

# Our Care of the Sinning Brother

By Prof. Barry Gritters

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**Bible Text:** Matthew 18:15-17  
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## Grace Protestant Reformed Church

O-11225 8th Ave NW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

**Website:** [www.graceprc.org](http://www.graceprc.org)  
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Matthew 18 is the word of God that we read this evening and we will read the first 20 verses and notice how the teaching of Jesus progresses from where it begins in verse 1 and the ambition of the disciples, to where it ends in our text, verses 15 and following. How it progresses from that ambition to where it ends in our text.

1 At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? 2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, 3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. 6 But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! 8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. 9 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. 10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. 11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. 12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? 13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. 14 Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or

three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 18 Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

That's the reading of the Holy scripture.

The text is 15 through 17, and especially 15 and 16. Let's reread that.

15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 16 But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

John 3:16, and immediately, your mind lights up, you know exactly what it says. Exodus 20, and immediately your mind lights up and you know exactly what it says. 1 Corinthians 13, the great chapter of love when someone says 1 Corinthians 13, you know exactly what the subject of the chapter is. There are certain texts in the Bible that all you need to do is give the reference and immediately your mind lights up and you know what the subject of the text is. Matthew 18 is one of them. You don't need to be a member of the church very long before you realize the importance of Matthew 18 right along with John 3:16. Genesis 1, Exodus 20, 1 Corinthians 13, Isaiah 53, and classic passages like that; you don't need to be an old member in a Protestant Reformed church to realize that Matthew 18 stands high in our estimation in its importance. It does so exactly because it says something fundamental about life in the church of Christ, how we live together as sinners because we're all sinners, we must live together. Matthew 18 says this is how you need to live with sinners. Just because Matthew 18 is so familiar to us, there's a risk that we don't understand Matthew 18 as we ought to and we think we do, we think we know exactly the way of Matthew 18, what steps we must follow in order to obey the Lord Jesus and we're pretty familiar with those steps. If someone sins against you, you go, you alone go to him alone or her alone and rebuke them, and if they hear you, you've gained them, it's finished. If they don't hear you, you bring one or two with you so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. If they hear them, it's finished. If they don't hear them, you bring it to the church. We're all familiar with the process of Matthew 18 but I say again, there's a risk that we misunderstand Matthew 18, even its process, when we don't see the depths of what is in Matthew 18. And so I want to preach this word of God this evening, "Our Care of the Sinning Brother," by beginning with the principles. There are five very important principles that are found in the text and

once we lay out those principles, the foundation will be there, and then we will see how not to make mistakes when we look at the practice, and then in the third point, the last one, we will look at the promise of Jesus that we are able to gain a sinning brother.

So our care for the sinning brother begins with principles, goes on to practice, and then we'll see In the end, the prophet, but we must understand, first of all, the principles. Number one is the principle of love. This principle comes out when we look at the one who sinned and ask ourselves what we think of them, and the first word that must come to our mind is love. Do I love them? That principle comes out in two ways in the text. In the first place, the text says if your brother sins against you. He's your brother. He's your brother and if the word of God in the Old Testament says that there are friends that are closer than a brother, it calls attention to the fact that that must be a friend who's very, very close because a brother ought to be close, and if I love someone, I especially love my brother. If I care for someone, I especially care for someone who's my brother. Now the family is not your earthly family with your earthly father and mother and your earthly siblings, but it is this family and it is a brother here. He's your brother. Do you love your brother?

And that principle comes out in the second place, because though your action needs to be motivated by love, it needs to aim at gaining him. That's the promise here. The activity of Matthew 18's process is ending in your gaining him, winning him, saving him, as we'll see at the end of the sermon. And the question is, do you want to gain them? And you only want to gain them if you love them.

So the first principle is love, love. And don't misunderstand love for someone to mean that when you're in their presence they make you feel good. There is that kind of love, and when I'm in the presence of my wife, or you, God willing, in the presence of your spouse, they make you feel good, and that's an aspect of your love for them but love is not, first of all, that someone makes you feel good. Love is not, first of all, that someone is pleasant to be around, or that someone makes you happy. Love is, like the love of God for us, a real determination in my heart to do them good, a plan to carry out, to do them good. And then because love is like God's love for us, love is a desire to do them good. Not just a plan that I make, but a real will that I am able to do them good. And then because love for others is like God's love for us, love is a doing good to the brother, even if it means dying to myself for the sake of the brother because God's love for us is the model of our love for the brother, it is a determination, a desire, and a doing. Then, God willing, if my love is used by God to win them, then I draw them to myself in sweet fellowship and say they're precious to me. That's love.

So the first principle has us asking the question, when we see a sinning brother in the church who's not repented, do I love them? And so make that very practical tonight. Maybe you know of someone in the congregation who's sinning and isn't repentant. What do you think about them? What do I think about them? Principle number one, I love them. I love them. Principle number two is the principle of protection. I am interested in protecting the family and I am interested in protecting all of the members of the family. I don't want any little one whom Jesus loves to be hurt, and I do not want the bride of Jesus

Christ in any way to be damaged. I am interested in protecting the church and all the members of the church. So that's emphasized as I indicated in the context and you saw when you read the chapter with me that it progressed from Jesus addressing the sinful ambition of the disciples. "You really want," and this is the second time, remember, he said that to the disciples, "You really want to know who's going to be the greatest? I'm going to take a little one, a little child. I'm going to set him in the midst. I'm going to tell you that if you don't become like him, you don't even enter the kingdom, much less have an important place in it."

So he's looking at a little child. You must be like that little child. You must, in the second place, Jesus says, and here's the progression, receive such little children, and here's the third thing he says about them, "Don't you dare offend one of these little children, because if you do, it would be better that a millstone were hanged about your neck and you were cast to the depth of the sea." Be like them, receive them, don't offend them. And then comes our text, if a brother sins against you, if there is sin impenitent in the church, you have a duty to protect, first of all, the little ones, but all of them, because all of us may be, in a spiritual sense, very, very little and very, very vulnerable. Do you have an interest in protecting the church of our Lord Jesus Christ? So when the church order speaks of discipline in Articles 71 to 78, 79 and 80 talk about the discipline of office bearers, when the church Order speaks of discipline in 71 to 78, of discipline in the congregation, it begins by asking about the purpose and goal of discipline and establishes two purposes and goals. Number one, our first principle, do you love the brother, the salvation of the sinner, and number two, do you love the church, the purity of the church? Because a little leaven leavens a whole lump, you want the leaven to be taken out, and the removal of that leaven from the lump begins with you having an interest in the protection of the congregation.

So ask yourself a question tonight. If you know of a member of the congregation, man or woman, young person or old, who has committed a gross sin, we'll talk about what kind of sin in a little while and is not repentant, are you interested in the well-being of the congregation, the protection of all of the people, and in a special way, the little ones? Love and protection. The third place, the principle of Matthew 18 is maturity both in the offender and the offended. You are the offended, he, sinner, is the offender. Now we're looking at both the subject of the action in Matthew 18 and the object of your action. Maturity is required and maturity is found in the text in two places. First of all, when Jesus says, your responsibility as the actor here is to tell him his fault, that's one word in the original Greek, tell him his fault, but it's a very important word that means to convince by careful argumentation; to argue a case; to explain a problem; to reason in such a way that you convince because you've convicted them of their sin. Now, that takes effort. That takes maturity. You need to reason from the word of God.

So that's the first place that maturity is found in the text, and in the second place, it's found in the expression, if he hears you, and we all know immediately that someone who hears you is not someone who simply opens his ear to you, sits down and lets the sound of your voice come in his ear and enter his brain. Hearing you is much more than that. Hearing you is hearing you, is hearkening to you, is understanding you and being

convinced by you and repenting because of your convincing argumentation. Does he hear you?

So first of all, are you able to convince from the word of God, that takes maturity, and are you able to make the judgment whether he has heard you. That takes spiritual maturity, doesn't it? You don't ask a child to carry out the actions of Matthew chapter 18. Oh, of course, you teach a child the principles of Matthew 18. You teach a child the way of Matthew 18. And if on the playground, someone says something to him that they ought not say. you teach that child to rebuke in a loving, careful way that sinning child and be finished with it if the child says he's sorry. But you don't ask a child to do the great work of Matthew 18 in the church of Christ when there is serious, impenitent sin. A child doesn't confront his teacher. A child does not address her teacher with the sin that the teacher committed against her. An immature person isn't able to reason from the scripture. An immature person isn't able to judge whether the person they've addressed has heard you.

And the same applies for the object of the actions of Matthew 18. Maturity is required. This is a prohibition, this principle of maturity is a prohibition of accusing someone with sin, which accusation could lead to their excommunication who isn't mature spiritually. You don't excommunicate a child, to put it very simply. You don't bring the process of rebuke of a sinner, of a child sinner, to the end where they're brought to the church and finally counted a heathen man and a publican. If they're a child, maturity is required.

There's another aspect of maturity that's very important here in the object of this action, and that is one whose mental capacity is not full, isn't disciplined. And the easy example of that would be that if, God forbid, you or I, when we get old, get a mental disease like Alzheimer and begin doing and saying things that we've never done or said before, awful things to our spouse, to our children, to the elders. You know very well that that person is not the object of discipline, but the object of mercy and you put them in an institution where they can't hurt themselves or others. They are not the objects of discipline. Maturity, that's the point here. Ask yourself the question, is the subject of this action and the object of this action, are they mature?

Fourth principle is privacy, and this speaks to the atmosphere of these actions. Privacy. And even though privacy isn't the only rule of Matthew 18, it's one of the most familiar ones to us because as soon as you say Matthew 18, and your mind lights up with what it teaches, you think, by yourself, and that's a very good thing. Alone, and that's a good thing. Or one or two that go with you, and that's a good thing. Privacy is the principle. The text is very clear, you and him alone, one or two with you, and even when you take it to the church, that doesn't mean put it on the congregational e-mail list. It doesn't mean to post it on the congregation social media page. It means tell the church, and that means tell the elders of the church, and we'll come back to that in a moment, what even that means, but the point is, privacy. If I know that you sin, and I'm the only one who knows that you sin, I go to you by myself, by myself.

And that's important because the principle of charity is the principle that love covers a multitude of sins. You recognize that as a passage that's found in more than one place in the Bible. But our sinful tendencies are to expose the sins of others. We've been hurt, I'm going to hurt you. You've done damage to me, I'm going to destroy you by letting everyone else know what you did to me so that everyone else knows how evil you are. That's our sinful tendency and so Jesus addresses that sinful tendency when he says, privacy is the principle. Keep it close, as close as you possibly can.

And that principle of privacy, that love covers a multitude of sin, is simply following the example of God's love to us. Because God loves us, he does not want to expose your sin, God's going to put his hand over your sin. And even in your relationship with him, just you and him alone, what God does with that sin is not keep bringing it up to you, but is to say that, "I am going to take that sin, I'm going to tie it to a cinder block, I'm going to go out to the 200-foot level in Lake Michigan and drop it off so it's gone. That's the way I," God says, "deal with you. I'm always interested in hiding sin, covering sin." And the basis of that, of course, is in the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which makes all of our sins go away.

Privacy is what God does with us. And now you object and say, "But isn't it true that in the end, the books are going to be opened and even the things I've thought about in my mind that no one else ever knew, no one knew, are going to be exposed in that great day of judgment?" And the answer to that question is, yes, that's true, but I assure you, it's not to bring you low. It's not to shame you. It's not to make you feel awful. But it will be for, number one, purpose to magnify the grace of God and the cross of Christ, and number two, to make you so profoundly thankful that eternity will not be long enough, will not be long enough for you to express your gratitude to God for the covering of all of those sins, many of them that you hadn't thought about for 80 years, covering every one of them.

So if in the end you say God does uncover our sins, he does, but not to shame you, not to make you feel poor, but to magnify his grace. The point is privacy. Privacy and that's built right into the system of Reformed Church government and the church order. Read that this evening when you get home. Start at Article 71. See that it begins with the goal of discipline, spiritual discipline, in addition to civil punishment, spiritual discipline for the well-being of the sinner and the good of the church, and then it goes immediately to talk about Matthew 18. Immediately. If you are sinned against personally, you go privately, follow the way of Matthew 18. And even the next Article that brings up the possibility of the consistory, don't bring it to the consistory if they repent. So, built right into the fabric of the church Order, so that when, I say once more, when we hear the word Matthew 18, what comes up in our minds is immediately privacy.

And we've learned that all of our lives, privacy, which brings up a very painful point and that painful point is that we have made some very serious mistakes in the past because we've been driven by the principle of privacy as probably the only principle in the whole Bible. We have learned in the past five years or so that consistories have committed very, very serious sins in the past by keeping private what never should have been kept private. Very serious sins. Consistories have confessed those sins, asked forgiveness for those

sins. But those sins were not sins of malice, they were sins of ignorance. In my knowing of those sins, there may have been sins of malice and a cover up in a sinful sense of the word, where they knew something ought to be known more broadly and said, "We are not going to let that happen." There may have been cases like that, but I don't know of any of them and what I know of in the cases that I was involved in, it was a sin, but it was a sin of ignorance, because we were not aware that there are certain sins that may not be kept private but must be made public even if you are the only one who knows them, and I'll come back to that in a little bit.

Privacy is the fourth principle and the fifth, of course, you can't say Matthew 18 without saying grace. The principle is grace and that comes out in the text in not so easy a way, but once I say it, you will say, of course. Your brother hurt you. Your sister did damage to you. Your sister or brother hated you in that act or those words. They don't like you. And Jesus says, you go to them in love for them and help them, and what's the word to describe that, that you go to someone who doesn't deserve to have your help? And the answer is grace. Unmerited favor, like the favor that God shows to you, you and I who do not deserve that favor, now we show that kind of favor to the brother or sister in the church that hurts us. The principle of grace.

Do you love the brother? Are you interested in the well-being, the protection of the church and all of the members of the church? Is there maturity? Will you deal in privacy? And will grace bleed all over everything you do? Those are the five principles. And then, and only then, are we able properly to understand what Jesus says is the practice of Matthew 18 and now we may look at that. There are three stages. The third we won't look at because that's another sermon, and that's found in verse 17, tell it to the church. I'll mention it, telling it to the church and excommunicating that person, but the business of this sermon is to ask what you and I must do as private members in the congregation.

Stage number 1, you go alone when a brother sins against you. Of course, the sin of the brother is not a sin that can be overlooked and simply ignored, and there are those kinds of sins, and if you are married, then you know there's all kinds of sins like that that you and your spouse deal with by simply ignoring them and letting your love cover them in that way. But there are other sins that you know that are serious enough that they cannot be, they may not be ignored. They're serious. He or she, your brother or sister, is impenitent. They cannot be ignored. Your brother sins against you and that brings up the first difficult question in the text: does that mean only against you personally so that it's your business, privately, that your sister slanders you and damages your name, or that your brother steals your property, or that your neighbor takes your spouse, or that a member of the congregation murders you or one of your family members by words or deeds, or that your neighbor in the congregation dishonors your authority that you may have over them? And there you see I ran through the commandments nine down to five in order. Is it only the case, and of course it is the case if they sin that kind of sin directly against you, but is it only those kinds of sins? What about the sins against the fourth commandment and Sabbath violation, or the third commandment and the taking of God's name in vain, or image worship, or idolatry? Is it the case that Jesus is saying, only those

sins that hurt you, you are permitted to deal with by way of Matthew 18, and all of the other sins you must not touch.

Well, that's a pretty popular opinion, but it's not a right opinion if you understand the principles behind Matthew 18 and very simple questions that you need to ask. You know of a brother in the congregation that committed a very serious sin. He's not repentant of it and because it wasn't directly against you, maybe only against God, and maybe only against your brother, but it wasn't against you, you're going to leave it? And you say, "That doesn't make any sense at all. I love him and I love the congregation of which he's a part, and if I don't do anything about that, then this is a risk to the congregation, and maybe a risk to the little ones in the church who are going to learn from that sin that he committed." Do you love the brother, and do you love the congregation? The fact of the matter, people of God, is that any sin, even if it's against someone else, or only against God, is your business. Your business. You ought to be wounded and grieved, Calvin said, whenever God is offended. And we are. We are.

So my brother sins, and it's against me no matter what direction he was aiming at in that sin, that way, that way, or this way, my brother sins, I have a calling to go to him. Now, let's watch that brother go. In your mind's eye, picture the one who's sinned against sitting in a chair in his house. Watch him get up and go. But before he gets up and goes, watch him prepare very, very carefully by prayer, by reading Galatians 6 verse 1 that says, "If anyone is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such a man in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself," yourself. Watch him pray over Galatians 6 verse 1 about his own spiritual state of mind and heart before he gets up out of that chair. Watch him prepare. Watch him open the word of God, because before he opens his mouth at the neighbor, he needs to find from the word of God what that sin was, why it's an offense to God, why it's damaging to the church, and what are the consequences of repentance or impenitence. He needs to study. He needs to think. He needs to work very, very carefully, writing some things down before he ever gets up from that chair and goes to his car or walks to his neighbor's house. Very, very careful spiritual preparation.

And then before he goes up from his chair and into his car, he thinks, "Is this safe for me, a man, to visit a woman alone?" And he knows the answer to that question and he has to figure out how to address that problem. Or if she has been sinned against by a man, she has to ask herself the very same question, "Is it safe and is it right for me to visit him there alone?" And then perhaps he and she get counsel from a wise elder or minister as to how to do that without naming any names. How do I go to someone of the opposite sex alone? But if it's safe, he goes, or she goes, and he goes alone.

The very first thing you do after you have spoken a few words is close your mouth and listen to what the other says because the principle of the ninth commandment comes in here. I must not judge rashly. I must not judge unheard. I believe that you sinned, but I am going to listen to you first before I begin to convict you of your sin. I'm going to listen to you. He that speaks before he listens, the book of Proverbs says, is a fool. And we must not be guilty of being foolish.



It brings up one example in my own life where some years ago, and I was sitting in the pew as a minister after the service, I got a phone call from someone who rebuked me for shaking hands with a visitor to that service who was excommunicated. "Why, Prof. Gritters, did you shake his hand?" And he went on for five minutes rebuking me for shaking his hand and finally, when I could get a word in, I said to the brother, "I didn't. I knew this man was going to be there. I made a very careful plan what I was not going to do, and I didn't do what you said. Why did you accuse me of that?"

We listen very carefully when we go to the brother and then convinced that he is guilty of that sin, we do all of that hard work of opening the word of God as we planned and prepared and explaining to them in love for him or her, and in love for us, and in love for God whose people these are and church this is, in love we speak and call them to repentance and show them the mercy of God in our Lord Jesus Christ. And if he is repentant, we rejoice with the angels of heaven as the context puts it in verses 13 and so forth and following, that we're going to rejoice with the angels in heaven over his repentance more than almost anything else. And if he doesn't, then we have work to do, but before we do that work of inviting others into our company, we warn him of the seriousness of impenitence. And maybe we go again, again. But if he repents, you've gained him, the matter is finished, and no one in all of the world will ever know from you what he or she did. You've covered it, sin.

The second stage is that you take with you witnesses. One is permissible, two may be wise, so that with that one and you, you have two, or with that two in you, you have three, so that Jesus says in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And here comes up the second difficult question of the text: who are these witnesses? There are two possibilities, one is right, the other can't be right. The one that can't be right is that these are witnesses of the sin, and the one that is right is that these are witnesses of what you now do in their presence in rebuking the sinner. The one that can't be right, that these are witnesses of the sin, is obvious on the face of it. It was a sin that you and only you knew, and you, by yourself, went to them. If it were known by others, it's not private and you need to go with those others, but Jesus is addressing a sin that you and only you know, so that when you bring witnesses, they're not there to say to the sinner, "We saw you do that," but they're there to listen to you and your explanation from the word of God of the guilt of that man or woman in their sin.

The other alternative has another problem, not just the one that's on the face of it, but the problem of the principles. If these witnesses were required to be witnesses of the sin, and there were no other witnesses of the sin, you're finished. And that doesn't make any sense either. He sinned. He's not repentant. There are no witnesses. So you conclude it's finished? No, you love him, and you love the church of which he's a part, and you love God, whose precious body this is, and you go to him. And yet, and yet, here's the problem with that right view: it seems to contradict the testimony of the Old Testament in Deuteronomy chapter 19. Everyone knows when they read Matthew 18 that Jesus was referring to a very important instruction in Deuteronomy 19 where the law of God forbade anyone, anyone to be executed without two or three witnesses. You may not stone someone for adultery or murder if there's not a witness of that sin. Now, there are

other ways that need to be other actions that need to be taken for those two particular sins especially but the point of Deuteronomy 19 is that unless there's a witness to the sin besides the one who says, "You sinned," you may not execute that alleged sinner. Witnesses of the sin. But Jesus is not taking Deuteronomy 19 and saying, "This is the application of it." He's taking the idea of Deuteronomy 19 and says, "This is my teaching and an application with witnesses."

Now, I want to conclude this point here, who are these witnesses, by saying, and yet, if in the church there is an accusation by one against another, and the other says, "I did not do it," and the accuser says, "And you did it," and the elders cannot find any witnesses of it, in the end, with one witness of this sin, you do not excommunicate a member of the congregation. That's the application of Deuteronomy 19 to Matthew 18. And then these witnesses listen to the rebuke. Here's the positive instruction here. If they're not witnesses of the sin, they're witnesses of what you do. They listen. Did you judge rashly or unheard? Maybe you did. We will tell you. And if we judge that you did not judge rashly or unheard, we're going to listen to what he says about his sin. We're going to witness your rebuke and approbate that rebuke and this activity, and if we find something wrong in it, we're going to caution you about what you did in the way of Matthew 18. But if they did not find anything wrong in the activity that you have engaged in, then they join you in pleading in love for the sinner to repent. And if he repents, you've gained him. It's finished. You and the angels in heaven rejoice. And if ever anyone knows about that sin besides you and the witness or two with you, then it's because you said something out of school and you now are guilty of sin. It's private. It's private. If he repents, you've gained the brother. And if he doesn't, you bring it to the consistory.

Well, there's where this sermon ends and the explanation of the activity of Matthew 18, but before I go on to the third point, there's two very important things that need to be said. Number one, Matthew 18 must not be applied in the same way to every case. I want to mention four very briefly cases where you must not use Matthew 18 in all of its steps. Number one, where an office bearer sins a sin that makes him worthy of deposition. You may not go by yourself to him, hear his repentance and say it's finished. You probably ought to do that, go by yourself to him and call him to repentance and maybe even hear expression of sorrow, but you're not finished there. You may not keep it private. You must inform the consistory because he made himself unworthy of continuing in that office.

You may not, in the second place, follow the way of Matthew 18 for sins that warrant civil punishment. If you know of a murder, for example, it's very difficult to imagine the case where only you and the murderer are aware of the murder, but just consider the possibility. You may not say, "It's Matthew 18, he's sorry for that sin. I'm going to be silent and no one ever will know it again." You may not do that. You ought to go if it's safe but you aren't finished then, you need to bring that to the civil authorities very, very quickly. And then there are two other categories that are like that. Number one, sins committed against children, and the sin of sexual assault. Be very, very careful what you say about Matthew 18 and how you would call a victim of sexual assault to follow Matthew 18? No. Or a child to follow the way of Matthew 18 for a sin that an adult

committed against him? No. Be very careful. There are some exceptions to the full following all of the steps of Matthew 18.

But aside from those exceptions, people of God, this is Jesus speaking to you tonight and it's a command, not a suggestion. This is in the imperative, "If your brother sins against you, you must go." And as soon as you start thinking about how this is going to play out, you will do almost anything to stop and not do it, to make an excuse not to begin, or having begun to say, "I can't go any further." This activity is so odious, the process of excommunication, which begins here in Matthew 18, is not pleasant. It's an extreme remedy, the end of it is, and it's always a distasteful necessity and because of that, you are going to be tempted to say, "I will not do that. I simply can't." And then you remember Jesus says, "Go." And Jesus asks you those questions in the principles, do you love him? Is he your brother or your sister? And are you interested in the protection of all of the others in the church? Go. Go.

So you go, and it's so painful because you know what the consequence might be if he doesn't repent, your friendship with him may be irreparably damaged, and you make a certain effort to take that first step and say, "He treated me so poorly, I'm not going to take witnesses. What he's going to do to me in retaliation for what I've done in love to him is too painful to imagine. I'm not going to go again." After you've gone again, perhaps you two or three together say, "We don't want to bring this to the consistory. Do we have to?" And Jesus says, "Go, go." This is a command from the word of God. Do you care for your sinning brother?

And then when you are tempted not to go, remember what Jesus promises you in the end of the text: if he hears you, you've gained your brother. That's a beautiful expression. It's a surprising one from a certain point of view. You? You? I thought God was the only one who can gain the brother. I thought God was the only one who could win a sinner. And now Jesus says to you, you have gained him. It's a beautiful expression but it's not the only time that that expression is used in the word of God. It begins already in the book of Proverbs. "He that wins souls is wise." You win souls? Yes, that's what the word of God says. And it continues in the New Testament. You think of what Peter says to that poor woman who's married to an unbelieving husband who will not listen to what she says. She's rebuked him. She's called him to repentance and faith. He will not listen. Peter says to her, "If they don't obey the word, they also may without the word be won by your godly conversation as you live in chastity and fear." You believing wife, may win your unbelieving husband. That's what the word of God says to you. You win them.

And you go back a couple of pages in the Bible at the end of the book of James and you remember what he ends the book with this exhortation, "Brethren, if any of you err from the truth and one convert him," yes, you convert him, "let him know that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save," save, "a soul from death and hide a multitude of sins." It's not once, it's not twice, it's three or four times that the word of God uses this expression where God attributes to you and to me an activity that belongs only to him. Let me say that again because it's an important way to put it and to think about it: God attributes to you the work that belongs only to him, winning souls and

converting sinners and gaining impenitent men and women. God attributes that work to you, which belongs only to him because you, in his decree and his command, are such an important instrument in his hand. When he does it through you, it's as though you did it. In the end, you're going to say, "I didn't win him, God won him," and God will praise you for that recognition. But you may also remember this, God says to you, if he hears you, you've gained him and that's what we want.

So go back to the beginning, Matthew 18, and in your mind lights up very, very simple truth, and now go back to the beginning of the first point and ask one simple question when you think of a member of the congregation, maybe he's here, maybe she's not here, you think of one member of the congregation that you know, you know, is in a bad way, here's the question. Do I love them? Do I really love them? Then maybe ask a couple of other questions too, but that's the one you start with. Do I love them? And if I love them, I'm going to die to myself and go to them and express that love to them by calling them to repentance. That's the way of Matthew 18. Amen.

Let's pray.

*Father in heaven, forgive us. Oh, forgive us for our sin of having seen sin and ignoring it. Forgive us, Father, for having seen sin and spoken in an improper way. Forgive us, heavenly Father, for not loving thy church as we ought to love thy church, and for not loving the little ones who need our protection. And then hold before us again the great promise that when we obey thee, it may be that we do what thou alone art able to do as tools in thy hand. Use us, Father. Bless thy church. Establish us in the faith and unite us more and more, even in this painful way, as we walk it. For Jesus' sake, amen.*