

Gospel of Matthew

18:7-9

Serious About Sin



One of the problems with sin is that it works against the Kingdom of God which runs on love.

Quote from last week: *“When I say we **do wrong to others**, I mean that we can be suspicious, mean-spirited, cruelly competitive, impatient, looking for ways to do someone harm/cause them damage. We can be without empathy/mercy regarding someone else’s pain or loss, stingy, envious and resentful. We will lie/deceive, participate in malicious gossip, we can enjoy keeping discord going, we can be unfaithful and even traitorous, we can betray a confidence, pilfer and steal, cheat, lust, revel in filth, vulgarity, and vice, and all the variations of these sins that do evil to others.”*



A person cannot love people, especially **all** people, when they are participating in the sins of human nature – the common stuff of this world! These are the sins of character that degrade the people of the world – that insulate it from God, and keep it firmly in the back pocket the Kingdom of Hell! The Kingdom of Hell runs on malice, envy, competition, and combativeness! It likes people just fine unless or until they get in the way! Then they are obstacles to be beaten down and discarded like garbage! When this mentality is carried into the Kingdom of God by someone who **claims** to have given themselves to Jesus, we are in trouble. My assessment of the church in general is that we ARE in trouble! The method of the world has been permeating our churches everywhere, but especially our mega churches. It begins with the leadership that perhaps 30-40 years ago began styling themselves on a “business model” in the interests of efficiency. Perhaps it was the big new idea in the seminaries, perhaps it was a popular book that was passed from pastor to pastor. I really don’t know. So churches are being run like businesses, with strata of supervisory oversight, pastors wielding power over pastors, and unfortunately, all the power struggle that exists in business is just duplicated in the church. Such attitudes and behaviors are completely inappropriate in the Kingdom of God and have to be confronted vigorously by the rank and file – by the people in the congregation as they encounter and recognize it!

*I remember now-disgraced mega-church pastor Mark Driscoll boasting before the many thousands in his congregation in his Seattle church, Mars Hill, a rich and outwardly successful church of huge reputation in the evangelical world. He boasted that at Mars Hill people had to jump on the bus, and that behind the bus lay “a mountain of bodies”. Such was the power of his personality that no one thought to challenge him on that terrible boast!



It wasn't until later when persistent allegations of double-dealings and abject cruelty within the power structure of the church – the staff - began to gain traction through social media that people began to take statements like this seriously. After years of allegations being ignored or lightly investigated, the board caved to pressure and began to really “investigate” internally what they had known to be true for *TWO DECADES*, and within months he had been asked to leave his position as senior pastor. His apologies were feeble at best – damage control at best. He really didn't seem to get what he had done wrong!

This is epidemic in the church. The latest “big”/well-known names to fall are Bill Hybels and James MacDonald – both of whom were investigated and the allegations found to be “credible”, which is the technical term for TRUE! Intimidation, cutthroat practices with underlings, sexual misconduct, and financial misconduct. James MacDonald, of Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, Illinois, was making *almost a million dollars a year in salary*, not to mention the considerable revenue he was raking in on royalties from the church's popular songwriting and worship ministry, “Vertical Worship”, and its radio ministry, “Walk in the Word”, and, I think, he was making money from writing books too! There is nothing wrong with good salary – especially for the head of such a large organization. But that amount of money was obscene. It grew a monstrous ego in the man and helped to make him into the monster he turned out to be!

But this should have never been allowed to happen by the board members and pastors and members of that church. Can a person be considered to be too big and important to be confronted over character issues and sin?! Not in the church! Never!

Now they have become a stench in the Kingdom, the community, and it even garnered national attention. Now the church is struggling for damage control! But it never should have happened if all the people were knowledgeable in the word enough to protecting the Name of Christ and the purposes of God in their church! It is part of what we are called to do!



It is not just pastors who transgress – although we seem to make the biggest splash. I have heard the many complaints of pastors, good men, venting their misery at having to try to lead in churches where there is a continual clash of egos and alliances on the board and within the congregation! I am so glad to have been spared that here, in blue collar rural America, but we have also been careful to cultivate the values of the Kingdom here. That is why I am often so hard on us on Sunday mornings! If you actually **get** the predominant message from the pulpit, I, or someone else won't have to show up on your doorstep to confront you on unacceptable behavior or an obvious attitude problem that is infecting others! But I know we are as filled with natural human inclinations as any church that is failing right now. The majority, maybe all of us, have that predator waiting inside of us for a chance to escape and pounce. But so far, we have let the Spirit of God keep the peace. There is not peace between everyone that attends here, but I believe that good faith efforts have been made to not let offenses get the best of us and spread to others. And, of the disputes I know of, the antagonists involved want it resolved but don't know quite how to do it – but most are praying for an opportunity and would jump at the chance if they saw it.

Here is the thing – sin begets sin. *This is the worst thing about the public school system. Kids from all over the community gather together in one place and of course, socialize. In socializing, they talk, they watch each others mannerisms, style of clothing, hair styles, and most often, instead of learning the best from each other, lacking supervision and guidance from home, they learn the worst. Or even with love, care, and home, they chose to depart from the path and go their own way, and follow their so-called friends! Some of it is harmless enough but it is the bad stuff that gets the front and center these days. If it is a new way to stretch boundaries, it goes viral in the school community! Ever since the schools swore off of teaching and enforcing the Judeo-Christian ethic, it has been thus. Now the public school systems have transitioned into enforcing a new morality – pro LGTB-XYZ, ethnic sensitivity, white privilege, ethnic diversity, religious and (unless it has to do with Christianity, equality of the sexes, and no “weapons” (jackknives), no bullying, etc. They are as severe and unbending on the main tenants of this new morality as the old Puritan schools were hard on their students 200 years ago with the old morality! And so, change speeds on. Now the process of cultural change, along with its split with the Judeo-Christian ethic, is sped along by the internet which knows no boundaries in its dark excesses and its falseness, and the laughable inconsistencies of its pseudo moral outrage and its many



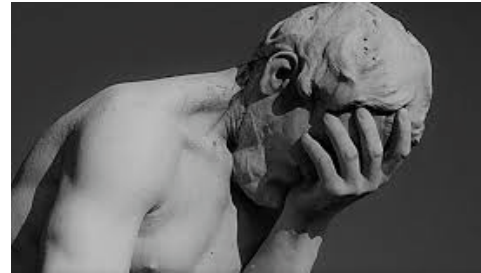
Well, Jesus warns us that although we live in this mess of darkness and confusion, we are not to lend ourselves to it! Don't fall for it! Stand up to it! Be the resistance! Be strong and be the counter-culture! This is not so that we can win back the culture to the Judeo-Christian ethic. We are past the tipping point – actually long past! Pandora's box has spilled out and it cannot be stuffed back in, so that is not going to happen!

This is so that we can promote the name of Jesus! Only Jesus makes the difference in people's thought processes! The truth of scripture grounds those who are trusting Jesus, stabilizing and protecting our thoughts. If our #1 mission in life is to bring the people in our lives to faith in Jesus, those in the Kingdom of God will survive this perilous age with their faith, their perspective, and their purpose, intact! Arguing and debating ideas only serves to expand the widening gap in people's viewpoints. But Jesus brings sense, consistency, and unity back to the equation as He draws people into His love and into His sphere of influence!

The alternative is not good. “*Woe*” warns Jesus to the people who waver; who are tempted to mix the Kingdoms, who want to take some pieces of the Kingdom of Darkness over with them into the Kingdom of Light, who want to be cool, who want/need to be accepted in the culture, and who in their impudence and carelessness in handling scripture, influence others in the Kingdom of God to take back some of the territory they had previously given to God! “*If you eat of the fruit you will not surely die*” they lie! “*Enjoy your freedom in Christ*” they hiss! “*This is the age of GRACE! You will be forgiven!*”



This whole passage is about sinners sinning and influencing people to sin! Sin begets sin! As I began this morning, just like in school, some people in the church seem to easily be swayed by those in the church who are not really following Christ, to join them in their sin – rebels making rebels! Then what usually happens is that they cop an attitude toward the others at church and soon they are gone – out into the world, retaining a sour taste in their mouth, blaming Christians, the church, the pastor, as they try to make up for lost time and begin to build - bad choice upon bad choice - a life of regret! Jesus says it will go bad for both the influencer and the influenced - for *anyone* who continues to live a life of sin even as they Name the Name of Christ as their Savior! They are “tasters” and soon, inevitably, the Name of Jesus will turn sour in their mouth!



[Heb. 6:4-8]

By the way. This is a classic example of Jesus' use of overstatement to get across an important point in the strongest possible terms. It was a common ancient technique of speechmaking in that time and that culture. So Jesus says it is better for a person who tempts and causes someone else to fall into sin to hack off the arm or foot that helped them do it. It might help such a person to think better of doing the same thing next time! It is better to go to hell, He says, with one foot than with two as there is that much less of a person to torment! He also says it would have been better for a person if they were born maimed than to have been born whole – especially if that limitation would keep them from sin and/or causing another to sin!



But I have to say, I don't think Jesus was expecting us to actually hack off our own arms or feet to stop ourselves from sinning. It is not our appendages that cause us to sin but it is in our minds! Our minds tell our appendages what to do or not do. It is our heart, or our core person, that decides what we really want.

And we are not expected to blind ourselves because of some form of lust. Lust resides in the brain, not the eye. There is no such thing as an “evil eye”, but evil people are as common as dirt. So Jesus it not advocating that His followers prove their dedication to purity and sinlessness by maiming our bodies. He is just saying that maintaining and protecting ourselves from sinning or causing others to sin is vitally important. We cannot relax, we cannot give in, we cannot let ourselves be influenced by others, or we will be lost to God. We will prove ourselves to be tasters only. Our identity has to be in Christ, not ourselves or anyone else. If our focus is on Him we will be true, we will be an effective servant of Christ, loyal and undivided.