

My Brother's Keeper, Part 3

Luke 17:3-4

Well, we're in Luke 17 and we're continuing a series called My Brother's Keeper, and we are looking at Luke 17:1-10, Luke 17:1-10. Today, we're just going to get through the first four verses. This week we're going to learn how to be our brother's keeper. So this is really some practical, practical teaching from our Lord today. And so today is going to be less, maybe less like a sermon and more like some in-house instruction for the saints.

So the first point is, number one, sin is serious, so pay careful attention. Sin is serious, so pay careful attention. Look at verses 1 and 2. We see that this falls immediately on the heels of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, and Jesus said to his disciples, Luke 17:1-2, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come." What's the woe? The woe has just been described in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

It was a graphic, vivid portrayal of the woe he's describing. "Woe to the one through whom temptations to sin come." Verse 2, "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin." And then this in verse 3, "Pay attention to yourselves."

After delivering a parable, graphically, vividly, terrifyingly portraying the reality of a rich man who unexpectedly finds himself suffering in torment. It's a religious man. In this culture, he would have been a religious man. He would have been a church-going man. He would have been your neighbor. He would have been friendly, respected, commended in the community and yet he finds himself unexpectedly suffering in torment after he dies.

And so Jesus, his warning here to us as a church, to his disciples, this warning makes perfect sense. "Pay attention to yourselves." Watch out for yourselves. It's not an

individualistic command, just pay attention to yourself individually, though this has individual implications.

This is a corporate command. Pay attention to yourself as a community. Pay attention to yourself as a fellowship of believers. You disciples, pay attention to yourselves. You are your brother's keeper. We have to watch out for ourselves. We have to guard the fellowship. It's our duty, our job, to protect the little ones in our midst.

Just as society tries to protect the little ones from predators preying upon their little lives and their naivete and their vulnerability and their weakness, so we as a church do the same thing with the little ones among us.

"Temptations to sin," *ta skandala*. That's, *skandalon* is the noun, stumbling block. And in the context, these temptations to sin, Jesus is referring here to the scribes and the Pharisees, those who oppose the godly, those who rejected the little ones who despised the poor and the crippled and the lame and the

blind, those who criticized Jesus for receiving tax collectors and sinners and eating with them.

They're the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. They're the ones who not only hate their younger brother and hate the grace and the forgiveness that's coming upon him, but they hate the father for it, too. That's who these stumbling blocks are in context.

And Jesus' summary of the parable for his disciples forms an introduction, then, into the instruction that we're about to hear today. So we want to make sure we stay far, far away from that woe that Jesus has pronounced upon those through whom temptations to sin will inevitably come. They will arise.

We don't want to be the people who are the stumbling blocks. We don't want to introduce the stumbling blocks. We don't want anyone in our fellowship to cause others to stumble. We don't want any of these little ones in our midst to stumble, either. Consequences are so serious and final and deadly and permanent.

And so we are, by this instruction from our Lord and by this warning from our Lord, we are well motivated, aren't we, to pay attention to ourselves, to be our brother's keeper, to listen carefully to Jesus' instruction. We're convinced that we need to take up the responsibility, take up this blessed duty, this call of our Lord to care for our brothers and sisters, to make sure that we know what to do, know how to respond when the inevitable stumbling block enters into our fellowship.

And so the second point, number two, sin is insidious, so practice biblical confrontation. Sin is insidious, so practice biblical confrontation. Since stumbling blocks are inevitable, since it's impossible that there will not be stumbling blocks entering into our fellowship, and since they enter into our fellowship not with signs on them, but through loving people, flesh and blood people like you and me, then it's inevitable that people will enter into our fellowship who, though they don't appear that way at the first sight, they will become a cause of stumbling for others.

We need to count on it, because our Lord told us to. They will become a cause of stumbling for others. They will inevitably introduce temptations to sin, temptations to compromise. They'll introduce aberrant or false doctrine. They will influence others through ungodly behavior, whether in their speech, their influence, their lifestyle.

The sin, the temptation to sin, it's insidious. It's deceptive. It's pernicious. It's crafty because it comes in the form of people that we, as a believing community, we are inclined to love them. We're inclined to think the best. We're inclined to receive and welcome and rejoice in people coming into our fellowship. And so there's a vulnerability in us.

Jude identifies the same issue. Jude in Jude verses 3 and 4, that short little one-chapter epistle, Jude says, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary instead to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." Jude, what changed your mind about the purpose in writing? Why couldn't you just write about our common salvation,

rejoice in that? Why did you have to get all serious on us and talk about contention?

Verse 4, "For certain people have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality, that is, living by their senses. And they deny our only master and Lord Jesus Christ." Watch out. Canon of New Testament revelation had not even closed. The ink's not even dry, and already what Jesus is warning us about in Luke 17, it's happening in the little letter that Jude wrote.

So Luke 17:1-2, it's a perennial problem. It's inevitable that stumbling blocks will come. There's not a day that goes by that we must always be watchful, always be on our guard, always be checking, always be careful and concerned. Doesn't mean live in fear. Means live in joy, but discernment and wisdom.

And look at verses 3 and 4. Jesus says, "Pay attention to yourselves." And here's how you put this into practice. Here's how you pay attention. "If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if

he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in the day and turns to you seven times saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." Short instruction, just two verses. But man, is that packed with content. It requires great wisdom in putting it into practice and that can be tricky, if you've ever entered into this.

People are tricky, aren't they? And sometimes when you confront or you bring something up to somebody that's difficult and complicated, sometimes you see not the best in yourself coming out. Confrontation can be tricky, and you don't want to go into one of these confrontation situations wielding a battle axe or a broadsword, just whaling away at everything, swinging around, lopping off sins left and right. That's not biblical confrontation, that's idiocy. Makes a big, big mess. Doesn't actually hit the problem. Hits a bunch of other things and causes all kinds of other problems.

Biblical confrontation, if it's done biblically, requires a gentle hand, requires a soft touch and a steady hand of precision. So instead of Conan the Barbarian with a broadsword, think surgeon with a scalpel, eye surgeon, brain surgeon,



delicate; think about someone with precision and skill. Biblical confrontation requires this. It requires patience, a gentle demeanor, and, as Jesus says here, a gracious and forgiving spirit.

So let's get into this. Jesus addresses two situations here: in verse 3, one in which you witness a brother sinning, verse 3; and another situation where he kind of turns up the heat a bit in verse 4, in which you're not just witnessing someone sinning; you are the victim of that sin. That sin is now against you; you're the victim of your brother's sin. The first isn't personal, necessarily, but the second definitely is.

So verse 3, "If your brother sins," if you witness a fellow Christian sinning, whether it's a sin against others or against God alone or whatever it is, rebuke him. In verse 4, Jesus makes it personal. "If your brother sins," notice it, there, "against you." Against you.

First situation, your brother's sinning, not necessarily against you, and if that's the case, what do you do? If we

practice biblical confrontation, when we start out, here's letter A, when we start out, we make a reasonable assumption. We make a reasonable assumption. That's letter A for your notes. When we witness the sin, our starting assumption is that we are dealing, as Jesus says here, with a brother. And that masculine form is meant to bring to mind the sister as well. So, brother, sister.

This is, in other words, this is a fellow disciple. This is a professing Christian, and this is so important. Jesus is not telling his disciples to confront just anyone. We're not to run around confronting all of our unbelieving neighbors and unbelieving coworkers. There are instances in which we must address sin in the world and confront unbelievers, but here Jesus is calling his people to confront sin in the church, confront sin in the household of faith, among believers.

You can turn there if you're quick enough, but in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 9 and following, Paul is dealing with the situation in the Corinthian Church in chapter 5 of 1 Corinthians, verses 1-8, in which it's a horrible sin. A man has his father's wife, and not only is that sin going on, but the

church is actually rejoicing in their liberty and saying, Look at this example of grace and liberty and freedom. And even the unbelieving world around them, and that's the Corinthian world around them, is condemning it and saying, this is abhorrent, repugnant.

What is this fellowship of people doing? Paul corrects that, confronts it, says, expel that man out of your midst. He says this in chapter 5, verse 9, 1 Corinthians. He says, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world," that is, your coworkers, your neighbors, unbelievers. Not the people, "the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters since then you would need to go out of the world.

"But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother. Don't associate with somebody who's a professing Christian if he's guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler. Don't even eat with so, such a one." Don't even sit down and have breakfast or lunch. Don't get into each other's houses.

“For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those who are outside. You purge the evil person from among you.”

That's 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. So if we're confronting sin, we're confronting it in the church, and we start by assuming that this person is a Christian. We assume they are a regenerate church member, and when we do that, we need to realize that we are dealing with a fellow believer, a believer who has all the marks of being a believer that you do.

This means we assume, and this is especially the case in a church like ours, where we have learned from other faithful churches, we have learned that we need to practice formal church membership. We need to know, then, the front end before anybody comes into the church, that they're truly a Christian. We need to here, a credible profession of faith. We need to make sure, as much as it depends on us, as much as we can tell, that this is a regenerate person, that there's evidence of regeneration in their lives.

So we examine professions of faith, we examine their testimony. We insist upon believer's baptism, credo-baptism. We assume when they come in and they enter into our church and they join our church, now, everybody who's a member of this church, we assume some basic truths about every single church member.

We assume, for instance, that every member is born again by the Spirit of God. Born again. Regenerate. Every member has a new nature given to him or her by God. That's a heart of stone replaced with a heart of flesh, and that heart of flesh, it responds. It's living. It responds to the Word.

And so we assume that that new nature accepts all the basic truths of Christianity. There's no questions about the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the things we confess, the authoritative nature of Scripture. There's no questions about what the true Gospel is, that salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. There's no question about Christ being the head of the church, and his authority comes by his Word mediated in and through the church.

Those are all accepted basic foundational things among Christians. Every individual member has been baptized into Christ by the Spirit, immersed in the Spirit, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and therefore partakes of the Spirit's ministries of illumination, so that truth comes to life, and they kind of have an understanding of it, takes part of the Spirit's instruction, conviction, motivation for righteousness. All those things we assume to be true when we see a brother sinning. We put, brother, in all caps in our minds, sinning, small font. Brother, this is a brother.

We assume that every believer in our church shares a love of the truth, desires to mortify sin, repent of sin, respond well to the truth, has a longing to walk in holiness and righteousness of the truth. And so when we come to a brother or sister to talk to them about sin, we have every reason to expect that this person will react, what, positively, eager to be obedient to truth.

In fact, it's one mark of a healthy Christian, it's one mark of a healthy church, that we react to biblical confrontation well. Christians are a robust people. They're not

thin-skinned about confrontation. They've actually got a thick skin. They're a strong and confident people because they are eager to open themselves up to confrontation, eager to open up their lives to the scrutiny of one another. Why? Because they want to grow in the truth. They love the truth. They love to worship the God of truth.

This is why Jesus is careful to isolate the practice of biblical confrontation to a brother. Luke 17:3, "If your brother sins," one from among yourselves to whom you are supposed to pay attention, if that one sins. We're talking about members of the church, and it's for the good of the church. It's for their good, and it's for the good of the whole church. This is why we come.

So we make letter A, a reasonable assumption. Next little sub-point here, letter B, we witness, letter B, we witness a verifiable violation. Verifiable violation. It's a violation of what? God's Word, God's truth, and it's verifiable. That is, we can see what they've done, we can point to chapter and verse.

So we're talking about an actual sin, according to God's Word. It's not some petty violation of tradition. It's not someone walking across your preference issue. It's not your cultural standard. It's not your cultural church standard. It's actually chapter and verse.

So when Jesus says, "If your brother sins," the verb for sin is *harmartano*. *Harmartano* is to miss the mark. So picture, like, an archer shooting an arrow, and he fails to hit the bullseye. He fails to hit the bullseye, that's missing the mark, and that, what is the target? The target is perfect obedience to God's Word.

So he misses the target, he misses the bullseye. So your brother or sister here in this scenario is off target. He or she, missing the mark in word or deed, straying away from obedience to God's Word in word or deed, in lifestyle and behavior and speech. There's no, close enough is good enough, with God's law. This isn't horseshoes or hand grenades. This is God, who's perfect. Jesus said, Matthew 5:48, "Therefore be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."



So this is a God who requires absolute perfection, absolute precision, pinpoint accuracy in doing his will in obedience to his commandments. This requires obeying God wholeheartedly in thought and word and deed, in doing whatever he commanded and excluding nothing and leaving nothing out. Obedience to him.

Who among us fits that description? Not one, right? Not one. Only the Lord Jesus Christ fits that perfection of righteousness' description, and that's why we start out understanding that the act of obedience of Christ and being united to him by the Spirit, joined to him in union with him, when God looks at us as Christians, you know what he sees? He sees Christ. He sees Christ's perfections. He sees his absolute perfection and righteousness, and so we are covered in him.

And yet, we see in our practical experience, don't we, yeah, positionally righteous in Christ. Practically, practically, that's the problem, isn't it? And so if none of us can raise our hands, say, yep, perfect, wholehearted obedience, loving the Lord God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength,

never failing in that for a second, and loving my neighbor as myself, never failing that for a second, nobody here can raise their hand and say, that's me.

So what should we expect? Every once in a while, we need to be confronted. Every once in a while, we might be putting a foot wrong, and we might expect, I've offended somebody. I've, my sin has come out and been seen in public. And you say, well, wait a minute. Even what I do, rightly, that people don't perceive, sometimes there's bad motives in my heart, sometimes there's a mix of motives. So are we supposed to be heart-sin police? Are we supposed to get into everybody's kitchen and start questioning and put him in the interrogation room. Single light bulb swinging back and forth. Turn up the heat.

Who among us has the spiritual perception to test the heart for that kind of precision, accuracy, and obedience? Not one of us, not one. God and God alone can see the heart, right? There's no way that you or I as human beings with our inherent human limitations, there is no way that we can see the heart. There's no way we can know the mind, discern the motives.

That's God's territory, not ours, right? God told Samuel, 1 Samuel 16:7, "The Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." That's not condemning us, that's just calling it like it is. It's simply stating the obvious. It acknowledges we live and we are creatures living in a visible world, flesh-and-blood world.

All the information that's going to come to us, requires a stimuli, an external stimuli that's going to hit our sensory perceptors, our audibly, visually, touch, taste, smell that's interpreted by the brain, and we make a decision. Hidden matters of the heart, it's invisible to us. We cannot perceive it. That's God's territory and God's alone.

So when it comes to Jesus' command here in Luke 17:3, "If your brother sins," if he misses the mark, if he strays off course, we're dealing with those sins that are externally observable. We don't address what we suspect may be going on in the heart. We deal only with what we can see or hear, sins that

are obvious to us because we can see them with our eyes, we can hear them with our ears.

We like to say when confronting sin, make sure you're dealing with something obvious, something you can take a picture of, something you record on video, or something you could, don't record each other on video. That's not what I'm saying. But something, you could do that or recorded, you know, audio. Perhaps something dramatic, blatantly obvious.

This "brother's keepers," keeper mentality does require us to take a very tough stand against sin, to confront and purge any cause for stumbling out of our fellowship. But while we take a tough stand against sin, at the same time when we confront sin, we also have to have this uber meek, gentle demeanor. How do you get ahold of the two things together in the same life? We stand tough, but we do it with the tender heart. We're strong and straightforward and direct, and yet at the same time, gentle, gracious, eager, ready to forgive.