

Mt 18

Elders meeting: Fellowship of Christ

We have touched on some very key issues for our fellowship this month. The first being in God's word. As priests unto God we are each required to come before the Lord on an individual basis and hear his voice in His word. We have to feed our souls. I hope all of you are becoming like Barbara's testimony last week, you feel lost without your word time. If you are struggling in this area don't give up. It will change your life if you will continue in it. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly! Eat the bread and the wine. Taste and see the Lord is good!

And then last week we talked about the great need to have the love of Christ permeate our relationships! How love keeps no record or wrongs. We are to bear with each other and forgive one another as the Lord forgave us. We are commanded (not requested to LOVE ONE ANOTHER) That message really spoke to me. I hope you all know that I pray about what I am to share with you and try to get a confirmation of some kind that God is leading me to share a certain topic. Last week I prepared a sermon and set it aside. Sometimes I have two different things on my heart and I wait to prepare it until I sense God's leading. Sometimes that means I put it off until Saturday afternoon and I don't like to do that. I like to be prepared. But I have thrown away too many messages I prepared before I really got the Lord's leading.

I say all that because I want you to take the messages as from the Lord. Of course you should discern and confirm with Scripture too. But it is not just what comes to mind but something that is prayed over that is presented. I am as amazed as anyone sometimes at the direction He leads. That message last week is still stirring in me. We can't go on as a fellowship unless we will obey the command to love. Will you let God love the person that grates on you the most? Will you pray for God's love for them? Can we become a fellowship of love? When I was applying for a pastoral position a year ago I wrote in my resume that part of my vision for a fellowship would be to be a place of brotherly love.

Today is another foundational message that we must agree upon to have a healthy fellowship. What do you do when a brother sins against you? Jesus talked very little about the future church function. He talked about future events and coming difficulties, about spreading the gospel but as far as church function goes this is the only thing I can recall other than the message last week. Paul gives us much more information on church function than Jesus. But here we have the one instruction of Christ as to the operation of the church.

If we love Him first and one another, become a house of prayer, remember his death, and preach the gospel most everything else will fall into place. But if there is sin in the church – and since we are not yet glorified it will happen – what do you do?

Mt 18:15-17 First we can observe that “If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” Who is to go? The one who has been sinned against. The sinner may not realize his deed or the extent of which it affected you. We often respond to offense with, “Well he was the wrong one so he needs to make the first move to set things straight.” But Jesus doesn’t let us get away with that. We must make the move to point out what we see was wrong, show him his fault. I find it is helpful to use “I” when you speak about the offense because the offender doesn’t tend to get as defensive. It has to be out of love. 1Cor 13 says whatever we do if it is not based out of love we are wasting are time – loose paraphrase. Pray before hand for a loving approach and presentation. I have found myself crying out of compassionate love for the one I am trying to help see his wrong. That is disarming and helps them be receptive.

Who knows about this at this stage? Two people. “just between the two of you” What is human nature? Come on, we are them. Yep- tell our friends, why? We want people on our side. We are hurt and we want to share the pain or we want a confirmation for our actions, some sympathy. Just the two of you! We have to exercise self-discipline here because the person may repent, but if he hears it from someone else, you risk opening the wound and infection of bitterness.  
HOW MANY PEOPLE KNOW? 2

If he sees his fault and repents you have won your brother over. That is the rest of the verse. James 5:19,20 That is the loving thing to do. If you love him you can’t just say, “Oh I’ll forget about it and maybe it will blow over” – not if it is sin and you truly love the person. WE must see the destructiveness of sin in our lives and in our fellowship and deplore it.

Vs 16 “But if he will not listen, take one or two others along” Now how many know? At the most 4. JUST 4! And here Jesus quotes from one of his favorite books, Deut 19:15 “so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Not so you can get them on your side, not so you can all gang up on the person, but that they might intercede and hear what each party is saying as a witness to the communication.

Often another set of ears can find the common ground and a solution to a disagreement. Then again, that other party may confirm the offender has hardened his heart and will not listen to loving correction. Still only 4 at the most know. You can’t draw people into choosing sides because you are all on the same side. We are talking about someone in the body who has sinned against

you. Maybe he cheated you in business, shared something you asked him to keep confidential, flirted with your wife? ? ? The goal is restoration and forgiveness. If one member of the body hurts all the members hurt with it.

Vs 17 "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;" Now others can know and try to encourage repentance and restoration. There is an attitude today that says, "just keep it a secret and don't let anyone know" At the Wesleyan Church after I left and discovered what sin was hidden I was encouraged over and over not to tell anyone. We had gone through the steps one and two and got nowhere and yet no one was to know. In the mouth of more than three witnesses every word was established yet it remains buried.

Do you remember Achan's wedge? If that wedge remained buried the nation of Israel would have stayed right there! The church has to know and then there can be a pleading of the congregation and a realization on the part of the offender that "be sure your sin will find you out". To cover it is to do harm to both the body and the offender.

Some say that by church Jesus means the elders. Sorry this word is ekklesia meaning all who assemble.

If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. This is interesting because Jesus was a friend of sinners and tax collectors. Jesus' example of how to treat them was as the lost who are loved by the Father. Jesus' example included laying down your life for them. But on the other hand, they are not included with the disciples. Some things are not shared with them because they are not able or ready to hear. In other words treat them as unbelievers outside the church. They could not receive the word of instruction the church gave them and are caught up in the web of sin, refusing to repent and be changed. We don't give up on them but neither do we count them as family.

This is a tough instruction but the price for ignoring it is division and the invasion of evil into the church. Let us determine that we will follow the guidelines Christ gave us. Let us especially determine to act in love when sinned against, not telling anyone but going to that brother. Most of our problems will end right there and relations will be restored. And one of the most difficult of all is the "just between the two of you"... isn't it? Let's obey the Lord's instruction. Amen?