

Win Your Brother Back from Sin

‡ **Keep it private. (v.15)**

‡ **Stand words with witnesses. (v.16)**

‡ **Perform the last act of love. (vv.17-20)**

In the name of Jesus, the Lover of our souls, dear fellow-redeemed:

Most of us have never experienced anarchy because we're blessed to live in a land largely governed by laws which apply to everyone. Whether it's politicians or Martha Stewart doing the "perp walk" to jail, law enforcement makes an example of convicted law breakers for everyone to notice.

But if you've ever been a teacher in a classroom you know the fear of anarchy. My first two years out of Sem teaching English grammar to high school Sophomores and first year German to the Juniors taught me I could keep everyone awake and even get them excited. The hard part was settling them down again, especially that last class of outlaws my first year. Day after day they got worse until I kept the ring leaders after class. One piped up, "We should put our heads on our desks with our thumbs in the air." "Sounds good," I replied, "since you're acting like little children." I went from one to another quietly blistering their ears from least to most in trouble. When one boy was left, I told him, "Your classmates respect you because you're a natural leader. When you say, 'Be quiet,' they do. Today you led them the wrong way, didn't you." He nodded sheepishly. "I could use your help," I said. "Don't let this happen again." For the rest of the year when some got noisy, he would call them back.

Such is the nature of our Savior's counsel to us in God's school of grace. **Win Your Brother Back from Sin**, He says, then shows us one of the key ingredients by telling us....

‡ **Keep it private. (v.15)**

In a way we all are still stuck in high school. It's very difficult for us as individuals to come right out and admit, "I was wrong." But put us in a group of our peers and it becomes nearly impossible because then we lose face in front of everyone else. Jesus' wisdom and love join hands here when He says, ***"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."***

But someone might ask, "Whatever happened to 'Judge not that you be not judged'?" Have them look it up in Matthew 7:1, the beginning of Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount*. He does not condemn all judging, just the double standards we use to excuse ourselves. What Jesus actually says is this: ***"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*** (Matthew 7:1-5 NIV) Then in Matthew 7:15f, the same Lord Jesus tells sheep to judge their shepherds: ***"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them."*** (Matthew 7:15f NIV)

One fruit of a false prophet would be making excuses for sin, either his own or others, by telling Christians not to judge anything. ***"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?"*** (1 Corinthians 6:2 NIV) So keep Jesus' goal in mind and **Win Your Brother Back from Sin**. Just make sure you don't gossip, but **Keep it private** by going to him alone, as Jesus says.

‡ Stand words with witnesses. (v.16)

Another honest question one might ask is, “Since we are all sinners, what kind of sin is Jesus talking about?” The second verse of our text helps as we let Jesus interpret His own words. Our Lord quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 19:15: *“But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”* These are open, obvious sins which people can see. It’s not the sins of the heart for which we must pray, *“Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.”* (Psalm 19:12 NIV) But sins like theft, violence, chronic breaking of the Third Commandment by not coming to church or receiving the Sacrament, fornication and adultery, or even continuous gossip – all are clearly condemned by God in the Ten Commandments which are repeated in the New Testament to show us they express God’s holy, immutable will.

Under Moses’ law, and our laws influenced by their Judeo-Christian background, it takes more than “he said...she said” to condemn anyone. Multiple witnesses and facts are required in civil courts. We are to take a lesson from that because we are trying to **Win our Brother Back from Sin**. The Lord says, *“The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.”* (Ezekiel 18:20 NIV)

The hope is that first in private our fellow sinner will admit his guilt, so that we can personally tell him his sins are forgiven. But if not, then we **Stand words with witnesses** by taking along two or three others to say the same thing: “This is sin; you need to repent.” If he does, thank God, those witnesses will help answer if others ask about it. “We heard him say he was sorry. Let’s forgive, forget and move on.” And if, because of stubborn pride, the unrepentant sinner refuses to admit his sin, we must...

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Jesus puts it this way: *“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”* Christ gives His Church on earth the authority to lock or unlock the chains of guilt for sin.

A situation came up where the church at Corinth failed to **Perform the last act of love** for one of its members. In his first epistle, the Lord’s Apostle Paul had to severely admonish the congregation for being proud when they should have grieved over his sin. Not even a pagan would have his father’s wife as this Corinthian did. In assembly, Paul told them to *“hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”* (1 Corinthians 5:5 NIV) Apparently, the man repented, but then the congregation would not forgive him. So Paul had to write again, *“The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.”* (2 Corinthians 2:6-7 NIV)

When everyone understands this up front, excommunication will be rare. Many years ago a New Life member was getting a divorce not because of infidelity or desertion. Our member simply did not want to live with the spouse anymore. After months of admonishing, excommunication was next, but the unrepentant individual left the congregation. As one of my Seminary professors put it, “If they quit, you can’t fire them.” But we prayed for God to bring about the miracle of repentance, and He did. Years later before worship I saw that same person’s smiling face coming to worship with a whole new attitude. I’m glad to take that as evidence of repentance even if we can’t always understand how. And I’m gratefully looking forward to joy in heaven together. Our **last act of love** was blessed even though we could not complete it. God did in His own time and way. God’s Word works; He wants us to work His Word. Then thank the Lord each time He uses you to **Win Your Brother Back from Sin**. Amen.