

Win Your Brother Over

- ✠ **by personal, private admonition (v.15)**
- ✠ **with help from witnesses (v.16)**
- ✠ **as the Church's last act of love (vv.17-20)**

In the Name of Jesus, the soul's best Friend, dearly redeemed servants of God:

A retired FBI agent was explaining why he liked making Elders' calls on straying members. "It was like my work for the FBI," he told me. He had my attention. "We used to watch for suspects coming home late after another day of guilt for taking bribes or selling American secrets." I wondered how it would help if they were tired and hungry. "They cried tears of joy," he said. "They were so relieved to have a way out. We told them, 'We have you dead to rights. We can convict you to spend years behind bars, or you can come clean on your own and possibly avoid jail time.' It was like salvation for them. So similar to my work as an Elder. Calling sinners back to the Lord saves them from far worse than an earthly prison. We get to give them eternal freedom from guilt with God through Jesus."

And that, my dear friends in Christ, is our Lord's goal for you: **Win Your Brother Over....**

✠ **by personal, private admonition (v.15)**

The first time I noticed this was teaching high school students. But isn't it true for all of us? It's easier to admit you're wrong in private than in front of a crowd. Christ's love wants to accomplish a miracle: ***"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."*** Keep it close **by personal, private admonition.**

Unfortunately, this is where we usually mess up. Someone says or does something wrong to you, and it's only natural to tell someone else. But Jesus says, ***"Show him his fault, just between the two of you."*** The goal is not to involve others. The goal is to **Win Your Brother Over.**

Sometimes you'll hear people criticize a pastor or church elder for admonishing someone about sin. "Who are they to judge?" Honestly, I ask myself the same question. "Who am I to point out someone else's sin when I have so many of my own?" But my Lord Jesus, God's Son, says we should.

This whole section in Matthew 18 is about Christ's winsome love. He calls us to protect the children and discipline ourselves. The Good Shepherd says it's worth leaving ninety-nine safe sheep to reclaim one who wandered off. Guarding His flock protects His good name. When God's people thrive, it makes God happy. So when a prophet like Ezekiel in today's First Lesson might hesitate to warn his fellow sinners, God warns him that his own soul is on the line: ***"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?"*** (Ezekiel 33:11)

✠ **with help from witnesses (v.16)**

It's not safe or loving to just to walk on by. Sin may seem harmless like a mole. But a good doctor doesn't worry about ruining your day to call it cancer. He may order a second opinion to convince you. So our soul Doctor says after your personal, private admonition, ***"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.'"*** The Lord of the Church says we have to escalate the admonition with two or three **witnesses.** They can agree that unrepentant sin is a serious, deadly condition. It ruins lives in time and eternity.

Since God holds us responsible, especially pastors and elders, this is not a choice. We must go. But how? In what spirit? What attitude? Listen to the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul: ***“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”*** (Galatians 6:1f NIV84) If someone fell in a hole, wouldn’t you try to pull them out – without slipping in yourself? Care for others while caring for your own soul. That’s the way to **Win Your Brother Over**.

† as the Church’s last act of love (vv.17-20)

Is all this really such a big deal? Don’t most people and churches today say, “As long as you’re not hurting anyone, it’s okay”? The only sin most Americans can see is what they call “intolerance.” “Just because something is wrong for you,” they argue, “doesn’t mean it’s wrong for everyone else.” Cheating on your taxes, sleeping together before marriage, same sex relationships they call “marriage” – who can say otherwise? They argue, “Everyone’s going to heaven anyway. What’s the big deal?”

And then Jesus speaks up, so counterculture: ***“O unbelieving and perverse generation....I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven....If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea....Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.”*** (Matthew 17,18 passim) Jesus sounds very sure that hell is real and heaven is not open for unbelievers.

That’s why Jesus commands **the Church’s last act of love**. This is for an unrepentant sinner: ***“If he refuses to listen to [two or three witnesses], 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.”*** Excommunication is all that’s left to **Win Your Brother Over**. God’s people still hope the sinner will come to his senses before it’s too late.

As God and Lord of all, Jesus has given a very unique authority to His Church on earth: ***“Amen, I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*** (Matthew 18:18) The Office of the Keys binds the guilt of sin to the unrepentant sinner on earth and in heaven. But every sinner who repents, God wants us to freely forgive. Jesus says, ***“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.”***

Sometime I’ll tell you again about the failure of one congregation in the Bible. If you want to search this out yourself, see what was happening in 1 Corinthians 5, where the Lord’s Apostle Paul relayed Christ’s orders to excommunicate an unrepentant sinner. Then see what happened in 2 Corinthians 2, after the man repented. You can get a clue if you read Jesus’ *Parable of the Unmerciful Servant* in Matthew 18, right after our text. Only the devil wants souls stuck in damnation with him.

Seems to me our dear Savior bought us tickets on a one-way flight home to heaven with Him. Trust your whole life to the one who shed His blood for you, and you’re home free. It’s just a matter of time and eternity. But if you’re resting by the exit, what will you do if another passenger tries to get out? “I need some fresh air. Don’t tell me what to do! Who are you to judge?” You’ll try to talk him back to his seat. Then you’ll call for help from fellow passengers. You’ll tell the flight attendants if you have to because everyone is in danger. Love must be brave, tough, steadfast. “This is your Captain speaking. Everyone take their seats. Fasten your seat belts. We’ll be landing soon.” Amen.

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