

Living on Earth for Heaven: Doing Justly

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[0 : 00] But let's turn now to God's Word this morning and Matthew's Gospel, picking up where we were last week, Matthew chapter 18, and we'll be reading there from verse 10.

So Matthew 18, and we're reading from verse 10 there. This is Jesus speaking to his disciples. Verse 10, see that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven, the angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the 99 on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?

And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the 99 that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

[1 : 15] If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

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.

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Again, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

[2 : 17] For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. Amen.

May God bless his word to us this morning. Well, do open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 18. And we're focusing particularly this morning on a little section, verses 15 to 20. Obviously, the context is the whole chapter here.

In Matthew 18 here, Jesus is teaching his followers about the life of his family, his household. That is, the church whose true home is in the glory of the kingdom of heaven, which is coming, but in the meantime, until Christ's coming at the last judgment to restore all things, until then, his church must live here on earth, but for that heavenly kingdom which is coming.

The end of chapter 17, remember, gave us a glorious picture of all believers as children of the king, as rulers of the cosmos, exempt, therefore, from all mere earthly rulers and their taxes.

[3 : 38] Wow. And so in their excitement, Jesus' disciples say to him in chapter 18, verse 1, who's going to be the greatest in this heavenly kingdom, this wonderful new life?

But as we saw last time, Jesus totally wrong-foots them, doesn't he, as he so often does. Because he says, the first thing on the path to true greatness in my kingdom is to walk humbly.

And it begins with receiving Jesus as a little child, he says. That is, as recognizing that you are entirely dependent on him, that without him, you have absolutely nothing. You are nothing.

You have no status at all. But those who do receive him will also, therefore, themselves receive others, welcome others who have likewise trusted in Christ, welcoming them just as they have been welcomed by God's sheer grace and mercy.

And certainly never then risking the ruin of any brothers and sisters like that by being careless, causing them to stumble into sin. And in that way, you see, the true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are reflecting the Father in heaven.

[4 : 59] Because he is the one who will give everything to restore the wonder, even at great cost. Well, that's what we saw so clearly in verses 1 to 14 last time.

But now at verse 15, Jesus goes on to speak further about these crucial relationships within the earthly family of the church. And especially in terms of rupture and restoration of these

relationships.

Remember that in the Bible, that word righteousness or justice, it means rightness. And it means that primarily in right relationships.

The very essence of sin is the rupture of right relationship with God and then consequently with one another. And the essence of salvation, of redemption, is restoration of right relationships.

In the whole universe, the whole cosmos. That's why Peter, when he's writing later, calls heaven the home of righteousness. Chapter 3, verse 13 of 2 Peter.

[6 : 02] The kingdom of heaven, you see, is the family home of Christ's church. It's the place where right relationships will rule forever. And if the church is living on earth for heaven, for the home of righteousness, then the church of Jesus Christ must be the place where right relationships will flourish.

Where real righteousness flourishes. That might be very different from what some people think of when they think about righteousness. But that is what Jesus means.

And Jesus' teaching is full of concern for that real righteousness. The Sermon on the Mount, in chapters 5 to 7 of Matthew's Gospel, explains that true life of righteousness in very personal terms.

It's all about right relationships with one another. But here in Matthew 18, we find the same thing.

But the focus is on the corporate life of the church. The community of the kingdom.

Which is heaven's beachhead, if you like, here on the earth. The Christian church is the showcase of heaven. It's a light on the hill.

[7 : 11] It can't be hidden, says Jesus. We're to shine so that people will see and will give praise that is due to our Father in heaven. Because they see him in us. Go back and read Matthew 5 later on.

But here's the thing, you see. Jesus' point here in verses 15 to 20 is very clear. Until we are finally permanently at home in the glory of the heavenly kingdom, still sin is going to be a real problem in the church.

A big problem which has to be fought. Just be overcome in our relationships, even in the Christian church. I wonder if we're as realistic about that as perhaps we need to be.

But we do need to be realistic. Here's one church, I think, that showed utter realism on this issue on its website. I looked at it a few years ago. It was when my friend, many of you know, Ralph Davis, was the pastor at that particular church.

And there was a note on the website that was entitled, A Note to Prospective Members. And it was typical, if you've read Ralph Davis' books, you'll recognize it's typical of his humor and down-to-earth reality.

[8 : 23] Here's what it said. A note to prospective members. I must warn you, this church is full of sinners. Everyone who comes here is one. You'll need to remember that if you associate with us or you may be unnecessarily disappointed.

Isn't that good? I don't think that came from a church growth manual, do you? But it is undoubtedly real biblical wisdom and reality.

Sin must be constantly battled and overcome in church life. And Jesus' point in these verses that we're looking at is very clear. Sinning, and especially being sinned against, can lead to ruptured relationships in the church.

And it's a deadly serious issue. And it can lead brothers and sisters to go badly astray so that if the situation isn't restored, Jesus says they may even be lost altogether.

Not just lost to the church, but lost to the kingdom of heaven itself. Verse 14 there, remember that word, that they might perish. One of these little ones might perish. But that is not inevitable and nor is it the will of the Father.

[9 : 39] Look at that again in verse 14. It's very clear, isn't it? So such situations can be turned around. By God's grace and his mercy at work through his people.

And that leads to a strengthening of the whole body. And not to the loss, but verse 15, do you see, to the gain of a brother.

Bringing him back within his true destiny in the Father's house. And it all depends on how we deal with fellow Christians who sin. And especially when we are personally involved.

And maybe even when the sin is directly against us. Jesus says we are to deal with that situation, with sin among believers, by doing justly.

That is by letting heaven's redeeming righteousness flourish among us and through us. And that means in practice, not just what verses 6 to 9 showed us last week.

[10:39] Not just not leading others into sin or driving them to sin and fall away. But also it means when they do sin. And remember verse 7?

It's very clear there will be causes of sin and much sin. Right to the end in this world under the curse. When they do sin and when we are personally sinned against.

We are to react with true righteousness. That is, with the merciful justice of God himself. With the justice, with the righteousness that bears the cost of forgiveness in ourselves.

In order to bring reconciliation and restoration. And that's what these verses in front of us are explaining in very practical terms. When that happens, says Jesus. When we are sinned against within the church, as we shall be.

We must see that we have a responsibility from heaven that we mustn't shirk. And we must see that we also have the authority of heaven. We're not to shrink from that.

[11:45] And we're to remember that we have the presence and the power of heaven. We must never forget that either. So let's think about these things in turn. First of all, you see, verses 15 to 17 tell us that we have a responsibility from heaven.

And we mustn't shirk it. Jesus tells us we must not fail in our duty. To show costly and persistent redeeming love.

That seeks to restore those who have sinned. Even if that sin is against us personally. We're to go to very great lengths. To restore that person back into a right relationship with us.

But also, even more importantly, into a right relationship with God himself. Very important we look at these verses carefully. Because it's easy to misconstrue Jesus' teaching.

When he says in verse 15, If your brother sins, go and tell him his fault privately. He's not just giving advice here about the process of law, as it were. He's not just giving us advice about the best way to get an apology.

[12:53] Or the best way to get reparations for the damage that's been done to you without a lot of public fuss. Without stress. No, no. The aim here is not justice in the sense of reparation or of punishment.

This is not just about psychology. This is not just teaching us people handling skills as the best way of getting an apology. No, no. No, no. Now the aim, says Jesus, verse 15, is to gain your brother.

If you've got an NIV, it says to win your brother. It's the same language that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 19. Where he talks there about making himself a slave to all people.

So as to win some to Christ. So as to save them. That's what Jesus is talking about here. It's much more than just winning back a good relationship with your fellow believer.

That's very important. That's very precious. Important to do that. But to gain your brother here is to win back someone who is otherwise at risk of going astray.

[13:56] And if they're not won back, are at risk of really perishing. And as we saw in verse 14, the Father's will is that that should not happen.

And so we have a responsibility from heaven itself to do everything within our power to win back our brother or sister from their sin.

The stakes are very high, you see. Verse 15 is quite clear. It's to do with a brother or, of course, of a sister who is sinning if your brother sins against you.

It's not just talking about somebody who irritates you. It's not just a trivial thing. This is not a license to confront one another with all manner of things all of the time.

I'm offended by your choice of clothing in church. Or I'm offended because your mobile phone keeps going off. Or, you know, things like that. It's not about that. It's not about confronting one another with trivial things or with differences of opinions.

[14:58] That's the very opposite, isn't it, of the whole spirit of this passage. That sort of thing creates bust-ups. That doesn't solve them. No, no. This is a serious matter. This is serious sin involved.

And it may be that outwardly it is against us personally. But the reality is that at heart it's sin against God. And it's sin against God's word.

Some manuscripts actually, in verse 15 there, omit the words against you. Your Bible might have that in brackets. And if that's the case, then it's even clearer.

We can't be sure which is the best reading. But either way, the point is the real sin is against God. And we have a responsibility not just to ignore that, but to act.

Because the issue is not that our reputation's in danger. Certainly not that that we're to care about. No, the issue is that a brother or sister's spiritual well-being really is in danger.

[16:07] And we must care greatly about that. And it may be that it's something that only we are personally aware of. In fact, I think the context is clear that others aren't yet aware of this thing.

But you're not to say, well, I'm the only person who's involved here, so I'll just forget about it. I'll just let it lie. No, you've got a responsibility from God for your fellow Christian's good.

And when we see it like that, you see it's very clear, isn't it? This is the very opposite of the sort of attitude of an interfering busybody. This is not the nitpicker.

This is not the sanctimonious hypocrite who's always pointing out the specks in other people's eyes while always ignoring the log in their own eye. No, no, no. Because this kind of responsible intervention is actually very hard.

It's very costly. And you see, it's only a certain kind of person who can act in that truly restoring way.

[17:15] That's why the order of Jesus' teaching here in chapter 18 is so important. This passage in verses 15 to 20 is all about mutual discipline. It's about care of each other in the church family.

But you see, that can only happen after personal self-discipline is taken very seriously.

It's only then that we are great in the kingdom of heaven and that we also are able to show that kind of restoring grace to others.

It's only those who have learned the lessons of verses 1 to 14 who are walking humbly, who are aware of the reality of their own sins and their own total reliance on the grace of God and Jesus.

It's only those who fear their own sin. It's only those who have embraced the reality of verses 8 and 9 of a ruthless personal discipline so that they themselves won't stumble and won't fall away.

It's only those kind of people, isn't it? Who have come to share the true heart of their Father in heaven. And so who really do reflect his desire to restore the wanderer, whatever the cost.

[18:27] So you see, with that kind of person, the mutual brotherly discipline that's in view here, it can never be harsh, can it? It can never be disciplinarian.

No, it's going to be full of mercy. It's aimed at restoration. And it's powered by a forgiving heart, by a heart that is overflowing with mercy and with the grace of God.

Which is why immediately after this section, look, verse 21 onwards, Jesus' parable comes immediately about forgiveness, about forgiving 70 times 7, which is extraordinary.

It's all bound up together, do you see? Excuse me. Because we need to see not only that judgment will be real and terrible for a brother who sins against God and against us and won't repent, but also we've got to see that judgment will be real and severe for us if we've been sin against and we don't forgive our brother or sister from the heart.

Look down to verse 35. So my heavenly Father will do to every one of you if you do not forgive your brother from the heart. See, it's only when we've got to grips with the desperate seriousness of sin in others, but especially in ourselves, and when we've got to grips with the true wonder and the grace and the mercy of God towards sinners, only then can we really understand what it means to bear the responsibility that we have laid upon us as the household of heaven here on earth.

[20:11] But when we do understand these things, then our priorities will become very clear. When a brother or a sister is enmeshed in sin, even if that sin has badly hurt us personally, damaged us, then we will know that only one thing is really important, that they should be won back to the Father's house, whatever the cost might be to us and the loss to us.

And the cost might be very, very great. Look at what Jesus says about how we're to deal with this.

Notice three things about the process of how we're to seek to restore our erring fellow Christian.

First of all, we're to be persistent. Verse 15, if he listens, you've gained, you've won your brother.

But verse 16, if he doesn't listen, well, you've said your bit, don't waste your time anymore on him.

No, don't give up. Go on with the process, even if it does involve time, personal cost, maybe embarrassment, awkwardness.

And it is costly, isn't it? Let's be real, to pursue these things is difficult, especially if you've been wronged and hurt. Because it's not just a battle to get your errant brother or sister to listen, to see their own error and to repent, but there's a battle in your own heart.

[21:29] It's a battle with ourselves. There's the wrong party. There's a battle for us to show a forgiving spirit. In every relationship breakdown, there's two sides, aren't there, to be dealt with.

There's two sources of sin. There's two sources of discipline in this fallen world. There's the offender, who must be brought to repentance and to restoration, or else, Jesus says, they are truly at risk of perishing.

But there's also the offended party, who must also be penitent, who mustn't harbor grudges, resentment, bitterness, who mustn't react to the sinner's reluctance to repent by becoming hard, by becoming unforgiving in our own heart.

We've got to continue to offer that forgiveness from the heart. That is desperately hard, isn't it? Especially if you graciously try to forgive, and that forgiveness isn't welcomed, it's not received. Or if it's scorned, if somebody just says, well, I've nothing to feel bad about. I've nothing to repent about. I've done nothing wrong. See, forgiveness can't be forced on people.

[22 : 45] Forgiveness has got to be received, and it can only be received by a penitent person. Otherwise, they don't think they need any forgiveness. Forgiveness offered can only work restoration and salvation in the offender, if they will receive it penitently and know that they need it.

But likewise, forgiveness can only work mercy and salvation in the giver, in the wronged person, if they continue to offer it freely in their own heart.

And that's very hard. But that's what we must do, says Jesus. Our forgiving attitude must be persistent, however hard it is to go on. And it might get harder and harder.

Involving others, as Jesus says here, if necessary. And then perhaps even having to make the matter public. Not for our personal vindication, but only with the spiritual restoration of a beloved brother or sister in view.

And that spirit means that we will be very careful, won't we, at every stage of the process. As well as being persistent, Jesus says we are to be protective. Firstly, to the brother that we're seeking to restore.

[24 : 03] We don't go public at once, he says. We certainly don't go straight into a public spat on Twitter. Which seems to happen so much these days, even among Christians, to their shame.

Now, only if we must, verse 16, do we involve anybody else at all. Only if all efforts for discrete counsel fails, are we then to take it further, verse 17, take it with the whole church, which means the proper discipline of the local congregation, however that is ordered.

Not just a gossipy free-for-all in the church. Properly done. Things must be done carefully, decently, because we want to protect the erring brother.

We don't want to humiliate them. See, our world of media, our world now especially of social media, is like a medieval bear pit. Even a tweet from your teenage years can be dragged up and have you cast to the beasts for your destruction.

That is the very antithesis, isn't it, of Christ's way here. The absolute opposite. There's to be discipline, says Jesus. Yes, there is. But no degeneracy like that. But you see, the other side of it is that once we begin dealing faithfully with an errant brother or sister, we've got to be willing to go on and carry it through to the proper conclusion.

[25 : 35] That's what he's saying in verse 17. And that too is protective, isn't it? Because that makes us think hard. Do we even want to begin taking something up this way? That will guard us, won't it, from making a mountain out of a molehill in the beginning.

If we know we've got to carry things through properly. So ask yourself, are you willing, if it comes to it, to be exposed yourself to other people's scrutiny, that of the whole church, for your allegation against a fellow believer?

See how the very process there is protective of the errant brother. But it's also protective for you as the wronged party. Because involving, as Jesus says here, one or two others, that means you'll have support, won't you, from other wise heads.

And if things do have to escalate further, well, their testimony will add to yours, that you've acted rightly, not vindictively. That you try to do everything you can to help the situation.

That you're not just acting out of petty vindictiveness. The whole process, you see, is protective of sinners. Because we are a church full of sinners.

[26 : 44] Everyone who comes here is one. And so even those who are right, and in the right, in a particular situation, they are themselves flawed. And they're going to have mixed motives.

So the process must be persistent and protective. And also, notice verse 19 and 20, prayerful. It's very closely linked, those verses, with this whole process of discipline.

If two or three agree on earth, about anything they ask, that is, asking in prayer, about this, then it will be done, by your Father in heaven.

We're not left on our own, to sort these things out. Our Heavenly Father is there for us, to ask for help. You see, these verses are often taken, as just a general encouragement, to corporate prayer, in general.

And there is an application, of course, to all prayer in general. Notice it is to corporate prayer, gathered prayer. But in the context, you can see, it's specifically related, to this whole area, of restorative discipline, isn't it?

[27 : 52] And the point is, you see, something like this, can never be called, and calculated. It's not a tribunal. This is a family. It's Christ's church. His family. And so of course, these issues, have to be surrounded by prayer, right from the very start.

Your own prayers, but all the more, when you do have to involve, one or two others, as verse 17 says. Well, you're not on your own, because verse 20, assures us, when those two or three believers, are gathered, to deal with such things, prayerfully, asking the Father in heaven, for wisdom, and for help, well, we have the promise, in verse 20, look, of Christ himself, in the very midst.

His Holy Spirit, to help us, to guide us, in these situations. So you pray, for the right attitude, for a heart full, of forgiving grace. You pray, knowing God's mercy, to you, his forgiveness of you, for your sins.

And you pray, knowing that the Father's will, is for the wonder, to be restored. Lord, and our gracious Lord, we know, stands with us, in the midst, to help us, and to guide us.

So what is our responsibility, from heaven, when a brother, or a sister, sins against us? We're to see, that most important, is their sin, not against us, but against God.

[29 : 22] And we're to see, the urgent need, for their restoration, not for our reputation. And we'll be persistent, in seeking that restitution, while being protective, of their reputation, and of our own motivations.

And above all, prayerful, we'll be imploring God himself, to work his mercy, and grace. That's our responsibility, from heaven, as the church, of Jesus Christ, here on earth.

Well, how do you think, we're doing that? In general, in the church today, would you say? I suspect, that what we often do, isn't, to go first, to a brother, or sister like that, but we go, and bleat, and moan, to other people, don't we?

Or we bad mouth, the offender. Or if we do confront them, what we want to get, is an apology, and we want to justify, ourselves. Or perhaps, more likely, we just don't even, approach them, but we just, don't talk to them, we break off the relationship, all together.

Or even worse, sometimes people, just go public, straight away, don't they? Spread gossip, they spread poison, especially now, in this cesspit, that we call social media. And it just fractures, relationships, more and more, doesn't it?

[30 : 40] I think if we're honest, the Cummings approach, is probably much more common, than Christ's approach, than you think, even in the church, that bears Christ's name.

And the result? Well what happens, is that a wrongdoer, very often, is left to drift away, or even is made, to storm away.

And the wronged person, just remains bitter, and hard, and unforgiving. And if we take Jesus, words seriously here, then he says, look at verse 9, don't forget that, he says that they are, in great danger, of hell fire.

Despite, no doubt, each of them, feeling utterly righteous, themselves, and much more, sinned against, than sinned, sinner. But if we really, did take Jesus, seriously here, if we took our, responsibilities, as his family, seriously, wouldn't the church, be transformed, out of all recognition? The place where there's, no gossiping, no backstabbing, no salacious, tweeting, and retweeting, of people's accusations, or people's anger. Instead, lots of people, who just say, no, no, don't tell me about that, I don't want to hear.

[32 : 00] you go and pray for him. Ask to pray together. Gently seek restoration, with Jesus, both of you. And if you need help, ask someone to come, and join the prayer.

Don't you think, if the church of Jesus Christ, right across our nation, really did live like that, living for heaven, here on earth, don't you think, a lot more people, might find the way, to heaven, from earth, right here in the midst, in the midst of God's people?

Well, we've got a responsibility, from heaven, we mustn't shirk from, from our heavenly father. But further, we have the authority, of heaven, as the church, on earth today, and we mustn't shrink, from that.

Verses 18 and 19, you see, teach us, we're not to doubt, that in the gospel, the church has, God's saving truth, authority, authority, revealed from heaven, forever.

And it is this, that has been given, to the church, and committed to the church, as the supreme rule, of faith and life, here on earth. And we're not to shrink, from standing on that, and applying that, in the church today, with all the authority, of heaven itself.

[33 : 19] So we can't separate, the persistent, forgiving love of heaven, from the permanent, revealed truth, of heaven. which must be, the standard, that we all submit to.

Otherwise, there will be, no real forgiveness, and no restoration. In other words, where there is sin, we need to love, but we need to love, in truth.

As Paul puts it, in Ephesians 4, cherish the truth, in love. God's restoring, forgiveness, God's merciful justice, isn't, isn't, just soft, and sentimental.

It's never, affirming of sin, never that. Rather, it is demanding, and it is transforming, of sin. See, the discipline, in the Christian family, is always to aim, for restoration.

It's always to win, the wonder. It's to save them. Only if it's resisted, is it in any way, to become, punitive. But when it is resisted, when all, attempts are exhausted, when there is no response, verse 17, even to the church, then Jesus says, we can't be naive, and sentimental.

[34 : 33] No. Let him be to you, as a Gentile, or a text collector. That is, as an outsider. You can't consider them, as a Christian brother, or sister anymore. There are times, and it's very hard.

It's very heartbreaking. When we have to accept, the reality of that situation. Even, even when we're deeply involved, personally.

The you there, in verse 17, is singular. It's very personal. But you must face up to it, says Jesus.

People can place themselves, in a situation, where we can only conclude, that they've insisted, on placing themselves, outside, the family of God, in Christ.

Because they continue, to behave in a way, that shows clearly, that they are rejecting, the authority of truth, of God. They're refusing, to submit, to the, sole rule, of faith and life, that is laid down, by Christ, and by his apostles, from heaven, to us.

Now notice, what he's not saying here. He's not saying, to us as Christians, that, that we can look, inside people's hearts, and make judgments, and say, are they really saved, or not? I think not.

That's a question, for God alone.

[35 : 49] And you and I, are not God. We do not have, the all-seeing eye. But for us, Jesus says, the question is, very straightforward. Is there, visible submission, in life, to the word, and the command of God?

Is there, in someone's confession, and in the reality, in their life, visible submission, to the scriptures? Or, is there just, flagrant denial?

Is there refusal, to submit, to God's clear word? Is there open rejection, of it? Because, obedience to God's word, is binding, on true disciples, of Jesus.

Whether you're, a professing church member, whether you're a leader, a pastor, a bishop, an archbishop, or whatever, titles you think, are important. It is those, who do the will, of the Father in heaven, says Jesus, back in chapter 12.

Those ones, alone, who are to be regarded, as part of my family. Not those, who disobey him. However much, they might say, oh Lord, Lord.

[36 : 55] Jesus, does not know, those, lawless frauds, he says. And therefore, you see, the application, of any discipline, in the Christian church, must be the application, of whatever, has already, been authoritatively, bound, in heaven.

Look at verse 18. Things that are bound, and loosed. And that is what is revealed to us, in the word of God. If you look at the footnote there, in verse 18, it shows us that the tense, is future perfect.

It's, it's better to read it, shall have been bound, or shall have been loosed. It's a bit clumsy sounding, it's hard to translate. But it means, what God's word, has already bound, or loosed, has forbidden, or commanded.

Through Christ's own words, and through the words, of his apostles, whose teaching, is the foundation, of the church forever. And indeed, through all scripture, which Jesus clearly, regards as authoritative.

In fact, verse 16 here, he's quoting directly, from Moses teaching, in Deuteronomy, chapter 19, verse 15. You see, what he's saying is, that the church, on earth, has the authority, of heaven, because, it has, God's immutable words.

[38 : 15] It stands on, absolute, biblical, authority. And it must act, in line with it. Because that is what tells us, heaven's verdict, on all things.

What has been declared, bound, or loosed. What has been declared, right, or wrong, for all time, in all places, for all churches. The Bible tells us, what sin is, and isn't, not man.

And when we stand, on the Bible's authority, and only when we do, the church is acting, with the full authority, of heaven, here on earth.

And hence, verse 19, you see, it is wielding, the sword of heaven. It's wielding, wielding the hand of God, at work, to vindicate his church. The gospel, you see, is a double-edged sword, we're told.

And when we are praying, in line with the gospel, God will act, in line with his truth, in his church.

Remember how Paul tells us, in 2 Corinthians 2, that his word, is the savor of life, and of restoration, if it is received.

[39 : 22] Just as it is, the savor of, death, and of judgment, if it's rejected. It's a very serious matter. And not only, is the church, living now for heaven, to reflect, heaven here on earth, but the issues, of eternity, are being decided, now, on earth, and being decided forever.

And that's why, we mustn't miss, this last thing, in verse 20. You see, we have a responsibility, from heaven, that we mustn't share it. We have the authority, of heaven, in the scriptures.

We must not shrink, from that. But also, we have the presence, and power, of heaven, in our midst.

And we must never, forget that either. When the church, stands true, to its responsibility, of costly love, and to its witness, to the authoritative truth, of scripture, speaking truly, in the name of Jesus, then it is, he, it is Jesus himself, who is truly, in the midst.

It is he, who acts, among us, both in salvation, and in judgment. What a huge relief, that is to us.

That means, it's not for us, as the church, to exert things, like physical discipline, or any earthly power, or any earthly punishments, like that.

That's not our business. No, but rather, by being witnesses, to the truth, to real spiritual truth, and bringing real, spiritual discipline, thereby, as these verses describe, then, what he's saying, Christ, himself, is heard.

[41 : 09] And he himself, will be at work, in our midst, by his Holy Spirit. there I am, myself, among them, to restore, to heal, to bring back, to win, that precious brother, or sister.

Or, if, resisted, persistently, I am there, to deal with them, personally, in his justice. Christ, himself, is in the midst, and it's out of his mouth, that comes that, two-edged sword.

That means, two things, and with this, I close. First, friends, this is a real warning, to the church, to those in the church, don't ever mock, don't ever scorn, the truth of God.

What God in heaven, has bound, or loosed, and what he has revealed, to us on earth, in his words, of scripture, are for us to obey. And, in a church, where that truth, is being proclaimed, it is a dangerous place, for those who are defiant, for those who will refuse it, for those who are hardening, their hearts to it.

There I am among you, says Jesus. To do as heaven declares. And that is a real warning to us. But it is also, a great, great encouragement.

[42 : 44] Because Jesus, our Savior, wants to be in our midst, to do the Father's will, to heal, to restore, to renew. That's his proper work.

That's what he loves to do. That is the will of the Father, that none such should perish. But every errant one, should be won back. And if we're to be in line, with his desire, then we mustn't shirk, our responsibility, to sow love, and restore, however costly it is.

Nor must we shrink back, from the Bible's authority, that it is our duty, to speak that truth, in love, not to shrink from that. Nor must we forever forget, the power, of the presence of our Lord, among us, to win, brothers and sisters back, to restore, to repair, again and again.

If we will do justly, and let, heaven's redeeming righteousness, flourish among us, whatever the cost, if we will truly cherish, that truth in love, as a church, then our Lord Jesus Christ himself, will be among us, bringing heaven's power, to earth, right here in our midst.

That's what we want, isn't it? It's certainly what we need, today, and every day. Amen.

[44 : 20] Let's pray together. As we, in quietness, examine our own hearts, look into, the deepest recesses, and ask ourselves, are we reflecting the heart, of our Father in heaven, his will, for our

brothers and sisters, when they've sinned against us, and our part in that.

We pray, Almighty God, who shows, to them, that are in error, the light of thy truth, to the intent, that they may return, into the way of righteousness.

Grant unto all of us, in this fellowship, of Christ's church, that we may turn away, from things, contrary to our profession, and follow all such things, as are agreeable to the same.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.