

My Responsibility to My Brother

by Max Hougham

This sermon emphasizes the importance of lovingly reproofing and encouraging one another in the faith, balancing correction with encouragement and unity. It highlights the need for accountability among believers, the power of prayer, and the significance of approaching each other with grace and discernment. The message underscores the value of striving for righteousness, showing mercy, and building each other up in love.

Scripture: James 5:19, Hebrews 10:24, 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 John 5:16, Philippians 2:2, James 5:19, Psalm 133:1

Topics: "Accountability in Faith", "Encouragement and Correction"

Description

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Transcript

It's a real blessing to be here this morning, and I just want to greet everybody in Jesus' name. I, uh, for some reason I just was really looking forward to the meeting this morning. Maybe because I missed last week, I'm not sure.

But I'm just really thankful to be here. Um, I think everything was pretty much said in the comments, but I just wanted to second or third or fourth that, that I really appreciated Philippians. Of all the epistles, and not that it doesn't have weighty matters in it, I think Paul was dealing with a little bit of disunity, maybe in the group there.

And, uh, but it's just consistently, uh, edifying and encouraging. And, um, the warnings that I see in that book aren't addressed necessarily at like a specific problem within the church, but just I think general good for any body of believers. And I just really appreciate that.

It's just very uplifting. Uh, why don't we stand this morning and pray? Father in heaven, thank you for this morning. Thank you God for loving us and for giving us a fellowship, a body of believers, to sharpen one another, to strengthen one another, to encourage each other.

I just pray this morning, Father, that, um, you'd help me to speak the right words, give me grace to say something that makes sense, that's useful. I pray, Father, that you'd give us what we need to equip us to go out and be effective ministers to each other and also to the world. God, have mercy on us and help us as we press into the kingdom and endeavor for that.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. You may be seated.

It seems like in our group we kind of major a lot on topics that involve brotherhood relationships. And why not? The New Testament is full of writings that give us instruction on how to walk together in unity and as brothers. It's at the heart of what Jesus was teaching, how to effectively walk with our fellow man.

We have instructions on how to walk together as a brotherhood, people striving to enter the kingdom together and to better each other. And also instructions relationally on how to relate to the rest of the world. So this morning I have yet another brotherhood topic to discuss.

And I think it's one of those things that falls into the category, not mine in particular, but other ones that we've had here as a church on forgiveness, on words that we speak from Buddy a couple weeks ago, things that we just need to hear again and again. I wanted to start near the beginning of the Bible account in Genesis chapter 4. So let's open up there. I'll read Genesis 4 verses 1 to 15.

And Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bear Cain and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bear his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

And in process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground and offering unto the Lord. And Abel he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering, but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect.

And Cain was very wroth or angry, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

Another way to read that last half of 7 is that sin's desire would be for you or to have him, but that God's desire is that Cain would rule over sin. That him is in reference to sin, to the wrong that I think God anticipated coming. So just to say that again in another way, sin would desire to have you, and you should rule over sin.

And Cain talked with Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not, am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength. A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from thy face shall I be hid. And I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth, and it shall come to pass that everyone that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore, whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken

on him sevenfold.

And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. Here in this account, we read about, and I'm pretty sure it was the first, but the first recorded murder anyway, on earth. We know that God had respect for Abel's offering, but not for Cain's offering.

And I've heard different messages over the years about why that was. Maybe it was because Cain's involved a blood sacrifice, or not Cain, Abel's involved a blood sacrifice, but Abel's didn't. I'm not real sure about that.

I guess I can't say. I don't think we have enough clues. But one thing that I find interesting is that as best I can tell, these two men, through their offerings, are both trying to serve God.

And I understand that this happened after the fall, after Adam and Eve's transgression. So they've been removed from the Garden of Eden, they can now expect to face physical death, and they are attempting in some way to serve God together by offering offerings. One brother was favored over the other, which led to some kind of anger, resentment, bitterness, or jealousy in Cain.

And Cain received something I think that a lot of us would covet, which is a little bit of special counsel and personal instruction from the Lord. I think that God knew that there was trouble ahead for Cain if his attitude didn't change. And that is the key.

It's hard to get out of the King James, but that's the key to God's instruction to him. If I could paraphrase it, God is telling him, listen, if you can change your attitude, things will go well for you. But if you can't, sin is going to be the master over you.

Kind of like how Jesus told, and I'm not saying that Peter had a wrong attitude, but Jesus foretold of Peter's betrayal of him. And was like Satan, he told Peter, Satan desires to have you and sift you like wheat. I feel like Cain is getting a similar warning from God.

Sin desires to have you, but I want you to rule over sin. I want you to be the victor. And because God gave us a free will, Cain had to make a choice.

But his choice was murder. Murdering his brother. He thought that was the right route to take.

So also in this account, but maybe slightly less obvious, is that Cain murders Abel. And then when God asks him a question, where is thy brother? Where is Abel thy brother? He lies about it. He says that he doesn't know.

And he follows it with this phrase, am I my brother's keeper? When God talked to Cain, I'm not sure that words can describe what I think God felt in the way of disappointment and sorrow. So I have the same question for us this morning. Am I my brother's keeper? I think it's a valid question.

If I could ask it another way, I'd say it like this. Do we bear any responsibility to God and our brother for his spiritual and physical well-being? Do we bear any responsibility? Why would I even ask a question like this this morning? Maybe to some it would seem kind of obvious why. Or the answer to that question may seem kind of obvious.

Here's why. I sense that there's a bit of debate about it, about this question, from one congregation to the next. I also believe that at the heart of this question is accountability from one brother to another.

Some kind of accountability is at the heart of this question of Cain's. On one hand, it's possible for men to pick and pick at each other, almost endlessly delving into each other's faults. And I think that doing that can lead to a highly critical attitude towards others, both in and out of a church.

And then on the other hand, there are some groups of people who prefer mostly to stay out of each other's lives, preferring to let a church leader handle any perceived errors in other believers. Sometimes this means accountability is not lateral, brother-to-brother, but in a leadership structure, it's only to the church leader and to God. It only goes up.

But there's no lateral responsibility shared in watching out for each other. One reason given why you would want that kind of structure is charity for your brother. You don't want to inappropriately reach around and somehow offend him or hurt him.

And there's a lot at stake. If we do it wrong, somebody can certainly be offended. Or sometimes, in spite of the best efforts that we take to be charitable, people are still offended.

So there's a lot at stake. There is a lot at stake. But I suspect on this position of staying out of each other's lives and just letting a church authority handle it exclusively, and I can't prove it, but just knowing myself, and what I think others would probably share with me in this thing that we want to rid ourselves of, is a protection, a desire to keep somebody's own faults hidden and not have to be accountable to someone.

I think that's human nature. You know, there are a lot of principles in Christianity that I think are about striking a balance. We have to take the full collective of what Scripture has to say on a subject, and sometimes that requires affirming two things that seem to be opposites.

We've had discussions about that here. And we've had several messages lately, in the last six months or so, that are about striking a balance. Because if we don't, if we don't strike a balance, we wind up with unhealthy polarization.

Just like the two perspectives above. We have, on one hand, people who wind up nitpicking each other to pieces, and on the other hand, we have somebody who really isn't interested at all in speaking into another brother's life. So my endeavor today is to strike a balance.

To try to take, it's not going to be an exhaustive survey of all that the Scripture has on it, but I'm hoping enough Scripture, combined together from enough different places, where we can understand better what would be a right way, brother to brother, to relate to each other when we have trouble. So to answer the question, am I my brother's keeper, or do I bear any responsibility to God and my brother for his spiritual and physical well-being? I believe the answer is yes. Yes, I think we do.

But that comes with some vulnerability. I think that's why David could say that faithful are the wounds of a friend. Because having a stranger tell us something, maybe that we don't want to hear about ourselves, isn't nearly as hard or painful as somebody who knows who we are.

It carries so much more gravity when someone knows us and they speak something into our lives in an area that we're either falling in or that we need to improve and need work in. It's a vulnerable position to make yourself open to somebody like that, because we're afraid of getting hurt. The Scripture is full of guidelines on how we ought to walk with our brother.

So let's first answer Cain's question in the context of what happened in Genesis. In this passage, God doesn't directly answer Cain's question. But we have to remember that Cain answered a question from God with a question.

God asked him, where is Abel thy brother? God was holding Cain accountable for his brother's whereabouts and his well-being. And then if we move past Cain's question, God holds Cain accountable for his failure with his brother with a curse and a mark. So I would submit this morning that from the beginning, the manner in which brothers trying to serve the Lord treat each other and look out for each other is something that's close to the heart of God.

So with that said, let's move into the New Testament and look at a very familiar passage in Matthew 5, verses 3 through 12. This is Jesus speaking. Here in the Beatitudes, we find a diverse, a pretty diverse range of topics.

And we understand the Beatitudes as something, virtues that ought to be applied to our lives, everyday living. Several of them are relational in nature. For example, verse 4, I think that not only will God comfort them, but we as his body are expected to comfort one another in mourning.

Verse 7 says, Peacemaking is a risky endeavor, but it's something that Jesus calls us to. A peacekeeper, a friend of mine once told me, is somebody who walks on eggshells and never confronts an issue, just tries to keep it. Maybe for lack of a better way of saying it, someone who is willing to ignore an elephant in the room.

But a peacemaker is somebody who's willing to have a conversation, somebody who's willing to talk about something difficult in order for there to be healing, to the end that there'd be healing. There are a lot of topics throughout the New Testament that we have responsibilities towards another brother. Some of them are things that we've covered in teachings here.

Peacemaking, which we just talked about, forgiving and asking for forgiveness, meeting each other's material needs is a big one that gets talked about all throughout the New Testament. But the one that I wanted to focus on this morning that I'm really primarily dealing with is our walk in righteousness before the Lord. And again, I don't have an exhaustive teaching on it this morning, but I want to focus on how to hold each other accountable.

So I guess we ought to start by asking, is it right to criticize in a right way, or is it wrong to criticize? What are we instructed to do? I think Jesus gives us a clue in Matthew 7. He says, And behold, a beam is in thine own eye. When we're on the street, when we're trying to reach people, when we're trying to point people to a standard of righteousness spelled out by Jesus Christ, this is one of the verses or passages that people most point to. And the way that they mean it is that we ought, we have no right, we have no right to point into somebody else's life and tell them that they need to change somehow.

And I'm talking right now outside of a brotherhood, although it gets used within a brotherhood too. If we only had verses 1 through 4, I'd almost have to agree with that. But then we move into verse 5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

What we have here is not an instruction to never speak into somebody's life, but an instruction not to do so in hypocrisy. At a minimum, if we're going to talk to somebody, we have to at least be willing to own faults

of our own in the same area and try to improve on it. Jesus is warning people against hypocrisy in calling out faults in others.

But it is not an instruction, as far as I can tell and see here, to leave off offering somebody constructive criticism at all, or to try to bring them closer to the truth and righteous living. I think one thing that's helped me a little bit in trying to figure that out is the parallel passage in Luke chapter 6. Jesus says this, or the account of Jesus' words says this in Luke. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged.

Condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned. Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. Give, and it shall be given unto you.

Good measure, pressed down and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye meet, withal it shall be measured to you again. What I see in Luke is that it's a humble coming alongside of a brother.

It's not condescending, it's not talking down on somebody, because we're going to be dealt with the same way before God. That's what I see here. So however we choose to conduct ourselves with our brother, that's somehow going to weigh when God himself judges us.

The overall tone that I'm getting from Luke is one of charity. Charity when we speak into a brother's life, without hypocrisy, without condemnation, and with charity. There's an idea that I was introduced to years and years ago, and some of you may have heard me talk about it, but we can take truth and we can wound somebody with it, out of spite, out of a desire to see them fall, and it would be truth.

The things that you would have to say are accurate, that you could say to somebody, but the motivation of the heart is the key. And our audience, whoever is hearing us, picks up on that. They know whether it's there.

They know whether you're trying to gouge them, like an ah-ha, I gotcha, or if you're trying to come alongside and help them. The idea is the medium is the message. The way that we give somebody truth is about as important as the truth itself.

If we do it the wrong way, it has a great power to harm somebody and do wrong. I wanted to look at what Jesus had to say in Matthew 18. This is the passage that we often look to as a model for church discipline.

Matthew 18, verse 15, Jesus says this. Oh, I wanted to back up and give it some context. Let's start in verse 11.

For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye, if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? I was glad you picked that song this morning, Atlee. That was nice.

It kind of fit in here. And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Then verse 15 starts with the word moreover. And to me that ties it back to verses 11 through 14. Moreover, in light of how God loves the one lost sheep and how it's important that God would redeem that one lost sheep, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him

alone.

If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.

But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything, that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. As I said before, we look at that as a model for church discipline. And it can be used that way, and rightly so.

I think it's intended to. But think about it for a minute, not as a model for church discipline, but as a model, as an effective model to win your brother back who is sinning against you. To win somebody back, to redeem a brother.

What a beautiful idea, what a beautiful perspective to look at that teaching of Christ in, and that is at the heart of it. Especially within the context of the 99 sheep, and the one that God desires to have back. That's at the heart of the Father.

For years and years, I say years and years, but for several years, my wife and I got this publication for youth, and it was a Mennonite publication called The Christian Example, and there's a lot that I really appreciate about it. But one thing that it did consistently, that I kind of wondered about, is it would give these stories of an offense. And the solution was nearly always to turn the other cheek, just swallow it, move on, suffer the wrong, don't ever bring it up, and offer the person grace without ever explaining it.

One story in particular that I can still remember is a story about a family that had an urgent medical need and was spending night after night, and I think even week after week, in the hospital. And the father of the family who was suffering the medical need overheard a conversation between two other brothers in which they kind of criticized his family for being too needy. And the solution and the resolution for the story was that this dad just needed to be able to humble himself, see all the good that was being done for him through the church body, and just move on.

I think that there's a time when that's right. I think maybe some counsel could help us know when that time is right and when it's not right. But in a way, if we always do that as a solution, we are robbing our brother the opportunity to make something right.

Years ago, my family went through, when I was a boy, my family went through some pretty hard times, and my dad was especially difficult to be around. And he was trying to change, and he was trying to be made different, but I was kind of done with it all. And I was avoiding him.

If he walked into the room, I'd leave. I didn't want to deal with the verbal criticism or attacks. Anyway, my mother observed this.

She saw it. And she pulled me aside one day and told me that when somebody is endeavoring to change, we owe them the opportunity to change. And that was just a really precious nugget of truth to me, and I feel like it was really a big hinge and turning point.

My mom's intervention between my and my earthly father's relationship, I feel like that did a lot to help save it. I want to look at some of what Paul had to say in Galatians 6, 1-5. Paul writes this, Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

For every man shall bear his own burden. This is an instruction from Paul to the church that is in Galatia. And it comes with a caution about not being overtaken ourselves.

There can be sins that a brother could be caught up in that we have to take special care ourselves not to be caught up in. But one thing that I wanted to bring out is that there's no qualifier here other than someone who is spiritual. Restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.

And my point in that is not to diminish at all the role of an elder that an elder could play in a situation like this. But that qualifier isn't there. It's something that a brother could do for another brother.

And I also, in all of these things, maybe a more appropriate place would have been back a little ways here. But some churches, one thing I wanted to talk about in brother-to-brother relationships here is that in some churches, they require someone who's going to be kind of in the inner circle of the church to have a membership, a membership in the church, to hold membership. Concerning church membership, which is a topic in and of itself, but just in a nutshell, I don't see, I see local churches throughout the New Testament, but what I do not see is a requirement for anybody to have a secondary membership in a church.

Here at our group, and I think rightly so, when we baptize somebody, we baptize them into the kingdom of God, into the universal church of Christ. Not the denomination, Robert. But anyway, we are baptizing them into the body of Christ as a universal idea.

Why is this significant? Because in churches that hold real strongly to this secondary membership, the only people who can really be held accountable with that manner of thinking or with that way of thinking are people who hold that secondary membership. A friend of mine used to always say, as soon as we step into the arena of saying, yes, I am a Christian, now we can help each other along, and it doesn't matter whether you're part of this local congregation or this local congregation. It's something we can do universally, that we should exercise universally.

That said, I just want to also confess that it takes two willing parties. If we ourselves are never willing to approach a brother, this kind of relationship cannot happen. And in like manner, if another brother shuts down the conversation because he's not willing to hear it and doesn't want to hear it, whether it's locally in a church or whether it's a brother far away, it's not going to happen.

It's not going to happen. It takes mutually open dialogue for these things to happen. And I want to confess that, or just say, that most of this is going to happen in a local church because that's who our sphere of influence is.

Those are the people that we're in connection with most of the time and most regularly. So just naturally, it will be within a local congregation, but I just want to make the point that it is not exclusively so. It doesn't

have to be that way.

So what about this idea of, and we talked about it a little bit already, but I brought up in the beginning this idea of being accountable only to a church leader. I think 1 Corinthians has a little bit of instruction on that or some writings that can help us. 1 Corinthians 5. I'll start in verse 9 and go to chapter 6. I'm going to, just to give a little bit of the context, he just got done admonishing the church for holding in fellowship to a brother who was in gross immorality.

The specific thing is not important to what I want to bring out, so I'm going to skip to verse 9. Paul says this, I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or a covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such and one know not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth.

Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. Chapter 6. Dare any of you having a matter against another go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. I want to put a little asterisk there.

We're going to come back to this. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren.

But brother goeth to law with brother and that before the unbelievers. Now therefore, there is utterly a fault among you because ye go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, you do wrong and defraud and that your brethren.

Okay, so first, kind of a big picture here. Legal courts are not the way to solve disputes. Paul wants them solved within the church.

And I think that this could involve a church leader, but in some way, this passage gives preference and this is kind of my point there with verse 4. No, I'm sorry, it'll be verse 5. To a wise man among you, it says. Now back to verse 4. Raise your hand if you have a translation that says something entirely different than a statement. Harvey? Does anybody have a translation other than the King James that says this? If then you have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church, period.

Does anybody have a translation that's not King James that agrees with that? If you have ordinary cases, then do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? Right. So I went through this morning, I went through a couple different translations that I have and they don't read like a statement. They read as a question which entirely changes that.

For years, I have believed that what this passage is saying based on the King James is that we would allow, the way that it says it here, I'm just going to use these words, those who are least esteemed in the church to settle our disputes. Has anybody else been there or is that just me? Yeah. Right.

Okay, so I'm just going to, just for contrast, I'm going to read that section out of 1 Corinthians 6 in the ESV and see how it changes this. I'll start in verse 4 because it's pretty similar up to verse 4. So, if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers and that before unbelievers? So what it's really saying is that we ought to seek out somebody who's got a little bit of wisdom who can help us work through a matter and stay away from the worldly systems for solving disputes.

I just wanted to bring that out. It was kind of a hitch as I was trying to clean up this message and I went back and was doing some final preparation this morning. It was kind of a hitch in what I planned to talk about and I actually had to shift direction a little bit.

It is, the passage, is encouraging us to seek out somebody who's got a little bit of wisdom to help us solve our problem as like a mediator. Okay. Accountability.

Accountability is for everybody. And I want to turn to 1 Timothy 5 17-20 because I want to make sure that we maintain balance here. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and doctrine.

For the scriptures say it, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And the laborer is worthy of his reward. Against an elder, receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.

Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear. And I think that verse 20 is a more generic statement, not necessarily about an elder, but my point here is that if something like that were to come up, if there were to be some kind of accusation, this is an instruction for how it ought to be handled, not with hurling, railing accusations at somebody. That would be entirely inappropriate.

So along those same lines of a balanced perspective or how to have it, those two polarized extremes I was talking about, on one hand is to be overly critical, to nitpick everything that we don't really like maybe in our brother that we see, and then on the other hand it's just kind of a hands-off approach and just letting it be between the brother and his overseer or God. I want to read out of 1 John in the ESV. 1 John chapter 5, 14-20.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him. If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will give him life.

To those who commit sins that do not lead to death, there is a sin that leads to death. I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.

This is an incredibly, to me, ambiguous passage. This is really hard to plumb the depths of. And I think a testament to that, and I find this in commentaries, either the truth is so plain and so cutting that a commentator avoids it, or it's ambiguous enough where he's not going there.

He's not even going to try to untangle that mess. He doesn't know what it means. I see kind of both.

And so as I was studying on this, I looked into a couple commentaries and they are silent. They have nothing to say about this. Because it's tricky.

What does that mean? What is a sin unto death and what is a sin not unto death? We know that God answers our prayers and that if we see a sin not unto death in our brother, we ought to pray for it. And it says to the end, we pray about that to God for those that commit sins that do not lead to death. But then there is a sin that leads to death.

And he says, I do not say that one should pray for that. What I really want to bring to this passage is that there is this, there is discretion used. There is discrimination used.

You don't take everything that bothers you about your brother to him immediately. That's not appropriate. But there are sins that are appropriate to bring to his attention.

So again, I'm not claiming this morning to be able to plumb the depths of what he's saying here. What is a sin unto death and what is not a sin unto death? But it might be easier to understand a sin unto death than to understand a sin not unto death. So what are things that the scripture lines out that disqualify us from fellowship with God? And one of those, one of those places that we get a very clear list is in, back to 1 Corinthians, just past where I stopped reading before, 9 to 11.

I think that's the right spot. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the sexually impotent nor the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you.

This is something that I think we ought to take an active role in, in admonishing somebody in and in calling them out of because these are serious things if left unrepented they sever us from fellowship with God. Very serious. And in like manner, Galatians chapter 5 has a similar list.

But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh for these are opposed to each other. To keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law.

Now the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these I warn you as I warned you before that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Again, it's a list of it's a list of things that keep us out of the kingdom of God that we need to rectify that are essential things that I think we need to be willing and able to speak into our brother's life about.

Okay, Jude chapter 20 no I'm sorry there are no chapters in Jude. Jude verse 20 Okay, but you beloved building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit keep yourselves in the love of God waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life and have mercy on those who doubt. Save others by snatching them out of the fire.

To others show mercy with fear hating even the garment stained by the flesh. Again, that's kind of going to get back to the spirit of first John where we have to exercise a little bit of discretion a little bit of discernment and whether or not we're going to make this an issue or not or whether it's something to spearhead that's a pretty dramatic scene to pull somebody out of the fire that's dramatic. I mean if somebody is standing next to a fire and they're on fire I mean you're going to tackle them get them on the ground and roll on that thing until the fire is out.

It's not a time for playing around like excuse me I just think your pants are on fire. No, you're going to knock them down and you're going to put that fire out. And then others it says I love the balance that he gets here on others show mercy with fear hating the garment stained by the flesh.

Okay. All right. There is another tool in our toolbox of ways it's not all it's not all coming alongside somebody and telling them about the faults in their life.

I think that we need to recognize that there are other tools for encouraging each other on the road of righteousness other than telling each other where we're in error and that's pointing out the straight and the narrow way which I think Hebrews speaks of I just want to turn to that Hebrews chapter 10 23 to 27 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stir up the King James says to provoke one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. It can be an encouragement it can be just edifying teaching something that brings us closer to the heart of God something that puts us and encourages us to walk that narrow way that we're commanded to walk. Colossians 3.16 is just a sound bite and it kind of has the same idea.

So I'll just read that real quick. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. These are just a couple more tools ways that we help each other that we can encourage each other to be balanced to walk a righteous life rather than only calling each other out when we see something wrong.

And I also wanted to acknowledge that one thing I wanted to be careful of in this message is to not diminish the idea that leadership doesn't have a role in helping a brother back onto the right way. They do have a role. And that there's a passage like this in 1 Thessalonians 5 verses 12 to 13.

We ask you brothers to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. I guess I'll keep going.

And we urge you brothers admonish the idle encourage the faint hearted help the weak be patient with them all see that no one repays anyone evil for evil but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. I wanted to wrap it up and just affirm again my conviction that yes we are our brother's keeper and we do have responsibility to God for our brother's spiritual and physical well-being though ultimately we must all give account for our own lives to God. Jesus in the epistles give us instructions and tools for how to win back or to help a struggling brother and this can be done by leadership or brothers in the church.

It ought to be done in charity without hypocrisy. We ought to be willing to examine our own selves in an area that we think we would like to approach a brother about and make sure that we are at a minimum willing to work on that and deal with it in our own hearts. And just to kind of rehash it can be done through correcting or constructive criticism.

Correcting is a better word or admonishing for a serious fault and we can also encourage or stir up one another to good works and to love. We've got to strike the right balance. We can't be nitpicking each other to pieces.

We've got to exercise discernment. We've got to exercise some discrimination in the things that we choose to talk about and the things that we don't choose to talk about with a brother. Maybe commit the one that's not such a serious offense to prayer.

Neither can we be forsaking all responsibility to each other leaving it only up to leadership. It's tough. It requires opening ourselves up to hurt and it's a vulnerable position.

Responsibility towards our brothers and sisters and I mentioned at the beginning is not just about whether our brother is walking in righteousness or not. It's also about making sure that nobody is in want among us and making sure that we're humble enough to ask for forgiveness and being willing to forgive others who have hurt us. My heart is just that we can strike the right balance, not be polarized one way or another and exercise care and discretion when we do want to talk to each other about something that maybe is a little out of order.

I just want to pray. Father in heaven, thank you for this day and thank you for my brothers and sisters. Thank you God for the fact that we do here locally have a church that we can work with each other in and help each other on the narrow way.

Help us God to have right attitudes and to have attitudes that are for betterment of one another. Thinking of others better than we think of ourselves and preferring one before another or one before ourselves. God just help us strengthen us through your Holy Spirit and thank you God for this opportunity to meet together.

I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. God bless you all.

And of course it's open to comments and corrections. Thanks Max. I really appreciate it.

That was very nourishing. I thought of an illustration or an object lesson. If you can imagine imagine there's two men and one man represents lots of fault finding and addressing people's faults and the other man represents leaving people alone and minding your own business and letting God deal with that stuff and imagine that they're trying to hold a blanket between the two of them and they're pulling at it and one guy saying hey we don't want to be nitpicky we don't want to leave people alone and the other guy saying we have to love our brethren and as they're pulling on this blanket then imagine there's a third guy and he's in the middle and he falls and he falls into the blanket and the blanket is there and it gives and it catches and it prevents the guy from hitting the floor but it only works if neither of the two men let go.

It only works if the two men don't if both men don't let go. It creates it creates this beautiful thing and it's you know just another example of this how that our stretching and not letting go of two things that pull us opposite directions is is the way to help people or makes us useful tools. I remember specifically a time that a brother came to me no need to be specific but there was something in my life that troubled him he thought I was doing wrong and he he came and he talked to me about it and I think he started to talk to me about it or something and then walked away but it was kind of dramatic in that he told me afterwards that he was walking walking away thinking that I was doing this thing that was wrong and he was just like oh just I'm just going to leave him alone I'm not going to worry about it whatever I don't want to deal with this and then he he stopped in his track and he said no and he turned around and he walked back to me and dealt with me about this I say a hard thing you know I mean it's difficult and I just in my in my mind he was saying when he stopped and said no I always said no I'm going to love a buddy and it's just one of my most precious memories at all of being loved and of my precious memories of my my relationship with this

this man and then I wanted to I've shared before but that it says iron sharpens iron and if I had two knives here you don't you don't clang them together that doesn't sharpen them and you Max kept using the phrase coming alongside your brother gently guiding them you know you slide two knives across each other to pull pull the burr out and to sharpen them it's intentional it's gentle um it's somewhat precise um you don't just bang bang them into each other that ruins them both and just to say like I'm sure we all kind of know that this is in general our society and and then in the realms of whatever degree of what's called Christianity people are not exercised in in this there's a social an established social thing like Max was talking about um when you talk to somebody they immediately go to don't don't talk to somebody about the the thing in their eye when you've got something big in your eye everybody just like oh everybody leaves everybody alone and so nobody's exercised in I suggest for the most part very few people are exercised in uh speaking to someone else or into someone else's life or or having somebody speak into your life and so just kind of um it I've been I've been really surprised at people that that were seemingly mature uh and seasoned how they how I've been very surprised how poorly they were able to um respond to somebody offering some correction like wow like they can take it really hard and get really defensive and and stuff and I've I've been like it's just like it's this thing I've seen over and over it's a big deficiency and so I would just want to say something like don't don't be that guy that if somebody tries somebody takes this leap of love and and tries to bring some correction or admonition that you um don't don't don't get defensive don't don't start trying to point out their faults don't start trying to justify yourself um we we really need to be exercised in that and then and then also like recognizing that because people are that people are especially not exercised in this in receiving such things if when you do go to talk to somebody whether it's a brother or somebody on the the street or anywhere in between you know that we're being especially um gracious and careful and and nearly expecting that that they're it's so easy for people to to take things wrong and get offended and think that you're mad at them or dislike them or um or or something like that thank you brother max i appreciated that i recently heard a saying i i don't think i fully agree with it but i really appreciated the the thought behind it and that is your enemy will stab you in the back but your friend will stab you in the front and i think there's probably a better way to put that but i appreciate i kind of appreciate that and also i remember reading one time um speaking the truth without love is like chopping down a tree that only needed to be pruned and i i think that's kind of like what you're talking about like it it just because it's true doesn't you can do a lot of damage you know and and and what you're sharing is true but the way you're sharing it is it's not really helping anything so i really appreciated that thank you i heard another good one tell you it said um fake friends say nice stuff to your face and then say bad things about you behind your back and a true friend tells you the hard things to your face and says good stuff about you behind your back thank you for both the opening and the main message um i was really blessed with being able to connect with both of them and um yeah i i needed this message um i've lately had hard dealings with someone who i not someone from here by the way but someone who i feel i feel um justifies himself and he feels like i justify myself and um and i just i've struggled you know to uh to just even know how to relate to this person um and i just appreciate it there was just a quite a few scriptures read that i that were that i was really in need of being reminded of that that one that says something about if if a brother is at fault you who are spiritual restore him in the spirit of meekness or you know like the if the intention is not to to help somebody you might as well be quiet um and regardless of how wrong the person is regardless of how you know if the purpose is not to help him i'd better just be quiet anyway i appreciated that um appreciated that the difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper i think there's a lot of truth in that um concerning this thing we've talked about a lot lately and today about the the two the two the balance or completeness between two opposing forces recently came across this quote the archer strikes

the target partly by pulling and partly by letting go and i heard i'm pretty sure i have this straight you might even know this max but um i think i heard dean taylor say this one time that that uh i think north korea pilots out of north korea have for i guess for the amount that there would be they they have a um high rate of i guess crashes plane crashes more than maybe anybody else um and i think statistics have shown that that the north korean culture is a culture in which you don't you don't talk into your brother's life uh these things are taken care of by a you know a tyrannical dictatorship or something like that anyway i hope i have those facts straight but but i remember him saying something like that and it was like wow that's that's like if the statistics show that that's that's an amazing thing that that that your co-pilot is uh or or what can we learn from that if a co-pilot is so is so um it's so much in his mind that he should not he should not you know correct his his uh the person flying the plane that um they crashed the whole thing is a crash a wreck uh i wanted to say one more thing and and this is that passage you talked about in in john first john five about a sin unto death and i know that has i think over the years that has puzzled a great many people i never i never realized that commentators even like maybe just want to stay off the subject but i just wanted to bring this out i think i've shared this with some people and i'm kind of inclined to think there's some truth to this it's it somebody somebody explained this or told this to me one time and it at the time he told me it was like oh man that's that is very enlightening um and later i've kind of read it and been like i'm not quite sure but anyway it goes that john wesley struggled with that passage um and and he finally he had a he had a high respect for the moravians and he decided to ask the moravians what they make out of that passage and and what the moravians said um is they they connected that passage though it's two different authors it's two different books they connected that passage with the passage in james where it talks about uh what when someone is sick to call for the elders to pray over them um and and they said this is what the moravians think and let me just read this again if anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to let me first explain what they said and then i'll read it again like it can fit they said like what they think that means is that's talking about a physical death if someone if someone had a sin in their life that was destructive a destructive kind of sin let's say and the example this preacher used was like if an alcoholic uh gets gets liver cancer uh and and he he's he can repent of this sin he he can be forgiven of this sin but it's probably not appropriate to come together and pray that the lord would heal his liver cancer this was a sin unto death um or you know if a if a if a um somebody that smoked for 50 years gets lung cancer it seems inappropriate according to the to them to come together and ask god and anoint this person and ask him to heal him of this lung cancer this was a sin unto death um anyway but but there are sins that are not that way there are sins that are not a sin that that the consequence of it is physical death those sins you ought to come together and pray for and and anoint now just with that in mind like reading this in john again if anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death he shall ask and god will will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death there is a sin leading to death i do not say that he should make requests for this all unrighteousness is sin and there is a sin not leading to death that's one interpretation of that i've heard over the years that it's kind of stuck with me i i'm not a hundred percent sure it's right but um i give it i give it some level of validity um anyway i just wanted to share that because it was talked about today thank you again we ask god for mercy because we want to be accepted on judgment day and so god expects us to show mercy to another yet if my heart is to i want the lord to rebuke me if i'm in sin i believe that god holds us to that same standard that we need to be willing to rebuke our brother and i think a challenge is for a lot of us is that we've been maybe in a sense so hammered to think that being labeled as lawless i'm not lawless but um legalistic or judgmental that we've been hindered in doing good and that saying that admonishing a sinner is somehow less than doing good and so this is a little bit from the wisdom of Solomon where it says for your incorruptible spirit is in all things therefore you reprove little by little those who fall into error and by

reminding them of the things through which they sin you warn them in order that being freed from wickedness they may believe in you oh lord and a little bit on but by judging them little by little you gave them an opportunity to repent though they thought you were not unaware that their origin was evil and their wickedness and born that their way of thinking will not change and so I think as a brother said is you're letting you're pulling back and letting go on that arrow is that we love our enemies even if they still choose to remain an enemy and I know I want the lord to speak to me and I don't want to him to and other scripture to where he says that the lord loves approves those that he loves and chase them in that but if you don't receive that chastening you're considered a bastard child and I don't want that so as and also we have a tendency to be a little more frank with our family than maybe with strangers so so I appreciate the message and amen and encourage us to do good and to approving one another in love that is love it is love to approve I didn't have much to add I just wanted to share my appreciation for all the all the admonitions and the ideas and just the all the help we can get from it and may god be blessed same for me I appreciate many good points that brother max made and always have to be reminded of that all the comments from buddy and Teo and Dwayne and Walter and Alec Hebrews 10 and the one another with so many one another verses someone said once that all week long and we meet three or four times a week at least we have it available three or four times a week in our fellowship but all week long we should be thinking of things to edify one another and how thrilling it is to get together and to pray with one another as brother max read about oh Matthew 16 and 18 when two or three agree and he didn't use it in the sense that some of the early Christians use when two or three agree in anything it can be loosed from heaven max was talking about discipline but it's a prayer we can tap in the power of god and things can happen when we pray it's it's it's it's it's just the amazing love of god the amazing power prayer that god gives us when we pray together and and we shouldn't be surprised when we see things happen but the one another in verses he touched on Galatians in verse John but Galatians and the other verses there just a couple of more comments and okay I'll be a little critical here for once no I mean you you and Lisa did like the Christian example and I used to like that too it's what and staff publication and it's it's all made up it's all fluff I ripped them all up it's impossible for anything any the adults could never live up to that standard never mind the children the children would come to mama and papa and say thank you for spanking me mama and papa I really deserve that and it's it's just it I couldn't take that the Christian example and shame on water and staff for putting that in there because it's made up but I used to I used to like to to read it you know is that true is that true well okay well they must have changed good okay yeah but anyway maybe I'm yeah if I'm wrong I apologize but I ripped him up and I said this is impossible the adults couldn't live like this never mind these little angels oh Heidi goes to mom thank you for spanking me I deserved it so much I really need it need a couple more whacks yeah okay but and seven of the ten commandments are relational seven of the ten commandments are relational as brother Max was talking like that and but the power of prayer and it's thrilling to be here yeah we see the same old faces same old faces over and they go but this is Christ crucified and we're going to take communion and it's thrilling and we should edify one another constantly Philippians right the Lord be magnified and I stand corrected in my criticisms I just thought I'd read one another scripture that came to mind regarding reproving a brother just at the last couple verses of James brethren if anyone among you wonders from the truth and someone turns him back let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will so save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins I just thought I'd add that verse with the mindset that we have regarding the responsibility to rebuke and reprove a brother there's the reward of knowing that a brother was turned away from sin and saved from death for the beauty of the earth for the beauty of the sky for the knowledge of the earth over and around us fly Christ our God to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise for the joy of human love brother, sister, parent, child friends on earth and friends above for your

gentle thoughts and mild Christ our God to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise homeward
cherished and evermore lift up holy hands of earth honking up on every shore it's your sacrifice of love
Christ our God to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise for thy selfless giving of life to our race so
freely given for thy great great love of life peace on earth and joy in heaven Christ our God to thee we
raise this our hymn of grateful praise behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us behold
what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons of God that we should
be called the sons of God behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us behold what manner
of love the Father has given unto us when brethren love each other if I shall love him no that I should be
called as I love the Father and the Son when Jesus died we now belong in unity Behold how good and
pleasant it is, when you gather well and well in beauty and beauty.

Unlike no other holy ground, He sent from Heav'n's crown, From truth, His fear, unto His will. A breaker,
sweeper, body, note, Yet members all in one, are brought in unity. Behold how good and pleasant it is,
when you gather well and well in beauty and beauty.

Like dew on verdant spills, down over Zion's hills, They bless those who dwell thereon, Who live no more
for self alone, And what they have of their own stay in unity. Behold how good and pleasant it is, when you
gather well and well in beauty, In bonds of perfect love, in standards far above, All earthly nations,
soldiers, hounds, The brethren's hearts and souls are one, A song in harmony, a song of unity. Behold
how good and pleasant it is, When you gather well and well in beauty.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/00D4-DFk8tl.mp4>

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