

New Testament, Gospel Doctrine Lesson 14
"Who is My Neighbor?" Matt. 18, Luke 10
Goose Creek Ward, Ashburn, VA Stake
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Overview

Historical Context of Matt. 18, Luke 10

The time is about 5-6 months before the crucifixion of Jesus. In the preceding chapter of Matt. 17, the three prominent apostles have been given the keys to the kingdom. This is probably what prompts the controversy in Matt. 18:1-6. Three of the apostles have been elevated in stature and this leads to contention among the rest. As to who started the trouble, it is unclear.

Jesus follows his censure in Matt. 18:1-6 with regulations regarding how to govern the church organization in Matt. 18:7-20. Peter then asks how this relates to interpersonal relationships, and Jesus responds in a much different fashion in Matt. 18:21-35.

Related to interpersonal relationships is Luke 10:25-37 and 38-42.

Substance

Church Governance, or Relationships Within the Church

Matt. 18:1-6 There is controversy among the disciples as to who is greatest in the kingdom. This is probably a result of the recent promotion of Peter, James, and John (cf. Matt. 16:18 , Matt. 17:1-9). We are uninformed as to who started the controversy. Perhaps there was some unrighteous dominion among the three, or perhaps the other disciples resented their apparent promotion. Regardless, Jesus censures them:

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus,
saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2
And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him
in the midst of them, 3 And said, Verily I say unto
you, Except ye be converted, and become as little
children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of
heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as
this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom
of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little
child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend
one of these little ones which believe in me, it were
better for him that a millstone were hanged about his
neck, and [that] he were drowned in the depth of the

sea.

Jesus tells them plainly they must humble themselves as little children, and not offend one another. Jesus is speaking figuratively of the adults being child-like, in that they should be humble and teachable. These are the "children" of Christ, as King Benjamin spoke of:

And now, because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters. (Mosiah 5:7)

Those within the church who turn and apostatize and offend these children are those who would have been better off with a millstone around their neck, as in D&C 121:19-22, as follows:

16 Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord, but have done that which was meet in mine eyes, and which I commanded them. 17 But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves. 18 And those who swear falsely against my servants, that they might bring them into bondage and death-- 19 Wo unto them; because they have offended my little ones they shall be severed from the ordinances of mine house. 20 Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them. 21 They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation. 22 It had been better for them that a millstone had been hanged about their necks, and they drowned in the depth of the sea.

These apostates are those spoken of in the next few verses of Matthew.

Matt. 18:7-9

7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast [them] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or

maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. [IV/JST adds: And a man's hand is his friend, and his foot, also; and a man's eye; are they of his own household.]

Those within the Church who cause offense and who lift up their heels against the Lord's servants have to be cut off. The IV/JST on v. 9 (in the LDS edition KJV footnotes) makes it plain Jesus is referring to relationships between people and not the sins within an individual. Jesus is figuratively comparing the Church, the ecclesia, to a body. It is better that the body of the Church cut off the apostates, then be entirely dragged down to hell by them.

As a Gospel Doctrine teacher, I come in and teach and hopefully do a good job. But, if next week I come in and teach false doctrine that misleads people and I speak against the leadership of the Church, then I cannot teach this class anymore. How many people would I lead astray if I were permitted to teach lies? Thus, I would have to be cut off. It is the same with any member of the Church.

Matt. 18:10-14 Jesus then makes it clear it is the responsibility of the Church to go after those who have gone astray. Even those who wander away on their own must be pursued and brought back if possible:

10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. 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? 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. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Matt. 18:15-17 While those who wander away on their own must be pursued, if they commit serious offenses, and they refuse to repent, then they must be cut off from the Church:

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. 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.

Jesus is laying out the Church policy on how to deal with the members of the Church who go wrong. If they wander off, bring them back. If they sin, encourage them to repent. If they "trespass against thee", and refuse to repent, then they must be cut off.

In practicality, most people excuse themselves from the Church and do not have to be actively cut off. But, what does it mean to "trespass against thee", which requires the offended individual to actively do something about it? D&C 98 explains that well (esp. see D&C 98:23-44).

Matt. 18:18-20 Jesus then reminds them they have the keys to the kingdom, and therefore have the responsibilities to use them.

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. 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.

The apostles are required to use the priesthood keys they have to govern the Church. Clearly, v. 20 also implies Jesus will inspire them according to his will.

Interpersonal Relationships

Following Jesus' discourse on how to run the Church. Peter follows up with a question dealing more with how often we ought to forgive one another. Aside from the official capacity of the Church, how ought the individuals within the Church deal with each other? This conversation dovetails nicely with the text of Luke 10.

Matt. 18:21-35 Peter asks Jesus how often ought he to forgive people who are sinning:

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

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

23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took [him] by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. 29 And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee? 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Peter offers a seemingly generous 7 times, but Jesus tells him he must forgive as often as people repent. Jesus then relates a parable.

The parable works on the principle that any sin against another person is in fact a sin against God. Thus, while I may only sin once against many individuals, I have accumulated many sins against God. If I fail to forgive others their few sins against me, why then will God forgive my many sins against Him? He won't.

The underlying premise is we must have charity with one another, and be looking to forgive the repentant and not fault the sinner. As long as we are counting up the faults of others, then we are at fault ourselves.

Luke 10:25-37 The principle of charity is plainly displayed in parable of the Good Samaritan:

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. 28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? 30 And Jesus answering said, A certain [man] went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded [him], and departed, leaving [him] half dead. 31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked [on him], and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion [on him], 34 And went to [him], and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave [them] to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. 36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? 37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Jesus' parable is one that is very finely crafted, and very clever. He is facing off against a religious lawyer, someone very studied in the Law of Moses. Jesus knows his opponent is learned, and is trying to trick him. As such, his parable must leave the lawyer with no room to maneuver. The parable of the Good Samaritan is based on the passage of Hosea 6:6, as follows:

4 O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness [is] as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. 5 Therefore have I hewed [them] by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments [are as] the light [that] goeth forth. 6 **For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.** 7 But they like men have

transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.

Jesus presents three individuals, a Priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan. The Priest and Levite (the Temple elite) would be considered ritually pure by the lawyer, and the bigotry and elitism of the lawyer would cause him to say the Samaritan is ritually impure.

Note Jesus explicitly presents the injured party as stripped and half-dead. Dead bodies were considered ritually impure according to the Law. But, this man wasn't dead yet, only "half dead". In other words, he appeared as though he might be dead. The Priest and Levite avoided this guy because they were more interested in maintaining their ritually pure status than in being merciful. They don't know whether he is dead or not, they don't want to know, so they use that as an excuse to cross over to the other side of the road.

But, along comes the Samaritan, who is ritually impure according to the Pharisaic view, and he exercises great mercy. Jesus then asks the lawyer who loved his neighbor, and the lawyer knows that he cannot equivocate or make excuse. He answers rightly, because he knows that Jesus' parable is based upon Hosea 6:6.

But, Jesus doesn't let it go at that point, rather Jesus presses home the point and tells him to "do thou likewise". Jesus takes the one who studies the Law, but does not live it, and tells him he must live it.

Luke 10:38-42 This next passage is brief, but also serves to explain the relationship people in the Church ought to have. While superficially only about one overly industrious woman, it has broader application:

38 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. 40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. 41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: 42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Martha tries to get Jesus to intervene in a matter that is not only unjust, it is something she shouldn't be asking him to

intervene on. Martha cumbered herself with much serving, her ideas of hospitality are such that they prevent her from listening to Jesus teach. It is nice that Martha wants to set an elaborate table, but at this point the more important thing is to hear Jesus teach. So, Jesus gently sets her straight.

How many times do members of the Church expect the leadership to deal with things that really aren't their business? This is precisely such a case. Martha's notions on hospitality cloud her judgement, and she asks Jesus to do something that is out of line.

Why is there a difference between the way the Church should handle relationships and the way we should handle relationships?

This question is answered in D&C 64, as follows:

8 My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened. 9 Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. 10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. 11 And ye ought to say in your hearts--let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

12 And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation. 13 And this ye shall do that God may be glorified--not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver-- 14 Verily I say, for this cause ye shall do these things.

Let the Church deal with people's sins. We as individuals do not have the authority or inspiration to deal with these things. God has given the authority and inspiration to the leaders of the Church so that people can judge according to God's judgements.

We tend to be petty, selfish, and vindictive when it comes to judgement and punishment. Our vision is clouded by all sorts of things. When we render judgement, it tends to offend the lawgiver.