

Confronting the Erring Ones

Matthew 18:15-20

Halifax: 9 April 2006

Introduction:

In our study of Matthew's gospel, we are now learning of our Lord's ministry to the twelve disciples as he draws nearer and nearer to the time of His betrayal and crucifixion.

- In Matthew 16, we have seen how He affirmed to His disciples that He was indeed the Messiah, the Son of the living God...
 - and also that He would use them to lay the foundation of the church He was going to build...
 - They were His chosen representatives to introduce the laws and principles by which the church would be governed...
 - Under His direction, they would set forth His guidelines for what was permitted and not permitted in the church for all ages...
 - After He ascended into heaven, they would be His ambassadors to administer His will on earth.

And as we move on into Matthew 18,

- We find our Lord giving them directives about His Church and how His people are to live in unity and love.
 - Rather than vying for position about who is the greatest in the kingdom,
 - they must humble themselves and become like little children—totally dependent on their Saviour for salvation.
 - and no one was to even be admitted to this kingdom without this child-like spirit of dependence.
 - Then Jesus goes on to show them how important the salvation of his people is to Him...
 - He burns with rage against anyone who does anything to turn one of these little one away from Him...
 - And He warns them that if anything (or any one) causes them to stumble, they are to cut it off—even if it is their own right hand—rather than to allow it to turn them away from Him.
 - He has left the glories of heaven to bring them salvation, He has given His choice angels to guard them...
 - Each one of His sheep is precious to Him and He will not allow a single one to perish...
 - It is not His Father's will that even one should perish.

- You are to have this same zeal for your own salvation and for the salvation of the other members of His people—especially for covenant children.
 - That is what we looked at last week.
- This week we come to Matthew 18:15, and we find that here Jesus continues the same theme.
 - Just as we are to guard against doing anything to cause His people to stumble,
 - so we are to do everything in our power to restore them when they have stumbled.
 - If Jesus leaves the 99 to go after the one that has strayed,
 - We are obviously to do the same!
- In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus tells us to go and He tells us **how** to go to restore the erring ones.
 - This is something the church in the west has largely neglected to our own hurt.
 - My brothers and sisters, I urge you to listen to what our Lord says here and to diligently apply it!
 - He is the expert in how to rescue lost sheep.
 - He is the Lord and He has told us what we are to do when our brother strays.
 - We do not know better than He about how to love the erring one!
 - There is so much arrogance about this today—
 - so much vain human wisdom and disgustingly pious sentimentalism—
 - so many foolish little disciples who think they know better than the Lord...
 - How we need to humble ourselves and become like little children and hear what our Lord says.
 - It is not that our Lord's directives are difficult to understand...
 - It is only that we are so proud and wicked that we will not obey what He tells us to do when our brother errs.
 - I urge you to receive His counsel about this as it is recorded here in our text and resolve that from this day forward,
 - you will do what He says to do!

I. In verse 15, He begins by tells you what to do if your brother sins against you.

- He says,

- v. 15: “Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.”
 - Of course, by your brother, Jesus means any fellow believer, male or female.
- . But what does He means when He says, “If your brother sins against you”?

0. You will not find the words “against you” in a few modern translations, but there is very little reason for their exclusion...

- A couple of fairly unreliable manuscripts from Egypt exclude them, but they are definitely in the majority of the manuscripts—
 - and there is the additional evidence that Peter picks up these words in verse 21 when he says,
 - “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him...”

TRANS> Now in some ways it might be easier if these words **were** excluded...so that it simply said, “if you brother sins, go and tell him...”

- because now we are left with the question,
 - “Does this mean that I am not supposed to go to him if he sins, but only when He sins against me?”
 - No it does not...

0. Here are two reasons why...

- . First of all, because it is impossible for your brother to sin and it not be against you—at least in some way...

0) We are all brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ and He is our Master whom we love.

- Anyone who does anything against Him—anything contrary to His commandments—has sinned against you.
- Did you notice in the reading from Deuteronomy how the Lord said He sends false prophets—even those that are dear to us—to see if we really love him?
- Do we count their sin to be against us because against the Lord?

0) The one who sins begins a deviation from the ways of our Lord, and if he does not repent, it will affect the entire body, and especially it will affect our children.

- Think how something as seemingly innocent as the neglect of family worship has affected the church today!
- There is no way your brother can sin and it not be against you.

- . Secondly, the words “against you” are rather general in nature...

- The preposition translated “against” is ordinarily translated “into...”
 - While it certainly conveys the idea of that sin which is directed specifically against you,
 - it also conveys the idea of sin that is simply brought into your view...
 - In other words, when you discover that your brother has sinned.
 - And really, no matter what the arguments may be...
 - If your brother has gone astray, you are not to just leave him to perish...
 - You are to go to him to restore him.
- . The Lord’s directive is very plain...
 - There are three very clear directives that you are to follow as soon as you discover that your brother has sinned.
 - Lets look at each of them...
- 0. First, Jesus plainly tells **you** to go to him...
 - . Often, disciples want to contend with this point...
 - 0) You may say something like,
 - “Well, Bill was the one who lashed out at me—he knows what he did—why should I go to him?”
 - He ought to come to me...”
 - 0) And you know, you are right...
 - Jesus speaks to Bill about that in the Sermon on the Mount...
 - He says that if you are Bill and you go to worship and remember that your brother has something against you,
 - you need to leave you gift at the altar (He is using the language of the Old Testament) and go first to be reconciled with your brother.
 - In other words, you cannot properly worship until you have gone to make things right with him...
 - to ask for his forgiveness and to make whatever restitution is necessary.
 - So yes, Bill ought to come to you if he has sinned against you.
 - Jesus knows that.

- 0) Jesus knows He said that, but still He tells **you** to go to Bill if Bill has sinned against you.
- Learn from this that it is so important—
 - such a priority—that you live in peace with your brother that you are supposed to go whether **you** did the wrong or whether Bill did the wrong...
 - There is no need to debate the point...
 - If you are following Jesus Christ, you are supposed to take the initiative to go in either case.
 - You are to do all that is in your power to remove the offense—whether you are the cause or whether your brother is the cause.

TRANS> You will say, “But why? He is the one who did the wrong.”

- . Let me give you four good reasons why you should go...
 - 0) First, you are to go because the Lord says so...
 - It is a matter of plain old obedience!
 - Jesus tells you to go to the one who sinned against you. He does not tell you to wait for him to come to you.
 - 0) Second, you are to go because of love for the soul of your brother.
 -) Surely you have regard for the soul of your brother!
 - Do you not see the danger that he is in?
 - He has sinned and there is danger that instead of repenting, he will harden his heart and depart from the Lord!
 - Do you want to see him apostatise and go to hell because you, in your pride, refused to give him warning?
 - You will say, “But I thought once a person is saved, they cannot be lost.”
 - But are we not warned to take heed to ourselves lest there be in any of us a heart of unbelief in departing from the living God?
 - You are not God and you don’t know the state of your brother’s soul, but there are times when you can see his sin...
 - It is true that if He is elect, he will certainly persevere...
 - But perseverance does not occur in a vacuum!
 - When the Lord has decreed that a person will persevere, He often places that person among people who will call him to repentance when he has strayed.

- David was recovered from his fall because Nathan went to him and called him to repent.
- Just as God ordinarily sends a messenger to His elect to call them to repentance in the first place,
 - So He often sends a messenger to restore His sheep when they have strayed...
 - And if you see your brother stray, you are to be the one who goes in love to your brother lest he perish.
-) Just look at how Jesus speaks of the outcome if your brother hears you...
 - He says, “If he hears you, you have gained your brother.
 - . There is a sense in which he has been lost.
 - As I brought out last week,
 - sin is a thing that separates...
 - It separates us from each other and it separates us from God.
 - . When you go to your brother and successfully convince him of his wrong,
 - when he “hears” you, it leads him to repentance.
 - It restores his relationship with you against whom he has sinned,
 - and it restores him with the Lord against whom he has also sinned.
 - . This is not just hypothetical...
 - There are disciples like Judas that depart from the living God and perish.
 - Can you just leave your brother to depart from our Lord?
 - Not if you love him.
 - If you love him, you will go to him in order that you might gain him...
 - gain him as a brother in the Lord.

TRANS> So then,

- the first reason you should go is because Jesus says to go...
- the second reason is because you love your brother...

- 0) Third, you should go because of your love for the Church...
- Think about it,
 - How does the church fall into periods of decline and darkness?
 - Did the reformers wake up one morning and read in the newspaper that a conference had been held and the church had decided:
 - to worship images of the saints,
 - that ministers become priests instead of preachers of the gospel...
 - and that superstition and immorality should become the order of the day?
 - Or did we wake up one morning and read that the protestant churches had met and had decided that
 - the scriptures are not a reliable guide for morals...
 - that sexual relations outside of marriage should not be deemed evil...
 - and that homosexual union is not an abomination and should not even prevent a man or woman from serving as a minister?
 - Of course not!
 - It was a gradual erosion process!
 - Let's take homosexual ordination...
 - It began as a few individual believers began to question the scriptures at this point or that point and nobody went to them about it...
 - Then, as they wanted greater sexual freedom, they began to call into question the Bible's restrictions about divorce.
 - Soon serial marriages (where you marry, divorce, and marry another) were allowed in the church. A man could forsake his wife for another woman—provided he did the legal work).
 - Then extramarital sexual conduct was winked at—at least if you weren't in the ministry...
 - It would be considered unloving for a Christian to confront his brother about such things...
 - Soon, it was winked at for those in the ministry too...

- And then a nice homosexual couple came to town and wanted to join the church.
 - There were already several couples that were living common law—and nobody even thought about that buy now...
 - At first there was a little fuss about the lesbian couple, but soon everyone agreed that at least it was good that they were coming to church...
 - though no one would ever dream of having an openly practicing homosexual as a pastor!
 - Until a few years had gone by and there were several homosexual couples in the church...
 - And then one of the partners of these relations was called to the ministry...
 - How could they be denied if God had called them?
- Do you see how the erosion occurs?
 - It doesn't happen over night!
 - It is because of indifference about sin that the church has fallen into such a deplorable condition today.
 - If you see sin in the church and do nothing,
 - You do not love the church.
 - Think about it—
 - Would you say a man loves his garden if he sees weeds or destructive insects and he does nothing about them?
 - Would you say he loves his house if he sees a leak in the roof and shrugs his shoulders and does nothing?

TRANS> If you love the church, you will go to brother when he sins.

- Toleration of his sin will lead to the destruction of the church.
- So then, we have seen three reasons to go to your brother...
 - You should go because the Lord says to go...
 - You should go because you love your brother...
 - and you should go because you love the church...
 - and now,
- 0) Fourthly, you should go because you love your Lord...
 - I have already spoken about this when I spoke about how sin is against you because it is against Him...

- And that when the Lord brings your brother's sin before you, He is testing you to see if you really love the Lord Jesus...
- The Lord Jesus came from heaven to purify for himself a people who are zealous of good works...
 - This was so important to Him that He left the glories of heaven to come and die on the cross to redeem us.
 - He wants a holy church, not a church in rebellion against His Father in heaven.
- Now if you have any regard for your Lord and what is important to Him,
 - You will not be able to see your brother stray and remain aloof.
 - Have you no regard, no heart, for your Lord who has so deeply loved you and your brother that He gave Himself for you...
 - Do you not even care enough for His honour to go at His command to restore His straying sheep?

TRANS> I know it can be hard to go to your brother, surely you have sufficient reason to do so... I have given you four...

- The Lord has commanded it...
 - Because you love your brother...
 - Because you love the church...
 - Because you love your Lord.
 - His first plain directive to you when you see your brother sin is to **go** to him.
0. His second plain directive is "to tell him his fault."
- . The idea here is that you are to try to **convince** him of his wrong...
 - The word in the original carries the idea of not only of informing him about what he did, but also of persuading him that it was wrong.
 - 0) It could be that he does not know he has sinned and needs to be informed...
 - perhaps he repeated something you told him in confidence because he forgot that you had asked him not to tell...
 - or perhaps he damaged someone's property and didn't know about it, but you saw it...
 - If this is the case, it should be easy to restore him...
 - As soon as you tell him, he will repent.

- 0) On the other hand, it could be that he does not know that his wrong was wrong and needs to be shown from scripture...
- Maybe he is a new believer, and with the best of intentions, he went out and bought a ticket for the two of you to go to the races on Sunday afternoon...
 - you have to go to him and explain to him his wrong...
 - In this case, you simply have to sit down with him and show him what the Bible teaches about honouring the Lord's Day.
 - Again, if he wants to serve the Lord, he will receive it with gratitude... at least in the end.
- . But of course, often, it is not quite as easy as all this because often he *knows* that he has sinned and is trying to avoid the issue.
- When that is the case, he wants you to avoid it too...
 - He does not want you to come to him about it and he may resist you and oppose you when you do.
 - He may try to accuse you of being harsh or legalistic or dig up something you have done in the past...
 - Often in such cases,
 - the sinning brother's sinful heart may have been at work trying to appease his guilty conscience long before you arrived...
 - You may find that he has reconstructed the account of what happened in order to justify what he did...
 - For example, he may have accused you of stealing, but when you go to him about his false accusation, he might say:
 - "I didn't accuse you, I was just asking."
 - If there are no witnesses, you can argue the point with him a bit, but if he continues to deny it, it is probably best to let it go...
 - Perhaps you were overly sensitive.
 - If he has a problem in this area, it will come up again in another situation.
 - Or you may go to your brother and find that he has concocted some way to argue that his sin was not after all sinful.
 - I have to say that I have seen some pretty fancy twisting of scripture to justify certain sinful behaviours—

- We saw how in Jesus' day there were people who actually made a case from scripture to justify their refusal to help their parents when they were in financial need!
 - Today we even see people trying to justify the ordination of females to the gospel ministry when the Bible expressly states that a woman is not to teach in the church!
 - People can be quite motivated to justify their actions...
 - but you are to go to them and try to convince them of their wrong.
0. The third plain directive of our Lord when your brother has sinned against you is that you are to do all this between you and him alone—at first.
- . If you are like most people, your first instinct will be to go and tell everyone else what your brother has done.
 - When you do that, it is clear that you are more interested in **reproaching** your brother than **restoring** him.
 - Perhaps you find some sort of comfort in the sins of others because it is a way of justifying your own...
 - or perhaps you take pleasure in exposing your brother because of envy or a desire for vengeance.
 - Whether or not you are willing to own up to any of these awful motivations,
 - the Lord is very clear that you are not to go to others about the matter until you have first gone to your brother alone.
 - And if he repents, the matter should end there—no body else needs to know about it.
 - . There are possible exceptions to this as an absolute rule, but you must be very careful that you don't stretch the exceptions too far...
 - There are times when you might want to go to someone who is over you in the Lord to obtain counsel about how to proceed and if you should proceed—
 - you might want to go to your parents, to an elder or a pastor in the church—to get counsel about how to proceed and to find out what you ought to do.
 - In fact, there are even times when you ought to take someone else with you on the first visit...
 - For example, if a woman sees a man sinning against his children, refusing to deal with them, she ought not to go alone to that man...

- it is not only allowable, but highly recommended that she go to her husband or to an elder and that the two of them go together...
- Likewise, if a man is concerned about immodest apparel in a young woman, he should not go to her alone about that.
 - Wisdom must be exercised in such cases.
- But the general rule is that you are to go alone.
 - Be honest,
 - most of the time when you go to tell someone else about your brother's sin there is no justification for it at all!
 - It is more about you and what feels good to you than about helping your brother...
 - notwithstanding whatever self-flattering pretences you may have concocted about your motives.

TRANS> So in verse 15 you are given these three very plain directives about what to do if you brother sins against you...

- Go to him...
- Tell him his fault
- Do it between you and him alone.
- I am convinced that the church would be a far different place—a far better place—if only these simple directives had been followed.
 - Many brothers would have been gained that were lost...
 - Many churches would have remained pure that have become synagogues of Satan.
 - Many Christians would have a deeper love for their Lord...

But suppose you go to your brother and he does not hear you?

- Suppose he says,
 - “you have no business meddling in my affairs—do you think you are perfect?”
 - Of course you aren't, but you must explain to him that the difference between a Christian and a non Christian is not that the Christian never sins,
 - The difference is that the Christian deals with his sin... he repents and turns to the Lord for forgiveness.
 - But suppose he still will not hear...
 - suppose he says that whatever he is doing is not wrong or continues to insist that it is not your concern...

II. What should you do if you go to your brother about his sin and he will not hear?

- . First, the Lord tells you to take with you one or two more.

0. You are to bring one or two others as witnesses.
 - . They are there to bear witness to what you have said to him about his sin...
 - to help you try to convince him of the wrong he has done—
 - to show him his sin that he might repent.
 - You can see that this is still the goal by what the Lord Jesus says in the next verse about your brother's response to your little committee...
 - v. 17: "If he refuses to hear them..."
 - This shows that they are still trying to convince him about his sin—to show him his fault.
 - . The Lord's command to take this second step brings us back to the importance of this whole matter!
 - If your brother does not hear, you are not to just kind of let it drop!
 - You are to take this second step!
 - You are to do everything you can to try to gain your brother—to win him back—to call him back to God's ways.
 - It is better for him to cut off his arm or pluck out his eye if it is making him sin than to be cast into hell fire!
 - Whatever it is that he is holding on to, every effort must be made to convince him to cut it off, no matter how dear it is, if it is keeping him from repentance.
 - Please don't trivialise sin and its consequences!
 - Jesus did not have to die on the cross for a trivial matter!
 - Every effort must be made to restore your brother.
0. But remember, the witnesses are there to confirm what you have begun.
 - . You need to be opened to the possibility that they may look at the situation and determine that **you** are the one who is out of line.
 - 0) Maybe you have gone to your brother because you saw him take a piece of paper off the company printer at work...
 - He was talking to his wife on the phone after work and she ask him to pick up a few things at the store...
 - Without even thinking about it, you saw him casually reach over a grab a piece of company paper right out of the paper tray!

- You came to him and confronted him about it, and told him that he needed to go to the owner of the company and confess what he had done.
 - You heard the preacher say something about pilfering when he preached on the eighth commandment and you have Titus 2:10 to back you up:
 - “not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity.”
 - It may be that the witnesses will tell you to get a life and go home.
 - That is what they are there for!
- 0) Or perhaps you are upset because your brother Bill refused to help you when you had a flat tire—
 - You go into a long story about how you were stranded and how you called Bill on your cell phone and how he refused to come and help...
 - The witnesses turn to ask Bill about it and he explains that he was on his way to an important meeting and tried to explain that to you...
 - Now instead of joining you in calling Bill to repentance, the witnesses ought to call you to repentance.
- 0) You get the point—the witnesses are there to hear the issue (not before they arrive, but after they get there) and they must determine whether to join you in calling your brother to repentance, or tell you to leave him alone.
 - It is very important for you, then, before you go to your brother, to make sure you are not going to him about a doubtful matter.
- . Now as the goal is to win your brother, you should be careful about the persons you choose to take with you as witnesses...
- 0) You should make every effort to take someone your brother highly regards.
 - If you know that he doesn't get along real well with your best friend at church,
 - that is probably not the person to take...
 - Take someone that he regards highly—your goal is to win him, not to stack the deck against him.
- 0) Whether you take two or three is also a judgement call on your part...
 - If you are taking an elder along, one might be fine,
 - but if you are taking along your spouse, it is certainly better to take along a third witness as well—and not your wife and her mother!

TRANS> But now suppose you have done all this—

- You have taken one or two with you,
 - and they have heard the situation and they have joined you in urging Bill to repent, but still he refuses.
 - What are you to do then?
 - Once again, you are not to give up.
 - The matter is too important to just drop—even though you may very much want to by this time!
- . Jesus says that if he won't hear you and the witnesses together, "tell it to the church."
 0. Does this mean you are to stand up on Sunday night and declare the matter to the entire congregation?
 - . Absolutely not!
 - The twelve would have never taken Jesus' words in that way.
 - Jesus was not introducing some new, unprecedented practice here.
 - He was rather endorsing the long standing practice within the Jewish synagogue.
 - . From ancient times, by God's own institution, elders had been chosen out by the people to rule.
 - If someone was found in sin and refused to repent, that person was brought before the elders...
 - And if he refused to hear the elders, he was put out of the synagogue.
 - John talks about this very thing in his gospel when he tells us that the Jews had decided that anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Messiah should be put out of the synagogue.
 - That was the way things were done and the way they had been done for centuries.
 - The government of the church (or the synagogue) was in the hands of a plurality of elders as representatives.
 - . When the apostles came forth after Jesus' resurrection to establish the church in accordance with His will,
 - rule by elders was simply assumed—it was simply continued.
 - The New Testament does not present elder rule as a new thing because it was not new.
 - There was no need for a new structure in the local assembly.

- We see Paul going about to every city where disciples had been made and ordaining elders.
 - We are told very little about the procedure because the procedure had been established long before...
 - Godly men were to be chosen from among the people and ordained by those who were already in leadership.
 - Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to be sure that these men meet the necessary qualifications so that they will be able to fulfil their office well.
- . The point is, when Jesus said “tell it to the church,” He was not speaking about some strange procedure that the disciples had never heard of...
 - He was referring to the longstanding practice of his day...
 - and in that practice, an impenitent sinner was brought before the church by bringing him before the representatives of the church...
 - They were the ones that were appointed to hear the matter in behalf of the church.
 - We must not take our modern democratic principles and impose them on the day of Jesus.
 - If anyone in that day had spoken about taking someone before the church—that is the ekklesia or the assembly—no further explanation would have been necessary...
 - It would be understood that they were taken before the representatives of the local assembly—the ruling elders.
- 0. And what are the elders to do when you and your witnesses come before them to tell them of Bill’s sin and his refusal to repent?
 - . They are to do the same thing you began to do at the first...
 - They are to tell Bill his fault...
 - They are to try to convince him of his sin and bring him to repentance.
 - They are to warn him of his danger and to urge him to listen...
 - Hopefully, he will yield to their authority as those who have been appointed by Christ.
 - They are to make every effort for the same reasons that you were to go to Bill in the first place...
 - because Jesus commands it...
 - because they love their brother who has sinned...

- because they love the church and want to see her preserved as a holy institution...
 - because they love the Lord...
- Does this seem like an awful lot of fuss for one straying sheep?
 - Well it is, and it ought to be!
 - Jesus loves His sheep and He commands us to spare no effort in attempting to restore them.
 - That is how important this matter is to Him!
- . But if after all this effort has been expended, suppose Bill still refuses to repent...
- As the Lord says, “if He refuses to hear **even** the church”... then what?
 - Jesus says, “then let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”
- 0) I prefer the old version here—Gentile and a tax collector...
- Here again, Jesus is referring to the long established practice of the synagogue...
 - In the synagogue, a gentile and a tax collector where persons who were not recognised as a part of God’s people.
 - They were, as Paul explains it in Ephesians,
 - Eph 2:11-12: “Gentiles... aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”
 - And of course the tax collectors were also excluded from the membership of the assembly.
 - Jesus is saying,
 - If your brother will not repent of his sin after all this, you are to count him as a stranger to the covenant—one who is cut off from God and without hope.
 - You are to tell him that unless he repents, he will perish.
- 0) This does not mean that Bill is to be excluded from attending church and hearing the word,
- but it means that he can no longer be regarded as one of Christ’s flock.
 - He may not come to the communion table, he may not have his children baptised, and he is to be considered as one who needs to be evangelised—who is, as far as we can tell by his profession, on his way to Hell unless he repents.

- The goal of this final step is not to say good-bye to him forever...
 - The goal is to wake him up to repentance!
 - It is hoped that by putting him out of the church, he will be brought to his senses and repent.
 - As Paul says in 1 Cor 5:5, you deliver him over to Satan with the hope that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.
 - He may indeed be born again, there is no way to tell...
 - but until he brings forth a credible profession again,
 - the Lord commands us to regard him as an outsider.
 - The whole congregation is deal with him according to this manner.
 - Sometimes such a person will go on talking as if he is a believer, but we must not speak of him in this way.
 - We must let him know that Christians are distinguished by confession and repentance of their sin before Jesus Christ,
 - not by self-justification or by denying their sin.

TRANS> It is surely a very awesome and solemn thing for the church put a member out of the church and count them as an unbeliever...

- Jesus knows that we are surely hesitant to take such a step.

III. But Jesus assures us that we are fully authorised by Him to do this.

- Indeed, it is His church, and He wants us to know that He has given us the responsibility to act as His representatives on earth in this matter.
- . And so He says, “Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”
 0. The word **assuredly** is prefaced to this statement to make it clear that He really means this...
 - It is such a solemn thing that He uses an oath to confirm what He is saying.
 - And what is He saying?
 0. He is saying that whenever the elders act to either receive a penitent sinner into the fellowship of the church or to exclude an impenitent one,
 - they are speaking for heaven...

- . The language He uses here suggests that the thing has already been decided in heaven...
 - A very wooden translation bringing out the tense here would be:
 - “And whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you lose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.
 - . If the elders do what Jesus has described here...
 - If they make every effort to call Bill to repentance and he will not repent and they put him out of the church...
 - Jesus says that they are carrying out heaven’s directive.
 - They are only doing what heaven has already decided.
 - . By these words, Jesus is showing that His church on earth is fully authorised by Him to receive and to remove members from His covenant community.
0. But it is important to understand that Jesus is not authorising them to decide about ultimate destiny of those they receive and remove from the church.
- . There only job is to apply the guidelines He has given them to determine who is in and who is out of the visible church.
 - He has **now** given the responsibility to read the hearts of men and to determine the eternal state of their souls.
 - It is his will for one who is a believer to be excluded from the church for a time if that one has lapsed and will not repent...
 - He is not by this made an unbeliever, but He is counted as an unbeliever.
 - On the other hand, it is also His will that one who is a hypocrite, but who makes a credible profession of faith to be received as a member for as long as he maintains that credible profession...
 - It is not the elder’s task to try to read his heart, nor are the able to do so.
 - They rightly receive him if his profession is sound...
 - and it is God’s will that such persons be received.
 - . What this means is that just because you are in the church—and just because it is God’s will that you be in the church...
 - That does not mean that you are a true child of God.
 - It only means (or should mean) that you make a credible outward profession.
 - God will separate his real sons from the false sons at the last day...

- Remember the parable of the dragnet?
- . But the church positively errs when it either excludes those who do make a credible profession or when it embraces in its bosom those who do not make a credible profession.
 - 0) The worst example of excluding those who make a credible profession is that of the Jews who declared that anyone who confessed that Jesus was the Christ should be put out of the synagogue—
 - By such a decree, they became a synagogue of Satan!
 - 0) And of course there are many examples throughout history of the church embracing idolaters, fornicators, adulterers, thieves, covetous persons and all sorts of heretics that ought to be excluded.

TRANS> Surely it is a very solemn task for the elders to represent their Lord in determining who is received and who is excluded...

- And one that should be undertaken with extreme reverence and care...
- . Our gracious Lord, knowing this, provides special encouragement to the elders that He will bless them when they carry out this solemn responsibility.
 - 0. In verse 19, He says,
 - Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.
 - . Surely this ties together with what He just said about “Whatever you bind on earth being bound in heaven...”
 - . No individual should ever take upon himself the responsibility of removing someone from the church...
 - It is where at least two elders agree together to ask the Lord to recognise or to reject a disciple...
 - This is the idea referred to in James where a person confesses his sin to the elders and they pray for his forgiveness—and it says that God will forgive him his sins.
 - On the other hand, if they find a sinner in the church who will not repent of his sins and they agree together to turn him over to Satan,
 - and to put him out of the church,
 - the Father will also do this from heaven...
 - That person will be delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in order that his spirit may be saved.

TRANS> Jesus is assuring the elders who act according to His work that heaven will fully sanction their actions on earth and back them up.

0. Then He makes another very comforting to them in verse 20:

- vs. 20: For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them
- . Here He is promising His own presence with them when they meet together in His name to transact His business for the church.
 - His words have a wide application that can be given to them, but they especially to pertain to the meeting of the elders to determine this matter or who is to be excluded from the church and who is to be received.
- . Jesus is probably referring to a well known view of the Jews that when two Jews got together to study the Law, the Divine Presence of the Shekinah glory was with them...
 - Jesus is promising the elders that when they assemble for church discipline, He is the Shekinah Glory who is with them so that they are not alone.
 - They have the fullness of His blessing, support, and authorisation!

. What should this encouragement do for us?

0. For the elders, it should make them all the more humble that they are not to speak for themselves, but only as agents of the Lord...

- It should make them all the more diligent in prayer and in study of the scriptures that they might understand His will, lest they misrepresent Him...
- And it should give them boldness to speak His words with all authority because of their faith in His promise.

0. And for the members of the church,

- It ought to make them all the more earnest to pray for the elders and to see to it that they act in accordance with God's word...
 - And to support them when they must remove members or when they receive members.

0. But above all, let us see the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us!

- He has appointed all this for the sake of His people—
 - He has appointed that there should be a church for them and that they should be nurtured and guarded and protected there...

- And that if they go astray, that they should be sought out by that church, and that every effort should be made to reclaim them.
- He does all this because He is not willing that any of His sheep should perish!
 - He will see to it that they first hear the gospel and that they then continue in the gospel to the end.
 - He has authorised this whole procedure for our good and our safety, and we dare not disregard it as so many have done.
 - It is understandable why many would lose confidence in the church when it is so divided...
 - Be humbled because this is His judgement against us for our laxity...
 - It is His judgement because we have not been faithful over the years even to take that first step of going to our brother when he has sinned against us to show him his fault.
 - The result us, today we have a weak and powerless church that is not unified in what it believes.
 - How can we have confidence in such days?
 - We can have confidence in the Word of God.
 - The church is not defined by what men do, but by God's Spirit speaking through the Word...
 - And where we find disciples who are assembled together in the name of Christ, even if it is only two or three,
 - where we find them following the precepts in the word with confidence in Jesus Christ,
 - It is there that we can know that He is present,
 - authorising their actions as His own.
 - But if we want this blessing and if we want it to continue,
 - we must be earnest to do what our Lord has told us to do when our brother has sinned...
 - And then we must go on and do all that He tells us to do when our brother refuses to repent.
 - It is not our church, it is the church of Jesus Christ.
 - It is not for us to make up the rules of procedure, it is for us to earnestly submit to His will
 - Then we can know surely that we belong to Him.