

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Third Sunday after Trinity, June 28, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 7 (550:9) 358, 331:1-7, 331:8

Lessons: Genesis 28:10-22; Acts 16:22-33; Matthew 13:44-46.

Sermon Text: Matthew 18:15-18

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ,

If we would see a close friend doing something very foolish and know that he is in great danger of losing his life, would we not warn him of the danger? If we know that a Christian brother is doing something very sinful and that he is endangering his soul and might lose eternal life, what would we do? Because eternal life in heaven is certainly far more valuable than this temporal and physical life, we want to learn today:

**CHRIST'S INSTRUCTION REGARDING BROTHERLY ADMONITION**

- 1. The three steps in carrying out this admonition in brotherly love;**
- 2. Such admonition given in Christ's name is also valid in heaven.**

Jesus says: ***"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you."*** Jesus is speaking to us in these words as people who believe in him. He is instructing us with regard to our Christian duty of admonishing those who profess to believe in Jesus and are fellow church members. When Jesus speaks of a brother sinning against us, he is not speaking of weaknesses and faults, which we all have. He is speaking of sins, which endanger our brother's soul, sins that call for admonition and church discipline. For example, sexual immorality, drunkenness, despising the means of grace by not attending church services and not going to the Lord's Supper.

What are we to do in such a case? Jesus is not, first of all, speaking about a public matter. If the matter is a matter of public knowledge, that is, public offense, the case may be taken up by the congregation at once. Paul writes to Timothy: ***"Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."*** 1 Tim. 5:20 It is wise that also in this case someone speak to him privately first.

In the case of a private matter, we are not to go to other people and tell them what a bad person the sinning brother is. We are to go to the person and in a kindly way speak to him about his sin. We are to show him from the Word of God that what he is doing is wrong. We are to admonish him in a loving way that he should repent of his sin. We are to speak to him about God's will regarding sinners, that God ***"wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,"*** 1Tim. 2:4. We are to tell him that the grace of God ***"teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,"*** Titus 2:12.

Jesus then says: ***"If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."*** The purpose of Christian admonition is always to gain him. If he listens to us and repents of his sin, then we have accomplished our purpose. Then we will want to thank and praise the Lord because an immortal soul has been saved. Then the matter is closed and no mention of it is made to others. Indeed, we would be happy if all cases of church discipline ended in this way.

Often this is not the case and so Jesus instructs us: ***“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.”*** The purpose of this second step in church discipline is again to gain the sinning brother. The Lord instructs us to take with us one or two other people. They can give evidence of what was said or done. They too should admonish the sinner in a kindly way and do all they can to bring him to repentance. If this is accomplished, the matter ends here.

But Jesus says: ***“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”*** The Church, in the sense we speak of it in the Apostles’ Creed, is the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. It is made up of all believers in Christ. When Jesus speaks of telling the church, he is speaking of the congregation where the individual has his membership. The believers in Christ in the congregation have the right and the duty to act in matters of church discipline. The admonition of all the brothers should make an impression on the sinning brother.

But if even the repeated admonitions of the brothers are not successful, then Jesus says: ***“If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*** In other words, the person is to be expelled from the congregation and no longer considered a brother. However difficult this may seem, we are to remember that this final step is also prompted by Christian love. It is not a matter of getting rid of a sinner or kicking him out. He is to be dealt with in patience and love. If all efforts are in vain, then as in the case of immorality in the Corinthian congregation, we should do as Paul instructed the members at Corinth: ***“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 Cor. 5:5. This final step of excommunication is also intended to bring the person to repentance so that he will repent and be saved.

It is to be emphasized that the basis for all Christian admonition is love for the sinner’s soul. We are always to keep in mind that we want that person to go to heaven, not to hell. Our Savior said: ***“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many,”*** Matt. 20:28. So we are not to lord it over others, but serve one another in love. What greater love could there be than the Savior showed in giving his life to pay for our sins! Such love is to be more than an example for us in dealing with those under church discipline. We are also to keep in mind our own soul’s salvation. As we deal with those who are being disciplined, we are always to remember what the Lord did for us poor sinners. Paul writes: ***“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins,”*** Col. 1:13-14. We are not one bit better by nature than the one being disciplined. Our loving attitude can be shown toward those caught in sin by doing what Paul said. ***“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,”*** Gal. 6:1. Only when we act in love toward those being disciplined can we be confident of God’s blessings upon our efforts.

In Christ’s instruction regarding brotherly admonition, **He also assures us that such brotherly admonition in Christ’s name is valid also in heaven.**

2.

Jesus says: ***“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.”*** These words are in effect the same as those spoken to the apostles when Jesus conferred upon his Church on earth the power to forgive and retain sins. ***“Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven,’”*** John 20:21-23.

Jesus has given to his believers on earth the power to pronounce forgiveness to the penitent sinner, and to withhold forgiveness from the impenitent sinner. When the believers in Christ do this, they are not judging hearts, but simply repeating what God has already pronounced with regard to the sinner. Therefore, when pastors, acting on behalf of the believers of the local congregation, exercise church discipline, their action *“is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ our dear Lord dealt with us Himself.”* (Ministry of the Keys)

It must never be forgotten that the Lord has given this power to his Church on earth for the comfort of poor sinners. How comforting for the poor penitent sinner to know that the forgiveness pronounced to him is as valid and certain as if Jesus were visibly here on earth and speaking the words himself! It is like the comforting assurance spoken by the Lord through Ezekiel: *“As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. ... I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak,”* Ezek. 34:12, 16.

The instruction which our Lord gives here regarding brotherly admonition may at times seem to be very difficult to carry out. It would be much easier to ignore the sin of an erring brother. That would save us much labor and spare us from many disagreeable experiences when our admonition is rejected. But we must remember the great blessing it gives to the penitent sinner who is assured of forgiveness and the sure hope of eternal life.

Let us all humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, examine our own life in the light of God’s commandments, and then go to our brother who has sinned and with a love for precious souls seek to save that which is lost. God help us to do this, for Jesus’ sake.

Prayer:

O Jesus, Lamb of God, Thou art the Life and Comfort of my heart. A sinner poor I come to thee And bring my many sins with me.

O God, my sin indeed is great; I groan beneath the dreadful weight. Be merciful to me, I pray; Take guilt and punishment away.

Saint John the Baptist points to thee And bids me cast my sin on Thee; For Thou hast left Thy throne on high To suffer for the world and die.

Help me to mend my ways, O Lord, And gladly to obey Thy Word. While here I live, abide with me; And when I die, take me to Thee. Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 328)

(Revised Ministry By Mail sermon from July 14, 2002)