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# STRAY SHEEP RESCUE



## Section One

To understand and implement the strategy God gives us in Matthew 18:15-20 for dealing with sin in the Church we need to broaden the context to include 18:12-14 so that we may accurately interpret the tone and meaning of the text in view of the passion God has for rescuing his stray sheep.

- (Matthew 18:12–14 ESV) What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, **and one of them has gone astray**, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and **go in search of the one that went astray**? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 **So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**
1. It is the will of the Father that we, the Church, the body of Jesus Christ, seek and rescue his straying sheep.
  2. It is important to note that these are called stray sheep, not lost sheep as they are in Luke 15.
    - (Luke 15:4 ESV) What man of you, having a hundred sheep, **if he has lost one of them**, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, **and go after the one that is lost**, until he finds it?
  3. These are sheep who in one way or another are identified with those who profess to be one of God's people—the sheep of his hand.
    - (Psalm 95:7–8a ESV) For he is our God, and we are **the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand**. Today, if you hear his voice, **8 do not harden your hearts.**
  4. It is not the will of the Father that even one stray sheep should perish.
  5. As his servants on earth it is our stewardship in doing the will of the Father to seek his sheep that have gone astray.
    - A. “Gone astray” speaks of a sheep that has wandered from the flock.

**πλανῶ [plano]** ... as wandering away; being led away from the truth into error and deceit (maybe self-deceit); led aside from the path of virtue; to be severed or fall away from the truth; to be led away into error and sin.

- B. “Gone astray” could also mean the sheep has been led away from the flock.
- C. It is a cause of great joy when even one stray sheep is found.
- D. There are lost sheep who are not truly the Lord's sheep and will not be found and saved.

A sheep that is not found and rescued but remains astray from God will ultimately be revealed to be someone who only professes belief and is **not a stray sheep but a lost sheep that will perish.**

- (Ezekiel 34:16–17 ESV) I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. 17 **As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and male goats.**
  - (Ezekiel 34:20–22 ESV) Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: **Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.** 21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and thrust at all the weak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, 22 **I will rescue my flock**; they shall no longer be a prey. **And I will judge between sheep and sheep.**
- E. The sheep that is not found and perishes was never truly part of the flock.
    - (John 10:26–28 ESV) But you *[Pharisees]* do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27 **My sheep hear my voice**, and **I know them**, and **they follow me**. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.
    - (John 6:37–40 ESV) **All that the Father gives me will come to me**, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, **not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me**. 39 And **this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me**, but raise it up on the last day. 40 **For this is the will of my Father**, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

## Section Two

With the insight we have gained in developing the context we are now able to correctly interpret Matthew 18:15-17 in view of God's passion for and commitment to rescuing his stray sheep and understand what our emphasis should be as we put into action God's strategy in dealing with sin in the Church, the Body of Christ.

- (Matthew 18:15–17 ESV) **If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault**, between you and him alone. **If he listens to you**, you have gained your brother. 16 **But if he does not listen**, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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.

### 1. The strategy that God gives the Church, the body of Jesus Christ, to rescue his straying sheep is simple—**confront him with his sin**.

- A. If a brother (sheep) sins and has gone astray or has been led astray, then we are to go to him and tell him his fault.
- B. We are bound by the passion and will of God to go to him and tell him his fault.

18:15 sins ... *ἁμαρτάνω* [hamartano/] ... to miss the mark; to err, be mistaken; to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, to do or go wrong; to wander from the law of God, to sin.

18:15 "tell him his fault" ...

*ἐλέγχω* [elegcho] ... to convict, refute, confute; generally with a suggestion of shame of the person convicted; by conviction to bring to the light, to expose; to find fault with, correct; by word; to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove; to call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation; to admonish someone strongly; likely using argumentation to convince and refute.

- 2. If a brother wanders from the path of uprightness and honor and sins, we are to sternly admonish the person with the purpose of refuting his position and convincing him to repent.
- 3. Our goal is to get the person to listen.

18:15, 16 listen, listens ... *ἀκούω* [akouo] ... to heed – to listen, hear, or pay close attention to, and

usually respond in conformity; to attend to, consider what is or has been said; to understand, perceive the sense of what is said; to hear something; to perceive by the ear what is announced in one's presence; to find out, learn.

- A. If he listens, then we have gained our brother.
- B. We have rescued the Lord's straying sheep and saved him from his sinful experience or action.
- C. If he does not listen, we take one or two others with us to establish every charge.
- D. If he refuses to listen, tell it to the church, and if he refuses to listen to the church, then treat the person as an unbeliever.

18:17 ... refuses to listen ... *παρακούω* [parakouo/] ... to not listen – to hear what is said, but ignore or take no heed of it; to hear aside; causally or carelessly or amiss; to be unwilling to hear; on hearing to neglect, to pay no heed to; to refuse to hear, pay no regard to, disobey.

## Section Three

Now understanding our responsibility to do the will of the Father and our stewardship regarding the care of his sheep we must move forward in humility, reverence and the authority given to us in Matthew 18:18-20 and deal with sin in the Church, the Body of Christ, and rescue his sheep.

- (Matthew 18:18–20 ESV) **Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind** on earth shall be bound in heaven, and **whatever you loose** on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 **Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven**. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, **there am I among them**.

### 1. Christ declares his opinion and judgment as to the truthfulness of his following statements about binding and loosing.

- A. He wants to make sure we are hearing him and receiving these words as we should so he begins—  
"Truly, I say to you."

*λέγω* [lego] ... to say, to speak, declare ones judgment and opinion; affirm over, maintain; to teach; to exhort, advise, to command, direct; to point out with words; to speak out.

- B. He wants us to grasp how inclusive this truth is—  
"whatever you bind" covers it all.

## SO WHAT EXACTLY IS CHRIST SAYING?

2. We only accurately interpret Christ's words when we understand them in direct connection with our context—i.e. we are being instructed and commissioned in the procedure for confronting sin in the lives of the Father's stray sheep.
3. Christ is telling us that in obeying this teaching that we are now working with the authority and the support of heaven.

MacArthur ... These are rabbinical terms, very familiar to the Jewish audience, very common terms to Matthew and to our Lord living in that time. They simply refer to the rabbis either binding someone's sins on them or loosing their sins from them. And it basically is the idea that you're either saying to someone, "Your sins are bound to you," or "Your sins are loosed from you." In other words, you're still under the bondage of sin or you're free from sin.

... when on earth you say to someone, "You are still bound with sin." ... it'll already have been bound in heaven ... when you say to someone, "Your sins are loosed" in other words ... you're freed from them, heaven will already have done that, as well. That's a perfect passive form, which means it's already been done with continuing results.

In other words, when the church finally gets around to saying your sins are bound on you or your sins are loosed from you, the church is then beginning to act in accord with the Father who is in heaven, who's already said either they are loosed or they are bound based upon whether the person responded to the conviction of sin or not.

\*\*\*\*\***Now the point is this, a very simple point,** heaven ratifies what is done on earth when the church follows this process of discipline. That's exactly what it means.

And so I say it again. Never, never is the church more like Jesus Christ. Never does the church more fulfill the will of God than when it acts out the principles of this passage. This is taking the kingdom in heaven and bringing it to earth. That's our authority. Heaven stands with us. [*The Discipline of God's Children, Part 3 - MacArthur.*]

4. Christ affirms the truth by saying it again in a slightly different way—what two of us agree on as we follow the divine procedure for church discipline will be done by our Father in heaven.
5. Christ once again affirms us by reminding us of his presence among us.

- (Matthew 18:20 ESV) **For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**

**Donald Hagner ...** This presence of Jesus should not be understood as a metaphor **but is the literal presence of the resurrected Christ ...** The community founded by Jesus is assured that he will be present in that community until the close of the age. [*Hagner, D. A. (1995). Matthew 14-28 (Vol. 33B, p. 533). Word, Incorporated.*]

- (Matthew 28:19-20 ESV) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.**
- (Hebrews 13:5b-6 ESV) ... for he has said, **"I will never leave you nor forsake you."** **6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"**

6. The key to Christ's promise in 18:20 is understanding what it means to be "gathered in my name."

- (Matthew 18:20 ESV) **For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**

7. Gathered in his name means that we come together in agreement with each other and in agreement with everything that is true about Jesus Christ.

When we gather in his name and obey his words in unity and harmony as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, these things are happening ...

- A. We are doing the Father's will in the Father's authority.
- B. We are working in the authority of and with the support of heaven
- C. Jesus is with us.