

Faults and Forgiveness

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[0 : 0 0] It's great to see everybody again and thank you for your welcome and the brothers for praying and we've had a lovely day here on Lewis the sun has shone all day and we took some time to visit some of the famous sites we began in Kalinish and then we drove up to Ness and to the Europa Play Park and we were struck by the history of Lewis Kalinish of course one of the most used ancient sites in Western Europe but we passed through a number of historical sites with reference to the gospel and the Christian church and we stopped in Barva to buy some sandwiches at the petrol station and read a lot and listened to a lot about the revival at there in Barva and of course coming into Ness or on the way to the lighthouse we passed the ancient church as it said Melrose church going back almost a thousand years and to know that

Christian worship and Christian witness has been a feature of island life for hundreds indeed thousands of years and it's a wonderful privilege therefore for each of us to say we're part of the Christian church by God's grace and to know that that history is in part something of our own story and that we stand in that line it's a great joy a great privilege by grace to be part of the Christian church but it's not always easy and Jesus recognizes that there will be difficulties interpersonal difficulties and in Matthew chapter 18 he speaks to that situation and he gives to his disciples teaching as to what they are to do when verse 15 a brother sins against you one writer said relationships are the source of our greatest joy in life but also the source of our greatest trial and I'm sure we can all relate to that we can have great highs in life through friendships and great lows in life through conflicts whenever you look in the world there are broken relationships in homes within families in workplaces and even unfortunately in churches we might go to the kessok convention as perhaps some of us have done and we might see on the wall those words all one in Christ Jesus but we don't feel that in our hearts some churches the the older the older him is sung one church one faith one lord and yet we don't feel very united perhaps we come to church and there are some people we hope we don't end up sitting next to or having to speak to perhaps there's history perhaps there's baggage there something has been said about us or to us and we haven't been able to forgive them maybe there's been a difference of opinion or a disagreement on a decision that was made maybe there's been simple miscommunication and misunderstanding maybe somebody said something to us which hurt our feelings or maybe they didn't say something to us when we hoped that they might maybe we feel like we've been sidelined or marginalized in the church maybe somebody made a joke a joke between friends but it hit a nerve and we didn't find it very funny maybe somebody rather than speaking to us personally about a difficulty made it public and spoke to everyone else but not us maybe somebody has gossiped about us behind our back or spoken unkindly to our face maybe we had a disagreement outside of the church maybe in the workplace it may be at a social function and we find that disagreement carried into the building on a Sunday or indeed a Saturday but there are many many reasons why relationships between Christian brothers and sisters may be strained or even severed we have all kinds of expressions don't we in the English language we talk about bearing a grudge having a chip on our shoulder having an axe to grind a whole range of illustrations and metaphors to describe difficult interpersonal relationships and it's very important therefore as Christians that we enjoy good relationships we thought last night of one of the great themes of this portion of the gospel being the identity of Jesus but another theme which comes up time and again is the relationship between Christian disciples we have it here in Matthew chapter 18 and we have it recurring where the disciples are arguing among themselves who is the greatest look back just to chapter 18 verse 1 who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven so within the 12 there were these stresses and these strains and Jesus wants to nip them in the bud and so he gives to them his teaching and his parable parable of the unforgiving servant and we want to look at this unit of the gospel together under two

headings firstly verses 15 to 20 if your brother sins against you show them their fault and secondly verse 21 to 35 if your brother sins against you show them your forgiveness and it's possible that we find the first one easy to do and the second one a little more difficult so if a brother or a sister sins against you firstly show them their fault that's verse 15 go and tell him his fault between you and him alone if he listens to you you have gained your brother there is some discussion as to whether verse 15 should be translated if your brother sins or if your brother sins against you whether it's a brother or sister straying into sin in general or whether it's another believer sinning against us in particular but i think the verse and indeed the passage covers both possibilities what to do if somebody sins if they wander away from the Lord and how you are to treat them if they sin against you in particular the first thing we notice is what we are not to do if we find somebody wandering into sin we are not to ignore it we're not to turn a blind eye we're not to be apathetic about one another's life i had a friend once who for many years was caught in an unhealthy pattern as a Christian and when she escaped from that cycle she said to her friends why did nobody speak to me and they said well we didn't want to hurt your feelings and we might think that we're being loving by not saying anything but Jesus is clear we are to speak about problems it were not to sweep it under the carpet to take another metaphor and we're certainly not to just bury it and hold a grudge against one another he expects us to deal with interpersonal issues he expects them to be addressed as Christians we are called to live in relationship with one another as members of Christ's church we are to comfort one another when we're suffering but to be willing to challenge one another in love when we are sinning and as members of Christ's church we are to be humble enough to be willing to receive correction to receive reproof or admonition in proverbs the Old Testament wisdom book of proverbs we find this saying chapter 9 verse 8 reproof a wise man and he will love you one of the evidences of true wisdom true humility is being willing to accept correction in the knowledge that that will wake us wiser still faithful are the wounds of a friend and so Jesus anticipates that when we see a brother or a sister falling into sin or sinning against us we're not just to ignore it verse 15 go tell him his fault between you and him alone and Jesus seems to institute something of a process between verses 15 to 17 it may be in your workplace you have policies and procedures for things like a dispute you know and what to do if there's a complaint in the workplace or there's a dispute and and you have a meeting and then it's escalated and and so on and things go all the way to an employment tribunal well Jesus gives us something of a pattern here he begins by saying talk about these things in private and if you're not heard then you are to share them in public and begin speaking to one another informally but if there's no repentance then it becomes a more formal matter and the key seems to be whether someone will listen verse 15 if he listens to you if he does not listen verse 17 if he refuses to listen and there is this step word progression in how we are to respond to one another it firstly we're to speak individually you are to speak to him alone verse 15 we are to meet them for a cup of coffee or a meal we are to go for a walk and have a chat I remember my student worker when I was a student and he had all kinds of techniques for doing one-to-one ministry and he said the best time to ask somebody that the difficult question is when you're at a weekend away or a camp and you're washing the dishes together because you're focused on something else and you're not looking at one another and that's when you ask the question something like that here just going privately in love speaking face to face person to person but if he refused to listen if he listens to you you have gained your brother but if he doesn't listen take one or two others with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses as in the Old Testament law that's a slightly more formal setup almost like a small group going to speak to this person to reason with them to plead with them to turn back to the Lord to seek his forgiveness for whatever as whatever they've fallen into but if he refuses to listen to them verse 17 tell it to the church when you visit historic buildings you often see some of the old church furnisher and in some of the older churches you might find a penitent stool and these would have been on display and somebody publicly repenting of their sin might have been required to sit on that stool to demonstrate their repentance before the whole church and there's something of that here if if somebody doesn't listen to brotherly correction if they're not willing to listen to a small body of believers and they persist in their sin then you are to tell the congregation and if they refuse to listen let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector they are to be for a season excluded from the fellowship until they turn back to the Lord and the goal of this as we've seen all the way through is that people will be restored to the Lord restored into fellowship with their brothers and sisters the goal is consistent Christian living 1st Corinthians 5 Paul speaks about this when you're

assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ you deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord the goal is repentance the goal is restoration and the brother who's sinning or the brother who's sinning against you may be brought back into fellowship and the love of the fellowship for him or her reassured so the Lord gives us here a template for a church discipline probably not the most popular word the most popular term in the christian world today discipline's an interesting word isn't it it has a sort of positive connotation and a negative connotation positive connotation is self-discipline when we look at an athlete like the Olympians or the Paralympians or or emiraducanu or Andy Murray in the US Open and we admire their self-discipline and getting up day after day and restricting their diet and exercising for however many hours and ensuring they're in bed every night to get so many hours of sleep self-discipline it's a virtue it's a positive thing but the other connotation of discipline is a negative thing and we think i'm sure most of us of school being disciplined at school being punished being given a punishment exercise and when people talk of church discipline perhaps that's what we think of it's a punishment it's something unpleasant it's something you want to avoid and yet Jesus in Matthew 18 says it is the means of restoring, straying, sinning brothers or sisters of calling them back to a consistent walk with the Lord and sparing them the consequences of their actions it begins a friendly word in private which if heated goes no further but if not heated becomes ultimately a formal concern it brought before the whole church so Jesus reminds us that as Christians we are members of his body we are to look out for one another and we are to listen to one another he's not advocating that we live in a cult not by any means he's not talking about coercion or control remember at the beginning of lockdown when it's very strict i remember being in hollywood park and we'd go for walks with the children and you had the hour or two a day didn't you could go out and what surprised me was that the police presence there were police cars there were police men there were police women and we were afraid to sit down because if you sat down they would question you whether you were actually doing exercise whether you should actually be out of the house and so we uh we made sure we were always walking Jesus isn't saying we are to be moral policemen we're not

[17:11] to be proactively looking for fault in one another's lives but as brothers and sisters we are to be reactive if we become aware of something if we learn of something if we if we see something and we want to speak to it out of our loving concern for their welfare we're into carol concert once and it wasn't um my home church it was a traditional carol service elsewhere and i was speaking to a man and it became clear that he was quite heavily under the influence of alcohol and uh i spoke to him for a little while and i thanked him for the hospitality of the church and he said yes i'm one of the elders when i was a little surprised i stayed once with a brother very good brother but as we were just settling down for the evening he was being very short with his wife and raising his voice and i thought to myself do i say something went to a conference well-known christian speaker and writer got up and gave a talk and it was a helpful talk but some of the humor in it was very inappropriate what do you do in these situations what do you do when somebody has the opportunity outside a pandemic to come to a Sunday service in week after week they're not there and it's not clear why they don't seem to have other commitments they just aren't there how do we show our concern do we go and have a quiet word and say my brother my friend i'm just worried that you're drinking too much and i'm worried that you're being a little impatient with your wife i wonder if you shouldn't tell those jokes in a public or indeed a private context we haven't seen you in church for several months and i just want to check is everything okay are you under pressure has something come up has somebody upset you what do you do verse 15 when somebody sins what do you do when somebody sins against you an informal word a quiet word and see if they will listen and verse 20 is verse 19 and 20 are written into that context they are wonderful verses aren't they if two of you agree about anything it will be done for my father by my father in heaven for where two or three are gathered in my name there am i among you these verses often find themselves in kitchen calendars or or crocheted and framed don't they two or three are gathered in my name there am i among them and it's true of course because we worship one who is our Emmanuel who is God with us and all the way through the scriptures from old testament to new we are told that he will be our God and we will be his people that he is with us says Psalm 91 in times of trouble we worship a God who is with his people never leaving never forsaking but the context is one of the church discipline that where two or three in this small group are gathered there am i among them as we read in first Corinthians when you're assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and my spirit is present and the power of the Lord Jesus something about that meeting

together as we seek to restore a brother or a sister so somebody sins against you go and tell him his fault by means of application we do recognize that we are one in Christ Jesus

that we have one heavenly father we have received one holy spirit there is indeed one faith one church one lord but within that one church there will be interpersonal difficulties there will be controversies there will be conflict people will say and do things that are insensitive and hurtful we may unthinkingly or unfeelingly think or say or do things that are hurtful it's just the fact of life that when people come together there will be tensions and difficulties and Jesus reminds us that we need to be willing to receive correction it takes humility to listen to constructive criticism to receive feedback the disciples at this point in their journey were not known for their humility 18 verse 1 again they were debating who is the greatest in the kingdom but we need to be humble and one measure of that humility is whether we are willing to publicly join a church and to say that I am willing to be held accountable in my christian life for my conduct and for my conversation to not join a church in fact sends a signal that we don't want to be held accountable that we want to be independent of oversight we just want to do our own thing but Jesus says we need to look at our own hearts and recognize that we do need correction we need to be humble enough like the wise man of proverbs to know that when we are rebuked we will be wiser still and we need to understand as well that this process this sort of step ladder of discipline is instituted by the Lord Jesus himself that he wants us to be restored and so he has this patterns private discussion this informal conversation and then the involvement of the wider congregation if we don't listen it's very hard of course in our day and age it's very easy

I should say to evade this sort of discipline isn't it that the petrol engine the internet means that if somebody wants to speak to us about something or we we have something in our conscience we can just go to another church or we can tune into another church and we can avoid the difficult conversation but Jesus doesn't want us to do that he wants us to speak to one another in love and to listen to one another in humility he wants us to show one another our faults but secondly he goes on verse 21 to say having done that you are to show one another your forgiveness and I'm sure for many of us that is in fact the harder part of this passage there's a conversation with Peter Peter picks up on this and he says how many times will I forgive my brother if he sins against me how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him verse 21 as many as seven times now the rabbis of Jesus stay apparently taught that if somebody sinned against you you forgive them three times three strikes and then you're out and so Peter must have been rather pleased with himself to offer forgiveness seven times that's more than double what you get from a rabbi but Jesus verse 22 it raises the bar Jesus said to him I do not say to seven times but 70 times seven seven the number of completeness twice 77 complete forgiveness as many times as your brother sins against you so you are to forgive them one writer says there's no point burying a hatchet if you're going to put up a marker on the site and to make his point Jesus teaches the parable of the unforgiving servant it's not perhaps the most famous of Jesus parables but it's a very important parable the parable of the prodigal son which perhaps might be the most famous of all the parables talks about reconciliation between God and man between the father and the prodigal son the parable of the unforgiving servant speaks about reconciliation between man and man between man and woman between the servants of the king and we're introduced to some characters it's a bit allegorical 23 the kingdom of heaven there's a king and it's obviously april he's obviously finalizing the tax return he's settling accounts with his servants and the first servant comes in who owes him 10 000 talents and if you look down to your footnotes if your bible has the footnote it says a talent was a monetary unit worth about 20 years wages for a laborer so this man owes 10 000 talents 10 000 times 20 years it is an extraordinary in fact an impossible sum of money it's like the GDP of a whole country it is billions upon billions of pounds it's not clear how he ran up that debt and it's certainly not clear how he's going to pay off that debt and verse 25 we're told since he could not pay his master ordered him to be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made this man is in debt he's going to be imprisoned or sold as a slave his

family is going to be broken up he's never going to see his children again and he's desperate he's in a hopeless situation all he can do verse 26 is fall in his knees imploring the king have patience with me and i will pay you everything and out of pity for him the master of the servant released him and forgave him all his debt isn't that an astonishing thing imagine you had a parking fine and somebody paid it imagine you had a a much larger fine for for something for which you were held liable and somebody paid it off how grateful you would be to them and this man is about to lose everything his

job his marriage his family his home his civil liberties and the king is willing to forgive him all of his debts imagine the joy you and i would feel in that situation imagine the joy he should have felt and imagine the gratitude he should have shown towards the king who is so gracious and compassionate slow to anger and rich in love well that's not what happens verse 28 the same servant goes out and he finds one of his fellow servants who owes him a hundred denarii and seizing him he begins to choke him saying pay what you owe so this servant may be a subcontractor and he owes him a denarii a few hundred denarii sorry a denaris was a day's wage for a labourer so three months pay maybe a matter of a few thousand pounds and verse 29 his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him have patience with me and i will pay you and these words should have rung a bell in his ear shouldn't they because he said them just a few verses earlier verse 26 when he fell on his knees and cried out have patience with me and i will pay you everything and the king the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt of billions of pounds and the servant goes out having had his life restored to him and he finds this fellow servant and he falls down before him and says have patience with me and i will pay you and verse 30 he refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt when his fellow servant saw what had taken place they were greatly distressed they went and reported to the master all that had taken place his master summoned him and said you wicked servant i forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me and should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant as i have had mercy on you credible that he should have enjoyed such forgiveness such freedom and yet when he met a fellow servant who had wronged him there is no forgiveness there is no freedom there is no mercy and Jesus says this man will be thrown into prison until he should pay all his debt so also will my heavenly father do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from the heart how often should i forgive my brother when he sins against me Jesus says 70 times seven why should i show them mercy because God has shown you infinitely more mercy in your own life and therefore you are to be merciful to one another one writer says this it is the person who most knows himself liable to fall that will be most ready to overlook any offenses from his fellow man then they received mercy they were therefore to show mercy to one another and that's the heart of the gospel isn't it we have received such mercy from the king he has forgiven us all of our sins he has freed us from the slavery to sin he has rescued us from the jaws of death he has snatched us from the flames of hell because of his mercy because of his love through the death and the resurrection of his son who gave himself for us and we are therefore to be merciful to one another because God has been so merciful to us

[32 : 56] Paul in Ephesians 4 be kind to one another tender hearted forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you this is what of course the Lord himself taught in the Sarmor on the mount as he taught his disciples to pray maybe a prayer that each of us has prayed many times at home or in church for forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors the king has forgiven us an enormous debt but do we forgive one another the little debts that we run up in the ordinary business of life and it's important we do Jesus goes on in the Sarmor of the mount to say if you forgive others their trespasses your heavenly father will also forgive you but if you do not forgive one another their trespasses neither will your father forgive your trespasses unforgiveness bitterness resentment is a terrible thing it's a terrible thing emotionally it's a terrible thing spiritually and Jesus wants to be free of that he wants us to bury the hatchet and to enjoy freedom and life a few years ago i was reading an account of an incident involving brother Yun the Chinese Christian otherwise known as the heavenly man and in the late 90s he produced the book which was full of quite remarkable experiences and he was clearly a godly Christian leader who'd suffered for his faith and some people began to question whether everything in the book was true now i'm in no position to judge whether or not that is the case but there was somebody in Germany who really took exception to brother Yun and they launched a website denouncing him as a liar and a fraud that was one thing but this man in Germany somehow got the ear of Christian leaders in China again sincere godly men who'd suffered for the Lord and he persuaded them to publicly denounce brother Yun before the Chinese church many of them who'd actually never met brother Yun did so and brother Yun suffered real reputational damage as a consequence of this and somebody went to brother Yun and they wanted him to respond publicly to these allegations to these accusations and brother Yun said something like this he said i want my brothers in Christ to know that i hold absolutely nothing against them and i look forward to the day when we will embrace with joy around the throne of the Lamb in glory he knew he had received great mercy and so he in turn showed great mercy to those who had mistreated and maligned him if a brother sins against you we are to show them their fault but Jesus

says you are then to show them your forgiveness times without number complete forgiveness remembering what god in christ has done for you show one another your fault but show them your forgiveness and that's especially true isn't it at a communion season at a weekend such as this communion as we'll think about tomorrow we are given the invitation from the lord himself who who welcomes all who come to him in faith knowing that

he came to seek and to save that which is lost but as we will remember there is also the warning the warning paul issues in first carinthians 11 that we're not to eat and drink in an unworthy manner and we need to examine our hearts and our consciences and to ask whether we are right firstly with god through christ whether we truly have repented whether we genuinely have believed in him as our saviour but also whether we are right with one another in christ or whether there is bitterness and anger and unforgiveness and resentment in our hearts whether there are conflicts which have been rumbling on for months if not years and which need to be settled before we appear before the lord at his table the anglican book of common prayer has some notes before the communion service and it let me just read a few words to you if you shall perceive your offenses to be such as are not only against god but also against your neighbours then you shall reconcile yourselves to them being ready to make restitution and satisfaction according to the utter most of your powers for all injuries and wrongs done by you to any another and being likewise ready to forgive others that have offended you as you would have forgiveness at your offenses at god's hand so as we come to the table tomorrow we have before then this time of preparation to examine our hearts and our consciences to examine our relationships and to say have we been merciful to the lord's servants we have received great mercy from the king but have we shown that same mercy to our fellow servants to our fellow workers to our fellow labourers in the lord have we shown them their fault if we find them string and have we shown them our forgiveness if they turn in repentance and humility and faith forgive one another says paul as god in christ has forgiven you well let's pray together before our final sal our gracious god we thank you that you are gracious and compassionate slow to anger and abounding in love we thank you there is a father has compassion on a child so you have had compassion upon us as far as the east is from the west so far have you separated our sins from us indeed through christ they are cast into the very depths of the sea lord we thank you that when we were enemies you made us your friends while we were hostile toward you you preached peace to us and you poured out your love on us that we might be called children of god we thank you that christ has in his body reconciled us to one another he has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and made the two one and has united people from every tribe and tongue and nation from different generations in himself that we might be one in christ jesus that we might strive to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace lord we pray that would be true of us this weekend and into the future though that we would put away the old ways of malice and rivalry of selfish ambition of hatred

and we would put on the new ways of love and meekness and forbearance would you help us to live together as brothers and sisters in the lord jesus christ to live with one another would you help us to love one another and for that love to increase more and more to abound more and more as we wait the lord's return would you help us to bear with one another when things are said or things are done or things are not said or not done in a fashion that might cause hurt or offence that might cause sensitivities lord we pray that we would remember these words that we are to forgive our debtors as you have forgiven us our debts we are to forgive one another as you have through christ forgiven us and to live in peace with all men

Lord any parent knows what a joy it is to see their children getting on and we know how good and pleasing it is when brothers live together in unity for that is where you command your blessing even life forevermore so would this congregation lord would the congregations across the island from every denomination where your word is truly preached they've been known for a people who love one another and who live together in peace and are willing to forgive for we understand as we look to the cross what forgiveness truly means and so we thank you lord thank you for our common faith thank you for your love poured into our hearts through your holy spirit and thank you for the hope that is ours that we will indeed gather with one day enjoy around your throne and rejoice forevermore and so we thank you for this time in Jesus name