

In this passage Jesus expresses His desire for the reconciliation of people, specifically those without salvation and those who have sinned against another person. In the case of the latter, Jesus lists the steps we are to take to reconcile someone who has sinned against us if possible and tells Peter that we should always be willing to forgive no matter how many times a person has sinned against us.

Verses 1-10: The disciples come to Jesus wanting to know which of them will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mark and Luke reveal that the disciples had been arguing about this). In response the Lord sets a child in the middle of them as an illustration of the humility and childlike faith that is required to enter and be great in the kingdom. He then expresses His protectiveness of children who trust in Him and how that vengeance will be taken upon anyone who would harm them. He also describes how important it is that we remove all temptations to sin and hindrances to our entering the kingdom from our lives. Jesus then describes how that angels are always in the presence of God, ready at any moment to obey the command to punish those who have harmed one of God's children.

11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.

Jesus explains why He takes such an interest in the welfare of children who believe on Him: because He is in the business of saving [*to rescue; to keep safe*] those which are lost [*to destroy; to perish*]. Jesus wants to rescue those who are in danger of perishing and bring them to a place of safety with Him (reconciliation). As the remainder of this passage shows, the lost could be those in need of reconciliation to God through salvation or those who need reconciliation with their brother because they have sinned against him, whether unintentional or not. In both cases, reconciliation needs repentance from one party and forgiveness from the other.

12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

Jesus uses a parable of a man who has lost one of his 100 sheep. This man does not operate on the principal of acceptable losses but instead he leaves the 99 sheep safely at home and goes searching for the one that is in danger of perishing. He will not be satisfied that the 99 are safe but goes in search of the one because every single sheep is valuable to him. Jesus wants the disciples to see that every person who belongs to Him is important and He will not give up search for them until they are all safe. What joy to know that Jesus loves us enough to never give up on us when we go astray because He will not rest until we are once again safely with Him!

13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that *sheep*, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

When the man looking for the missing sheep finds it, the relief that this sheep is no longer in danger fills him with joy. The joy of the one being reconciled (rescued) to himself outweighs the satisfaction in knowing that the 99 were still safe at home. Like the father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), there was joy when the lost son was reconciled to his father (**Luke 15:32** "*It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*"). **Luke 15:10** "*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*"

14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

The "little ones" refers to the children He spoke of in v. 6 and likely Jesus is pointing to the child that He brought into their circle as He says this (v. 2). Every one of God's children (young or old) are important to Him and He will do whatever is needed to insure their spiritual safety.

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Not only does Jesus want to reconcile lost sinners to Himself, He also wants us to reconcile lost fellowships among His children. In vs. 15-20 Jesus describes the steps that should be taken in church discipline. The point of these steps is not punishment but reconciliation. Notice that the steps only escalate if repentance and reconciliation have not been accomplished. If someone has committed an offense against you, the first step is not to complain to others about it. Rather, we are to go to the brother who has wronged us and discuss the situation with him alone. It's possible that this brother is not even aware of the offense and will be happy to make amends once he had been made aware. If the two of you are able to resolve the situation then you will have "gained thy brother" through being reconciled to each other. There will be no need to escalate the situation further.

16 But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

If the first step of reconciliation has failed, then you are to bring witnesses with you so that it won't be a "your word against his" situation. The witnesses will also be able to help determine the truth of who is in the wrong and seek reconciliation for the two parties. If the presence of the witnesses fails to resolve the situation, then the matter is to be brought before the church and let them judge and attempt reconciliation. If the brother who sinned against you will still not acknowledge and repent of his sin against you even after hearing the judgment of the church, then you should no longer treat him as a brother. His refusal to repent may be evidence that he has not been saved. The Apostle Paul discusses how that matters between the saints should be resolved within the church instead of going to a secular court in 1 Cor. 6:1-8 because God has given such authority to the church.

18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

This verse mirrors Matt. 16:19 where Jesus gave Peter (and essentially all believers) the authority to enforce on earth the decisions already made in heaven. Many commentators point out that the underlying Greek in this verse (as well as Matt. 16:19) favors the translation as “whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall have already been bound in heaven...” Jesus’ statement is still in the context of seeking the reconciliation of a sinning brother and He has given the church the authority to make judgments (loosing or binding) in accordance with heavenly guidance. Loosing speaks of the permitting of behaviors and binding speaks of the forbidding of behaviors.

19 Again I say unto you, That 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. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

These verses should be taken in the context of v. 16 where we are instructed to take 2 or 3 people with us to talk to attempt reconciliation with a sinning brother. If you gather in the name of Jesus Christ, He promises to be there also to legitimize and guide the meeting. Anything bound (forbidden) or loosed (permitted) in keeping with the will of God will have His authority behind it. Verse 20 has frequently been used as encouragement at church meetings when very few attendees were present. However, that usage takes the verse out of its context as it is speaking about two or three gathered together to exercise church discipline.

21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Apparently this teaching on reconciling people who have sinned against us had brought a question to Peter’s mind. Perhaps Peter had someone specific in mind that had sinned against him more than once. He asks: How many times are we required to forgive someone who has repeatedly sinned against us? The rabbis taught that one was only required to forgive someone three times, citing several verses in the first chapter of Amos where God was only forgiving Israel’s enemies three times before pronouncing judgment on them. Peter apparently thought he was being generous by suggesting seven times. In Jewish culture seven was a number representing “completion” and so Peter may have thought that seven times would have completely fulfilled his obligation to forgive someone who was guilty of repeated offenses.

22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Peter must have thought that seven times was plenty but Jesus rejects that number as too small and says “until seventy times seven.” Jesus was apparently using an figure of speech based on Peter’s number to express that we are to forgive others an unlimited number of times. He did not intend that we track how many times a person has sinned against us and stop forgiving them after 490 times. In that day without computers it would have been tedious to manually keep track of the offenses of every one you knew so that you knew when someone had finally committed the 491st sin against you. Forgiveness is a common theme throughout the Bible and it would have been in contradiction to the other scriptures if Jesus had taught that there was a limit to forgiveness. Thank God that He doesn’t stop forgiving us no matter how many times we’ve sinned. No doubt every one of us have passed the mark of 490 sins long ago.

Verses 23-35: To illustrate the importance of forgiving others, Jesus speaks a parable of a servant who owed a king 10,000 talents (an amount which was more than he could pay in a lifetime). When this servant pleaded for mercy the king had compassion and forgave the debt. Immediately after being forgiven, however, this servant found a fellow servant who owed him 100 pence (about 3 months wages) and demanded payment. However, this second servant’s pleas for mercy fell on deaf ears and the first servant had him thrown into prison. When the king heard what this first servant had done, he reprimanded the man for not appreciating the forgiveness that had been shown to him and for not showing compassion to the second servant. The king reinstated the first servant’s debt and threw him into prison until he was able to pay it off. Jesus makes the closing statement in v. 35: “*So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*” Like the first servant, we owed a great debt because of our sin that we could never repay and God has graciously forgiven us. Thus, we ought to forgive others for their sins against us which are extremely small compared to our impossibly large sin debt for which God has forgiven us.