

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. We laid some groundwork for this passage. That's on line if you missed it and care to see what was said.

I built a case that this passage and what we do with it may in fact be the base line of how we emerge as a church. In fact I believe a church's views on sin and their willingness to confront it in the manner clearly delineated here may well be the difference between a Sardis church, remember them, there was an odor of death at Sardis, sin reigned, and a Philadelphia church that is vibrant and alive and Jesus is in their midst.

This is a tightrope though. There are pits on either side. You can also

go down this road and be an Ephesus church. They were doing all the right stuff. Committed to these principles. But loveless. That was a fail equal to the dead church.

If I've lost you, I'm referencing the seven churches that Jesus wrote letters to in Revelation 2 and 3. Those churches serve as types through all the ages of the church.

We need to be a church that thinks about who we are, where we're at, and who we want to be. We should be talking with each other, as a church, about those things. Where do we align. What changes do we need to make as a church so that we're not a Laodicea type church. Or a Sardis type church.

This passage before us this morning for our consideration is of paramount importance. How important? Jesus first introduces the idea of an ecclesea, a group of called out ones, ultimately the church, us included, in Matthew 16. Remember, I will build MY church.

So that establishes the paradigm. Now in Matthew 18, the first message that includes directions for the church, is this. "I died for these sheep. I expect you to love and care for the sheep by watching over them when they stray." That responsibility is for ALL of us. Not just me. Every one of us.

We said that Matthew 18 is Jesus great discourse on the "one anothers" How we respond appropriately, and lovingly, to each other. The first thing we do, is protect each other from our natural proclivity to wander. That's the first order for the church out of Jesus mouth.

Now, in the United States of America in 2016, that's also, over time, come to seem polar opposite of what anyone wants or expects. In the church, in America, in 2016, holiness is optional. I'll say that again. In the church, in America, in 2016, somehow we've gotten to the place where, if you polled the folks that the pollster's refer to as evangelicals, you would find that most of them think . . holiness is optional.

You don't have to be holy to go to heaven. You just have to be saved.

Holiness is second or third tier christianity, not some kind of norm. It's for other folks, and frankly, they aren't very winsome to be around.

In fact if you want to win your neighbors over to the cause, the last thing you want to portray is holiness. A lifestyle with limits. A narrow world view. That just turns people off. Right?

Let me quickly show you Jesus thoughts on worldliness and popularity with the outside world, in the church. Acts chapter 5

1But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, 2and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. 3But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? 4"While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. 6The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. 7Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." 9Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." 10And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.

In the formative days of the ecclesia, the church, the Holy Spirit did this thing so that once for all, the folks inside had a holy respect for sinfulness and obedience, and the folks outside had a holy terror.

Don't join that church. The people in there die if they don't get serious

about sin.

Compare that with evangelicalism 101 in America today. Church is like *kosmos lite*. It's the same world as outside. You just have to replace the world's sugar with the church's Splenda, or better yet, Equal.

Who wouldn't join *that*? It doesn't cost you anything! And you'll get used to the sweet taste of the fake sugar. Not that big a deal. Worldliness lite. Kosmos lite.

So we, as a church, need to consider the disparity between the New Testament picture of the first century believers, and us, and decide who we want to look like.

Why do I start there on a passage about dealing with sinning members? Because our culture has taught us that to push back is somehow bad. That's deeply ingrained. I don't get in your business, and you can jolly well stay out of mine, thank you very much.

This idea of confronting sin is foreign to us, and our culture has conditioned us so that our first thought is; confrontation is not loving.

When our biggest grandsons were toddlers, just beginning to investigate the world around them, we had a pellet stove. And I would invariably make a little game out of taking them into very close proximity with that stove and saying "hot!" and I'd take their fat little hands and pretend like I was going to make them touch it.

Sort of a dare. Force their hand within an inch or so. Close enough that they could feel the heat getting more intense. And they would pull back, and I'd do it again. Like a game. They would giggle, but they were learning that once this game is over, I'm going to give this machine a wide berth.

Did I do that because I hate those little guys? Of course not. Love gets right into someone else's business and does what it can to keep them from getting burned.

Jesus uses 2 metaphors in this teaching about sin and a brother's response to danger for his other brother. We are children. We need those boundaries. We need someone who loves us to warn us about exceeding the boundaries and getting burned.

And we are sheep. We wander away from the flock like sheep. And Jesus uses that metaphor to teach us the value of the sheep. We go looking for the lost ones. We exert effort to restore the ones who have wandered off.

Sin is the fire that burns us. And very often, like sheep, we wander and we are not really aware of the intensity of the danger we've wandered into. Or like the little ones rough housing by the hot stove, they don't really understand the severity of falling onto that hot surface. They've never been burned before. They don't have a concept of 3rd degree skin burns that will be painful for months and leave a scar, perhaps, forever.

Sin has another affect. It separates us from our love relationship with our heavenly Father.

God bought us by putting our sin on His Son at the cross. We began this love relationship when we acknowledged our sin, repented of it, and by faith, accepted the forgiveness available in the completed work for us at the cross.

When we walk back into sin, we walk away from fellowship with our God. I'm not saying we lose our salvation. But our fellowship, our daily personal relationship with the Saviour, is abridged. He won't have it. You can have your sin, or you can have sweet fellowship with the Creator, but you cannot have both.

Some people wander into sin, they love their sin, and they never recover. Ananias and Saphira are sort of special cases, but they perished. Did they go to heaven after God smote them? If they were Christians, they did. We don't know, do we.

There are other instances in the new testament where Christians fall into sin and they perish. 1 Cor. 11:30 *For this reason many among you are*

weak and sick, and a number sleep.

Sin separates us from fellowship. It can make us weak and sick. It can ultimately kill us. It is that dangerous. Therefore;

15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

As I studied this, something struck me subconsciously, and I had to go check it out. Carl will love this. All of the modern translations transition from the sheep / shepherd parable right into the vs. 15 as if there was a paragraph break. Old discussion, new discussion.

But the Authorised version, the King James doesn't do that. It finishes the shepherd / sheep illustration of danger and rescue, and then as if to say, "along those same lines", or in line with those thoughts, "this" and then vs. 15.

A connection between the illustration and the command. Because of this, Do this.

*AV. **Moreover** if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

So, I had to go look it up in the interliner. A book that has the greek and english together, one on top of the other so that you can see how the greek words got translated into english.

And there's this little conjunction word in the greek; de

de: can be translated; but, or and, or now,

Part of Speech: Conjunction

Short Definition: but, on the other hand, and

So, in the original language there's an important conjoining of the teaching parable, and the command.

Your brother is a sheep that's wandered into a dangerous place, and he has real value to you, therefore; you go rescue him.

Again, then, vs. 15 *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."*

And right away, there's another little point of subtraction between the NAS and the Authorized.

AV. **Moreover** *if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

The NAS just says, if your brother sins, go . . . Where the old Authorized says *if thy brother shall trespass against thee*

And that becomes a perceived problem, doesn't it. The NAS seems to say we're responsible to do this for any brother that's gotten himself entangled in sin. Period.

While the Authorised seems to qualify that responsibility with the words, against thee

So, again, we do some textual criticism. Is it in the original manuscripts? Is the against thee in or out? And we find that some of the best and most respected manuscripts that the experts rely on the most, have it, and some others that are just as weighty, do not.

Here's a case where you can't build an argument based on best manuscript evidence. Now what do you do. MacArthur says; "leave it in!"

John says, ultimately, you're building a circular argument that any brother who has compromised his placement in the local body of Christ and therefore every inter-action with all of the other saints in that body, has sinned against you.

He happened to be the "ear". The ear wandered off into sin. Now,

you've gone deaf, because of him. You relied on that ear. The whole body relies on every one else in the body. Therefore, any member that gets entangled in sin and has effectually been compromised, stalled, as it were, has a direct affect on you.

Leave it in, leave it out, it works out the same. Any member of this local body that gets neutralized, affects me. I depend on his gifts. And I love him, or her. Therefore, if I'm the first one on the accident scene, whether the sin was a direct affront to me, or not, it's my responsibility to carry out the Lord's command in this verse. Do you see that? Is that clear? I hope so.

We're all connected to each other. Any one of us who is neutralized, affects us all.

So, vs. 15 is phase one of four possible actions that are designed, not to throw people out, but just the opposite, to restore people who have walked away already.

It's very simple. Words wise. Not hard to understand. But it is awkward to do. You go to the thesaurus for awkward and I can identify with every one of these, regarding this responsibility; embarrassing, uncomfortable, unpleasant, delicate, tricky, problematic, troublesome, thorny

Those are all good words to describe how I feel about approaching someone and launching into a conversation about their sin.

15 "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother"

It gets worse. The words translated variously *show him*, in the NAS and tell him, in the authorized incorporate the idea of making a convincing argument. There's no beating around the bush. This is a confrontation! You are doing (or not doing, as it were) _____ insert sin, and it has affected your relationship with our God, and also with me, and also with the entire body of believers. And it has placed you in grave danger. You need to repent and be restored.

We might pause here, and talk about "what sin?" Is there a level of sin? Is there a threshold where I might not do this, and, OK, we've crossed a line, and now it's necessary.

I'm going to use some common sense, and argue, yes.

James says, we all stumble, in many ways. We all have sin issues, that we deal with daily. I'm constantly in 1Jn. 1:9 confessing my sin. Daily. We're all broken people. We deal with it. Ongoing. That isn't what we're talking about here. That's just spiritual breathing, right? Sin, confess, sin, confess, sin, stress about not making much progress on the sin thing, confess . . . and so it goes.

What we're talking about here is the kind of sin that breaks fellowship, and then, isn't dealt with, and then, becomes a lifestyle. Sin that is dangerous to both the one in it, and to the rest of the body. Sin that becomes a cancer.

After Paul rebukes the Corinthians for suing each other, he reminds them that people who remain in sin, won't be inheriting the Kingdom.

9Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

That isn't a list that the bad old unbelievers do but the christians are exempt. We can find ourselves and our beloved brothers slipping into those things. Dangerous territory. I can think of at least one presidential candidate who is a reviler. Those words mean things.

So we're talking serious problems that cause a brother to fall out of fellowship with the saviour, and also are problematic enough to be a danger for the rest of the body of believers.

Phase one: You confront your brother. **Convincingly** being careful to

do it lovingly. This is like one of those troubleshooting flow charts.

a. He says, you're absolutely right, thank you for loving me and caring, I didn't think anyone cared, pray with me as I repent, and rejoice with me that the Lord is good and has received me back.

That's it. Done. You can push the "finished" button. No one else needs to know anything about it. Period. Don't tell the ladies prayer group. It's between you and the other person, alone. fini. OR

b. He says, Sorry, Who died and made you fourth person in the Trinity? Buzz off. Leave me alone. I won't change.

Move on to phase two.

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.

Increase the heat. This is Old Testament Law. Deuteronomy 17:6 We've moved beyond the just between you and your brother possibility. Sort of like the old saying, "we can do this the easy way, or we can do it the hard way . .

You've just ratchetted the heat up a notch.

Now a group of Godly people go to the brother and lovingly but seriously confront him. No, we're not going to let you go. We want you. You're of too much value to let you go. We're calling you to repent.

Again, back to our flow chart.

a. He repents and is gloriously restored. That's it. Push the finished button. OR

b. He refuses to move away from his sin. He's made up his mind. The sin is more important to me than fellowship, either with you, or with the

Saviour. Jesus can forgive me later. I'm having too much fun with my sin to walk away from it.

Move on to phase 3

17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;

At this point, we make the entire church aware of the failed process, and everyone, all of us, call him back. We're all responsible. We all go.

and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Final phase, if the first 3 have failed. Dis-fellowshipped. We hold this person at arms length. We don't visit his house. We don't share a meal. Like the old popular songs used to say, we give him the air. Space. No longer part of the ecclesia, the body. You are outside. Where the wolves are.

Paul says; 1Cor. 5:5. Remember? The guy who was sleeping with his father's wife; And the church had done nothing. In fact there was some boasting about how loving and non judgemental they all were I suppose.

4 In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

This is shocking business to have to conduct. By far, the most dreadful and intimidating thing we will ever be called on to do. There's nothing easy or fun about this.

But Jesus paid the ultimate price for these sheep. And He commands us to do this. Go after the sheep and do everything you can, to restore them when they stray.

If you're a christian, this IS what you signed up for. No one gets a pass. If you're the first one on the scene, you get to administer the first aid.

You say, is there an up side? When the Lord asks His children to do something hard, there's always an up side! Sometimes the sheep win. Sometimes the shepherds win!

In a parallel passage in Luke, 15:6 *"And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"* 7 *"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."*

In heaven, rejoicing, and on earth, death and sins averted;

James 5:19 *My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.*

And finally, some assurances in difficulty.

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."*

When we are obedient and go after the Lord's sheep, like no other time, we are in lock step with heaven.

The verb tenses are telling us, in this difficult task, we are carrying out binding and loosing that has already taken place 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."*

What I see in these verses, and I've alluded to it last week, is a source of great spiritual power, or inversely, a lack of it.

Almost as if the Lord is saying, if you'll obey in this hard thing, I'm going to be in your midst.

We want to see the miracles. We want to see lives changed. We long to have lasting impact. In our community, and indeed around the world.

We long to be a church with tangible power. With real communion with the risen Lord. We want to feel His presence.

This is where He promises all of those things. Obedience in the hard commands here, is somehow linked to the real presence and power of the Lord.

So, then, are we going to DO this. Are we going to be a church set apart from American Evangelicalism Normative.

Epilogue

I've been around the church scene for about 50 years now. If you step outside that box and analyze, here's what I'm seeing. Pastors get rotated in and out about every 2 to 5 years. Why is that?

Well, I think it's frustration on the part of the Christians who are in the churches. People get frustrated that the church experience isn't alive. It's dead. Obviously dead. The odor gives it away. God isn't present. God isn't doing anything in this church. That leads to discontent and infighting. And the folks keep rotating pastors hoping the next one will be a different experience.

I'm not saying that because I'm trying to keep this job. I wasn't looking for a job when you asked me to do this one. Just wanted to be clear on motives. What I am saying is that the kind of excitement of a church where God is doing things, and it's exciting to be a part of it, begins here with the first command Jesus gave to the ecclesia before it even became the church at Pentecost.

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

We all want Jesus in our midst. At least I think we do. That's certainly what I want. For myself, and for this church. I want the excitement of daily and weekly seeing the Lord's hand in our midst, doing things on a spiritual plane, that could not be brought about any other way.

What's the difference between a church like that and all of the dead ones? Well, I would submit to you that the place to begin to answer that question is in this verse. Start there and work backwards. It's talking about a lively church, Jesus is there, working with them towards a common goal. Why?

Well, He had asked them to obediently go and do the hard thing. Confront sin. Their own sin first, then the sins of wandering wayward sheep. Rescue the sheep. Restore the sheep. Get serious about this, and I'll be in your midst, doing it with you.

You see, this is where the Lord's heart is. If we want to experience His presence, maybe we need to begin where His heart is, and not vice versa.

Finally, this doesn't have to be constrained to sinning members. His heart is with ALL of the lost sheep. The other 2000 sheep that live in this town, that are lost, that need to know about His dieing for them. Those sheep. That's where His heart is.

Ultimately, if we want Him in our midst, we'll have to move where He is, not beg and plead and cajole for Him to move inside these 4 safe walls where we are.