

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, September 10th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant

Biblical Discipline
Proper 18
Matthew 18:15-20

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Let us worship God, our light, and our salvation.

The Lord is the stronghold of our lives.

We desire to live in God's house
and to seek God in his holy temple.

**We have come with shouts of joy,
to sing and to make music to the Lord.**

Let us worship God in spirit and in truth.

**Teach us your ways and make straight our paths
in this hour of worship and always.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Dear God,
help us to worship you today.
May we listen carefully, pray honestly, and sing joyfully.
Send your Holy Spirit
so that our words will bring you glory.
Thank you that Jesus makes our worship perfect for you.
Help us remember that when we worship you,
we are part of your family;
we join everyone who loves you
around the world and throughout history.
In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn #499: "Tell Me the Old, Old Story" (V 1,2,4)

Tell me the old, old story
of unseen things above,

of Jesus and his glory,
 of Jesus and his love.
 Tell me the story simply,
 as to a little child,
 for I am weak and weary,
 and helpless and defiled.

Refrain:

Tell me the old, old story;
 tell me the old, old story;
 tell me the old, old story
 of Jesus and his love.

Tell me the story slowly,
 that I may take it in,
 that wonderful redemption,
 God's remedy for sin.
 Tell me the story often,
 for I forget so soon;
 the early dew of morning
 has passed away at noon.

(Refrain)

Tell me the same old story,
 when you have cause to fear
 that this world's empty glory
 is costing me too dear.
 Yes, and when that world's glory
 is dawning on my soul,
 tell me the old, old story:
 Christ Jesus makes thee whole.

(Refrain)

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
 Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

**Righteous Father,
 we who own more than we use,
 proclaim more than we experience,
 and request more than we need,**

come asking your forgiveness.
 We seek your salvation, then act like we save ourselves.
 We beg your forgiveness, then repeat our errors.
 We experience your grace, then act defeated.
 We rely on your power, but only in hard times.
 We have become confused and misguided.
 Forgive our every defection.
 Bring us to an unbroken commitment
 and a steady trust,
 through Jesus Christ, who is the way of hope,
 the truth of God,
 and the life of love,
 now and always. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Take comfort in the assurance
 that even those things that are hidden from memory,
 or are too deep for our words,
 are not beyond God's forgiving love.
 God, who knows us completely,
 bestows pardon and peace.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever. Amen.

Music Ministry: "In This Very Room" Choir

Responsive Reading

Psalm 119:33-40

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes;
 and I will keep it to the end.

**34 Give me understanding, that I may keep your law
 and observe it with my whole heart.**

35 Lead me in the path of your commandments,
 for I delight in it.

36 Incline my heart to your testimonies,

and not to selfish gain!

37 Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;
and give me life in your ways.

**38 Confirm to your servant your promise,
that you may be feared.**

39 Turn away the reproach that I dread,
for your rules are good.

**40 Behold, I long for your precepts;
in your righteousness give me life!**

Children's Hymn: "Down in My Heart"

I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

I've got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

I've got the peace that passeth understanding,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart;
I've got the peace that passeth understanding,
Down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

Children's Lesson

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Sermon

The hardest part about reading your Bible is the reading. We live in an age where reading has become secondary, people will watch videos, listen to podcasts, or do quick google searches for answers. So, to actually sit down and read your Bible has become almost unheard of in our modern church culture.

The idea of working through a chapter of a book of the Bible yet alone the whole book seems to be thought of as impossible by many. Yet it is only when you read the whole book of the Bible beginning to end that you really begin to get an understanding of what the Scripture truly says.

The biggest issue with everyone getting all of their Biblical knowledge from videos, podcasts and internet searches is that they are often not getting a full picture of what is being presented in the Word of God. Sometimes this is done on a purely accidental basis. However, often people that produce these videos or podcasts are also just doing quick internet searching for the keywords that they feel will support their idea and then grabbing that Scripture and using it to support their premise, not really caring what the Scripture really says, as long as they can use it to convince others.

And before you think it is only the podcast producer, or YouTube content creator, or church lay person that is guilty of this, in the Scripture we have read today there is one of the most often pieces of Scripture that is used out of context by pastors all over the world. In fact, it is so well known that I bet many of you here today can complete the verse from memory. **‘For where two or three are gathered in my name,’** does anyone know how this verse ends? **‘there am I among them.’”**

You have likely heard this at least once, as it is often used in context of prayer and prayer meetings. Yet, when we read this verse in the connect of the chapter or even just in the context of the verses that are preceding it, we learn that it really does have very little to do with prayer.

What many people are guilty of when they read the Bible is called eisegesis, they are trying to find a personal meaning and connection to every verse, usually to make them feel good about their lives and their choices, or to support their ideas, and in doing so they often are removing the context of the verse. What we are all called to do is the practice of exegesis, or simply put using scripture and the context around it to discover the meaning that God had when he had the author write that verse down. This is where the concept of Sola Scriptura came from during the reformation of the church. The fathers of the reformation saw the Roman Catholic church guilty of eisegeses and they sought to return to the practice of exegesis.

When we look at this Scripture in context, we see that the chapter deals with the ideas of dealing with our sin and selfishness, seeking out those who have strayed and in today's Scripture, what we are called to do when someone sins against us.

Matthew 18:15

¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

This is how God instructs us to deal with those who have sinned against us, and this first step is by far the most difficult. Actually, this first step is rarely done, people either ignore it completely or move on to another step, but this is where the Bible tells us to start. Truthfully if more of us were willing to follow the Scripture and go directly to a person who has offended us or hurt us in some way more often, we would probably find that many of the issues we have in our life would be much more easily resolved.

However, instead of doing this people often deal with conflict and sin in three different ways:

Some are peace-fakers; people who avoid conflict at all costs, they will do whatever it takes to avoid conflict, or if they are caught in it, they become like a turtle and retreat into their shell. These are the people who try to escape conflict in their lives and pretend everything is fine.

Then there are the peace-breakers, instead of retreating and avoiding these people believe the best defense is a good offense. So, the minute there is conflict they begin to amplify the issue, they bring in parties from wherever possible to support them and place blame upon anyone but themselves.

Finally, there are the peacemakers. Of the three this is the most difficult way of dealing with conflict in our lives, because choosing this path requires work. This is the biblical path; the narrow road and peacemakers are willing to discuss conflict and sins because they understand it is the only real way to peace and reconciliation.

How the peacemakers deal with sin and conflict is laid out before us today, and it all starts with a private conversation.

The first step on the path to peace is taken by trying to ascertain if your brother or sister has truly sinned against you. This is important because we sometimes react emotionally and instantly label something as a sin, or hurtful, when instead it is a pet peeve, personal preference or personality trait that does not agree with our idea of how things should be, in essence they do something that gets under our skin.

Ephesians 4:13

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

However, this is not a sin, and we should remember that in the book of Ephesians we are called to bear one another in love through these minor differences.

There are also times when we are called to overlook a minor affront and hold our tongues for the benefit of all parties involved.

Proverbs 19:11

¹¹Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

When we can, we need to set aside petty differences and have the grace to let things go that might otherwise upset us.

It is true there are some things which we can bear with and some things which we can overlook, however, we are not called to put up with sin. Another pastor put it well when he said, 'The church should be a safe place for sinners, without being a safe place for sin!' So, when we find ourselves in a situation that we cannot bear or ignore we should follow the next step that is given to us in the Scripture, go to the person in private and show them how they have sinned against us.

'**go and tell him his fault**' is how it is presented in the Scripture. We are to go to them directly, not wait for them to come to us, and we are to tell them what they have done that we consider a sin against us. This means we need to do so in a timely manner, we cannot wait for weeks and stew upon it, we need to do it quickly and we need to do it with conviction, we cannot go in and ask them what they think they did wrong, and wait

for them to guess the correct answer, we need to be honest and speak from our hearts telling them what they have done wrong to us in our own words.

Biblically speaking working towards reconciliation is always the Christians responsibility. In the book of Matthew, we are instructed whether we are the sinner or the one sinned against it is always our duty to go and make reconciliation with the other party. **'between you and him alone.'** If someone has sinned against you, hurt you or offended you, they should be the first person to know. This means if we need to talk to someone about it, it needs to be done in confidence with someone we know who will keep it private.

We do this because if we begin to talk to others before talking with the one who we feel has sinned against us we can actually cause them shame. When we are dealing with sin, it is best to keep the circle small and trusted, rather than make it a bigger issue.

Proverbs 17:9 says.

Proverbs 17:9

**Whoever covers an offense seeks love,
but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.**

We keep the circle small because it also minimizes misunderstandings. Sometimes when we think we have been sinned against, hurt, offended, or slighted against we will discover we are wrong. Sometimes when we meet our brother or sister in private, we discover that it was a simple miscommunication that is easily cleared up.

Also directly confronting the one who has sinned against us prevents us from festering in our anger or hurt and beginning to transfer that feeling to our brother or sister. This is why confronting conflict in a timely manner is important.

Leviticus tells us that we are to deal with issues quickly or that anger and hurt can lead us to our own sin.

Leviticus 19:17

¹⁷ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.

Finally, we go to them in private because in some cases they may not even realize that they have sinned against us. We are all guilty of hurting other people with our words and actions in this world and many times we do not even realize we have done so until they tell us.

When we are affronted, hurt, offended, slighted, or sinned against the Christian should seek out their brother or sister, quickly and quietly to confront the conflict directly. How many of us do this? It sure seems easy until we try to put it into practice.

One of the best ways of doing this is not to go to them seeking understanding and not an apology. Instead of going in and accusing them of sin, go to them and ask them to help you understand what happened or help you understand why they said what they said. If it is a sin that they refuse to let go of in their life, tell them you see something in their life that concerns you and you want to know if you are seeing things correctly, ask them to help you understand.

Also, when you talk with them make observations instead of accusations. It makes a conversation go much easier when you say, 'I feel like you have wronged me' than when you say, 'you lied to me'.

After all of this, the biggest reason we have for going to someone in private is because, **'if he listens to you, you have gained your brother.'** The minute that we start to make it a public affair we begin to make it harder for that person to be restored in the church. The word gain is a financial term, it means to invest in something and to profit from that investment. The Scripture says when we invest in ourselves and others we profit from that investment, because they have listened. The goal of a Christian is not to be right, not to win an argument, the goal is always reconciliation.

However, there will be times when a resolution cannot be reached in private. If the person who has sinned against you refuses to listen when you go to them and show them, you are to go to the next step.

Matthew 18:17

¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Jesus is quoting this directly from the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 19:15

¹⁵ "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.

This was the law for a reason, the words of one witness were not sufficient to make an accusation, it prevented people from slandering others. When we go to a brother or sister with a witness, we do a few different things.

We are establishing facts; the witness is there to hear what is said and to confirm that both sides are not just making things up.

The witness can observe the reaction of both sides.

The witness can often prevent the situation from escalating by acting as a moderator and calming the mind when emotions may get heated.

Witnesses can record events and having them present observing and recording the interaction can help communicate the seriousness of the situation.

Remember the objective of the meeting is always reconciliation. If the brother or sister repents, the whole process stops and all discussion of it ends. It should never become a topic of discussion or gossip.

Matthew 18:17

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truthfully there will still be people who refuse to listen even when you bring along an impartial witness. Which leads us to step three. This is a sobering and sorrow-filled moment when you bring sin to the church, the seriousness of the situation has truly escalated. At this point you will be involving the elders of the church and the pastor, this is a step that should not be rushed into, it should only be sought when there is continued, confirmed by witnesses, and unrepentant sin in the brother or sister.

This should not be done in a witch-hunt manner; people should not be looking into one another's lives like the sin police. This is meant to be brought forth in the same way as the previous two steps, from a loving heart seeking out reconciliation. The goal at this point is for the church to seek to bring about repentance and reconciliation between all parties and God.

While this step is serious, there are some good reasons for pursuing it:

It vindicates God's holiness.

It purifies the church.

It deters others from sinning.

It conveys the message of the Scripture of Biblical discipline, Biblical love, and Biblical restoration.

However, even with the seriousness of elder and pastoral involvement some may still choose to refuse to acknowledge their sin and repent.

The Scripture tells us, **'And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector'**. If someone refuses to repent, they are to be excluded from the church and treated as an outsider, an unbeliever, like a gentile or tax collector.

Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 gives us a clear picture of this idea of church discipline.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-5

¹⁴ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

The idea is that by being excluded from the church the person should come to realize the gravity of their sin and repent, and we are to wait with open arms for the return of our lost brother or sister, loving them as outsiders until they return to the church.

The idea of church discipline is foreign to many churches today, yet it is important to church life. The idea of discipline comes from the same root as disciple or 'to teach'. The church is meant to disciple people to discipline them in following Christ, and this is no different than how parents are expected to raise their children. We are called to use corrective discipline instead of vindictive punishment, the driving force being all interactions is not the casting out of the sinner, but instead the restoration of the sinner.

Hebrews 12:11 teaches us that.

Hebrews 12:11

¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

The idea of confronting sin in the church seems daunting to many, yet Jesus gives two promises to those who obey his instruction in the Scriptures.

Matthew 18:18-19

¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

The first is the promise of his power. When we follow the methods of Biblical peace making that are presented in the Scripture Jesus tells us that heaven itself enforces our actions.

The second is the promise of his presence when we are gathered together enacting church discipline.

Matthew 18:20

²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Do you see how this verse in context means something very different from the way it is usually quoted? In all of the Scripture today there has not been a single mention of prayer. The two or three that are referred to are the witnesses gathered either to confront the sinner or the church gathered to enact church discipline.

When we examine this verse in context its usage in the context of prayer completely falls apart. It sounds nice, but when you think about what it says, does that mean that God is only with us when two or three are gathered? Does that mean when I pray alone God is not with me? What about if there are four people praying, is God not there? after all the verse says two or three not two or more. You see when you critically examine the Scripture both in Context and logically you understand that it does not fit its most common usage. God is omnipresent, he is with you when you are alone and when you are in a crowd of one hundred thousand people.

God is with us through every step of our lives, even when we are in conflict with one another and as we go through the process of Biblical discipline, we need to keep what this Scripture teaches us front of mind.

We need to ask ourselves; "Am I treating the other person in this conflict, either the sinner or sinned against, as someone that God loves?" God wants us to always be treating one another with love, this is why we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves, including our enemies.

Then we need to ask ourselves, 'Is my goal revenge, retaliation or reconciliation?' We are called to be out among the lost in the world, not seeking to punish, profit or persecute. The Christian is responsible for reconciliation. Our goal should always be reconciliation and the return of the lost into God's family.

Finally, we need to consider our own attitudes. We need to consider how we are approaching them, it should not be with a sense of superiority, or a moral upper hand, instead it should be with the humility of one that understands we are also sinners. We are to come alongside our brothers and sisters.

Galatians 6:1-3

6 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

This is how Jesus Christ instructs his follower to deal with sin, to deal with conflict in our lives. Ask yourself if you are willing to obey these words that flowed directly from the lips of our God?

This is how we are to deal with sin in our lives, we do not have another option, or another way of dealing with sin if we do so we are ignoring the teachings of our Lord and Saviour. Just because it's hard, just because it's difficult, does not give us the option to opt out. Christians are called to be peace makers in this world and that is a narrow path that is hard to walk upon, but Jesus teaches us that he is with us every step of the way.

Brother and sisters as you walk with God in your lives this week, reach out to the lost in love. If someone sins against you deal with it directly and quickly, if you have sinned against someone confess your fault and be peacemakers in our community.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave his life upon the cross and was raised from the dead to grant us peace and reconciliation with God. As his faithful followers we are called to do the same in our lives, knowing that we have His power and His presence with us as we confront conflict in our lives, ²⁰ **For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.'**

Let us pray,

Help, Enlighten and Guide Us

Lord Jesus Christ,
 my Lord and my God,
 you know our weakness,
 and that we cannot do anything
 without your help and support.
 When we depend and trust in ourselves
 we fall into a thousand errors.
 Have mercy on us in our distress.
 Help, enlighten and guide us,
 that we may see what is truly good,
 desire it, and obtain it.
 We commend ourselves, body and soul, to you alone.
 With the Father and the Holy Spirit,
 you are worshiped as one God,
 forever and ever.
Amen.

Source: Wilhelm Löhe.

Hymn: "My Worth Is Not in What I Own"

My worth is not in what I own, not in strength of flesh and bone

But in the costly wounds of love at the cross
 My worth is not in skill or name, in win or lose or pride or shame
 But in the blood of Christ that flowed in the cross.

CHORUS: I rejoice in my redeemer, greatest treasure, wellspring of my soul
 I will trust in Him, no other, my soul is satisfied in Him alone

As summer flowers we fade and die, fame, youth and beauty hurry by.
 But life eternal calls to us at the cross
 I will not boast in wealth or might, or human wisdom's fleeting light.
 But I will boast in knowing Christ at the cross.

CHORUS

Two wonders here that I confess, my worth and my unworthiness.
 My value fixed my ransom paid at the cross

CHORUS

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewspert offering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer **(Congregant Prepared)**

Closing Hymn #485: "Saviour Like a Sheperd Lead us"

Saviour, like a shepherd lead us:
 much we need your tender care;
 in your pleasant pastures feed us;
 for our use your folds prepare:

blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
 you have bought us; yours we are.
 Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
 you have bought us, yours we are.

We are yours; in love befriend us;
 be the guardian of our way;
 keep your flock from sin, defend us;
 seek us when we go astray:
 blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
 hear your children when we pray.
 Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
 hear your children when we pray.

Let us always seek your favour;
 let us always do your will.
 Jesus Christ our only Saviour,
 with yourself our spirits fill:
 blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
 you have loved us; love us still.
 Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
 you have loved us; love us still.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,
 we, your unworthy servants, give you humble thanks
 for all your goodness and loving-kindness
 to us and to all whom you have made.
 We bless you for our creation, preservation,
 and all the blessings of this life,
 but above all for your immeasurable love
 in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ,
 for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.
 And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies
 that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise,
 not only with our lips, but in our lives,
 by giving up ourselves to your service,
 and by walking before you
 in holiness and righteousness all our days,
 through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
 to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
 be honor and glory throughout all ages. **Amen.**

Benediction

May you, people of God, know that
God our Father made you and guides your every step;
Jesus Christ gave his life for you and brings you new life;
the Spirit keeps you in the Lord's presence and empowers you to serve.
May almighty God continue to bless you and move you to give thanks. **Amen.**