

Dear Friends in Christ,

At times people will come up to me and say, *"I haven't seen so and so in church. Can you tell me about them?"* Sometimes it is about someone who is sick. Sometimes it is about someone who has not attending worship services. My response *"I will tell you what I can."* I also try to say, *"Thank you for asking. I appreciate your concern."*

Asking about someone and offering to visit when appropriate is a sign of Christians love and concern. It is helpful to me, but it is following the direction of our Lord to be concerned and to do something when we are able and it is appropriate.

Jesus tells his disciples to be concerned about the lost because HE is concerned about lost sinners. He is also concerned that we don't want to seek the lost. Someone might excuse, *"I didn't know Joe that well. I wouldn't know what to say him. I will let someone else go talk to him."* Someone might even say, *"That is the job of the church board of elders."*

Jesus gives a command to go and an encouragement to pray. We may not be situated to call on all the lost, but are their people that we do know, that we can speak to. Jesus encourages us today, **Go to Win Back the Lost.** His instruction and promise in these verses will help us.

1. We go at Jesus' direction.

In verse 14 of this chapter Jesus says, **"In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish."** He had just mentioned that a shepherd who loses a sheep will leave the rest and go looking for the lost one. Our God is seriously concerned about lost souls and so Jesus directs us to GO after the lost sheep. He tells us precisely what we should do.

A. What he wants to do is to confront that person but we do it in Christian love,

1. Verse 15, **"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault..."** When you go to visit, there may be some small talk. *"How are you? How's your family?"* We show that we care. We also care enough to get to the point of our visit. There is a sin or a fault. Sin is like poison. It ruins and destroys. While not all poisons will kill, sin causes death. It is death that is

eternal separation from God in Hell.

We point out their fault so that they can repent. They can turn from that sin and ask God for forgiveness. We can tell them that Jesus, the Lamb of God sacrifices himself for their sin too. We can tell them that by God's grace they can live for God now and not that sin.

Jesus interjects the thought here, that we are to go to the person in private. It is possible if someone else is involved that they could go along, although Jesus speaks here in terms of going by yourself because very often it may be just between us and the person who has done wrong. Also, public sins, like Peter's in the Galatians reading, call for a public rebuke.

2. Jesus indicates the goal of the meeting is to restore the person. What great joy when a person confesses their sin and receives forgiveness of sins. Jesus, the Son God, came down from heaven to seek and save the lost. His love reached the point where he sacrificed his body and blood for the world, that there would be forgiveness. Jesus has given this forgiveness to us. If we became lost, we would want someone to reach out to us. So Jesus wants us to reach out to the lost.

B. What happens if a brother or sister refuses to repent? Jesus lays out for us the steps that love takes to win back that brother or sister. Verses 16,17, **"But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'" [Deut. 19:15] "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."**

At times people will stubbornly sit in unrepentance and unbelief. To "Go" is not to go once or twice and give up. We can go a number of times. If we are not making headway, we can then bring other Christians along who have spiritual maturity and a love for lost sheep. Normally in our churches that would involve one of the church elders. If the person still persists in unrepentance the congregation can be told. In our congregations the Church Council would become involved in calling the person to repentance and finally the Voter's assembly.

Jesus tells us that if the person still does not repent we treat them as a pagan which means, treating them as an unbeliever. They have already demonstrated that they don't believe by their lack of repentance. The church is simply confirming the case. At any time when a person repents, they are restored and forgiven. They are again a member of God's flock.

C. Someone might say, “How can any church or group of people have such authority?” The answer is that the Lord has shared this authority with the church. Verse 18, **18 “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”** As long as we follow these steps in love, the Lord promises that his court will come to the same conclusion. Those who hang onto their sins will continue to be bound to them. Those who repent will be loosed from their sin for Jesus’ sake.

D. Why am I not up for a visit from the elders? You and I attend church regularly and confess our sins. We are even sorry for the times we did not call on someone who was lost. While we are in church, we are reminded in word and Sacrament that we are forgiven. We are given strength to go and do what Jesus asks of us. We can help those stuck in unrepentant sin.

2. We go prayerfully.

Jesus is deeply concerned about lost souls. But he was not always spending time with the same people every day. So he spent time in prayer praying for lost souls. We may not be able to speak every day to someone caught up in a sin. We can pray for them. We go prayerfully to our heavenly Father.

19 “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

A. There are many things we can ask for in our prayers for the lost sinner. 1) We can pray for opportunities to speak with them. 2) We can pray for the right words to say. 3) We can pray for repentance. 4) We can pray for guidance as the person goes forward. 5) We can ask the Lord to bless those who serve as Elders and the pastor to be blessed in showing love and calling people to repent of their sins. There is much to pray for.

B. Jesus promises that when we ask, the heavenly Father will hear and answer our prayers. He will provide us with opportunities to speak and words to share. In some cases, we will see repentance, in other cases we may not see results. We can be sure that our Father is working for the wellbeing of the people we are praying for. So keep on praying for the lost and troubled.

3. We go confidently.

At another time Jesus was away from the disciples and they tried to cast out a demon and they failed. Then Jesus showed up and he casts the demon out.

Things were better when Jesus was around. So he promises that he will be present wherever Christians are gathered. He says in verse 20, **For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.**”

A. In the worship service we conduct our worship in the name of “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” That includes Jesus. When we pray in church or in a meeting, we do it in Jesus name. In fact everything we do as Christians is in Jesus’ name.

Jesus name is powerful. He not only conquered demons, but he conquered sin, death and hell. When we have his name on us, we are asking him to use his power to help us and to bless us.

B. Here, in verse 20, Jesus promises to be with us. What he means is that he promises to bring his power and help to us. Especially as we help his people and we go after lost souls, he will be here for us. He wants us to do this work.

Conclusion: Have you ever had to ring the door bell and your stomach has butterflies? You are calling on someone caught in a sin. Sometimes it can be the hardest call to make. We can also do it with the phone. We can do it writing emails and letters. It is hard to recall a time when I said, “I shouldn’t have called on that person.” Many contacts have not worked out for a person coming back to church, but I was still pleased with the call.

Maybe we don’t want to talk to our brother or sister because we are afraid it will turn out badly or we don’t think they will repent and come to the Lord. Remember the love of Jesus. He moves us to go after the lost sheep. His forgiveness and peace won at the cross means so much to us.

We go to share it with others because he directs us to do so. We go because of his love. We go prayerfully and humbly. We go because sometimes sheep are won back for the Lord. We go because he goes with us. Amen.