

**The Childlikeness of Believers: Confronting Sin**

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-20

Code: 90-348

It was a long, long time ago when I was very young and I first came to Grace Community Church in my late twenties. And this building was not here. The large education building was not here. The gym was not here. The children's educational building was not here. There was a chapel and a small nursery building behind the chapel, and that's all there was. And it was a vibrant church, excited, energetic, committed to Christ, ready to move ahead and see what God would do. It was a church that enjoyed the blessing of God up to that point. And we were all on a great adventure to see what was going to happen in the future.

When I had the opportunity to become pastor of this church, I'm very sure that the people who made that decision had no idea what they were getting. I'm very sure of that. In retrospect, we all have seen the hand of God in a wonderful way.

I think it was assumed because it was the passion of this church and the heart of this church and the desire of this church to reach out and see people come to Christ. That was their longing, that was their commitment as a church. I think it was assumed on the basis of that, that the church would grow. We had no idea that it would grow the way it did, but everybody wanted the church to grow. I don't think a church ever brings in a pastor without the assumption that this is going to be good for us, this is a new day for us, this is a new beginning. We're going to flourish. We're going to grow. More people are going to come. More people are going to come to know Christ. And that was the expectation. It was my expectation.

But at the very beginning, my thoughts were not about how can we make this church grow? How can we get more people in this building? How can we fill up the empty seats, the few that existed, if any, in the chapel? How can we draw people in? How can we make the church attractive? I never really had thoughts like that at all.

In fact, when I came to Grace Church, there was one prevailing thing that settled into my mind and it was a text of Scripture that deeply concerned me, found in Matthew chapter 18. I had been studying that before I ever came here. It was probably two years before I came to Grace Church, it was in 1969 that I came, it was probably two years or so, maybe three years before that, that I began to grapple with Matthew 18 verses 15 to 20. And I want you to turn to that passage in your Bible and I want to read it to you and just reading it will help you understand why it was such an important portion of Scripture to me even as a young minister.

Matthew 18, beginning at verse 15. "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. 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. And 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 gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, 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. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in the midst."

I had great difficulty with that passage of Scripture because I in my entire life had never experienced a church, heard of a church that did that...no church that I had ever been did that..people confronting people about their sin, people taking two or three witnesses, people telling the whole church about an impenitent sinning member. The only part of that Scripture I ever heard quoted was the part about two or three being gathered together in My name and there am I in the midst, and that was almost like a popular axiom to remind folks that only when a couple of people showed up for prayer meeting, God showed up too. That was the universal exegesis of that verse.

I didn't know any church that did this. I never heard of any church that did this. And it consumed me in my thinking. I read extensively on that subject and I could find commentators and theologians who explained the text, but I couldn't find anybody who actually applied it.

So in my naivete in those days, I asked some pastors about that passage and if they ever applied it or ever implemented it or knew anybody that did. To which I received universal "NO". No one did it. No one knew anyone who did it. But I said, "This is the initial instruction to the church. This is where the word "church" shows up in Matthew 18. This is our Lord's priority concern for the church, that the church be dealing with sin within its own members. If it is the first word of the Lord of the church to the church, then it is not something at the end of the list, it is at the beginning of the list which makes it top priority. How is it that you can read it, understand it and not implement it?"

I was told by men much older than myself and much wiser than myself that if I tried to do this at Grace Church, if I tried to lead a church to do what it says in this passage, I would empty the place...I would empty the place. People wouldn't stand for that. I was told, "Do you think you can have people in your church walk up to other people in your church and confront their sin without driving them away? Do you think you could possibly get a little group of people to go after a sinning believer without frightening everybody out? And you certainly don't believe that you can announce someone and their sin to the whole congregation and anybody would show up the next week. You just can't do it. And if you're concerned about church growth, and if you're concerned about adding people to the church, forget that."

But I was reminded of the fifth chapter of Acts. And I want you to look at the fifth chapter of Acts, for a moment. And it's a story about a man named Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, famous names. They were in the church and they sold a piece of property and kept back, verse 2, some of the price, Ananias did, for himself with his wife's full knowledge.

Now he didn't have to sell the property, but he had the freedom to decide to sell the property so he decided to sell the property. He had every right to keep whatever he wanted for himself. There's no mandate from God to sell your property, nor is there a mandate from God to give all of what you get for your property to the church. So he was making choices.

But verse 2 says, "Bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the Apostles' feet. And 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? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? 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.'" What was the lie? Obviously this man had said, "I am giving everything to the Lord. I'm giving everything I received out of this transaction to the church. I'm bringing everything and laying it at the Apostles' feet for the work of the gospel in the beginning of the church."

He didn't have to sell it, Peter says. And you didn't have to give it all. And you didn't have to lie either. You haven't lied to men, you've lied to God. "And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last."

Wow! Dropped dead in front of the whole church. Who killed him? God killed him. "And great fear came on all who heard of it." Of course, that is a great way to keep people out of the church. Don't go there, people die. This is like Jim Jones and the Kool Aid. You don't want to have anything to do with that organization, people die in there. Verse 6 says, "The young men arose and covered him up. And after carrying him out, they buried him." Jews didn't embalm. You died, they buried you.

Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours and his wife came in. Several things interesting about that. Church went on well over three hours. This is a wondrous thing, I'm living in the wrong era. Second thing, his wife shows up three hours late. And as she's walking in, they're carrying her husband out. Peter responded to her and now we find out what they did.

"Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price. She said yes, that was the price." The price was far more than that, of course, and they had kept the portion. 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 carried your husband are at the door and they shall carry you out as well. And she fell immediately at his feet and breathed her last. And the young men came in and found her dead and they hurried her out and buried her beside her husband. And great fear came upon the whole church

and upon all who heard of these things.”

What is the Lord trying to do? Is He trying to prevent the church from growing? Why in the world would the first instruction given to the church in Matthew 18 not be some kind of instruction that makes it a warm and fuzzy environment that people might like to come to? Why is it that at the very outset in the very first church in Jerusalem, the Lord does such a dramatic thing as execute two people who lied to Him right in front of the church so that everybody knows you can die in that place? That is not exactly putting out the welcome mat.

I was grappling with these passages. But there's a very important verse that follows in chapter 5, verse 13. “But none of the rest dared to associate with them, however, the people held them in high esteem.” One of the objectives of the church is to make the church's commitment to holiness so crystal clear that on their own, people don't join. This has been turned on its head in our society and our brand of evangelicalism. One of the objectives of the church is to be so committed to holiness, so committed to purity, so committed to virtue, so committed to righteousness and that that is so clear, and so obvious, and so open that people who are not interested in that won't show up. This is the absolute opposite of the contemporary approach to hide our commitment to righteousness, hide our commitment to holiness, hide our commitment to virtue so that nobody will at all think we aren't the most loving, accepting, open, embracing people on the planet. Just the absolute opposite.

You say, “Well how in the world is the church going to grow?” Verse 14, “And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number.”

So you want to do church growth, do you? Here's the strategy. Here's the plan. You would like a church, wouldn't you, like verse 14? Wouldn't that be the model church for the modern Evangelical Movement? That ought to be their verse. All the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number.

How do you make that happen? Oh, have God kill a few people at the offering, become vocally, verbally, visibly concerned about holiness. Be so righteous and so committed to obedience to the Word of God that no one on his own will join. And then what will happen is the Lord will add to the church. And that's the way the church grows legitimately. The Lord adds to the church.

Go back to chapter 2 and verse 47, end of the verse. “And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” The church is a group of people who have been...what?...saved. It is not a place that accommodates the unsaved. It is the place that looks like THE most to be avoided if you are unsaved. It is not a place designed to make the unsaved feel welcome and feel comfortable.

Well it's interesting for me this evening while I'm talking to you to rehearse all this in my mind. I hadn't intended to say any of this. It's not in my notes. But this is where my mind was many years ago in 1969 when I showed up here. Of course a lot was at stake. I brought my precious Patricia and our little children...the ones that we had at that time. We wanted to be loved. We wanted to be accepted. We wanted the work to flourish. We wanted to honor God. We didn't want to fail. We wanted more people to come so more people could hear the Word of God and be saved and we could extend the Kingdom and advance the gospel.

But even then, I understood that the Lord builds His church. And I said this in those very early years, a reporter said to me, "Do you have a great desire to build this church?" Because in a very little while, Grace Church grew very fast. The first two years, it doubled. The next two years, it doubled again. And in those early years, at some point, a reporter said to me, "Do you have a great desire to build the church?" And I said, "Actually, I have no desire to build the church because Jesus said He would build the church and I don't want to compete with Him." This is not my church, this is His church. I just want to know how He builds His church and do that, which He's called me to do as an instrument by which He can do His work. It was very clear to me at that time that this issue of holiness in the church in dealing with sin was monumental.

The first time I met with a group of elders here, they posed a question to me about doing a wedding in the church. It was a wedding of a daughter of a very, very prominent family, serving in many capacities in the church. Their daughter was getting married, I recall, to an older divorced man, not a believer. And I said I can't do that. I can't marry a believer to a non-believer. To which someone replied, "Well that's going to offend them." I said, "Well, I feel badly about that but there's somebody else I'm more concerned about offending and that's the Lord of the church. I can't do that." To which one of the men responded by saying, "Well, okay, I understand that, that's a conviction you have so what we'll do is you don't have to do the wedding but we'll have it here, that will make them feel better." And I remember saying, this is the first meeting, I said, "Is this your church? It's not my church, is it your church? Who's church is it?" To which the same person replied, "It's the Lord's church." I said, "Maybe we ought to do what the Lord wants done in His church. I can't do it and it can't be done here at all because it's wrong, to mix a believer with an unbeliever clearly in Scripture."

That was a watershed moment. I said, "If this is Christ's church and it's going to honor Christ and He's going to build His own church His way, then we have to be committed to obedience to His Word." It wasn't long before we started to discuss the matter of church discipline as laid out in Matthew 18. Let's go back to Matthew 18. And I was warned, I really was warned that this was going to be the end not only of this church experience, but that I'd probably never get another church because once I destroyed this church by the conviction that I had to follow this pattern, nobody else would touch me. I would become a ministerial pariah.

But I just couldn't understand how you could preach against sin and not implement something so obvious. It just seemed to me that you couldn't convince people that you were serious about sin if all you did was preach against it. I mean, you could try to convince them that you were serious. I mean, you could give illustrations and you could work yourself up and you could go through the Bible and give God's view of sin, but if you wouldn't implement it in the church the way the Bible tells you to implement it, how in the world were people going to believe that you were genuinely serious about it?

In fact, it even went further than that. If there was anything that we knew to be true in the Scripture that we were unwilling to follow, then there was a severe breach in our integrity. And then our approach to Scripture became completely selective and there was just no place for that. You know, I thank the Lord that somewhere along the line, probably the influence of my grandfather and my father and some of my mentors in Seminary, but mostly I think the influence of the Holy Spirit in my heart, I had this and always have had this undying commitment to Scripture, not only to believe it's true, but to believe it must be implemented and that is the only possible path for life. That's the only way to live a joyful productive Christian life and that's the only way to have a church that the Lord Himself builds and that honors Him.

I had been in lots of churches and seen lots of churches where they preached against sin. I had never seen one where they did anything about sin. It just seemed to me that you were undermining everything you said. If people got the idea that you were good at preaching against sin but indifferent to dealing with it, that was a very serious lack of integrity.

So, in those early years, from the very outset, we began to think through Matthew 18 and Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 5 where Paul says to put out the leaven that leavens the lump, put out the immoral man. In 2 Thessalonians 3 where you are told again as a church to put out someone who is disruptive of the truth or contentious. Or 1 Timothy 1 where you have even leaders that had to be put out of the church. It seemed to me there was no way around this responsibility.

So, the end result of that, we have to understand this passage. So let's take a look at it, chapter 18 and verse 15. What's the context here? Well the context is the childlikeness of the believer. Remember, we're very likely in the city of Capernaum in this particular section in the ministry of Jesus. We well could be in the very home of Peter. Jesus has on His lap a little child as an illustration. He's talking about the childlikeness of the believer, the child is an illustration of childlikeness. And He begins this wonderful, wonderful presentation by saying we all enter the Kingdom like children, we all come in as children. If you don't become a child, you can't even enter the Kingdom. We come in humble and dependent and without accomplishment and with achievement, etc. Now that we're in the Kingdom, we remain as children. We need to be cared for as children. We need to be protected as children. We need to be respected as children. All of that is in the opening 14 verses.

And now He turns to say, "And we need to be disciplined like children." That's not a stretch. We all understand that. "Lord, deliver me from a home with undisciplined children," right? Wow! And we've got a lot of them these days. And this is obvious. Children need to be disciplined. When they do what is wrong, they need to be confronted and corrected and restored. The Word of God itself does that. It is profitable for correction and instruction, 2 Timothy 3:17. It is profitable...16 and 17...for correction and instruction, for reproof. It is the Word, Jesus says, that cuts, cleanses, purges. It is the Word that washes. So it is the work of the Word to purify the church by confronting sin and dealing with sin and showing the path of obedience and restoration. It is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is none other than the Spirit of holiness who desires His church to be holy. That's why He does His sanctifying work in us. This is the work of the Word, this is the work of the Spirit of God. And so it has to be our work. Paul says, "He desires to present to Christ the church like a chaste virgin."

It is not a surprise to us then that our Lord starts out by saying, "My concern in the church is the holiness and righteousness and purity and obedience of My people." I think this is maybe the greatest grief that I have and I have a lot of griefs about the state of the church today, but maybe the greatest grief is the unholiness of the church and its accommodation to the unsaved.

In that situation, if you ever brought any of this into such churches, it would be destructive of that system. I might add to its ultimate benefit...but not likely to happen when spiritual leaders aren't committed to everything in the Word of God. We have no choice. This is the Lord's will for His church. And even if people started dropping dead in front of this pulpit on Sunday for lying to the Holy Spirit, which was unique to the apostolic era, but even if it happened, the Lord would not be restrained in His divine purpose and power to add to His church cause that's His work.

You see, the illusion is that you and I can grow the church, that we have the power to grow the church by our cleverness, by our ingenuity, by our style, by our winsomeness, by our words. But this is the plan, a simple one. Let's see how it unfolds.

By the way, just a footnote before we start. There is no higher court than the church. And what we mean by the church is any duly constituted body of redeemed people. The actual church is not born until the Day of Pentecost, Acts chapter 2. This is preliminary technically to the church, but it is still an ekklesia, it is still called out ones assembled together under God as redeemed people. And the instruction here is for any assembly of those people and looks forward, of course, to the church. At this particular point, there were assembled believers together in Capernaum who would constitute the body of redeemed people with this kind of responsibility. Not long after this, of course, the church is born and this becomes the mandate for the church's life. There is no higher court. There is no higher court. I say that because through history there have been all kinds of authorities developed...Popes, bishops, cardinals, houses of bishops, synods composed of clerics. The New Testament knows nothing of that. All it knows is a local church, an assembly of believers who have been ekklesia, ekkaleo, called out, a saving efficacious salvation call. They constitute a body of people who are

responsible to pursue their own holiness.

There may be times when a collection of ministers has to move in to a church and deal with it because that church has so defiled itself, or so drifted into error, but the church locally remains the highest court.

Here's the plan, verse 15. "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private." Anybody have a hard time understanding that? If your brother sins, implied your sister as well. People say, "What sin? To what degree?" Well the whole point here is it doesn't tell us what sin and it doesn't tell us to what degree because any sin to any degree is a defilement. If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. Don't talk about it to other people..which is the tendency, isn't it? "Whoa! Did you hear about what she did?" That is not according to Scripture. That is in itself a sin. If your brother sins...any sin is a defilement, any sin not only defiles his life, not only because it may involve you personally, defiles your relationship, but any defilement of any believer becomes a defilement of the whole because we are one body.

So, you go in private. And then verse 15, "If he listens to you," which would mean, "I understand that. I regret that. I want to turn from that." That's what you're looking for. I love this, "You have won or gained your brother."

Do you know that inside the very church you can lose people? That's implied here, isn't it? You can't win him back if you haven't lost him. You can't gain him if he wasn't a loss. This word, by the way, won, or gained, is a commercial word. It's a word taken out of the marketplace. And it tells us right at the very beginning what the purpose of this confrontation is. It is to win the brother, to gain the brother. Some people have the idea that church discipline is to throw people out of the church. It is not. It is to keep people in the church pure. In fact, this verb, won or gained, is a word used to refer to a accumulating wealth. Use it in its context. It has the idea of a sinning brother being a loss to the fellowship. When restored, being a gain. It is a like wealth regained. When somebody sins and the kinds of sins we're talking about, obviously, here are not those that we do and for which we repent and we move on, but those sins that we do not abandon from which we do not turn and for which we do not repent.

When someone follows in that kind of pattern of sin, we have lost that person as a brother through that sin. So we go to recover him because he has value. Why does he have value? Because the Spirit of God dwells in him. Because he is gifted by the Holy Spirit to have ministry in the church to all the rest of us. Because he is an instrument by which God can do His work in the church and through the church in the world. That's...that's the inherent idea here, this one sinning person is so valuable that you go and endeavor to get him back. And if he won't come back, take two or three and try to get him back. And if he still won't come, tell the whole church to go after him because he has that much value. This is spiritual wealth regained.



It was G. Campbell Morgan many years ago who wrote this, "It is the great tragedy of a man lost which colors all this instruction. And the purpose which is to be in our hearts when we deal with a sinning brother is that of gaining him. The word gain...Morgan says...suggests not merely the effect on the one lost, but the value it creates for those who seek him. When presently we have done with the shadows and the mists of the little while, we will understand in the light of the undying ages that if we have gained one man, we shall be richer than if we piled up all the wealth of the world." What a blessed thing he writes, to gain a man, to possess him for the church, for the fellowship of friends, for the enterprise of the gospel, for the program of high heaven.

If you, in the church, are not willing to confront someone's sin, then you don't see them as having any value. Christ sees them as having value. He paid the infinite price for them, did He not? And He gives us the responsibility like any parent to go after our wandering children. We have grown children, at this time, but when we were raising our little four children, discipline was a regular routine in our family. And it was driven totally by love...totally by our all-consuming love for them. The fear was they would be lost to us and to the Kingdom. And so whatever discipline was necessary to make them feel the pain of their own sinfulness, we inflicted it upon them. And every time they drift into sin, they were disciplined for the purpose of restoration because they're so priceless. You feel that way about your children, and our Lord is saying that's how you should feel about the children of God.

Look at Galatians chapter 6 and just the opening couple of verses. "Brethren, even if a man is caught in an trespass," here again the general character of this instruction is notable. Any trespass, any sin, "You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself lest you too be tempted." Look, we all understand what it is to be tempted and to sin. This is not hard for us to grasp. Understanding human frailty, understanding the power of temptation, understanding the residing flesh, we go after these people, desiring to restore them because they have value. The word restore, *katartizo*, means to repair. It's actually a medical term used of resetting fractures, or mending bones, putting dislocated limbs back in place.

The idea then of this dealing with sin is certainly not to put people out. It's to restore them because they have so much value. And you do it in a spirit of gentleness. Never should this be harsh. Always it should be bathed in compassion, tenderness, sympathy, patience, mercy because you understand fallenness. It's our universal experience.

Our model for this, go back to Matthew 18, our model for this is actually God. And He set that model in the prior verses. Go back from verse 15, just a few verses, to verse 12. "What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, doesn't he leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it with...rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray." And who is that talking about? Verse 14, "Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in

heaven that one of these little ones perish.”

We're following the pattern of God which is the pattern of restoration. He goes after His sinning children to bring them back. And He uses us in the church as a means to do that. This is why it is so important. This is God's work. And that is why the next principle in verse 16 is given, because this needs to be a relentless process, given the value of the person. “If he doesn't listen to you, take one or two more with you that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every fact may be confirmed.” This takes us back, doesn't it, to the Old Testament, to the book of Deuteronomy where God established the pattern that accusations needed to be proven and attested by two or three witnesses. Verification of any fact called for two or three confirming witnesses.

So, if the person doesn't respond to you, you get a couple of friends and you go back and confront again and make sure that all the data is correct and that you call that person back to repentance and restoration. You do it collectively with the hope that he will listen, or she will listen and you will gain your brother, gain your sister. It's always that that is the point. You go to that extreme.

What if they don't listen then? Well, verse 17 says, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.” Are you kidding? No...tell the whole church. Tell the whole church such and such a person is following in a pattern of sin, I've gone to him...gone to him with two or three, won't repent, won't hear. Shun him? No. Tell the whole church, gang up on him or her.

Why? Why do you go to this extreme? First of all, who wants to confront an individual about their sin? This is required. This is the noble thing, if you care about the person. If you can be indifferent to someone's sin, then you don't care. If you really care, you can't be indifferent to their sin. I promise you, I have never been indifferent to the sins of the people I love. I want to do everything I can to restore them in every way I can. If I'm indifferent toward somebody's sin, it's somebody who is outside my own affection. And in the church, we're called to love one another without any restraint or boundary.

So we tell the whole church. That's not hard to understand either, is it? The church is the collection of people who are saved, who are redeemed. You tell them about this person, about their sin...not necessarily in lurid details, but you say...go after that person. That's how valuable that person is.

And then, verse 17, if they don't listen to the church, that's all you can do. “Let them be to you as a Gentile,” outcasts, “and a tax gatherer,” the most despised and despicable in Jewish society, those Jews had sold their souls to Rome to buy a tax franchise to extort money out of their own people for a pagan idolatrous nation...traitors. Treat them like total outcasts...total unbelievers if they won't come back.

What does that mean? That means you don't accept them into the fellowship because sin will leaven the church. There's so much in this text that I can't give you. I'm giving you the big picture tonight. The church has to protect its holiness. And in an effort to protect its holiness, it calls the professing Christian sinner back from sin. If that sinner doesn't respond, then two or three. And if that doesn't get the response, then you tell the church and the whole church goes. And if that doesn't bring them back, then put them out.

Back to 1 Corinthians 5, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." You can't allow sinful influence to just settle comfortably in the church. I've always hoped and I hope today that Grace Community Church is known as a loving church. I believe we are because you are a loving people. We have that reputation inside and outside and around the world. But I also always hope and pray that sinning people are never comfortable here. I can only tell you personally that if I was a professing Christian who wanted to live in sin, I wouldn't go to this church. I don't need the grief. And that happens. We have people who profess Christ, sin, are confronted, dealt with, they leave. We tell you about them at the Lord's table.

But most internal discipline in the church never gets to the Lord's table, it's going on on a one and one basis and restoration is going on all the time...all the time, in your family, among your friends.

Now you say, "John, this is a hard thing to do." Yes, but it's not a hard instruction to understand. Maybe it would help you to remember the Apostle Paul who confronted none other than Peter. In fact, the Apostle Paul confronted Peter to the face, Galatians 2:11, when Peter, Cephas, came to Antioch, "I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned." Whoa...can you imagine? Taking on Peter? Now Paul is a pretty strong guy but I'm certain he's no stronger than Peter.

I don't imagine that Peter was an easy guy to convince of his own sin. You say, "This might be the end of a relationship," and, you know, I've had that experience. I've had that many times, I regret to say, prominent ministers and pastors that you would know if I gave their names that I hopefully, lovingly, graciously confronted about some serious error and the result of that confrontation was the end of any relationship permanently. That's perhaps the price you might pay. You could ask yourself whether Paul confronting Peter was worth it, if it wouldn't have been better for them to have a cooperating relationship but Paul did what was right for the sake of the honor of the Lord of the church and he confronted Peter to the face because he was to be condemned.

Did that end their relationship? Second Peter 3 verse 14, hear the writing of Peter. "Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless." I love this verse. "And regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just also as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you."

No. Paul was Peter's beloved brother because all that Paul ever had in mind in confronting Peter was restoration.

Well, in closing, if this seems difficult, let me give you some encouraging biblical truth. Verse 18, "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth, literally shall be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." That particular statement appears a number of times in the New Testament. One is back in Matthew 16 and verse 19, another in John chapter 20.

It's a very simple idea. In fact, it may well have been sort of an axiomatic statement used by the rabbis, for all we know. It simply means that when you bind something on earth, it is bound in heaven, or has already been bound in heaven. And when you loose something on earth, it has already been loosed in heaven. Binding and loosing, the rabbis said, had to do with sin. If someone repented, their sin was loosed. If someone would not repent, they're bound in their sins. That simple.

So, when we confront a sinner and a sinner will not repent, and we say you're bound in your sin, heaven has already made that judgment. Or when we confront a sinner and the sinner repents, and we say you're loosed from your sin because we have biblical revelation that says if you repent you will be loosed from your sin, then when we say you're loosed from your sin, we're only saying on earth what heaven has already said.

The bottom line principle is this, when we deal with sin and confront sin and call people to repentance and hold them responsible for their repentance and rejoice with them when they...I should say...hold them responsible for their impenitence and rejoice with them in their repentance, we are simply doing on earth what is done in heaven. We can pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," here's a way we can implement it. Heaven has already rendered the verdict that someone's bound in sin, that someone's loosed from sin. We're just reflecting heaven when we do the same.

Then in verse 19, "And I say to you that if two of you agree on earth about anything," there we're back to the Deuteronomy principle of two or three witnesses, "that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." That means to say, when two or three come together and affirm someone's repentance and heaven is in agreement, we can ask the Lord to cleanse them and restore them and He will. If they will not repent, of course, and heaven is in agreement, we can ask the Lord to chasten and discipline and He will.

In other words, we're doing heaven's work. We're doing the Father's work. And then Jesus Himself has the final word in verse 20. "Where two or three have gathered together," not for a prayer meeting, folks. How many does it take for God to show up at a prayer meeting? How about one. "Lo, I am with you always." It doesn't take two or three. It doesn't have anything to do with a prayer meeting, it has to do with a discipline situation where two or three have gathered together which means this process is in motion, there I am in their midst. Never is the church more in tune with heaven, more in tune with

the Father and more in tune with Christ Himself than when it's dealing with sin.

We don't want to be reluctant in any of this. This is for the sake of the purity of the church. This is heaven's work. This is the Father's work. This is the Son's work.

Well, it didn't empty our church. Kept filling it and filling it, and filling it and kept building more buildings until finally we got this one. And they still come and the Lord grows His church and multitudes believe and they're saved and added to the church. It's a place of love. It's a place of restoration. It's a place of holiness. It's a place of fear. That's exactly the way God designed it to be. There never should be a question about why a church grew. I love it that people can't figure us out. It's pretty clear, we are what we are because God determined this is what we would be. This is the Lord's church and He's built it.

I remember some years ago, Fuller Seminary used to bring their classes here whenever they had a module or a group come in many times during the year in their church growth department. And they would come and look at our church. And finally I got a call from the head of that department who said, "We're not bringing them anymore." Because why? "Your church...he said...defies all analysis. You don't grow according to the principles of church growth."

I was very glad. I was very glad that we couldn't be analyzed on a human level. When we have a Shepherds' Conference here, and thousands of pastors come in, I'm sure there are some in the mix that want me to give them the five things that will guarantee a big church. Boy, I could do that, that's easy...that's easy. Soften up the message and pass out money. That's all. That's easy to fill up a building. Or you can take the pulpit down and have people wrestle. That would draw a crowd. Drawing a crowd, that is easy. I always wanted to be something that can only be explained from a divine side. And that's why we try to do what the Word of God tells us to do and let the Lord grow His church. And what a delight and joy it's been. Thank you for being a congregation that pursues holiness and also demonstrates the love of Christ, as you have always to me, to my family and to one another.

Father, it is Your church. There's never been a question about it. The true church is Your church. This local assembly is Your church, just a tiny group of people across this vast world that You have gathered into Your Kingdom who have become the children of Your love. We're so thankful, Lord, that is Your work and that the church has grown in a way to honor and glorify You. We want it never to be any different than that. Help us, Lord, to be faithful to Your Word, to live according to Your Word and by the power of Your Spirit to always be the church that Christ built. No tribute to men or methods but only to You and Your purposes. Thank You for what You've done. We're so blessed and so grateful. In Christ's name. Amen.

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