

*10“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

*12“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13“If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14“So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. 15“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** 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. 18“Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”*

We're going to begin again where we left off last week, in vs. 10. Vs 10 is a bridge. It follows out of the previous passage about physically small people, babies and wee ones who are humble. They are a picture of what the church is supposed to look like. All equals in the Kingdom. All humble children.

And it leads into the next passage where Jesus will speak of all of the elect as His sheep. We are like children. Humble. Equals with one another. Submissive. Needing care. Likewise, we are like sheep. Helpless. Stupid. Vulnerable. We wander.

*10“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

Little ones, are the elect. The saints. All Christians.

We talked briefly last week about wee ones having angels. Where the idea of guardian angels comes from. In Hebrews 1:14 it's clear that angels are ministering spirits who are there to help all of the saints.

Heb. 1:14 Speaking of angels, the author says; *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?* Angels minister to the elect.

Vs. 10 works equally well for children who are beloved by their Heavenly Father, and for all of us, who are childlike in our humility with each other, and who are helpless like sheep.

We'll see in this next section that this same idea of looking down on, as seeing as valueless applies to adults who belong to Jesus as it does to children.

This verse 10 is an emphatic imperative. *See that you do not despise one of these little ones!*

Strong imperative. This is important. This is a responsibility that must not be taken lightly. And the illustration that Jesus gives next is the lead in to the discussion about how we deal with members of the body of Christ, that wander. Into sin.

First a note about vs. 11. It doesn't appear in the best and oldest manuscripts. Sinaiticus and Vaticanus do not have this verse. Nothing wrong with this verse, it is said almost identically in Luke 19. There's no error here. Simply that it got added in later by a well-meaning copyist. Maybe in a margin at first, then, over time, it simply got placed here and re-copied.

It doesn't hurt a thing, and some day if we're studying Luke 19 we'll cover it, but not today. In fact, it's my belief that it impairs the direct lead in of vs. 10 to the parable in vs. 12.

In vs. 10 Jesus says, don't you dare look down on my little ones! And

He has 2 supports. The first is that their angels are ever before His fathers face, and second is the logic of this parable of the sheep. Little ones.

*12“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13“If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14“So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.*

How many times have you heard this taught as a lesson on how Jesus is the good shepherd and He's out looking for who? The unsaved. This is always a painting of Jesus carrying some poor little lamb and it's about how He travels the world over to find unsaved people and he saves them.

Well, that may well be true, but it isn't what's being portrayed here.

Jesus told Peter, *feed **my** sheep. Feed **my** lambs. Feed **my** sheep.* The sheep belong to Him, and if we despise them, Woe. The sheep is us. We are the sheep. The sheep are the elect of God. The church. The ecclesia. The called out ones. These are saved folk who are wandering off after they have responded to the gospel.

So Jesus argues, *What do you think?*

In the greek this is posed as a rhetorical question. The answer is implied in the asking.

This is like a Geico commercial. If you're a sheep, you go astray. It's what you do!

I was listening to a tape and the speaker was illustrating this. You're a sheep and you go, oh, there's some grass over there, oh there's some grass over there (X3 more), and you look up . . . where did the other sheep go. Where am I? And you've wandered off and you're lost and vulnerable. Wolves are out there. You have no defenses.

Other sheep are part of our defense against wolves and other threats. There is safety in the community of sheep. The shepherd is there. But sheep are prone to wandering. Getting separated from the flock.

Shepherds who do nothing about that, despise the sheep. We're back in vs. 10. The shepherd says, I'm so sick of that stupid sheep! He always wanders off. He is the dumbest one! It's always the same one. He isn't worth my time to keep beating the bushes to find him and carry him back to the others. I've still got 99. Good riddance.

This is an old picture. An old problem. Israel was God's flock. His sheep. The entire chapter of Ezekiel 34 talks about God's sheep and their abandonment and mistreatment by their shepherds. It's the same idea exactly. Listen to the opening verses;

*1 Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flock?" 3 "You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. 4 "Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them. 5 "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered. 6 "My flock wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.'"*

God's little ones, His sheep, are the elect. The called out ones that He has called to come out of this world and to belong to Him.

When they wander, when they are mistreated, when they are not fed and cared for; that causes wrath. God is angry when His sheep wander and no one bothers to go search them out and bring them back home.

These next verses are some of the most difficult in the entire Bible. I've been concerned this week, I'm not up to teaching this. This is beyond my capacities. Beyond my level of expertise.

Actually the concepts are simple and the language is easy. It's the resolve and the doing that are dreadful.

Let me begin by saying quite bluntly, the passage is about the ecclesia. The church. But . . . it is a poor match with our church.

This passage pre-supposes a group of people, an ecclesia, who enjoy membership, and a plurality of shepherds. It presupposes a belonging to a group that has real value. It presupposes a well defined standard of living and conduct. And it presupposes mutual accountability to the other members.

I'm not sure where this church is on anyone here's list of things they hold most valuable. We can take it or leave it. On a scale of 1 to 10 where a 10 are the things I would die to keep, and a 1 is like a TV re-run that wasn't that good to begin with, for most of us, church is about a 3. We're not going to die on this hill.

That may offend you, and you may well accuse me of overstating things, but if there's any truth to what I've said, this passage that Jesus is going to state as of utmost importance, doesn't really matter very much to us. There would be no cost involved for us, either way.

Let me paint a picture of a first century church before we begin. Let's say Corinth, just for the sake of example.

First, there is only one group of believers in Jesus. There weren't a dozen other christian churches around town to choose from. Only one.

Second, it has cost you everything to be a member. Your social status, your business status, your position in the culture and that culture's previous idolatrous religion. You have been plucked up out of that world, and everything normal about it, and seperated unto Christ. You're now an outsider to every other function in this world. Banished

to Christ. And His church.

But it's not so bad, within the church is a culture all it's own. There is a plurality of elders who oversee your welfare as a member of this new community. They are teaching you the Word of God.

There are members who have spiritual gifts that they bring to the community. Nothing's lacking, really. In fact this church, and it's cause, it's priority to be a picture of Christ in the community, through the gifts of it's members, is growing and vibrant, and you would not trade this new life for anything, ANYTHING you had before.

Then, one day, it happens. You open Corinth Facebook, and there's a girlfriend or boyfriend from 30 years ago, and holy cow, they're still pretty hot after all this time. And they're single now, and they want to get together with you. You're a sheep and that grass looks GOOD! Really really good. Got to at least investigate.

That's just one scenario in a million that our enemy can put together. Everybody has different weaknesses, different places of vulnerability, but you get the idea.

So a sheep has wandered away from the safety of the flock. What do we do? And more importantly, who is responsible to act? Is this only the shepherds problem? You're a sheep and your fellow sheep has wandered and is just a spot on the horizon now. If he goes behind that next bush, you won't even be able to see him any more. What happens. Is that sheep of any value to restore?

*15“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** 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.*

This is a blow by blow methodical instruction for what? Restoring

wandering sheep.

Jesus says, the sheep are mine, I care deeply for them, their angels are ever before my Father's face, and if they wander away into danger, this is what I expect you to do in order to restore them to safety.

This isn't optional, it is an imperative command. To the whole church. Every one of us.

Now, I have a confession to make. The only person in this room that is more abhorrent of conflict, than me, is Pam. We don't go there. We're the original wimps. Both of us. We just want to live in peace. To a fault. To a fault.

And then Jesus comes along and gives this imperative command. *See that you do not despise one of these little ones* Many of the translations are trying to get the intensity of this across with words like *He sternly warned them*

Jesus, in the original language, which doesn't come across as well in our translations, is severe here. This is imperative! This is must do. He was stern when He said this. He was severe. '

My beautiful bride, sitting there, has latitudes and latitudes of patience for me. She has different levels of asking me to do something. And then she has a tone in her voice and demeanor which is the final one. Business! Now, mister! That's the tone here. *See that you **do not** despise one of these little ones*

If we choose to look the other way, to not confront a sinning member, who is in some stage of wandering away from the flock, we have, in effect, ignored what Jesus commanded here. If we allow sin to continue, we have despised our brother.

Love demands this confrontation.

And yet, love, is the first excuse NOT to do what Jesus says here. Especially in our back boneless society. Listen to the word of God;

Proverbs 13:24 *Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.*

Jesus says, if you don't do this, you despise your brother.

Now, let's pause here, just for a moment. How many churches have you ever been in that took this command seriously? Maybe a show of hands. Anyone? Thought so.

I have had an exceptional experience in churches in my 45 years as a believer. I've been in 2 churches who were serious about not despising the flock. Grace Community Church, where I was saved, and Rancho's Community church which later became Hilltop Community Church. Both took this passage seriously.

Let me show you why this is so important. Don't worry, we'll get to vs. 15 eventually. I'm building my case. Is this important? Is it important to take this passage seriously and obey the Lord in the hardest possible thing for most of us to do?

Skip down to vs. 19. Just for a minute. *19“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”*

That's the prayer meeting verse, right? That's the verse where if you send the TV preacher some money and put your hand on top of the TV and pray along with him, Jesus will be there, right?

NO! That verse is in the context of THIS discussion about purity and confrontation of sinning members.

This is the most difficult thing any church will ever do, and Jesus says, if you'll do it, I'll be in your midst. Period.

Hmmmm. I wonder if the converse is true. If a church refuses to take this passage seriously and do what the Lord commands here, does the



inverse happen? Do you think if we say we won't do this, Jesus might just say, fair enough, don't scratch your heads wondering why I'm NOT in your midst.

Is that fair? Do This and I'll respond by doing This. Don't do this, and what?

I was at the previous church I attended for almost thirty years. This is the issue where I finally threw up my hands and said, I'm sorry gentlemen, I don't have any more time to waste.

Do this, and I'll be in your midst. Don't do this and what? I think it's obvious. Why is our land full of churches that are dead? DEAD?

When Jesus isn't in the midst of a church, that church is dead. *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."* R 3:1

It's rare to find a church where Jesus is in their midst. Rare. Truly!

When Pam and I left So. Cal. and moved up to Carson City, a guy who worked for my old boss in California, who was a devout christian and also a member of Grace Church, had preceeded us to Carson City. Steve Barron. And the report had come back that there was a church in the Gardnerville Ranchos that was alive and well. A bible honoring and teaching fellowship that was like our home church on a small scale.

So we went the first Sunday we were in Nevada and it was like we were home. Jesus was indeed in their midst. You could feel it. It was exciting! Everything that MacArthur had taught us, actually working, on a much smaller scale. We were at once, home. Then we moved to Tonopah, but that's another story . . .

At Rancho's the minister of music was a school teacher. A sweet sweet man, married about 35 years, humble, perfect. He had one of those old original houses about 2 blocks back from 395 in old Carson City. Everybody loved him.

Then one day the shock came. He left his wife and his children and was having an affair.

That church sprang into action! Sometimes you go slow and wait during this procedure. Sometimes that isn't possible. IN this case, for the sake of a dear sister, a wife of 35 years and children at home, that wasn't an option. If you're going to be able to salvage any of that, this process needed to happen fast.

The pastor went. The music minister said, *I'm in love for the first real time in my life, and I'll leave everything behind to keep this new love.* Phase one. Fail.

Then the elders went as a group. That church had the privilege of a plurality of Godly elders. They all went. No, he would not budge. *You guys don't understand. I'm in love. It's captured me. It's too powerful. I can't extricate myself, nor do I want to! Go away.* Phase two. Fail.

Then the part I remember, because we were fairly new members there. The pastor and the elders told it to the church! *All of you go and call this man back!* And a bunch of them did exactly that. No! He wouldn't budge. Phase three. Fail.

Then phase four. They did the only thing left to them. Everyone had begged and pleaded. No response. The Lord Jesus, in the midst of that congregation, complicit with them, they dis-fellowshipped him. He's now someone you hold at arm's length. Like the IRS.

Guess what. There was a partial happy ending. Not total. In a few months, he did leave his sin behind, with a full repentance. His wife did take him back. He was restored to his family. The only sadness was, he was too embarrassed to come back to that church that cared so much for him and his family. He found another church.

That's just one example where a church took this passage seriously and went through the process as biblically as they could.

If a church does this, does every story have a happy ending? No. No. Sometimes the wolves win. But, here's the thing. The two churches where I've felt Jesus Christ, in the midst, the most, were churches that would do the hard thing, and go through this process.

And, not only did they get Jesus, in their midst, they also had purity and power. Both places. You'd walk in and you could feel the life. The presence. Ask Pam. We walked into that church one time and said, this is it. We're home. Never once thought of trying out any other church in Carson City. There were about 90 people in that church.

So, let's look at what the Lord is commanding in these verses. I want to dig in a little bit here. IF we need to finish next week, that's OK.

*15“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** 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.*

There are four phases to this command.

Let me begin by laying some more ground work.

This process has been done badly, and when it's done badly, there's really nothing more ugly.

Here's the bottom line. It's impossible to do this right, without the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit helping, you can't do it wrong. Without the Holy Spirit helping, you can't do it right. And when it's done wrong, it's everybody's worst nightmare.

Pictures form in your mind of people in Massachusetts on witch hunts. Have you seen the pictures of dunkings. Like a teeter totter that goes under water and some poor person is being punished publicly by being dunked under water until they almost drown.

Keep those images, because Satan can have a field day here. Perhaps more than any other place. When this process is done without the help of the Holy Spirit, it can be the ugliest thing ever presented to the rest of the world.

Perhaps that's why most churches refuse to go here. There have been more times, by far, where Satan has had a field day right here, than there ever has where the church has gotten it right. This is a mine field.

Listen to Paul, to the Galatians. 6:1 *Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; **each one** looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. 2Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ....*

You who are spiritual. That's the prerequisite so Satan doesn't have a field day here. The Holy Spirit has to join in this process. Otherwise it's a disaster!

So, 90% of you just climbed up on that shelf didn't you. Safe. I could never do this. I'm not spiritual. At least, not like this. I'm not at this level. I'm off the hook. Count me out.

Guess what. What Paul is describing here, ye who are spiritual, is normative for every christian. Spirit filled. Walking in the Spirit. This is normal. For all christians! If you're not Spirit filled, you're either NOT a christian, or, you need to go through this process yourself!

There's no tier system in the body of Christ. Spiritual people and carnal people. I'm carnal and that's the way I like it. Please excuse me and go find someone who IS spiritual to do this thing.

Romans 8:9. The verse that swept me into the Kingdom. *If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.*

Ephesians 5:18 *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, literally with the word tenses in the*

original, *be being kept filled with the Spirit.*

*You who are spiritual, restore such an one.* And if you're not "spiritual", why not? Maybe you need to be restored first, so you can reach out to your brother.

A famous passage used most often to preclude what Jesus commands us to do. Oh, I could never approach my sinning brother! The Bible says, Judge not, lest you be judged. It would be judgemental for me to go to my brother and confront his sin!

Oh? Really? Listen to that passage again. In context. And think about what Paul just said to the Galatians.

Mt. 7. Sermon on the mount. Jesus speaking; 1 *“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3“Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye?*

See! I'm on high ground here! Not gonna judge my sinning brother. I've got my own problems. He'll have to deal with his. That's the high ground.

*5“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.*

*You who are spiritual, restore such an one . . .* And if you're not spiritual, the normative thing to do in the body of Christ is, yes, first, you take the log out of your own eye, but then, you go help your brother.

We don't go around with logs in our own eyes and let our poor brother go to pieces. Jesus says, deal with the log, then go help your brother.

Paul says, the very next thing in that passage in Galatians 6; *bear one*

*another's burdens and thus fulfil . . . what? the law of Christ.*

Confronting people about sin is a rescue attempt. It's difficult. Intimidating. A minefield. You can get blown up. Everything can and will go wrong. The scale is weighted about a billion times in the wrong direction. But. Jesus says, do it, and I'll go with you. I'll be in your midst.

And Paul says Do it, and thus fulfil the Law of Christ. The law of Christ is Love one another.

OK, that's the groundwork, and I think I'm going to wait until next week to take those verses apart.

Briefly then, in conclusion, what's at stake here? A sheep is lost. That sheep will perish if no one does anything. The necessary action is difficult. It's a mine field and you CAN get blown up.

Jesus says, you go into that minefield and rescue your brother. No if's, and's or but's. It is a command from the Lord. He's all business when He commands it. He expects us to do this. Individually and as a church.

He promises to join us in this. And I believe the inverse is also true. If we refuse to go here, if we ignore this command, don't bother asking why Jesus isn't in our midst. If you want Jesus, you've got to do the hard stuff.