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions⁷ and a fool's anger is known at once, but a prudent man conceals dishonor.⁸*

¹ Within the context of his teaching on offenses, Jesus equates little ones or children to Christians.

² Matthew 7:1

³ Matthew 7:5

⁴ Matthew 7:12

⁵ Genesis 3:3 and 22

⁶ Genesis 10:23

⁷ Proverbs 10:12

⁸ Proverbs 12:16

If the offender does not repent it is an indication that he is being **stubborn**. Therefore, the second step is to take one or two more individuals to confront the offender *so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.*⁹ The witnesses play an important role. First, because of their impartiality, they help insure that there is no **miscommunication** or **misunderstanding** between the parties. Secondly, they serve as ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. And third they gather the facts concerning the offense in regards to Scripture, what the offended party says and what the offender says.

If the offender does not repent at this point it indicates he is in **rebellion**. Therefore, the third step is to tell the church. In telling the church it is not necessary to inform every member of the church immediately but only the ruling body. After hearing the witnesses the ruling body then makes a **legally binding decision** in regards to the church's position. Jesus addressed this issue when He said, "*Truly I say to you, whatever you bind [forbid] on earth shall have been bound [forbidden] in heaven; and whatever you loose [permit] on earth shall have been loosed [permitted] in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.*"¹⁰

Should the ruling body fail to take action they are remiss in their responsibility and not acting in love. In other words they would rather see the offender continue in sin and suffer punishment from God than reprove him. It also shows a lack of love and concern towards others of the congregation who may be affected by the sin. The Apostle Paul rebuked the leadership of the church at Corinth over this exact issue.¹¹

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Once the ruling body has made its position clear the offender has one last chance to repent.¹² If he does not the he is guilty of acting with **presumption** or **high-handedly**. Jesus said that if he failed to repent at this point then everyone in the church was to treat him as a Gentile and a tax gatherer. In other words, the congregation was to have no fellowship with the individual until he repented. The Apostle Paul upheld this position in his first letter to the Corinthians.¹³

⁹ Deuteronomy 19:15

¹⁰ Matthew 18:18-20

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 5:1-8

¹² This was the third offer.

¹³ 1 Corinthians 5:9-13

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.¹⁴

Group Discussion:

3. How many churches do you know use the biblical process of dealing with an offending believer?
4. Why don't most churches use the biblical process?
5. At what point in the process do failures in responsibility occur most frequently?
6. Why?

The Point Of The Lesson:

Correct straying believers.

Application:

When you see a Christian sin, don't neglect your responsibility in the correction process.

¹⁴ The basis for dealing with offending believers can be studied in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. Specifically see Deuteronomy 17:6-7 and 12-13. The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy also said, "Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning."