

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

May 17, 2020

“Unity in the Family”

*Zoom & in-person Sunday school at 8:30, in-person Services at 9:15 & 10:45 with King’s Kids
(Video live-taped sermon online by Monday afternoon).*

NEWS

Welcome back, or welcome remotely, either way welcome - may the Lord be blessed.
Church camp at Little Bitterroot Lake, August 14-16.

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MATTHEW 18:7-9 ~ ⁷NASB “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! ⁸“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹“If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

It’s the second time Jesus has talked this way in this Gospel and it’s worth taking a moment to clarify the meaning (Matthew 5:29&30).

Please note that the language Jesus is using is symbolic. He used dramatic metaphorical discourse to stress the tremendous importance of His point.

Jesus is emphatically teaching His followers how to be His followers, and most of His followers, over the centuries, have either misunderstood, or ignored these instructions... Crazy!

Did God really say that? Surely God didn't mean what He said.

What Jesus intended with the hand, foot and eye thing, is to drive home the absolute seriousness with which He takes the issue of unity in His Body.

MATTHEW 18:10&11 ~ ¹⁰NASB "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹"For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Again, this is Jesus using language that paints a picture that not only helps us get His point, it helps us see its incredibly importance.

The strange doctrines about Guardian Angels... Are they Biblical? Does it matter?

We have full access into the very throne room of God... Ephesians 2:18, 3:12, Hebrews 10:19&20, Matthew 27:51&52, etc.

Contextually, "Little ones," means every Christian saved by Grace, because they received God's Salvation by recognizing their inability to save themselves. Do not despise, καταφρονέω (kā-tā-frō-ně-ō), think little of, or look down on...

You are not allowed to judge your siblings in Christ. Why?

Colossians 3:12-15

The Lord's Prayer leaves no ambiguity. Matthew 6:14&15

Moses got in deep kimchi with God... Deuteronomy 32:50-52, Exodus 3, 11, 14, 31, 33, Numbers 12:3, 20:10, John 7:19, etc.

MATTHEW 18:12-14 ~ ¹²NASB“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³“If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴“So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

The meaning of these three verses is so plain when we have the groundwork in place. Take them that way, without reading more into it.

Jesus wasn't saying that the 99 obedient sheep don't matter... He's saying that all the sheep matter very much to Him with the implication that they should therefore matter to you.

MATTHEW 18:15-17 ~ ¹⁵NASB“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 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.

The Christian you have the least in common with - the one you just don't get - that one is a beloved child of God... Just like you. Treat them well. What if you're the one being scandalized?

Verse 15 will either say, “If your brother sins,” or, “If your brother sins against you.” Either way, the point, as confirmed in verse 21, is a fellow Christian distressing you personally.

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

Love does not mean teaching others to treat you poorly. When we allow others to treat us as less, we are teaching them that they are more, which is the opposite of the low dependence upon God they are to have. Boundaries...

A fellow Christian, abuses you... Have the Holy Spirit gumption to politely, respectfully, unemotionally, discuss the issue with them, directly and privately. Notice what you're not to do?

If they are wrong and refuse to be reconciled... Then and only then, go tell it to one or two others in the church. Your motivation will be seen in whom you choose.

Well if that doesn't work, "Tell it to the church." Inform the church leadership and then patiently trust them.

As a Christian, you treat those outside of the church as possible...

 Check all that apply – detach and place in the offering or the prayer box

_____ I want to talk with the pastor about _____

_____ I want prayer for _____

_____ I want to volunteer to _____

_____ I want more information about _____

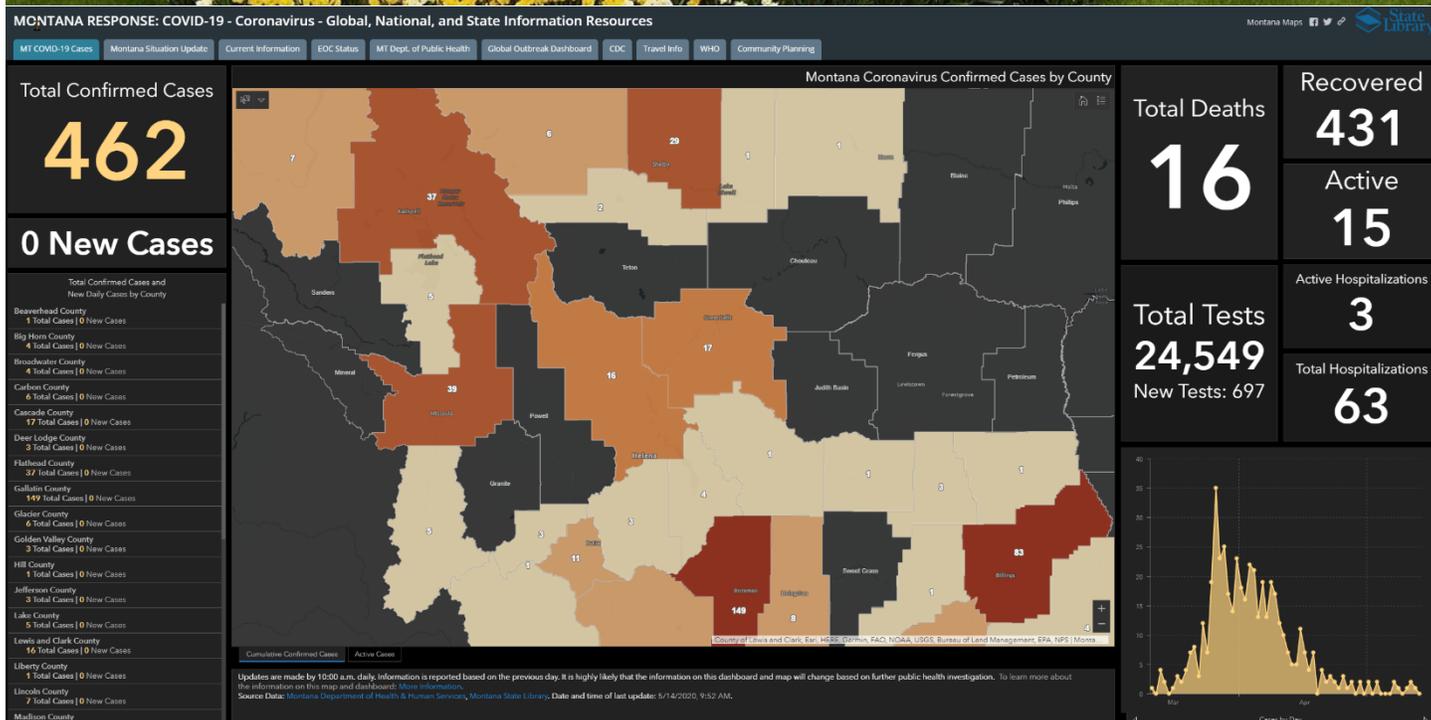
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Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 18c ~ 051720

“Unity in the Family”



Last new case 4/15

Welcome Friends

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MATTHEW
A CLASH OF KINGDOMS

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship



Last week we read... Matthew 18:7-9NASB

7“Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!
8“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. 9“If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

It's the second time Jesus has talked this way in this Gospel and it's worth taking a moment to clarify the meaning (Matthew 5:29&30).

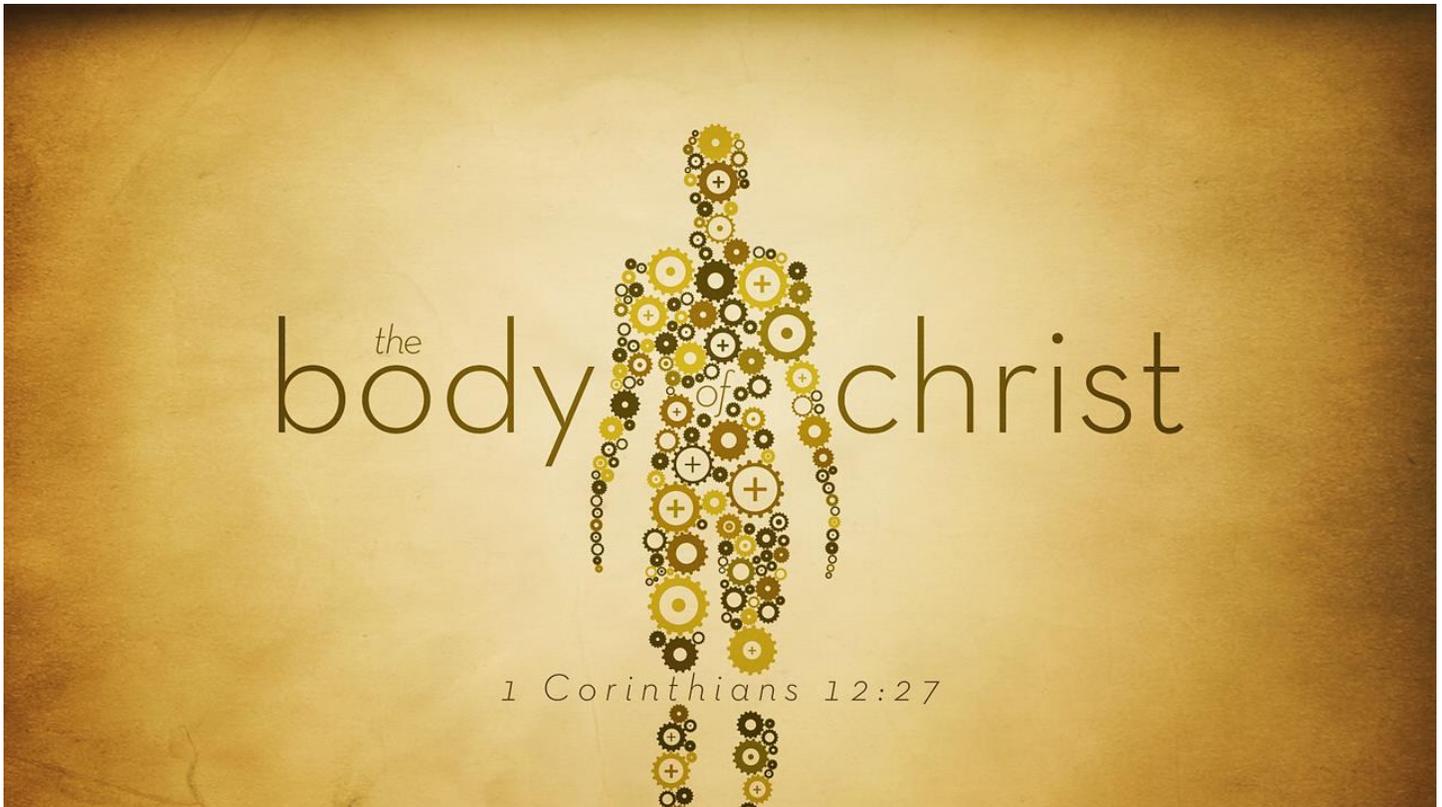
Here, it obviously has a different nuance than it did in chapter 5 when Jesus was talking about the sanctity of marriage. Here the thing to be avoided at all costs is being a cause of someone else's sin.

Please note that all of the language Jesus is using is symbolic. Those represented by the “Small child,” are the “Little ones,” and soon will be “Sheep.” All symbols representing Christians. Being a “Stumbling block,” is symbolic of causing someone else to sin. “Your hand or foot,” is not what will make someone fall in this

symbolic sense and certainly “Your eye,” cannot do that either. It is dramatizing the point that He’s actually making, not creating a strange new doctrine.

It is surprising how many people over the centuries take this whole thing literally, but what is more common, and just as surprising, is how many take it partially literal and partially symbolic - we don’t get to mix and match.

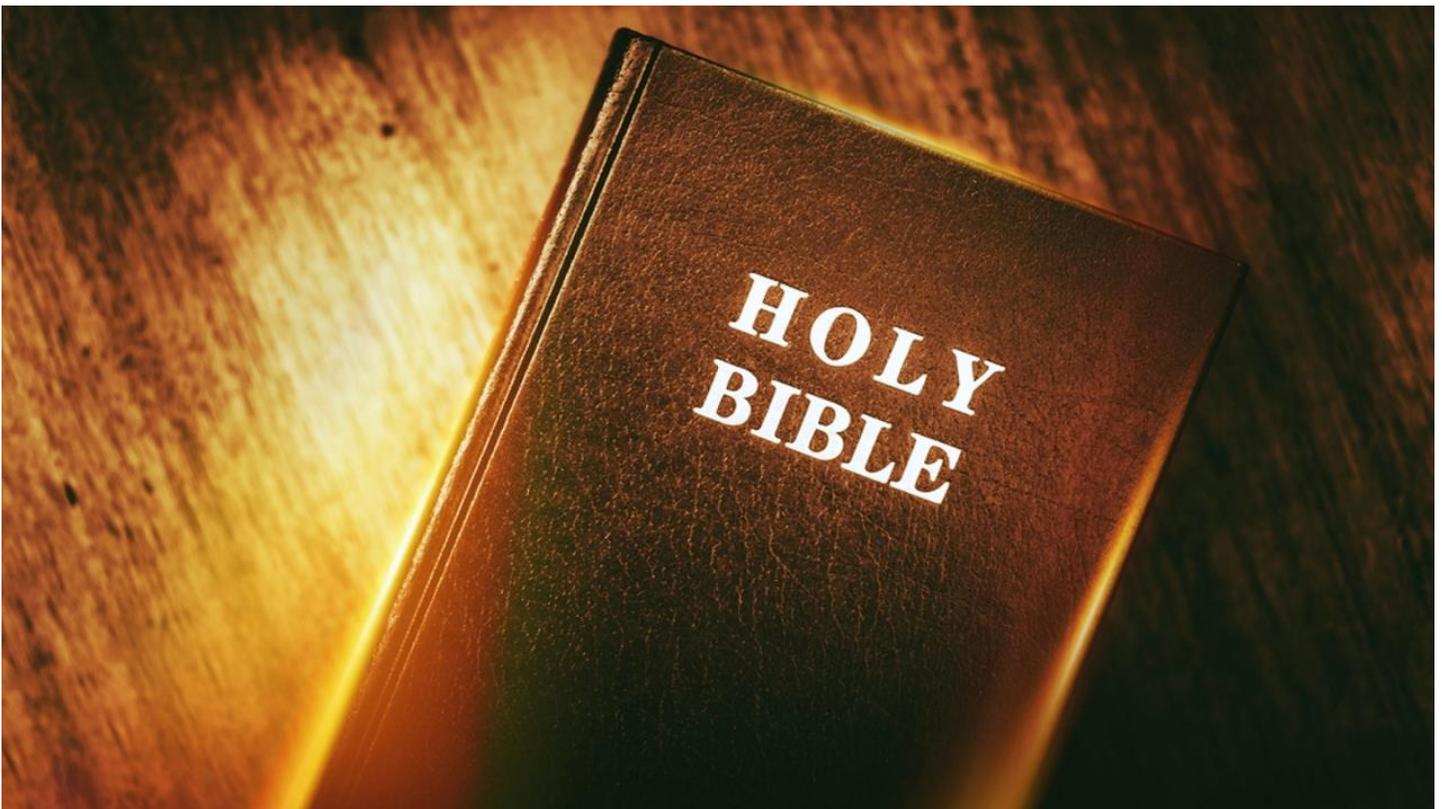
Often people arrive at such conclusions by way of the extrapolation dance. Taking a meaning and then extrapolating that meaning until it bears little resemblance to what was actually stated.



An example... The church is made up of individual people. It is the Body of Christ, a body is made of parts, like hands, feet, and eyes. We get confirmation of that line of thinking from Paul. These body parts, therefore, represent individual people. If we have difficult people, maybe they are hands, or feet, or eyes, we cut them off - we pluck them out - we eliminate them from the Body, for the good of the Body. We excommunicate them and cast them far from us - shunning them as traitors forever. Better to lose some, so that the rest, can enter Heaven.

There is a certain logical reasonableness to that, there's even a bit of Biblical correlation. At the end of

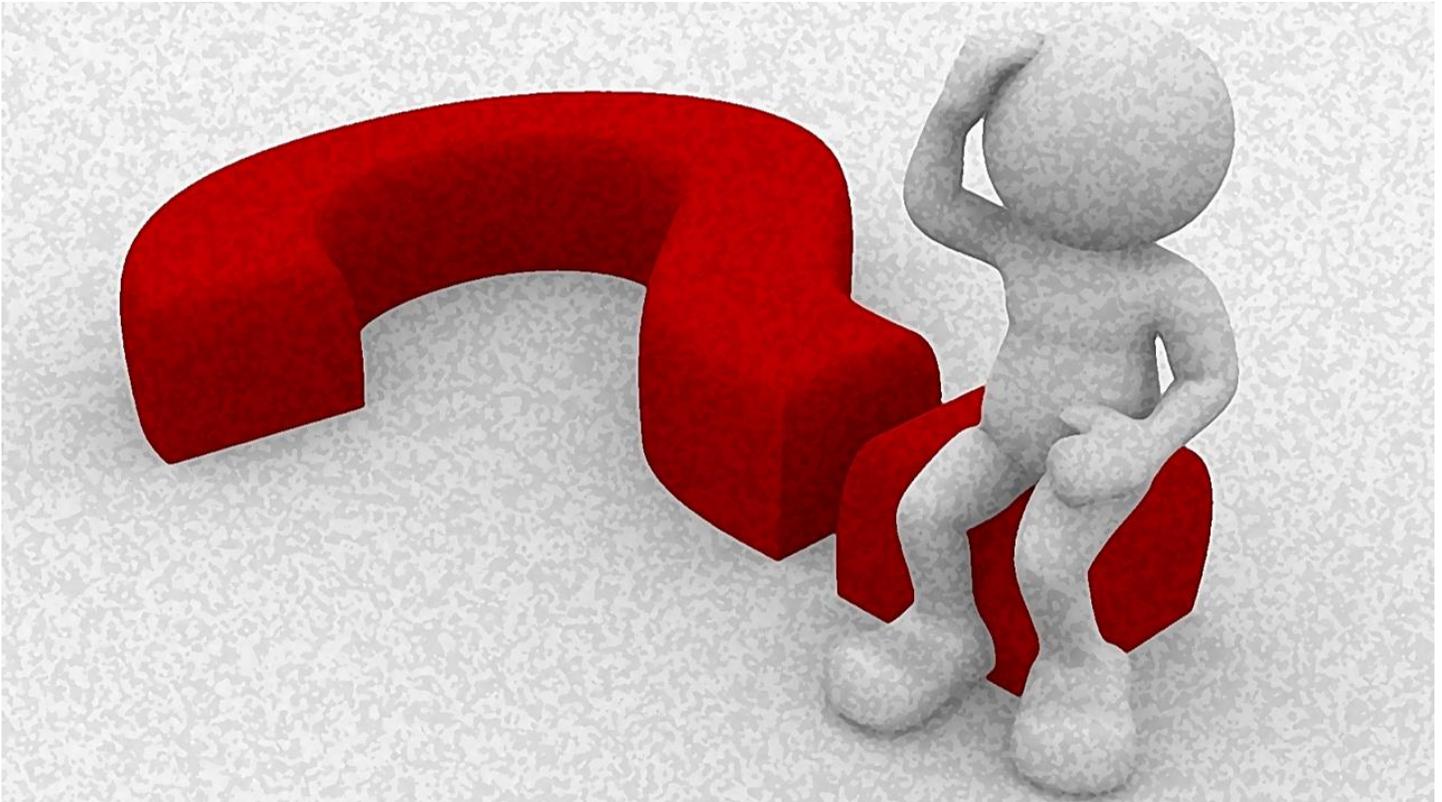
the day there is some Truth to it, and that's why it works for people... Why it works for less discerning people - for those okay with being a little lazy with God's Word. It is not at all what Jesus was talking about here - not even close.



There are other similar ways to take this passage that are just as reasonable sounding, and just as wrong. There are hundreds of passages that fall into this category. If we would just honor God and His Holy Word, enough to be careful in how we handle Scripture we would have a far greater understanding of Christianity, and far greater unity within the church.

Jesus sometimes says “Amen,” meaning truly, or verily. It is to draw attention and emphasize something as important. Sometimes He says, “I say to you,” or “What do you think?” Both add even greater emphasis. Sometimes Jesus uses a descriptive story, or an object lesson and sometimes He uses a dramatic metaphorical discourse to really ensure that people recognize the tremendous importance of what He’s saying. In this place, Jesus did every one of those things.

We are forced to conclude that there is probably no other place in the entire Bible more important than this part of the Bible. Here, Jesus is emphatically teaching His followers how to be His followers, and most of His followers, over the centuries, have either misunderstood, or ignored these instructions... Crazy!



You think Satan, and the demonic forces that he commands, aren't good at what they do? Christians get freaked out about demon possession and satanic activity around them, about portents of the end of the world, wars, pandemics, and face masks... But we are mostly oblivious to Satan's primary battlefield.

From the very beginning Satan has used the same playbook... In the Garden of Eden with Eve the entire thrust of Satan's temptation was calling into question what Eve knew about God.

"Did God really say that?" "Surely God didn't mean what He said." Their entire exchange was about

misinterpreting God's extremely clear command. Nothing has changed. The more Satan can get people misunderstanding or ignoring the Bible, the fewer Christians there are... The more he can get Christians misunderstanding and ignoring the Bible, the fewer Christians there are that act like Christians.

He gets us focused on our own interests, desires, and agenda... Through that self-focus he easily gets us isolated from the flock, isolated from the Shepherd, and he can then devour us at his leisure.

What Jesus intends with the "Hand," "Foot," and "Eye," thing is to drive home the absolute seriousness with which He takes the issue that He's actually talking about. It can be boiled down to verses 10&11...



DON'T
BE
THIS
GUY.

Matthew 18:10&11NASB, 10“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11“For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.

Again, this is Jesus doing what he just did previously. He's adding language that paints a picture that not only helps us get His point, it helps us see how incredibly important it is... This is not a teaching about angels at all - this is a teaching about how you treat your siblings in Christ.

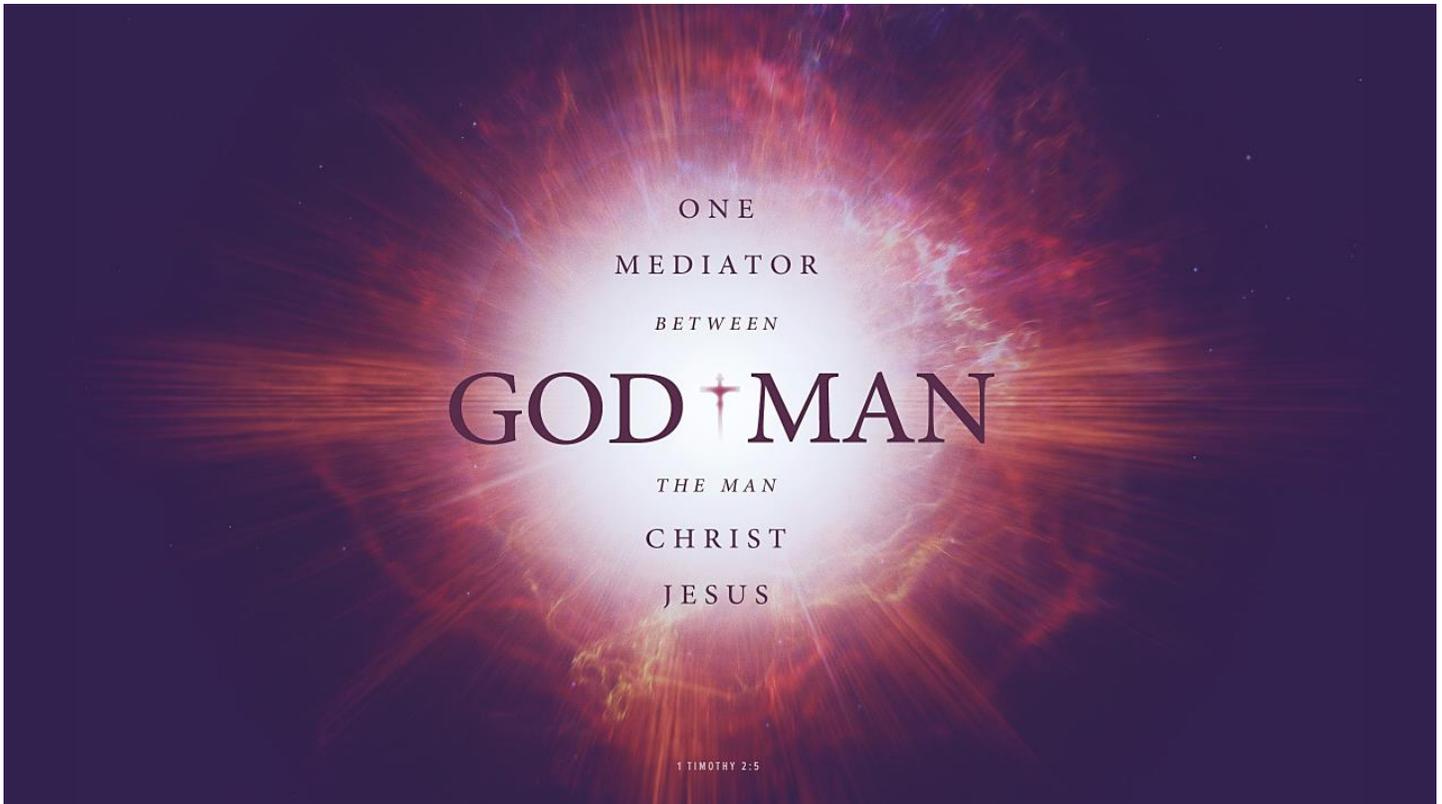


From this passage we get all sorts of strange doctrines about Guardian Angels in general and more specifically about how each small child is assigned their own Guardian Angel at conception, or birth.

We humans make whole doctrines out of thin air when we exaggerate what the Bible actually says and then let our imagination run rampant. Pope Francis recently spoke on this same passage and then used it to segue into a teaching on Guardian Angels. He claimed that if we act like little children our Guardian Angel will guide us - we can hear his voice telling us "Do this, don't do that." The Pope went on to say, "How is my relationship with my guardian angel? Do I listen to him? Do I bid

him good day in the morning? Do I tell him: 'guard me while I sleep?' Do I speak with him? Do I ask his advice? ...Each one of us can do so in order to evaluate "the relationship with this angel that the Lord has sent to guard me and to accompany me on the path, and who always beholds the face of the Father who is in heaven."

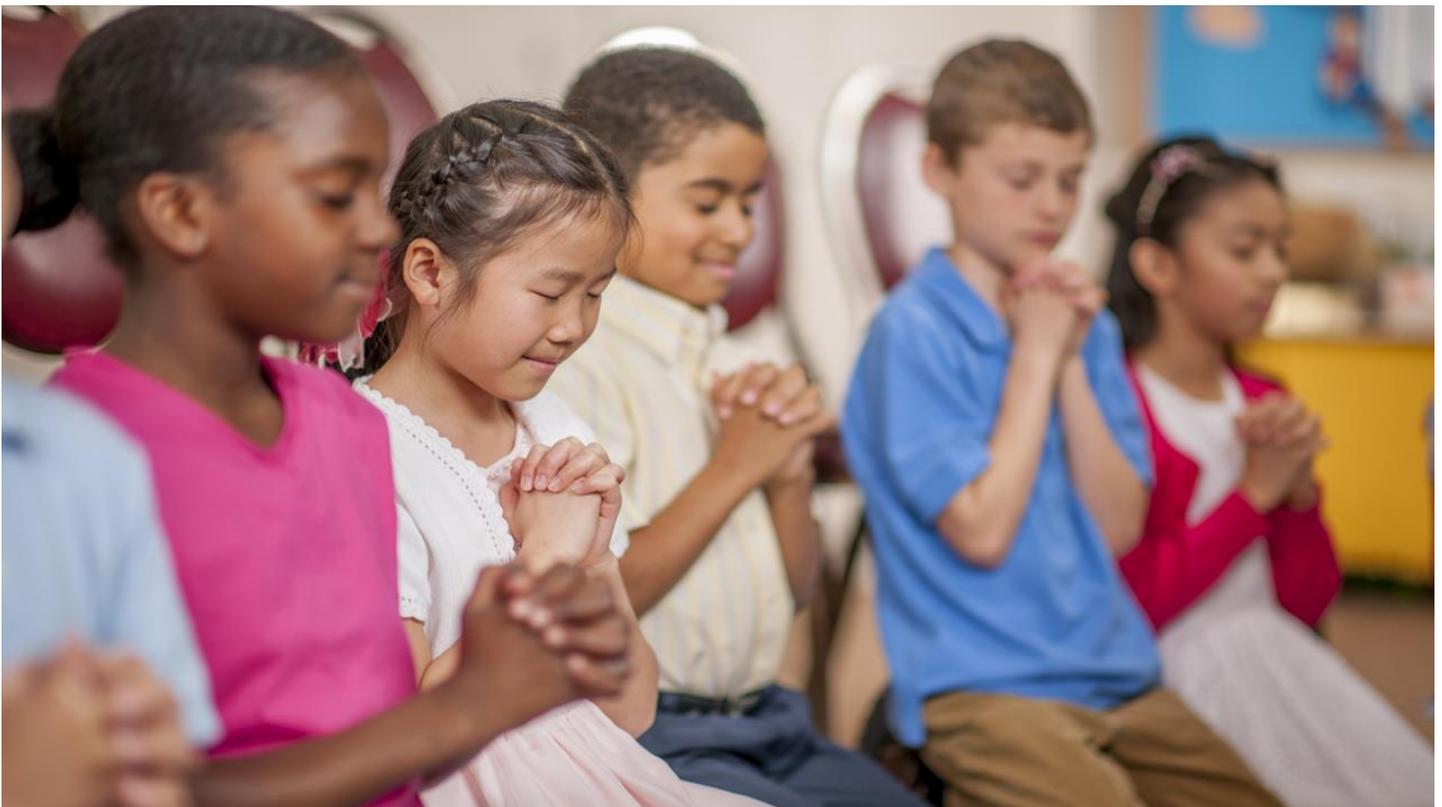
What's the problem with an extrapolated doctrine like this? Well first, it's not Biblical, it's manmade. A doctrine created in Christianity in about 400 A.D. and then really fleshed out in about 1200 A.D. Much more than being a manmade doctrine the greater problem is it's putting another barrier between us and God. Listen to Him - your Heavenly Father, bid Jesus good morning, ask for the Holy Spirit's protection and wisdom. See? The travesty is focusing on messengers, rather than on the Messenger. Focusing on intermediaries, rather than on our Lord Himself.



Praise be to our Heavenly Father, through Christ Jesus our Lord, in the power of our indwelling Holy Spirit... We are free of all incumbrances that stand between us... We have full access into the very throne room of God... We don't need priests, and sacrifices... We don't need the intercession of Mary or the Saints... We don't need Guardian Angels to replace the actual Spirit of the Living God within us... Ephesians 2:18NLT, "Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us." And then Ephesians 3:12NLT, "Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God's presence." How about Hebrews 10:19&20NLT "And so, dear brothers and sisters, we

can boldly enter heaven's Most Holy Place because of the blood of Jesus. By his death, Jesus opened a new and life-giving way through the curtain into the Most Holy Place." Remember the curtain? Matthew 27:51&52NLT, "Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart."

Why would we let anyone place barriers between us and God after Jesus cleared the way?



Anyway, "Little ones" here has nothing to do with actual children, or immature Christians, or Seekers, or weak

Christians... Contextually, “Little ones,” means every Christian saved by Grace, because they received God’s Salvation by recognizing their inability to save themselves. All Christians. Me, Miss Nell, you, Billy Graham and Gavin Sheeran.

Now, are there angels that are assigned to each Christian - maybe... We can’t get that from the text. What we know is that there are angels and they minister to Christians at God’s bidding... What I can tell you with absolute certainty, is any one of those angels would tell you focus on Jesus, not them.



Do not despise, καταφρονέω (kā-tā-frō-ně-ō), κατά (kā-

tä), is a preposition indicating downward motion, or down against something. φρονέω (frō-ně-ō), means to think and so it is literally, to think down, or against... So, to think little of, or look down on, to hold in contempt, or to regard with disdain.

You are not allowed to judge your siblings in Christ. Why? Because, if you judge, you will find a fault, real, or perceived, actual, or imagined, and you will think less of them.

Jesus commands us to love one another, not judge one another, and we are here, in this place, commanded with tremendous emphasis, to never think poorly of our fellow Christian. I don't know how many ways it needs to be said. We want God to overlook all of our faults, but we are unwilling to treat our brothers and sisters the same.

*What do people
see when you
walk into a
room?*



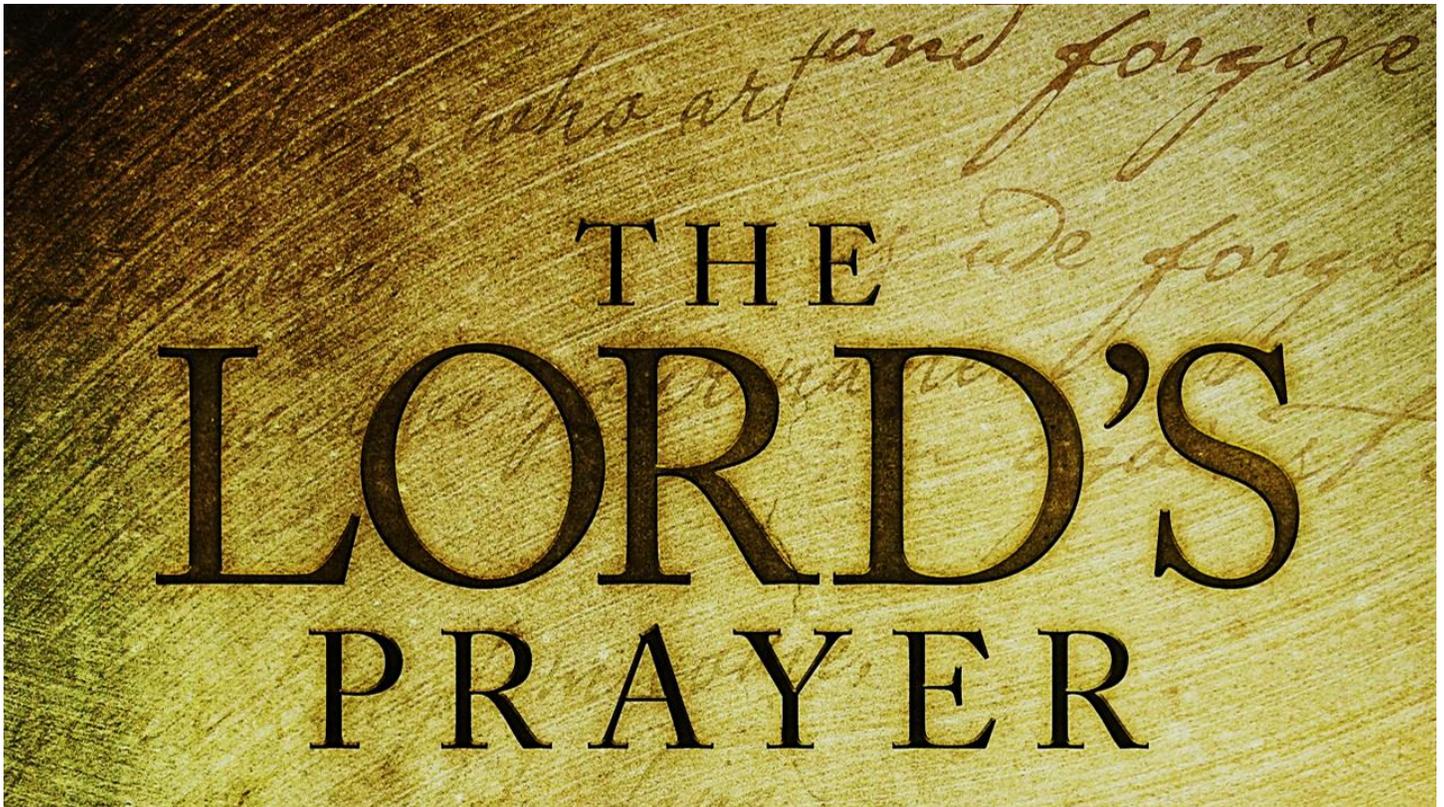
Colossians 3:12-15NLT, 12Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

That's what Jesus was getting at with His Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in just a few more verses in

Matthew. We'll probably get to it next Sunday. The Servant was greatly indebted to the King. The King forgave his debt. And then the guy... turned right around and harshly demanded full and immediate payment from those who were indebted to him.

How could anyone behave that way? Oh right, we do that, don't we? We cry out, Lord please forgive me, please have mercy on me, I'm sorry, please lift me up and restore me and give me another chance... Then after He is faithful, yet again, and fully restores us, yet again... We go out and want to crucify anyone who dares to wrong us.

Lord forgive us and please help us to stop doing that. Treat others as you would like to be treated... Seems like I've heard that somewhere before... (Matthew 7:12, etc.). You want Grace, mercy, and forgiveness... You want kindness, gentleness, and patience... Well?



The Lord's Prayer leaves no ambiguity. Father forgive us as - that means in the same way and to the same degree - forgive us as we have already forgiven those who have wronged us. Forgiveness is the only topic in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus then expanded on... His next words after giving us the prayer, Matthew 6:14&15NLT, 14 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. 15 But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.



Moses got in deep kimchi with God... He was barred from ever entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 32:50-52). You know the story well. Moses the man hand selected by God to lead the people out of slavery (Exodus 3:10). The man God spoke to from a Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-6). The man through whom God wrought The Ten Plagues of Egypt (Exodus 11:1). The man who spoke to God face-to-face like a man speaks to a friend (Exodus 33:11). The most humble man on earth (Numbers 12:3). The man through who God parted the sea (Exodus 14:21) and the man God gave the Ten Commandments to (Exodus 31:18) and the man who wrote the Torah (John 7:19, etc.). It's an impressive resumé.

That man was punished severely and why? Why was he not allowed to enter his rest? Instead of speaking to the rock to release its water, Moses angrily stuck the rock twice. Why did he do it and why was it such a big deal? Moses assembled the grumbling, thirsty, faithless, people at the rock and said in Numbers 20:10b-11a, “Listen, you rebels!” he shouted. “Must we bring you water from this rock?” 11 Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out.” Moses was never allowed to enter the Promised Land, for that???

He had allowed his frustration with the people to cause him to despise them and in the heat of the moment despise God. Your fellow Christians, no matter how annoying to you, are God’s beloved children... Be very careful.

Just so you know, there’s some controversy about the placement of verse 11 here, “For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.” but, there’s no controversy about Luke 19:10NASB, where Jesus said, “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The point is, that God chooses to unilaterally seek and save people and He never

requires our opinion on the matter, and certainly does not need our consent. Please do not interfere with what God is doing in someone else's life.



Matthew 18:12-14NASB, 12“What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13“If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14“So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

The meaning of these three verses is so plain when we have the groundwork in place. Take them that way without reading more into it. We run afoul when we start making wild extrapolations. Jesus wasn't saying that the 99 obedient sheep don't matter, or that a Good Shepherd would abandon them to find a single wayward sheep, or that the restored sheep is more precious than the others... It's just a very dramatic way to say that all the sheep matter very much.

That means He will go to extraordinary lengths to preserve each and every one of His sheep and that we should therefore have the same attitude towards our fellow sheep.

A dangerous and narrow path...



Matthew 18:15-17NASB, 15“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16“But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 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.

1) Jesus started this chapter saying that people who recognize their complete dependence upon God are people who are humbly grateful for whatever He

provides, rather than people jockeying for position and seeking power.

2) Then He said that how a Christian, welcomes, or treats, his, or her, fellow Christian, is how he, or she, is presently treating Jesus Himself.

3) Then He gave us the flipside. If you are a cause of unnecessary offence to your fellow Christian, you may not be a Christian at all. Such arrogance that runs roughshod over your brother, or sister is incompatible with the lowliness necessary to Salvation.

4) In verses 7 through 10, Jesus used language to demonstrate the extreme importance of getting along with and not hindering your brother, or sister.

5) Verses 11 through 14, gave us the rationale... He came to seek and save what was lost. That included you and it includes us all... How dare we impede that process! The Christian you have the least in common with - the one you just don't get - that one is a beloved child of God... Just like you. Treat them well.

Now we've entered a deeper dimension... What if you're the one being scandalized? Verse 15 in your Bible will either say what the NASB says, "If your brother sins," or it may say, "If your brother sins against you." Either way, the point, as confirmed in verse 21, is a fellow Christian distressing you personally.

This is not the green light get in everyone else's business. There is no Heavenly commission here, to investigate others in the church and take them to task. God is not deputizing you to enforce His Law, or promoting you to detective to ferret out sinners, or appointing you to the court where you judge your brother and sister... Jesus is not negating everything He just said, in order to create a culture of holier than thou tattle tails and criticizing castigators.

What Jesus is talking about here is, as I said, when a Christian brother or sister is sinning against you... I briefly mentioned last Sunday that humble love does not mean teaching others to treat you poorly. When we allow others to treat us as less, we are teaching them that they are more, which is the opposite of the low dependence upon God they are to have.



Boundaries. You can be loving, kind and gentle. Humble, grateful, and patient and still have reasonable boundaries that actually benefit others as much as they benefit you. And that's the key... Think of how it affects others. Be motivated by helping others. Don't demand to be treated fairly for your own sake, instead set a proper relational boundary to foster right thinking and behavior in the person you love and care about, because God loves and cares about them.

A fellow Christian, abuses you... Have the Holy Spirit's prompting to politely, respectfully, unemotionally, discuss the issue with them, directly and privately. You may need to calm down before proceeding. I think it

was Oswald Chambers who pointed out that if you get a clump of mud on your jacket and try to remove it, you will make a huge mess, but if you let it dry first, you can easily brush it off.

Notice what you're not to do? Do not gossip about it. Don't tell everyone else about how you've been mistreated and paint the other person as an ogre that everyone will think less of - how is that looking out for them? How is that love? Go to them and tell them what you perceived to have occurred and how it made you feel with the genuine intention of not taking them to task or making them feel badly, but to rectify the past, restore the present and make a better path forward for the future... You're trying to work out your differences in order to have a better relationship with one another.

I say that to lead to one other point... Just because you perceive a slight, doesn't mean there was one. We are often so self-focused we see an insult, where none was intended. We see only our side of the exchange... Be open to how the other person understands the situation. Your goal is to win a friend - more than a friend - a brother, or sister, in Christ.

As I said, this is Jesus teaching us about unity in the Kingdom of Heaven, harmony in the family of God, community in His church. Jesus never tried to win the argument, He always tried to win the person. If, through humbleness and God's love, you are able to be reconciled to your brother or sister... Praise God you've won them back and the church is unified, and God is blessed.

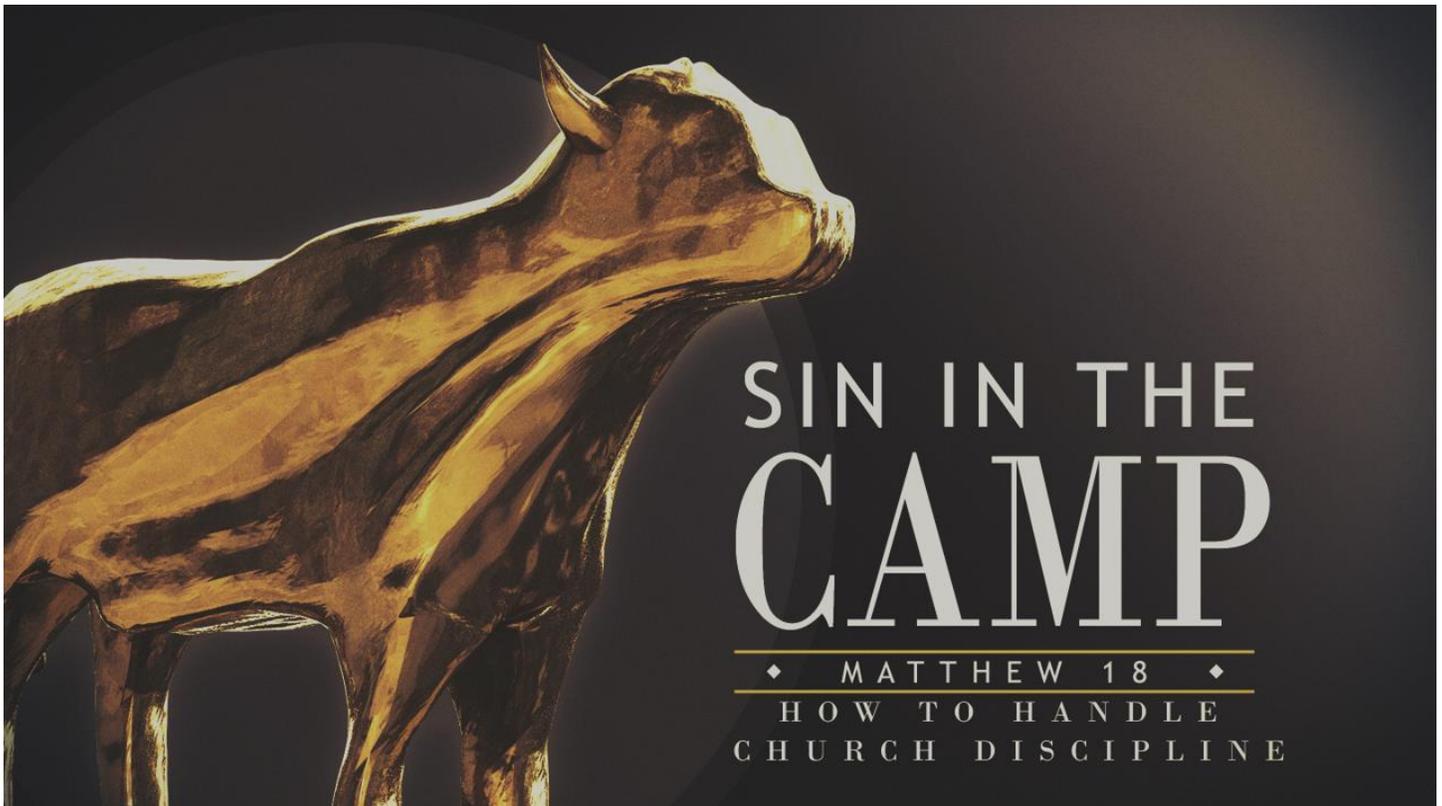
If they are wrong and refuse to be reconciled... Then and only then, go tell it to one or two others in the church. Now, your motivation will be seen by whom you choose. Choose people you know will side with you, and recognize your heart in the matter. Best to take two impartial, emotionally uninvolved people and go back a try to fix the issue.



What are the chances that a person who has already rejected you alone, will come around when confronted by a small group? Pretty slim, if it is just ganging up on them, but, if all of you are seeking to restore that person and genuinely care about them, then there's a possibility.

Well if that doesn't work, "Tell it to the church." That doesn't mean stand up in the middle of a service and complain. It doesn't mean gossiping about the situation until you've bent everyone's ear. It doesn't mean taking out an ad in the Daily Interlake, or splashing it about on your Facebook page... It is a semi-technical way of

saying inform the church leadership. In our case, come to me...



Give me and the Elders time to work it out. Please notice that if it is supposed to be our goal of restoring the relationship and correcting the offender, we may point out where you need to grow as well. In addition, it may take some time to move the other person forward in a measured way... If I simply chastise the person they will simply leave and the outcome is division, not unity. You must be patient with church leadership in the matter and that will require trust.

Many don't have the love, the desire for unity, the patience or the trust in me and the elders to weather the storm and they leave. Over the years we've had a few such situations that have escalated to the point where neither party was satisfied, and both left the church. Praise God - I guess it's just as well. I mean once they left, the church was more unified.

Anyway, if the offending person refuses to listen to the church, they have proven their obstinate lack of humility and should be treated just as you would treat a "Gentile and a tax collector."

How would a good Jew treat such a person? Look at Jesus' Parable about the Good Samaritan. Look at what Jesus did on the Cross for Gentiles and tax collectors.



Consider yourself shunned!!

You see we read those words and gleefully think we've won. Alright, now I get to abuse my abuser. I can treat them as the scum of the earth - I can shun them, close my door to them, never associate with them again... I'm free to be a far bigger jerk to them than they ever were to me... Does that sound like what Jesus had in mind?

As a Christian, you treat those outside of the church as possible... With your right thinking and kind, gentle, merciful demeanor and willing openness, every person outside of the church is a possible, fully restored, brother, or sister in the Kingdom.