

**Text: Matthew 17-18**

Section 1

*1Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified. 7And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. 9As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead." 10And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist. (Matthew 17:1-13)*

Peter, James, and John had the privilege of seeing Jesus in His glory as the Creator, Lord, and King of all creation. As I mentioned last week, this may very well have been a fulfillment of Jesus' statement at the end of Chapter 16:

**28"Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom." (Matthew 16:28)**

Then, they were enveloped by a cloud. This is likely none other than the *Shekinah* glory of God, that which guided the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness, and which filled the Temple when Solomon dedicated it to the Lord's service. This served as a further confirmation of Jesus' person and office.

**34Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; 37but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. 38For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel. (Exodus 40:34-38)**

**1Now when Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the house. 2The priests could not enter into the house of the LORD because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD'S house. (2 Chronicles 7:1-2)**

Next, the disciples asked about the coming of Elijah. As we discussed when studying Matthew 11, John the Baptist fulfilled this role, serving as the forerunner of Christ as prophesied by the prophet Malachi. Jesus used this as an opportunity to reiterate that He also would die at the hands of wicked men.

**1"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)**

**5"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (Malachi 4:5)**

Section 2

*14When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, 15"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16"I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. 19Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain,*

*'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."] (Matthew 17:14-21)*

It is impossible to do God's work without faith. We must have not faith "in faith," but in the Person and Power of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only through Him that we can do anything in His service, and for His Kingdom.

**4"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)**

**6And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)**

**13I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)**

### Section 3

*24When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" 25He said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" 26When Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. 27"However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me." (Matthew 17:24-27)*

Jesus appears to have viewed this tax as another regulation imposed upon the people on top of God's commands in the Law. While He regarded this tax as unnecessary because it was not commanded, He also saw no harm in paying it, since no command in the Law was subverted by it, as was the case with some of the minutia observed by the scribes and Pharisees. Because there was no harm in paying the tax, Jesus elected not to make an issue of it, but to pay the tax. Paul taught a similar concept. Rather than setting ourselves apart, as if to glory in the freedom we have in Jesus Christ, we should do as much as we can to show ourselves like unto those to whom we desire to witness, short of committing any sin in the process.

**19For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. 20To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; 21to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. 22To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. 23I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)**

Jesus and Peter were quite poor, and the two-drachma tax may very well have been beyond their means to pay. Still, God provided for them. Likewise, Christ's followers can expect to have their needs met at all times. We may not always have an abundance, but we will never want as long as we serve and trust in Him.

**19And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)**

### Section 4

*1At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. 7"Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! 8"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. 9"If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. 10"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] (Matthew 18:1-11)*

Our Lord was quick to put to rest any desire for position or dignity among the disciples. Indeed, we must remember that none of us deserves a place in Heaven.

**9What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10as it is written,**

**"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; (Romans 3:9-10)**

It is only because of His tremendous grace that we have a place in the Kingdom at all—we certainly have no grounds upon which to desire some greater dignity than others.

**27Where then is boasting? It is excluded By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. 28For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. (Romans 3:27-28)**

We have no right to boast in anything because we are justified before God only by faith, not by anything that we have done. And, as we have discussed before, even that faith by which we are saved is given to us by Him!

**8For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)**

Jesus compared those that are “great” in His Kingdom to small children, not driven by selfish ambition or lust for power, but trusting simply in the mercy and provision of their Heavenly Father. Please do not confuse “childlike faith” with naïveté. Jesus commanded His servants to be wise, to know what the world was like and more importantly to perceive the sinful nature of man. Still, “when push comes to shove,” we are to trust in God alone—and not in ourselves—for wisdom, for protection, and for salvation.

**16"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17"But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19"But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20"For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:16-20)**

**5Trust in the LORD with all your heart**

**And do not lean on your own understanding.**

**6In all your ways acknowledge Him,**

**And He will make your paths straight.**

**7Do not be wise in your own eyes;**

**Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.**

**8It will be healing to your body**

**And refreshment to your bones. (Proverbs 3:5-8)**

Jesus’ opinion of those that would be a “stumbling block” to His followers is quite harsh, and we should all take care to make sure that we as believers do nothing that might damage the faith of a weaker brother or sister, or drive away those that we wish to see come to Christ. In Christ we have great freedom, but it is a freedom to serve Him, and to serve others. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians that we read a moment ago are instructive, as is the following passage:

**1Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. 2One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. 3The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. 4Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.**

**5One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. 7For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; 8for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. 9For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. 10But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11For it is written,**

**"AS I LIVE, SAYS THE LORD, EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW TO ME,**

**AND EVERY TONGUE SHALL GIVE PRAISE TO GOD." 12So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. 13Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this--not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. 14I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. 16Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; 17for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. 18For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19So then we pursue the**

**things which make for peace and the building up of one another. 20Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. 21It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. 22The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. 23But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. (Romans 14:1-23)**

Paul reiterates that we have great freedom in Christ, but if in the exercise of that freedom we weaken the faith of another, we have sinned. My favorite example from this passage regards the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The Bible does not condemn the moderate use of alcohol, but it repeatedly condemns drunkenness. Now, if I decide to have a glass of wine sometime (and I don't intend to do so—I am a “tee-totaler”) I have not sinned, but let's say that Cody is a new professing Christian, and has been told by me and by others professing to teach God's Word that drunkenness is sinful and should be avoided. Then, he sees me drinking and presumes that I intend to do so to excess (and why shouldn't he?—in our society few drinkers stop at “just one”). He then assumes that I and every other Christian is a hypocrite, and worse, that the Holy Spirit Whose power we have proclaimed to be at work in our lives is either impotent or non-existent. He then begins to doubt the veracity of the Christian faith, and finally he falls away, and ends up like one of the seeds that sprang up but was then scorched or choked. He never opens a Bible or sets foot in a church again in his life. Having become agnostic at best and atheist at worst, he eventually dies and goes to Hell.

I don't know about you, but I was convicted just while studying this passage. Folks, sometimes I've been guilty of regarding “lifestyle evangelism” as a sham—and sometimes it is, if you think that people will be saved just by watching you and never hearing the Gospel. However, if our lifestyles do not match our confession—if “our walk doesn't match our talk”—we may well be driving people away from Christ and toward the pit of Hell. This should both humble and frighten us, and lead us to seek His enabling at all times simply to walk in a manner that honors Him, and to be given opportunity, wisdom, and courage to be His witnesses.

We must discard everything from our lives that keeps us from serving Him completely. Jesus uses graphic imagery here, saying that we should remove parts of our bodies if they cause us to sin. Please understand that this is just imagery—the Bible is against self-mutilation.

**28'You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:28)**

**19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)**

I know that not all tenets of the Levitical Law apply in the Christian era, but God does not change. Having seen no New Testament repudiation of the injunction against cutting or tattooing oneself, I would think it best to avoid doing so. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit, therefore let's do everything we can to keep those temples clean, fit, and holy.

Jesus used this graphic imagery to emphasize the necessity of fleeing from sin, even at great personal cost. I can think of no better example of this than that of Joseph, while he was a slave in Egypt:

**1Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. 2The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. 3Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. 4So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. 5It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. 6So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9"There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?" 10As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. 11Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. 12She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. 13When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. 15"When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." 16So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. 17Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; 18and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." 19Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger**

burned. 20So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. 21But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. 23The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper. (Genesis 39:1-23)

I suspect that Joseph knew he might have been falsely accused after fleeing from his would-be seductress, but he refused to betray his earthly master or to sin against God. Although the personal cost to Joseph was great, God honored Joseph's obedience by allowing him to prosper in all that he did and, as we know, eventually allowing him to become the viceroy of Egypt.

Our faithfulness and obedience may not always yield earthly rewards, but we know that the eternal rewards are great for those that believe in and serve the Lord Jesus.

**1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new " And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6Then He said to me, "It is done I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7"He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:1-8)**

If that's not a motivation to serve Christ and flee from sin, I don't know what is!

### Section 5

*12"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? 13"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. 14"So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. (Matthew 18:12-14)*

"These little ones" refers to believers (refer back to verse 6). To argue that it refers to all people makes this a statement of Universalism, the belief that all go to Heaven, and contradicts multiple Biblical passages (including the one we read in Revelation just a moment ago).

To the believer, this passage is a comforting reminder that God knows those that are His, and that those who are truly converted will be kept by Him, saved from Hell and granted everlasting life.

**27"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30"I and the Father are one." (John 10:27-30)**

**35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36Just as it is written,**

**"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;**

**WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)**

### Section 6

*15"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16"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.** 17"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. 18"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19"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. 20"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:15-20)*

Church discipline is an aspect of our collective lives as believers that has sadly been neglected in our times, yet Jesus Christ, to Whom we refer as Lord and Master, commanded us to exercise it. It is to be administered lovingly and fairly, with correction and restoration of the affected brother or sister as the goal. Also at stake is the effective witness of the church. Unbelievers can spot a hypocrite a mile away, and when we as a church allow professing believers to commit willful and flagrant sin while still claiming the Name of Jesus Christ and remaining members in good standing of our congregations the message unbelievers receive is that all Christians are hypocrites, they're no different than anyone else, and there's really nothing to this Jesus, if He even exists. Jesus warned us to put such individuals out of the Church, as did Paul.

**1It 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. 2You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3For 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. 4In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5I 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. 6Your boasting is not good Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7Clean 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. 8Therefore 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. 9I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10I 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. 11But 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. 12For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)**

Jesus followed in verse 18 by stating that *whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.* Rather than "reinvent the wheel," I will quote John Calvin's very able explanation of this matter.

The substance of it is this: Whoever, after committing a crime, humbly confesses his fault, and entreats the Church to forgive him, is absolved not only by men, but by God himself; and, on the other hand, whoever treats with ridicule the reproofs and threatenings of the Church, if he is condemned by her, the decision which men have given will be ratified in heaven. If it be objected, that in this way God is made a sort of petty judge, who concurs in the sentence of mortal men, the reply is at hand. For when Christ maintains the authority of his Church, he does not diminish his own power or that of his Father, but, on the contrary, supports the majesty of his word. As in the former case (Matthew 16:19) he did not intend to confirm indiscriminately every kind of doctrine, but only that which had proceeded out of his mouth, so neither does he say in this place that every kind of decision will be approved and ratified, but only that in which he presides, and that too not only by his Spirit, but by his word. Hence it follows, that men do no injury to the authority of God, when they pronounce nothing but what comes from his mouth, and only endeavor faithfully to execute what he has commanded. For, though Christ alone is the Judge of the world, yet he chooses to have ministers to proclaim his word. Besides, he wishes that his own decision should be pronounced by the Church; and thus he takes nothing from his own authority by employing the ministry of men, but it is Himself alone that looses and binds.

In short, when the Church administers discipline it does not act as judge, but rather as the minister of Christ's righteous judgment, so long as we act in accordance with His Word.

Jesus promises to be in our midst when we gather in His Name, and to grant any prayers about which two of us agree. True unity, truly gathering in His Name, is achieved not by our desires or our own power, but by the power of God Himself.

**22"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:22-23)**

If unity among believers is achieved only through His power, then it is impossible for truly united followers of Christ to ask anything contrary to His Will. When we abide in Him—seeking Him, serving Him, *obeying* Him—we have confidence that our prayers will be heard and answered affirmatively. Only when acting in His strength can we pray expecting an affirmative answer, because the Holy Spirit within will not allow us to make requests that are contrary to His Will.

**7"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:7)**

**14**This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. **15**And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

### Section 7

*21*Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"  
*22*Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. *23*"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. *24*"When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. *25*"But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. *26*"So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' *27*"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. *28*"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' *29*"So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' *30*"But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. *31*"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. *32*"Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. *33*'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' *34*"And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. *35*"My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:21-35)

Jesus commanded His followers to be forgiving people, and used a very poignant illustration to make His point. He tells of a slave that owed ten thousand talents, presumably of gold, to his master. A footnote in my Bible indicates that *one* talent was equal to about fifteen years' wages for a common laborer. In other words, at a withholding rate of 100%, 150000 years would be required for this individual to repay his debt. This debt was obviously impossible for him to pay, so he requested and received mercy. How much more than this is our debt to our Creator, who in His holiness cannot allow even the smallest sin into His presence! Yet, in spite of the tremendous magnitude of our transgressions, He grants mercy through Jesus Christ to all that repent and believe.

**23**For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

There was a problem with this slave, though. After being forgiven a debt of 150000 years' wages, he found another slave that owed him 100 *days*' wages, and gave neither mercy nor clemency. Upon hearing this, the slave's lord cast him unto the torturers.

What are we to make of this? Is lack of forgiveness such a tremendous sin that one can lose his salvation? That can't be true—we've already seen today that it is impossible for a true believer to lose his salvation. However, those that truly repent and believe receive a tremendous Gift, the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Book of Galatians tells us that the Spirit's presence produces certain "fruits," markers that are contrary to fallen human nature and are evidence of His presence within us:

**19**Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20**idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, **21**envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23**gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:19-23)

While the fleshly nature makes us angry and factious, the Spirit leads us to be patient, kind, and gentle. Only His work within us produces a nature that is inclined to forgive, and able to obey the following command:

**31**Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32**Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

If our hearts are hardened and unable or unwilling to forgive, then the fruit of the Spirit is absent. If that is so, the Spirit Himself may well be absent. If *that* is so, salvation also is absent. We must each examine ourselves daily, repenting of actions, thoughts, and attitudes that dishonor Him, and making sure each day that Jesus Christ truly is Lord and Master of our lives. If He is not Lord He is not Savior; if He is not Savior, we remain in our sins and destined for Hell. If Jesus Christ is not your Lord and Savior, repent of sins, confess Him as Lord, and believe that He is indeed the risen and reigning Christ. He'll save you!

**9**That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. **10**For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

If He is your Lord and Savior, but you find yourself laden with unconfessed sin, confess them and be cleansed and restored. He promised through the Apostle John to grant forgiveness when we confess our sins:

**9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)**

What great promises we have from a God that is infinitely powerful, wise, just, merciful, and good: No matter how dirty and sinful we are, He will save us from the just penalty of that sin if we will only repent and believe. Let us be about the business of serving Him, striving to live lives that bring honor unto His Name, and sharing the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to all that will listen!