

Dear Friend,

For true revelation knowledge, you must leave every verse in its setting, just as you must leave every stroke of the brush in place to drink in the beauty of a painting done by a master artist. A prime example is this verse, which is nearly always quoted out of context:

Mat 18:19 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.

Lifted out by itself, it sounds like you must always have somebody else with you when you pray, and they must be in agreement with what you pray, in order for your prayers to be answered. This verse is often used as sort of a "catch all" regarding answered prayer. But I noticed in the gospels Jesus would often spend solitary nights alone in prayer with His Father. He did not make sure there were other people with Him during His prayer time so there would be "two or more" in order for the Father to answer the prayers.

Also, Jesus did not say anything about the necessity of two or more agreeing in prayer when He taught the classic message about believing you receive when you pray:

Mark 11:24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

So what did He mean when He spoke of "any two of you" agreeing in prayer? The verse only makes sense in the context in which Jesus spoke it. Those verses are like strokes of the brush contained in a much larger image. The entire image is the complete chapter of Matthew 18. The subject matter does not change in the whole chapter. What was Jesus really talking about? Notice how the chapter opens;

Mat 18:1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

Notice how the chapter concludes;

Mat 18:35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Jesus is still expounding on His answer to their original question. You would have to conclude that the greatest in the kingdom are those who have been transformed enough to the love of Christ that they have developed the capacity to FORGIVE EVERY ONE HIS BROTHER OF THEIR TRESPASSES. This is the character trait that is most like our heavenly Father. After all, what is the gospel all about? God sent His Son to provide forgiveness and restoration for all the trespasses of man since the dawn of time! We are children imitating our Father when we do the same on earth.

So how does that verse on "agreement in prayer" fit in? Read the whole chapter through a few times to get the overall image into your spirit. Notice Jesus speaks of offences. There was a man who had trespassed against his brother. First the offended man was to go to the brother alone, then with two witnesses, to see if he would repent. The man would not repent. After

bringing the matter before the whole Church, still the man would not repent. Then we come to these two difficult verses that are nearly always taken out of context:

Mat 18:18 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.

Mat 18:19 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.

I have seldom ever read anything taught on the subject that fits into the complete image of the teaching given in Matthew 18, which is "forgiving every man their trespasses."

In context the question is, are you going to bind the man who offended by refusing to forgive him, or are you going to "loose" the man from his debt by forgiving him from your heart? To demonstrate that this is what Jesus is talking about, just look on down a few verses and you will see;

Matthew 18:21-27 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. [Emphasis mine]

Notice it was a "king" who loosed the man. Who is the greatest in any kingdom? Wouldn't it be the king? What was the original question? "Who is greatest in the kingdom?" Jesus is still teaching that the greatest in the kingdom are those who will "loose" every man from their debts, WHETHER THEY REPENT OR NOT!

Jesus died for our sins on the cross, without any guarantee that a single person would repent and believe the gospel. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That truth is still so real to me, even after forty years of being saved, how the love of God provided the path of forgiveness for me FIRST ... not waiting on me to make the first move toward Him. He made the first move by sending His only Son to pay the penalty for sin I so richly deserved. I hear the words of that wonderful song rising up within me, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." His love still amazes me.

Notice that in this teaching, the man who offended never did repent; not when the offended man first approached him, not when the two witnesses were brought, not when the matter was brought before the church. When Jesus says;

Mat 18:19 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.

Mat 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

The "two" Jesus is referring to are the two witnesses that originally went with the offended man to see if the offending brother would repent. Now they are joining together with the offended man to agree in prayer to "loose" the man of the debt, to forgive him in the presence of Jesus, in order that all the resources of heaven are now available to send the "Good Shepherd" after this one who has left the ninety and nine by his actions. (Mat 18:12-13). Everything in the chapter fits together when you leave it all in context.

It is important to know that it is not always a requirement that there must be two or more people agreeing in prayer to forgive someone who has offended you. I love the example of Stephen, who was being stoned to death by the religious people of the day. Saul of Tarsus was standing there watching this brutal execution, giving his consent to it. Yet notice the prayer of Stephen concerning all those who were executing him.

Acts 7:59-60 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. [60] And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

None of those men had repented. They were actively putting Stephen to death, unjustly, through no fault of Stephen's at all. Yet Stephen "loosed" them all by forgiving them. He didn't need anybody to agree with Him. He forgave them the same way Jesus prayed forgiveness when He hung on the cross.

I used to wonder why Jesus appeared to Saul the way He did on the road to Damascus. Jesus appeared to Saul in a manner so dramatic it caused Saul to fall from his horse to the ground. Then one day I understood the reason why. Stephen had forgiven Saul, and all his executioners. He had loosed heaven by that prayer of forgiveness. Heaven was free to send the Good Shepherd after Saul of Tarsus. I would not be surprised if every single one of Stephen's executioners were not dramatically saved also. Heaven had been LOOSED by the prayer of forgiveness.

Would you like to loose heaven to go after people who need to be saved? Especially people who have hurt you, offended you, cheated you? Forgive them. Loose them and let them go. Free heaven to send the Good Shepherd after them.

Your friend and co-laborer,

GARY