**Jesus Lays Out the Rules for a Healthy Christian Community**

*Does our church actually behave this way? What would church life be like, if more churches did?*

Mt 18:1At that moment the disciples approached Jesus with the question: ‘Who is greatest in Heaven’s domain?’ 2And he called a child over, had her stand in front of them, 3and said, ‘I swear to you, if you don’t do an about-face and become like children, you’ll never enter Heaven’s domain. 4Therefore, those who put themselves on a level with this child will be greatest in Heaven’s domain. 5And whoever accepts one such child in my name is accepting me. 6Any of you who misleads one of these little souls who trusts me would be better off to have a millstone hung around your neck and be drowned in the deepest part of the sea!

7‘Damn the world for the snares it sets! Even though it’s inevitable for snares to be set, nevertheless, damn the person who sets such snares. 8‘If your hand or your foot gets you into trouble – if it misleads you – cut it off and throw it away! It’s better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to be thrown into the eternal fire with both hands and feet. 9And if your eye gets you into trouble, rip it out and throw it away! After all, it’s better for you to enter life one-eyed than to be thrown into the hell of fire with both eyes.

10 ‘See that you don’t disdain one of these little ones. For I tell you, their guardian angels constantly gaze on the face of my Father in heaven. 12What do you think about this? If someone has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off, won’t that person leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go look for the one that wandered off? 13And if should find it, you can bet he’ll rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander off. 14And so it is the intention of your Father in heaven that not one of these little souls should be lost.

15 ‘And if some companion does wrong, go have it out between the two of you privately. If that person listens to you, you have won that companion over. 16And if he or she doesn’t listen, take one or two people with you so that ‘every fact may be supported by two or three witnesses.’ [Dt 19:15] 17Then if he or she refuses to listen to them, report it to the congregation. If he or she refuses to listen even to the congregation, treat that companion like you would a pagan or a toll-collector. 18I swear to you, whatever you bind on earth will be considered bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will be considered released in heaven. 19Again I assure you, if two of you agree on earth agree on anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20In fact, wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I will be there among them.’

21 Then Peter came and asked him, ‘Master, how many times can a companion wrong me and still expect my forgiveness? As many as seven times?’ 22Jesus replies to him, ‘My advice to you is not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 ‘This is why Heaven’s imperial rule should be compared to a secular ruler who decided to settle accounts with his slaves. 24When the process began, this debtor was brought to him who owed ten million pounds. 25Since he couldn’t pay it back, the ruler ordered him sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, so he could recover his money. 26At this prospect, the slave fell down and groveled before him: “Be patient with me, and I’ll repay every penny.” 27Becaue he was compassionate, the master of that slave let him go and cancelled the debt. 28As soon as he got out, that same fellow collared one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred pounds, and grabbed him by the neck, and demanded: “Pay back what you owe!” 29His fellow-slave fell down and begged him: “Be patient with me and I’ll pay you back.” 30But he wasn’t interested; instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he paid the debt. 31When his fellow-slaves realized what had happened, they were terribly distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had taken place. 32At that point, his master summoned him: “You wicked slave!” he said to him. “I cancelled your entire debt because you begged me. 33Wasn’t it only fair to treat your fellow slave with the same consideration as I treated you?” 34And the master was so angry he handed him over to those in charge of punishment until he paid back everything he owed. 35That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you, unless you find it in your heart to forgive each one of your brothers and sisters.’

19:1And so when Jesus had finished this instruction, he left Galilee and went to the territory of Judea across the Jordan. 2And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

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