

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

Those of you who were here last week know that we wrapped up our study of the 10 Commandments. What we continue with today is a very good follow up to that series. So we spent several weeks studying those Commandments, learning what God's will is in nearly every area of our lives. Well, what are we supposed to do with what we learned? The answer is obvious. God wants us to keep those Commandments! We know it. Now God is calling us to do it. He didn't give us 10 Suggestions, but 10 Commandments. For each Commandment we learned that when we sin, God calls us to repent, to trust Jesus as our Substitute and Savior who rescues us from our disobedience and the condemnation of God it brings. We learned that as children of God who have been forgiven, we now strive to be whom God has declared us to be. He has said we are perfect, dearly loved children, and so in love and thankfulness, we strive to be the perfect people God has declared us to be. We know that this is what is pleasing to him, and we want to please him who loved us and forgave us.

But here is the problem. We don't always keep God's law. We do break the 10 Commandments. Now ideally, when we sin, we would recognize it, acknowledge it, confess it, run to the cross of Christ for full forgiveness, and strengthened by his power, we would flee that sin and not repeat. And sometimes that does happen. But often it does not. So what then?

In other words, what are we supposed to do when a brother or sister in Christ sins, but does not recognize it, or acknowledge it, or repent of it, or run to the cross for forgiveness? What should we do when a brother or sister sins, and they hide it? Or they defend it? Or they're proud of it? Or they get obstinate or angry about it?

And by we, I mean YOU. You see a fellow Christian sin. You recognize it because we just had this series on the 10 Commandments. Your conscience has been sharpened. You're much more aware of God's holy will. And you see someone sin, and they appear indifferent about it, and they are continuing in it. What should *you* do about it?

You know, our first inclination is to push back. "You said *they* sinned and you're asking what *I* should do about it? Isn't the question what *they* should do about it? This has nothing to do with me. This has everything to do with them."

Our text today teaches us otherwise. It has everything to do with you. 1) A person's eternal future is on the line if they are living in unrepentant sin. Will we stand by and let them perish? 2) God created us as one body. He says if one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers with it. If one person is caught in a sin and is at odds with God, we will want to help them. 3) God's name is on the line. If there is sin in Christ's church and if God's reputation is on the line, we must do something about that. We cannot remain indifferent.

So what does God tell us to do when a fellow believer sins? I want to read through this whole reading and then we'll unpack what God is teaching us. Listen:

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. "Truly I tell you,

whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Place: First of all consider the place for applying what Jesus says here. We are to apply what Jesus says only to those that are within the church. “If you’re brother or sister sins...” And later, “Tell it to the church...” These are not instructions to follow with your co-worker who has never stated his religious association. This is not what you are to do with your Jewish neighbor. The place to apply this with a brother or sister in Christ when they sin.

Person: Second, who is supposed to go to the believer who is sinning? Who is to go to restore them? Jesus’ answer: The believer that knows about it. This is huge. It’s not the pastor’s job initially to the person who is sinning... unless it is the pastor who happens to be the one to have firsthand knowledge of the sin. It is not the church, or a committee, or the board of elders that are first to go to the person who sins. I can’t tell you the number of people who have informed me of someone in the church who was sinning... not so that I could give them advice on how to reach them, but so that I would go and do something about it. But Jesus is clear. The person to act is you. It is the one who has knowledge that the person sinned. Now, Jesus has a process where eventually the church is involved... eventually the pastor will also take action. But Jesus is very clear about who is to act first... you... the one who knows.

Purpose: Place this discipline takes place is the church. The person is the individual first, but the church supporting. The purpose of this discipline is made clear in verse 15. When you go and show the person their fault, **“If they listen to you, you have won them over.”** It is *vital* that we understand the purpose. The purpose is not to shame the person. The purpose is not to put down the person. Our purpose is to win the person. Or as another translation says: to “gain” the person. This wording makes it very clear what is at stake. When a person falls into sin and does not repent, they have placed themselves at odds with God. They have essentially said, “God is not the boss over me. I will do what I want.” Such a person is essentially declaring their independence from God. And the person who chooses to live independent from God will die independent from God. That’s a condition better known as hell. The person who sins and is not sorry has placed themselves on a path that could end in their eternal destruction. They are in danger of being permanently lost to God, and therefore also lost the church. Our goal is to win them back, to gain them again for God. And so we do whatever we possibly can with love and persistence, to lead them to recognize their sin, repent, and be restored to God. In other words, we go to the person because we care. We talk to the person, because we love them.

Isn’t this the reason we discipline our children? If we don’t care about our children, we will let them do whatever they want. If you don’t love them, you will let them stay up and be out until all hours of the night. You won’t make them do their homework. You won’t give them any responsibilities around the home. If they talk back to you or lie to your face, you will do nothing. How uncaring would such a parent be! But you do love them and so you discipline them and correct them. God calls us to do the same for our brother and sister in Christ.

Process: Well, how exactly are we to go about this? God who told us the place, the person, and the purpose, also reveals to us the process we are to follow. It’s not complicated or hard to remember. It’s a four step process. And as soon as one of the steps succeeds in winning a person back, you do not proceed to the next step. The goal of repentance has been achieved.

So, step one. Go to the person who sinned, and point out their fault, just between the two

of you. Our inclination is to not do that, but instead do one of two things. 1) To tell it to others. This is called gossip. It's easier to talk about the person than to talk to the person. 2) To do nothing. It gets messy if you get involved, doesn't it? It's so much easier to ignore the issue. Russians were especially good at ignoring other's sins. With a wave of the hand, they would dismiss the sins of a fellow believer, saying, "God is there judge." In other words, it's not up to me to get involved in this. It's between them and God.

Jesus says that's not true! It is your job to get involved... that is, if you care about the person. Don't wait for them to bring it up to you. Go to them. Talk to them. Point out the seriousness of their sin and how it's breaking their connection to God. Show them their fault just between the two of you.

If they repent, rejoice! Celebrate! Give them a big hug and assure them that their sins are forgiven for Jesus sake... that his perfect life and shed blood are the full payment for this sin. Take them out to dinner and celebrate. The matter is finished. But what if they don't listen?

Step two: Take one or two others along with you, that the matter may be established by two or three witnesses. Taking two or three adds weight to what you're saying. It shows the person that this sin is not simply your opinion, but others see it as sin too. It also gives witness to the sinner's response. Are they being obstinate and unrepentant? Is their understanding? Is progress being made. Two or three collaborate to help lead the person to repentance. If this works, rejoice! The matter is resolved. Comfort the person with the Good News of Jesus! But what if they still will not turn from their sin.

Step three: Tell it to the church. Jesus spoke these words before the establishment of the Church at Pentecost. The word "church" simply means "the assembly"... those gathered together. Those who are part of this person's group that gathers together around word and sacrament need to know about this person's lack of repentance. They need to know that the person is still in a lost condition and that the need to win them back is there. Together the church can work gaining the person back for the Lord. What does this look like? Sometimes it might be an announcement to the whole church. But it also could be a sub-group in the church. A board of elders, or church council. Or maybe the person is part of a small group of 12 people and that close-knit group is the gathering that needs to know about the sin to restore the lost person.

Repentance? Rejoice! Forgive. Gospel! If not...

Step four: After all attempts to win the person back to the Lord have been exhausted, the final step is acknowledge publicly what has been true all along. This person is lost to the Lord. This person is also lost to the assembly of believers, the body of Christ. By their persistent refusal to repent, they are declaring their unbelief. And so the church formally declares the person is indeed outside of the fellowship of believers. The person is to be treated as a "pagan and tax collector." They are a person who is outside of God's grace because they have repeatedly refused that grace by choosing to persist in holding tightly to that which God hates. The common name for this fourth step is excommunication. It is not something done in spite. It is something done in love, and the goal is STILL to lead the person to repentance.

RESULTS: What would happen if we would follow this exactly as Jesus outlined? 1) We as a church would far more mature in our faith. What a blessing that would be! Rooting out the sin in our lives and holding one another accountable, we would grow and mature in our faith and in our godly living! 2) But as a church, wouldn't this erode our membership and hinder our growth? It's true, some of the fastest growing churches in the country are those that avoid the whole "sin" word and allow their members to live however they want. But that's not the kind of

growth that is pleasing to God! Can a church grow if it's members take sin seriously and correct one another when they do sin? The New Testament church did!

Acts 5:1-11 Ananias and Sapphira

5 Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. 2 With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? 4 Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God."

5 When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. 6 Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

7 About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. 8 Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"

"Yes," she said, "that is the price."

9 Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."

10 At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband. 11 Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Were people who openly sinned and were unrepentant comfortable in that early Christian church? No! So that church must not have grown? Wrong. Ch. 6 tells us the number of disciples was increasing. People didn't join the church because sin was tolerated. People joined because people were convicted of sin, and give forgiveness and hope in Christ. The church grew in godly living as well.

I believe God will bless Good Shepherd with the right kind of growth if we will be a people that take sin seriously. If we are a people that love one another and correct one another, God will bless us as we remain faithful to his word. Not just faithful to the content of the word, or faithful to the teaching of his word, but faithful to the practice of his Word as well!

Let's love God and his truth enough to do what we learned today. Let's love one another so much that we are compelled to follow what Jesus taught us today.

Who do you know that has sinned? Go and show them their fault, just between the two of you. Go and win back your brother or sister. Gain them once again for Christ!

Amen.