

Lesson 67 – THE GRACE OF DISCIPLINE

Matthew 18:15-20

The Lord continues to deal with the theme of His people having the proper attitude towards one another. He cautioned that His children must never be despised and warned that offending them would be severely dealt with by the Father. Christ now proceeds to set forth the Gospel way to handle offences which sometimes arise within the family of God.

(Matt. 18:15) – Two things are clear: (1) He is speaking of differences that arise between believers – *“MOREOVER IF THY BROTHER SHALL TRESPASS AGAINST THEE.”* We are all members of Christ’s spiritual family, and we should always keep this in mind. None of us deserve or have earned our right to be in this family. It is all of grace and all based on Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. (2) The Lord is not speaking of insignificant, trivial differences that may arise. He is speaking of serious matters which may threaten the unity and edification of brethren in Christ. *“GO AND TELL HIM HIS FAULT BETWEEN THEE AND HIM ALONE: IF HE SHALL HEAR THEE, THOU HAST GAINED THY BROTHER”* – Note that the one wronged is to move toward the offender and try to settle the matter and restore their friendship and fellowship privately. One of the strongest motivations for reconciliation in these matters is a fresh realization of how our Heavenly Father has forgiven us of all our sins by His grace through Christ. He does not charge us with our sins, and He does not hold them against us.

When we seek a resolution and reconciliation with offended brethren, we emulate the Lord. Though He was offended by our sins, yet He went about to accomplish the reconciliation of sinners to Himself through His death on the cross (Rom. 5:10-11). Our goal in approaching the transgressor is not revenge, but restoration. Our desire is that our brother or sister will be repentant and receive the rebuke in the spirit that it is given.

(Matt. 18:16) – If the offender refuses to admit wrong-doing, however, do not immediately give up on him. One or two carefully selected persons are to go with the offended one to visit that person. These will act as witnesses of the accusation and the response. This is done in accordance with instructions laid out in the Word of God (Deut. 19:15; John 8:17). The witnesses are to hear both sides and endeavor to make an honest determination of the truth. The witnesses are also to admonish the wrong-doer to admit their offense and encourage them to repent. If successful, fellowship and peace are restored, and the matter is to be dropped never to be brought up again. Thank God that the sins and iniquities of God’s people, having been paid for and put away by the bloody death of our Savior, are never to be raised against us (Heb. 10:14-17; Isa. 43:25; Jer. 50:20). God will not impute them to us because He has imputed them to Christ Who is our propitiation for our sins and Who is our righteousness before God (Rom. 8:31-39).

(Matt. 18:17) – If the first two efforts fail, the third step is to bring the matter before the church and, hopefully, settle it positively so as to restore peace and fellowship. But if the offender refuses *“TO HEAR THE CURCH, LET HIM BE UNTO THEE AS AN HEATHEN MAN AND A PUBLICAN;”* i.e. he is to be treated as a lost person who needs salvation and who is not to be included as a member of the church family. This shows that the matters of which the Lord speaks are not petty differences but matters of the utmost importance as they pertain to God’s Word (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Thess. 3:6,14-15). Still, just as the church seeks the salvation of the heathen and publicans, she also desires the salvation and reconciliation of the one who refuses hear her in these matters.

(Matt. 18:18) – When the church acts under the authority of God’s Word, the matter is settled and cannot be challenged. This is the same when it comes to preaching the Gospel. All who believe are saved by God’s grace and to be received as full and equal members of His body. All who reject the Gospel are to be rejected and not received into His body (Matt. 16:19; 2 John 9-11).

(Matt. 18:19) – It is wonderful when believers are in agreement and can work out differences in a Christ-honoring way. It is then they can meet for worship and fellowship with one accord (Psa. 133:1; Gen. 13:8; Php. 2:2-5; Acts 1:14; 2:1; 4:24-31). *“AGREE”* means to harmonize together, rather than the undertones of friction that capture our thoughts and distract us from the sweet message of God’s grace in Christ. *“IF TWO OF YOU SHALL AGREE ON EARTH AS TOUCHING ANY THING THAT THEY SHALL ASK, IT SHALL BE DONE FOR THEM OF MY FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.”* This agreement in prayer does not mean that this insures we can get anything we ask for. It guarantees we will receive anything for which we ask according to God’s will and in line with His Word in Christ.

(Matt. 18:20) – *“FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE ARE GATHERED TOGETHER IN MY NAME, THERE AM I IN THE MIDST OF THEM”* – When God the Holy Spirit gathers His people together to exalt Christ crucified and risen from he dead in true worship, He promises to be with them in the Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24; Php. 3:3). Notice that the assurance of His presence is only to those who are gathered IN IS NAME which is exalted above all names (Php. 2:10). It is vital that our being gathered together in the fellowship of His body and in public worship that we do so as to honor and exalt His glorious name (Matt. 1:21; Acts 4:12; 10:42-43). His name is identified by the doctrine of His glorious Person (God manifest in the flesh) and of His finished work of redemption to save all whom the Father has given Him and for whom He obeyed unto death to save them from their sins, give them spiritual life, and bring them to glory (John 6:37-45).