**Immediate Repentance; Instant Forgiveness**

Based on [Matthew 18:1-20](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt18.1-20)

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The central teaching of the gospel lesson today is this: **In the church that Christ builds, we must always speak the truth in love.** **In particular, he teaches us how we are to speak the truth in love to an erring brother in the faith.** Now, the truth part is easy, we are to know God’s commands and promises as recorded in Holy Scripture. Your confirmation instruction was to aid you in this…but proficiency in the word of truth comes from lifelong study and daily immersion in the word of God.

Today, Jesus focuses on how to go about speaking the truth in love, especially to those who are not living in it. This does not come easily, which is why Jesus had to teach it. And Lord help us…we need it now as much as ever. **Because today speaking the truth in love means political correctness, or niceness.** Did you know that the word nice originally meant stupid or ignorant? In many ways it still does; because the nice person is the person who never offends anybody, and that as a rule is foolishness. **But Jesus wasn’t nice, he was a stone of offense, and by his cross he cuts through your pasteboard mask to confront the evil spirit within you; in order to bind him up and cast him out.** Niceness is tame and peaceful; love can be too; but it can also be spiritually violent, a struggle that requires virtues of temperance, modesty, self-control and humility.

We speak the truth in love, even at the risk of offense, and Jesus teaches us how to do it. To speak in love means to speak (1) with a childlike spirit, (2) with an eternal perspective, (3) with a disciplined approach from Jesus, and (4) with a heavenly assurance.

First, (1) we speak the truth in love by speaking with a childlike spirit. “**At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

To humble yourself like a little child means to live without pride and without doubt. A child has no pride. **He is not self-conscious “aware of his nakedness” as Adam and Eve were once they ate the fruit and gained forbidden knowledge.**  Pride keeps a person from loving his brother as he ought to. So does doubt. But a child isn’t afraid to tell someone what they know to be true.

We were camping at Park Lake a few summers back, and my son, Noah, saw a gang of kids riding their bikes past our campsite. He yells out to them, “**hey, you guys forgot to wear your helmet**.” // Grandpa likes to smoke his cigar and guess whose the only one who’s not afraid to tell Grandpa he shouldn’t smoke? Again, Noah. And when he says so, Grandpa doesn’t get mad. He doesn’t stop smoking, but he doesn’t get upset and cause a family feud. Grandpa knows Noah is speaking what he things to be the truth in love.

That brings us to number (2) we speak the truth in love by speaking with an eternal perspective. And that’s the beauty of childlike humility. It wouldn’t even occur to Noah not to warn his grandpa about the dangers of smoking. Because he might not believe you? Well tell him why smoking is bad then.

This is how children think, and to my understanding this is how manipulative grown-ups have learned to use wives tales to control behavior. **Turns out, you can’t catch a cold from not wearing your jacket. That was just to get kids to wear one.**  Turns out, reading in the dark doesn’t damage your eyesight, it was just a way to get kids to go to bed. And did you know it doesn’t take more muscles to frown than to smile? 11 to frown, 12 to smile. But hey, kids know it doesn’t make sense to do something that will harm you or takes more effort for less reward.

It wouldn’t even occur to a child not to warn someone who is about to harm himself. Why does it occur to adults? **Because we know it might offend, they might accuse us of being judgmental.** What if we didn’t know these things? What if we simply expected, like a child, that of course people want to know the truth, and of course I want them to know it? Then you would be humble, like a child, not proud and not doubting the right thing to do? Then your rebuke is from “the mouth of babes” and you can’t rebuke a child for speaking the truth…that would be cruel.

Smoking, drinking, these sorts of things aren’t sins because God doesn’t forbid them. **Anything can become a sin when abused, but most decisions we make in our life don’t threaten our salvation per se.** But some things do, works of the flesh do. Idolatry, drunkenness, jealousy, rage, sexual immorality, these things are always sins, always separate us from God and grieve the Holy Spirit and are serious business.

Jesus says, **“And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. 9And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell*3* of fire.”**

The truth is that those who practice sin will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. **You have a duty to speak that truth in love, and essential to doing that is always keeping an eternal perspective**. It is better to go without on earth, than to spend an eternity in hell. Smoking a cigar is one thing, what do you suppose a child would do if he found out his grandpa practiced real sin that would land him in hell. Would a child sit on that information? Would he say “Grandpa knows what he’s doing and he seems happy enough right now.” No, by faith he’d see the situation as it really is. If he saw his grandpa playing Russian roulette with a six-shooter he’d say, “Grandpa, don’t…it’s not worth it. You could kill yourself.” And a child who see’s someone playing Russian roulette with his soul would without a doubt say “grandpa don’t be a fool! It’s not worth it!” Grandpa might yell at mom or dad for saying that, but not a grandchild.

Childlike humility combined with an eternal perspective are two essentials to be able to speak in love to your brother in the faith. If you speak as an adult, it is as if you haven’t a log in your own eye. **But as a child who sees a real threat, you want to save him, call him away from the edge, that’s love.** He might not see the threat. He might think, “Well isn’t that cute that you believe in fairy tales like the easter bunny, fantasia, and hell” and pat you on the head and send you on your way. But it’s not you who will convert him anyway, it is the Holy Spirit who works not through adults or children, clever or nice people. He works through his word no matter who speaks it. The difference is for your sake, for your conscience, are you speaking in love?

And this Eternal Perspective is a reminder of how God thinks of your brothers in the church, fellow children of the Father. “**10“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.*4* 12What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 13And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14So it is not the will of my*5* Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.**

Jesus goes after the one lost sheep. This is the ministry of reconciliation he has given to his church. And there is a procedure he gives to do it, which leads to number (3) we speak the truth in love by speaking with a *disciplined approach* from Jesus. He says**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.**

If your brother sins, go to him with a childlike spirit and an eternal perspective. “This my brother may die in his sin and be thrown into the eternal fire”. So go to him. And he may listen to the Holy Spirit, repent and you have restored him. Christ in you has taken this lost sheep on his own shoulders and restored him to the flock. God be praised.

Alternatively, the brother might not listen to you. Even then, you have not given your brother all the love you owe him. Jesus says, “**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.”** Yes, he might get mad that you told on him. He might prove his proud spirit by doubling down. But this step is necessary in the hopes that your brother might listen to more of you. Where two or three are gathered in my name, Jesus says, there I am among them. There Jesus promises to be with you calling your brother whom he died for to repentance. But still he might not listen. So the other reason for this step is to have witnesses.

Jesus continues, “**17If 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.”** Perhaps he will listen to the church**.** If not this final step is important. God once told Ezekiel that he was the watchman of Israel, that he needed to warn the wicked or else they would die in their sins and he would be guilty of murder, because he didn’t love them enough to warn them. In the church too we are our brother’s keeper. That’s what Cain said, after he murdered his brother Abel and was confronted by God about it. “**Am I my brother’s keeper?**” And God said to Cain, “**What have you done?**” What have you done to your brother?

I was talking to a friend who shared that his son had asked him something about Cain. “**If God knows everything, why did God ask Cain “What have you done?”** Didn’t God already know? And my friend gave the right answer…do you know it?.........God asked Cain “What have you done?” not because He didn’t know, but in order to give Cain a chance to repent.

We owe at least that much to every brother or sister in the church a chance to repent. That here Jesus is talking about “in the church” is crucial. If we had to call to repentance every unrepented of sin of our neighbor, we could hardly get through the day. Those outside of the church, everything they do is an offense to God, for as Paul says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” We are to call the world to general repentance, that is—to acknowledge their sinful condition and turn to Jesus for salvation. But the housecleaning of God’s people can only happen within the church. Paul writes, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God judges those outside. “**Purge the evil person from among you**.”

Finally, number (4) we speak the truth in love by speaking with a heavenly assurance.Jesus says**, “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.”** When the church comes together and binds someone to their sin, this has effect in heaven before God. This tells the unrepentant brother that they are outside of God’s grace and need to repent. For those who confuse being loving with being nice; they think the opposite. The brother will be offended and he’ll never come back. Maybe, but that’s not up to you. It never was. It is up to the Holy Spirit who works, not through your being nice and non-confrontational, but by speaking the pronouncements God has ordered and authorized you to do, bind him on earth and in heaven, “**deliver him to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord”** (1 Cor 5:5).

All this is not to condemn, but to save. If someone has gangrene, you don’t cut off the limb in order to mutilate, but in order to heal. And here is the eternal assurance that is part and parcel to speaking the truth in love…it is by God’s order that you bind, or are bound. So too, it is by God’s command that you forgive, or are forgiven. As a member of the church you are to give your erring brother a chance to repent, even as you are given that chance.

And the gospel is this: The chance to repent is not a promise of some long distant, but attainable goal. A chance to repent is a chance to immediately be forgiven. There is no penance to be done; no weeping in sackcloth and ashes; no forty days of sorrow before Nineveh may be destroyed. **Forgiveness is immediate, instantaneous, seventy times seven times full and complete the moment you repent.** I can’t understand how Christians can think it is “all Law” to call someone to repentance. Because of the blood of Jesus Christ who paid our debt of doing penance before the Father, “repent now” simply means “be forgiven now”, “have a clean conscience now”, “Come to me and I will give you rest for your soul right now”, you may not have a tomorrow so repent today, Jesus says, “and you will be with me in paradise.”