

If you have your Bibles, why don't you grab those? Matthew, chapter 18, will be our anchor text in our time together. I'll read a couple of other texts, but Matthew 18 will be primarily where we are. In fact, I won't have you actually turn anywhere else in your Bibles, so if you'll get there... I think it becomes important that you see what we're going to see in our time together.

Just to recap not the entire 10 weeks of this series but especially the last few weeks, we have looked deeply in this series at all that has gone wrong and how our vertical relationship with God has been fixed. We looked at what *has* gone wrong in our relationship with God and then how God himself has healed and reconciled that in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We are fully forgiven. Those of us who are children of God, regardless of background, regardless of current struggles, are fully forgiven. All of our sin, past, present, and future, has been absorbed on the cross of Christ. Jesus' perfection and total obedience has been gifted to us, or imputed to us, at his resurrection. So we are not only forgiven, but we are delighted in by God. We spent a lot of time talking through the problem of what occurs when you understand you're forgiven but don't believe you're liked.

We talked about a God who not only has granted us forgiveness but also actually likes us despite us and the effects that has on guilt and shame and on fear and anxiety. Nine of our ten weeks were spent almost completely on the vertical relationship. Last week we made a turn and said in light of this vertical relationship being reconciled and restored, that vertical relationship now begins to soothe out and engage our horizontal relationships.

I wanted to lay this on the table very early. Just because I am reconciled to God in Christ does not mean I stop sinning against my brothers and sisters or am not sinned *against* by my brothers and sisters. We did a show of hands. We literally did a pop quiz. I said, "How many of you are believers in Christ?"

Let's do it again, because it will be the same. How many of you are Christians? "I'm a believer in

Christ. I've given my life to him." Now how many of you have either sinned against someone or have been sinned against? How can there be more hands up now than there were just a second ago?

Here's what we just found out about us. If you're not a believer, we just let you in. Although we have been reconciled to God, have been forgiven by God, and are delighted in by God, our obedience to God is imperfectly executed, and that does nothing to sway the forgiveness and delight of God that he has for his children. That alone is something to marvel at. In our imperfect execution of obedience, other people get hurt. When we sin against God (we looked last week out of Numbers 5), there's always collateral damage.

When we break faith in God... "I'm smarter than you. I know more than you. I can get this done better than you can. I know this is what your Word says, but surely you don't mean that for me. If you knew about this situation or this detail..." So many of us read the Bible as though there should be an asterisk on it, and we follow that asterisk, and there's a picture of us that says on the back, "Except you," and then there's a little box there where you get to write in the rules for you.

That's simply not true. It's not how it works. God's interest is leading us all to the fullness of life, and sometimes getting to the fullest possible life involves difficulties and some suffering. Oh, that God would restore a theology and understanding of suffering in the lives of his people. We walked through last week, "Okay, what are we to do when we sin against other people?"

All we did last week was ask, "How do we own our sin?" If all sins, even the ones that break down relationships, are actually, first and foremost, sins against God that have led to the breakdown of horizontal relationship, then how do we own our sin against others before God? We very carefully walked through what it means to be ambassadors for Christ, what it means to be agents of reconciliation, how we are to approach reconciliation with our brothers and sisters.

The high points were basically that we own all we can own (and sometimes a little bit *more* than we can own) for the good of the relationship and the glory of Christ. If in John 13 Jesus said, "They will know that you are my disciples by how you love one another," then how we interact with one another reflects brightly to outsiders, to those who are not Christians, the love of Christ, the pursuit of Christ, and the glory of Christ.

We must take very seriously our relationship with God and how imperfectly executing in our relationship with God does damage to our horizontal relationships. We own all that we possibly can, and here's why that's difficult. We don't have time to do a lot of polls, but I'm guessing many of us feel like, even when we've sinned against others, they started it.

There are few areas of life where adults will downshift into fourth-grade playground behavior like having to own their own sin. "Well, they started it. I wouldn't even have had to sin like that if it wasn't for them. I was minding my own business when they... What do you expect? You want me to be the victim here?" I mean, we're just not having it. It goes straight fourth-grade-for-the-second-time, playground-type stuff with adults when it comes time to own our sin.

The Bible said clearly (and we unpacked this) that we own our sin even if we just sinfully responded to someone else, and we never use our owning of sin as a platform by which to make accusation. I don't know if you've ever watched (this isn't true of all of them, but it *is* true of most of them) professional athletes apologize.

Have you ever picked up on the fact that they're not actually apologizing for anything? They're actually blaming you in their apology. "I'm sorry if that hurt some of your feelings. It was not my intent." Do you see what just happened there? He didn't own anything. It's *your* fault. That's not what he said. *You* took it like that. That's not what he meant.

When we approach a Christian brother we have sinned against by breaking faith with God (that's Numbers 5; that's what we preached out of last week) and say, "Hey, I need you to forgive me, because you're a jerk and I did not handle your 'jerkness' like I should have. So when you were a dirtbag, in response to your 'dirtbaggery' I gossiped about you. I slandered. I was really evil. So will you please forgive me? Now anything you want to say to me? No? Well, I take that back, then..."

That's not how this works. We're serious about *our* offense before a holy God. We just own it. "Forgive me; I slandered you. Forgive me; I gossiped about you. Forgive me, man. I've sinned against God and I've sinned against you." We own it. We don't explain it away. We don't justify it. There needs to be no "buts" or "ifs." No, no, no. "Forgive me. I've sinned against God and sinned

against you." We own it.

I said last week if you have somebody in your head you know you've sinned against, then you need to work to make that... You need to set up a cup of coffee this week. You need to get across from them. You need to own your sin before them, and not as a platform to get into *their* life. We read beautiful Matthew 7, which is important for you to know before we get into Matthew 18.

Far too many people love Matthew 18 before they dig around in Matthew 7, which says, "Get the log out of your own eye before you try to take the splinter out of someone else's." (That's a paraphrase. He says *eye*.) "Before you try to do tedious surgery on someone else, you probably ought to be sure you don't have something giant sticking out of your own head." (Again, paraphrase. You're like, "Head? I don't see it." It's a paraphrase.)

In the end, we're to take very seriously our offenses against others. To be an expert at everyone else's sin while being ignorant of your own sets you up for a series of shallow relationships that don't have deep enough roots to handle a small wind. Last week at length we covered, "What do we do with our sin against people?" We said we've all done it. There isn't anybody in this room who can say, "I've never sinned against anyone. Never. It has just never happened." You have. You've sinned.

Now we can also in the same breath say, "I've also been sinned against, Pastor Matt." I can raise my hand. *I've* been sinned against. So what are we to do, as the people of God, when others sin against us if those outside of the church, those outside of our faith, will know we are Christians by how we love one another? That's what we're going to discuss.

Before we get into Matthew 18, which is how it *should* happen, we're going to talk about some ways it *shouldn't* happen. Ken Sande, who wrote the book *The Peacemaker...* You should get that book and read it. I couldn't commend it to you enough. A lot of this is his stuff. I haven't seen anything as helpful or as spot-on as what I believe Sande teaches.

He says one of the places where we get this wrong is the vast majority of us like to avoid conflict. If you're a conflict avoider, why don't you raise your hand? You might not even raise your hand right now because this feels almost wrong. The vast majority of people are conflict avoiders.

When they are sinned against, they just want to... He calls it an *avoidance response*. "I'm just going to avoid that."

The first way we avoid that is via denial. We just want to deny that we've actually been sinned against. Remember, this is the wrong way to do it. While I'm talking about denial, here's an important caveat, an important thing to know. The first and primary way a Christian deals with being sinned against (by another believer in particular, but really anyone) is by absorbing or overlooking the offense. If you can absorb it or overlook it, that's the first play. Always. We are to absorb and overlook.

We are not the sin police. You Type-A rule followers, you don't have a clipboard going, "I saw that. I need to talk to you. Hey, when you were looking at me right there, what were you thinking? It looked like you were... I'm just going to mark it down anyway." No. We absorb all that we can, and there will be days we'll have to ask God for the grace to help us absorb it.

In fact, Proverbs even says it this way. Proverbs 19:11 says, "**Good sense [being smart] makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.**" Whose glory? Not God's glory to overlook the offense; the wise man's glory to overlook the offense. Because it is the mature man, the mature woman, the man or woman who's walking under and in grace who has a keen understanding of what they've been forgiven of, who then possesses the ability to absorb and overlook the sins of others.

So although one of the things that's the wrong way to handle being sinned against is avoidance... When I say *avoidance*, I'm not talking about absorbing or overlooking. I'm saying when it gets to the point where it can no longer be absorbed, no longer be overlooked... How do we know when that is?

When a root of bitterness starts growing down in your heart, when you start finding yourself frustrated with someone, when you no longer trust them, when you're no longer willing to give the benefit of the doubt. That's not you absorbing or overlooking it; that's its roots getting down deep into your heart.

The Bible says, "Beware the root of bitterness; it'll destroy both you and those around you." So

not only are *you* in danger, but you'll fry everybody else too. That's why this gets so serious. That's why we can't walk in denial about other people sinning against us if we've lost the ability to absorb or overlook. So we deny. We're not willing to admit there has been any sin.

Where there's a root of bitterness growing in us, where we have a hard time giving them the benefit of the doubt... I've seen it work itself out in many ways. I've even seen it work itself out in my life, where someone is trying to be genuinely spiritual about their relationship with God and you're thinking, "Give me a break."

They're like, "The Word of God is speaking to me," and I'm like, "It ain't speaking loudly, bro. If it's speaking, you guys are speaking two different languages." What has happened there? I'm not overlooking. I'm not absorbing. I'm just in denial. I can't even see that I have a root of bitterness in me; I'm just denying. I'm a denier. It's an avoidance response. I don't like conflict; I'm just going to deny.

Not only do we have deniers, but then you also have those who just fly away. We call these the "flighters." (I don't think that's a word, but I'm taking artistic license. If hip-hop guys can do it, I can do it.) Now here's what that means. You have some conflict, but you're not good at it. You know it's there now, so you're not just in denial.

It's not just that you're not willing to acknowledge it. You know it's there, you know you've been sinned against, but you don't like conflict, so you go, "I'm just going to remove myself from the situation. I'm going to get a new job. I'm going to divorce and get a new marriage. I'm going to get a new neighborhood. I'm going to find another church." This is not just "I'm going to deny this," but this is, "I'm just going to take myself out of it."

Can I just be really honest with you? You have nowhere to go. Where are you going where there aren't more sinners? Have you found that neighborhood, bro? I don't think they have those gates yet. I don't think they have a code to keep you safe from the sinners. Do you know why? Because you live there. Because you're there too. There's a saying in Recovery: "Wherever you are, there you are."

You will not find the workplace, neighborhood, or church where you will not be disappointed and

sinned against. It simply doesn't exist. If you think otherwise, you have bought into a myth that will perpetually drive you forward into the same experiences on repeat. Not shuffle...repeat. The rest of your life you'll go new relationship, you'll go new job, you'll go new neighborhood, only to fall right back into the same relational garbage you were in before, because wherever you are, there you are. This is flight. "Let me go find..." It delays the inevitable.

These are just avoidance responses. Although a good number of people don't like conflict, there are some people who *want* to be sinned against. They know their Bible well, and they're aggressors. "I dare somebody to sin against me." They have a lot of verses memorized, Sunday school pins on, Jesus bumper sticker... "Bring it. I know all of the pertinent texts." Just like a bad surgeon, willing to cut anytime they need to cut.

Avoidance responses are not the biblical way to interact with those who have sinned against us, but neither are the aggressor responses the right and good way to respond to those who have sinned against us. Aggressors like to intimidate. They like to bully. They like to badger with Scripture. Really, the banner the aggressor can fall under is "Vengeance is mine." (Not "...sayeth the Lord." That's what the Bible says.)

The Bible goes, "I'll take care of that fool; you don't have to." The aggressor goes, "No, I've got this, Lord. Thank you. I appreciate your vengeance, but I think I could do a better job at this than you could. I think I'm more just than you are." You want to talk about a wicked heart, talk about a brother who believes he has to take vengeance into his own hands. "I'll take this. I just don't trust you. I'm fearful you might be good to this man like you've been good to me." That's Jonah. Check your heart.

So the aggressor slanders, gossips, is interested in professionally and financially hurting someone, is interested in wounding someone at the soul level, and ceases to view the person who has sinned against them as even human or having a soul. They just want justice at any cost. But not for themselves. Nobody wants justice for themselves. Everybody wants mercy for themselves. We just like justice for *other* people. We like justice in the movies. We don't like justice in our own lives...unless it's on somebody else.

These are aggressor responses. They're not the way God would have his people engage with

those who have sinned against them. Where does that put us? That puts us in a beautiful little biblical niche, and it's speaking the truth in love. I want you to listen to this verse, because it's massive. Ephesians 4, starting in verse 15, says, "**Rather...**" We're not going to do attack responses. We're not going to do avoidant responses. We're not going to be passive. We're not going to be aggressive. We're not going to do vengeance.

By the way, if you don't know what to do with passive-aggressive people, that's actually in the passive response. That's the avoidance response. You're too cowardly to actually have a conversation, so under the guise of humor you want to take jabs at, to make somebody go, "Are you being serious right now?" "No, man. No, I was just joking."

That's passive-aggressive. That belongs up in that passive response. You're too cowardly to actually have the conversation, so you make a joke because you *want* to jab, but then you grow in frustration toward them when they don't get your jokes. "I don't know why they don't get this." Bitterness starts getting even deeper. The fruit starts to bud. It's pretty awful.

He says, "**Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...**" I want you to look at this verse carefully. "**Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head...**" Here's what just happened that's mind blowing.

This text is saying that by speaking the truth in love to one another and by receiving the truth given to us in love, we actually mature into the head of Christ. So part of Christian maturation is to be confronted in our sinfulness by those we have sinned against, or those who have noticed our sinfulness, for our good and for our maturity.

If God loves us, then he is interested in maturing us, which means you should never be surprised when someone wants to sit down with you and say, "Brother, I love you, but we need to talk. I've noticed this. I've seen this. I'm wondering about this." This is speaking the truth in love for the good of the person and the maturation of souls, both for the one who has to bring it up and the one it is brought up to.

When you confront someone over sin, you have nothing to gain but your brother or sister. Why I

think this text, "speaking the truth in love," is so profound is that it is a more accurate, beautiful picture of love than our culture holds. When my son is being blatantly disobedient, I'm not going to avoid that, because at this point in his life, life and death could be on the line.

If he's playing out in the street running around with a knife and I'm like, "Well, he loves that. It'll work out..." That's passive. Would that make me a horrible father? Yeah. A *horrible* father. What if he's running around in the street with a knife and I just get a bat and walk up there like *Bam!* "I told you!" *That* would make me a terrible father, would it not? Right. So you have aggressive and you have passive. Neither works.

What if I just go out there and go, "Hey buddy, come here. Put the knife down first, and then come here. Now listen to me. Daddy has told you not to do that. Now come over here. Do you see this squirrel? Do you see its intestines coming out of its stomach and that stuff coming out of its mouth? That's what happens when you get hit by a car. Do you want to end up with your intestines on our driveway? Okay, so let's stay out of the street, buddy." That's speaking the truth in love.

Some of you are like, "Are you serious right now?" I absolutely am. "He's going to end up in therapy." We have therapists on staff. I would rather him work through that alive than to learn the lesson by being dead, says every smart parent ever. "You can just put that on your amends when you go through Recovery when you're in your 20s. We'll work through it. We'll seek reconciliation. I'm in. But for now, stay out of the street."

Speaking the truth in love says, "I am not willing for you to be harmed in ways that have eternal ramifications." Sin begets sin. It's indisputable. Sin builds. For those of you who have come out of... We have a ton of former drug addicts. Nobody does heroin just out of nowhere. That's not how it works. There are building blocks of debauchery. Nobody stumbles into sexual promiscuity.

I have a dear friend about 20 days from getting married. So I check on our young bucks here. I'm like, "How are things going, brother? Are you being pure?" He's like, "Here's the thing, Matt. If I don't kiss her, it can't go anywhere." I was like, "That's absolutely true." If you aren't kissing her, it's not going anywhere, because kissing leads to other things. (I refuse to go any further with that

illustration.)

Sin begets sin. When we notice that someone has sinned against us, or we just notice someone beginning to live in rebellion, our heart is, "I love them too much to let them get off the rails for their own destruction and for the collateral damage that will occur in their world for disobedience against God." Love is willing to risk the relationship for the good of the soul of the one being confronted.

It is a cheap love that avoids, and it is a cheap love that pounces on to seek to destroy. It is real love that says, "I hate this, but I'm going to do it anyway. It's going to be uncomfortable for both of us. I've been thinking about it all day. I've been sick to my stomach even knowing I have to talk to you about this. I know it won't be easy to hear, but I need to say it because I love you." Speaking the truth in love.

The question then becomes...*How do we do that?* Well, that's where Jesus hooks us up pretty well here. Matthew 18, starting in verse 15: "**If your brother [or sister] sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.**"

The first thing we do if we've been sinned against or we become aware of someone beginning to sin whom we are in close proximity to... That means we see it. We're not guessing at it; we're witnessing it with our own eyes, with our lives. This is why group life and walking together in community is so important.

It is the shortcoming of the big room. I mean, we're pretty on the weekends, y'all. I walk around here before service. "How are you doing?" "I'm great, Pastor. How are you? It's just a glorious week, brother." We can get pretty for an hour and a half. We've said for years now that this place, maybe just the Metroplex itself, is very much like Camelot.

Do you know what I mean by that? Camelot looked beautiful from the outside, but once you got inside, Lancelot was sleeping with the king's wife. It was a train wreck. Everything was falling to pieces. Yet externally there was this beautiful, put-together, "Look at that; isn't it marvelous?" That's not the city of Dallas. No mountains, no rivers. We just have ourselves to make look better.

We have nothing else to do.

So when all is said and done, you get men and women in this place saying, "I'm doing great. I'm doing awesome. I'm all put together," but when we get closer, when we do life at a deeper level, one of the things the Lord starts doing is surfacing our inconsistencies. He starts surfacing those things we can hide for an hour and a half but can't hide all the time.

He begins to reveal how passive-aggressive we are. He begins to reveal how we speak about our wives, how we speak about our husbands, how we interact with our children, our little chinks in the armor. Those come out when we do life deeply with one another, which is why we avoid it. That's why we love Facebook friends. What do they know? Just what we show them: the highlight reel.

"Here's how awesome I am. Up early reading the Bible." That's what we're doing. "Oh, coffee and Calvin." It's nothing. It's not like, on your bed crying in depression...*selfie*. That's not what's happening. It's totally, "Highlight reel of my life. Look how awesome I'm doing." All that unravels when you do life legitimately with others. Nobody likes that. I certainly don't like that.

Here's what's crazy about what just happened in this text. If we go to this brother, or this brother comes to us and lays our sin out, here's why our posture must always be one of humility. My guess is that for everybody in this room, you have two, maybe three people you respect, love, and look up to enough that if they were to bring concerns, you'd be dialed in and would listen and respond; you'd be like, "Thank you, brother, for bringing this up." I'm guessing that's two to three people tops.

Everyone else you know, you'd be like, "Please, brother. If we're talking about weaknesses, I'm glad you brought it up. Hold on for a second. I have an Evernote file on you." More often than not, it's not that two to three we want to hear from. God help us; it's usually the guy we *don't* want to hear it from.

I can't tell you how many times I'm going, "Really, God? *This* dude? You're going to show *this* dude my junk? I mean, seriously? *He's* going to bring this up to me? I don't even like this guy. Do you know how much I know about his shortcomings? Are you testing me right now?" It does

always seem to be a clown, you know, the guy who can't zip his pants going, "You know, Pastor, I think you were off on that." It's like, "Well, I think you're an idiot." No, no. I can't do that. "Is this true about me? Let me ask a friend or two here."

This has to happen, because you're not fully sanctified yet. Is this true? Are we there yet? Does anyone want to say, "I'm there; I have nowhere else to grow. I've topped out, Pastor Chandler. I have nothing else to get better at, no known weaknesses. I don't even know why I'm here. I think the Lord should just call me on home because I have nowhere else... I've tapped out on this life. I'm at a 10 on all levels"? Nobody is going to say that.

If we can theologically and biblically say, "I'm not there," then should we not expect for someone to love us like this? So don't despise the messenger for the message. It's one of the surest ways for you to not hear from God. "Well, this can't be true, because this guy is an idiot." You can't do that. You must weigh out whether or not the sin that has been brought to your attention is legitimate, and you must be serious enough about your sins to take it seriously, regardless of whom it has come from.

So a brother comes to us, or we go to a brother, and we lay it before. Now what happens if he goes, "Hey man, I appreciate that. I get that you love me. I get that this couldn't have been easy for you to come, but man, I don't see it," or "I see it, but I don't care." You don't get to leave that meeting and go, "Okay, that's over. Flight time. Let's find another church. Let's find another job, get another neighborhood." No, no. The Lord has you all the way in.

We're covenanted together. We are a "one another" people. There are fifty-four "one anothers." We don't demand that *others* be those things; we *become* those things for the good of people, particularly those who are in our covenant community. Look at where the text goes next: "**If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.**" Did you get that? *Between you and him alone.* Just you and him, or you and her, sitting down.

I didn't even emphasize this enough. "**If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.**" Every conversation about sinfulness and rebellion against the Lord that calls people to repent is about winning our brothers back. It's not about being right. It's not about justice. It's not even about being justified. It's about concern for the soul of our brother and sister that would make us

enter into an uncomfortable situation and risk the relationship for the reward of winning our brothers and sisters back, because in light of eternity, this confrontation is of utmost importance.

Verse 16: **"But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."** This doesn't mean you team-build at other people who hate this guy. Did you hear me? You can giggle, but we deal with this stuff all the time.

It doesn't mean you go, *Larry is just bothering me. I tried to confront Larry on how he bothers me, and he just blew me off. So you know what? I think I know two or three other people who hate Larry.* "Hey, are you still frustrated with Larry? You are? You hate him? Hey man, I need to sit down... Listen, I was going to tell you this. I sat down with that brother and lovingly, like Pastor Matt said...

Pastor Matt said, 'You have to go to him. You have to lay this out.' So I tried to love that brother and win him back, but he didn't listen to me. Do you want to come and dog pile on this fool with me too? Do you know anybody else who hates Larry?" Then you kind of just pile on the dude at the next coffee. That's not how this works.

This is about, "We've seen this in you also, brother. Surely, those of us who know you best, have walked with you the longest, and have sacrificed and loved you, would see this. I'm telling you, the way you talk to your wife is sinful. I'm telling you, brother, your inability to operate according to the Word of God is creating havoc in your world that is wounding not just us but others."

One of the things I found helpful (this is more practical than anything else) is people usually, when confronted by their sin, want examples so they might dissect those examples so that you cannot be right. So, "Here are seven things we've seen."

"Well, okay. On that first one, you didn't see what happened in the car right before I got there, and then on that second one, don't even get me started on what happened at the house before we came to group, and then on that third one, you guys just completely misread that. When I said, 'Get out of my face,' that's actually a little flirty game we play." Right? They want to dissect every story.

I've just always refused to enter into that. I've just always gone, "I'm not going to take this story by story by story so you can hit each of these balls back to me. Listen, brother. I don't want to be here. I'm here because I love you. I have nothing to win here. There's no offering taking place. This probably ends with you not liking me and leaving the church. There's no touchdown for me in this except to be a holy man. We've all seen it. Surely you don't think this is some sort of ploy to exert control over your life. We love you, brother. Please listen."

What happens, then, if he goes, "I hear you. I even see it in the Bible. I don't care. I'm doing it"? Well, it doesn't stop there. Let's keep going. Verse 17: **"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."** We do this here. If you're going, "Well, I've never seen you do this," there are a couple of reasons for that. First, on any given Sunday, about half of our attendance is covenant members and half is not. We're never really going to do this type of family business in front of people who aren't family. I don't know how else to say it.

I'm not going to bring a man or woman and bring their name before you when you're not in covenant relationship with them, when you have not said, "I'm in to serve, love, and walk beside them." You're not a part of this process. This primarily takes place within their Home Group and within those they're doing life with, and then, if they don't listen even then... Now we have the Home Group, those who do life with them, involved. It has just now rolled up to the pastors.

I do want to say this. There have been hundreds of thousands of these types of conversations here at this church that have never rolled past that first cup of coffee because, by the grace of God, they heard, they repented, they confessed, and they began to be restored and reconciled in the relationship.

It happens nearly constantly here. Praise God for that. I try to remind our guys all the time who get caught up in really difficult discipline cases to just remember the thousands upon thousands that never got anywhere near us because godly people heeded the Word of God and walked in accordance with the Scriptures.

Then you tell it to the church. Then there even some people who, confronted by their whole group and everyone they're really doing life with... Because the relationships are so shallow to

begin with, it's so easy to just cut bait and run. I mean, think about how many churches there are in Dallas.

If you have one group that's holding you accountable for your sins, why don't you go to a large church where you can blend in and not be found or spotted or anyone even know you? Except now you're smarter, so you'll stay withdrawn a little bit longer until you figure out how to look pretty enough to try to fool people again. Oh, don't you limit your own relationships that way.

Then look what happens next. I feel like our culture has no framework for this, but it's so important. **"And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."** Gentiles and tax collectors were viewed by the first-century Jews as those who were outside of the kingdom. They were handled with disdain. They were ostracized and pushed to the margins. Jesus was correcting how they viewed them.

Jesus went to Zacchaeus' house and had a meal. He sat with the prostitutes. He spoke with the woman of Samaria. He preached the gospel to those near and far. In fact, one of the most beautiful parts of Jesus' ministry was he drew a gnarly crowd: prostitutes, tax collectors...

I mean, the worst types of sin imaginable, if there were even levels of sin, were drawn to the message and grace of Jesus Christ. So he's correcting how they interacted with Gentiles and tax collectors, but then says here, basically, if they refuse to listen to the church, they're revealing with their behavior that they're unregenerate; namely, that they're not believers.

So what happens in this moment, when men and women who have said, "I am a Christian, I have put my faith in Christ, I have given my life over to him," get to the place where they go, "Forget what the elders say, forget what the Bible says; I'm doing what I want" they are bearing the fruit of unbelief. They are revealing with their actions they do not possess belief, so our interaction with them becomes the removal of membership and interacting with them as though they're unbelievers.

We do this here. "Well, I've never seen it." We do it at our member meetings. Four times a year, after elder-led prayer on a Sunday night, we'll have a member meeting. How many of you went to the last member meeting? Okay, so you can look around and see just some of the hands at the

member meeting.

Near the end of the member meeting, we will lament, cry, and pray together for those we are removing from membership. We will put their names on this screen behind me. We will read out their name. We will not list out their sin. We will simply say, "Here is a man, here is a woman, in blatant, outright disobedience to the Word of God who has been..."

We have never put a name up there we have not walked with for more than a year. There are no fast cases when it comes to people. They're all different situations. There is no grid. There's walking with, encouraging, praying, crying, and pleading for repentance. Upon entry into membership, there is a clear covenant that says, "This is coming if you walk down this path." We show people, "This is your name, man. You signed your name to this. You said that you were in biblically at this level."

We'll read the names and say, "They're no longer members of this church. They're no longer welcomed at the Table, the Lord's Supper. If you see them, please encourage them, please pray for them, please edify them, but we do not, as elders of this church and as fellow covenant members of this church, consider them to be believers."

You might be saying, "Well, that is an arrogant posture to take." I just disagree. I don't know how anyone can say... I know we're kind of evangelical light in the 2000s, but I'll tell you, if you have not been transformed to walk in a newness of life, although imperfectly executed, then you're not a believer.

If you got baptized when you were 9 years old because you saw a scary sketch about hell but there has never been any transformation in your life and you have no concern about Christ and no desire to follow him and no willingness to walk in obedience, you're not a Christian. Do I think that's going to thin our herd? Yeah, probably so. But I'd rather stand clean before God than you like me. If you have no desire to be obedient to the Word, no acceptance that there's a greater authority than your own will, then you're not a believer in Christ. It's not arrogant; it's fruit.

For you to say, "I know that's what the Bible says; I could care less..." That's a strange kind of Christian. You're saying, "I'm a Christian, but I am uppermost in my own affections and I am my

authority. There is no greater authority except what I think." You would never say that out loud, but that's the way you're behaving. As elders, given charge by God via the Word of God to shepherd the flock of God, to love and to serve, we don't let wolves hang out with the sheep. That would be cruel.

Here's the way I want to encourage you. Proverbs 27:17 says, "**Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.**" I've always been baffled that people like that verse. I mean I get it. It kind of sounds cool...unless you think about the process by which iron sharpens iron. That's a violent process. Iron sharpening iron means nicks and imperfections are knocked off the pieces. There are sparks. There's heat. There are hammers. It's a violent process.

Here's the way I want to encourage you. If you're ever approached by someone who says, "Brother, I believe you're sinning against me and sinning against the Lord," I believe your humble default position is they're probably right. They might not always be right. You have to think about that and pray about that. I'd go ask some people you trust to weigh in, and by *trust* I don't mean your boys who are just going to tell you what you want to hear.

I pray to God you have friends who aren't just dropping honey in your ears. You've put yourself in harm's way if you've done that. If you have a bunch of spineless morons you're running with, I don't know why you'd jam yourself up like that. You're running in a herd of morons and just don't understand why you keep getting your legs broken?

Quit running with them. Give someone permission to tell you the truth. In the end, if someone approaches you, the default position should be, "This is probably true. I'm a sinner, prone to sin, imperfect, being perfected, not there yet. More than likely I sinned." Search your heart. Own it if it's right.

There have been accusations made against me that were completely untrue. There was no real basis. There couldn't have been two or three people to follow up with evidence because there *weren't* two or three; it was an imaginative type of accusation. That's possible. You need to even be gracious for the immature who don't know quite how to spot sin yet. What they're doing is right; they're just doing it wrong. So even be gracious to them.

If you're walking in resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness, you have not been a good friend to the one you are avoiding or you have run from. In fact, you're being a cruel friend. The Word of God would beckon you to uncomfortably walk in truth for their good and for your freedom, because bitterness is uprooted when we take steps toward reconciliation.

If bitterness has grown because we have been sinned against, we don't avoid and we don't get overly aggressive. We speak the truth in love in the hope of winning our brothers back. I've never been a part of it where it was pleasant. I've never gone into any of those meetings going, "Yes! I'm so glad I get to do this today." Never. But I've seen many a brother won back, and some give me the bird and I haven't seen them in years. I always want to be honest with you. It doesn't always work well, but I can say before God that, in love, I tried to engage.

They will know we are Christians by our love, because when we're frustrated with someone, we don't herd up with everyone else and complain about them and talk bad about them and talk about their weaknesses in a group, but we love them enough to sit down and go, "Hey, can I ask you a question? Is this going on? I just picked up on this. I'm a little nervous for you. I love you. I'm concerned this is going to end here." Then, if they're like, "I can handle it..." Gates just open if they can handle it. "Well bro, you can't, because I'm telling you, I'm seeing you on fire right now."

If you are walking in some bitterness, some resentment, some unforgiveness, and you need to have a conversation with someone... I want to push you. Last week was owning *your* sin, and now I'm encouraging you, edifying you, because you have been reconciled to God, because your vertical relationship has been made right and, therefore, God is straightening out our horizontal relationships, not to walk in passivity and not to be overly aggressive, but to be willing to speak the truth in love for the good of your brother and sister and for the glory of God.

If you're like, "I'm so lost I wouldn't even know where to begin," I'm hoping some of this sermon will be helpful. What we printed out for you and have for you in Connection Central is this little pamphlet by Ken Sande that's just entitled "Peacemaking Principles." Everything you would need to know about how to prep your heart beforehand, about how to consider your own heart, about how to approach the person, is in this little pamphlet.

I don't want to send you unarmed into these types of conversations. I want you to understand

how to be prayerful, how to know exactly how to approach the person in a way that is loving, how to consider your own shortcomings and sins before you approach. This is available for anybody who wants one in Connection Central after the service.

Here is my steadfast hope in last week and into this week. The more we will be willing to love one another in a dynamic way, where we're willing to own our sin, regardless of if we have just 10 percent or 2 percent to own, and the more we're willing to engage one another in a way that says, "I love you enough to risk this," the more robust, deep, and beautiful this community of faith will become and the more odd we'll become in an attractive way.

There's an "odd" that's *not* attractive and there's an "odd" that *is* attractive. We'll become the attractive kind of odd, where people marvel at how we love one another. "Doesn't that guy bother you?" "Well man, I'm just trying to encourage that brother in the Lord and love him. I mean, I was there at one point. I'm sure I got on everybody's nerves when I first was a believer. I know that brother is just a baby. I don't get angry at an infant in my house. I'm not going to get angry at this infant in my church.

I'm going to love him. I'm going to serve him. I'm going to help him. I'm going to encourage him, because that's what you do to infants in the faith. It's what you do to infants physically and infants in the faith. Oh, *that* guy? That guy is just a big Baby Huey. He just needs grace, and here's how I'm going to show him grace. I'm going to bring that up to him and see where his heart is in it, that we might marvel at the reconciling work of God among us, not just to himself but to each other."

I said this last week; I want to say it again. The more distance you create between this moment and the time you actually have the conversation, the more likely you are to not have the conversation at all. If while I've been preaching the Holy Spirit has been putting someone in your head, putting someone in your heart, and you've wanted to turn me off about eight times but the Holy Spirit hasn't let you do that, that person needs to be followed up with.

Here's what I'm telling you. The longer you put that off, the more likely you are to not do it. You will not even need to look for excuses. They'll just be there. Be committed to what the Lord has for you and what the Lord has for me, because he's pulling us into maturity, either by being

confronted or being pushed into confrontation. May we trust his hand. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women, the opportunity to be together tonight. I pray that you would grant us courage, Holy Spirit, to have the conversations that need to be had. I pray that you would uproot any bitterness, any unforgiveness, any anger, or the inability to give the benefit of the doubt.

I pray you would grant us empathy and compassion for those who are walking in sin, especially if that sin is a blind spot, if they don't know it's there. I pray that you would create in our hearts a receptivity to hear from others about our own shortcomings and failures. I pray we would be quick to invite others into that. Help us, Father. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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