

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹⁵ “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” **This is God’s Word.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Who do you think of when I mention the word family? Maybe it’s your brother or sister if you have them or your parents or grandparents. Maybe you think of a favorite aunt or uncle. Who do you think of when I mention church family? That includes most everyone who is sitting here in church today plus our members who are watching online as well as those members I mail the sermon or a DVD of the service to every week. We are all members of our church family and on a larger scale we are members of God’s family – connected to one another by a common faith in Jesus as our Savior.

The portion of scripture before us today talks about our church family and more specifically, **“Our Ministry to One Another.”** This portion of scripture breaks down, **“The Manner of our Ministry,” “The Method of our Ministry,”** and **“The Means of our Ministry.”**

I. How well do you get along with your brother or sister? We love our siblings but we don’t always get along – there are times when we disagree or even fight. That happens in every family and even though we may squabble at times, we still love our family and want the best for them. Is it the same with our church family? In this portion of scripture Jesus talks about a member of your church family who sins against you or whom you see involved in some kind of serious sinful act. What should you do?

Many times we don’t want to do anything – we don’t want to get involved because it is hard to confront someone. It’s easier to just look the other way. But James wrote, **“¹⁹ My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.** (James 5:19–20). Will save him from death – that’s pretty serious stuff and yet Isaiah wrote, **“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”** (Isaiah 59:2).

Both Isaiah and James were not talking about sins like talking back to your mom or disobeying the speed limit or gossiping about your neighbor. All sin is bad but Isaiah and James are talking about more serious sins – living together outside of marriage, drunkenness, addiction

to the internet or to pornography, staying away from church, publicly telling lies about someone to try and ruin their reputation and there are probably a lot more serious sins I haven't even listed.

So what should we do? Well, before we do anything we want to remember that we are sinful as well and we need God's forgiveness too. This shouldn't keep you from talking to them but rather remind you to go in humility as you address the issue. And pray – ask God to help you with just the right words and to give you the strength to speak up. Ask God to work through your words to call them to repentance and help them turn from their sin.

Then take action. This is a serious matter and Jesus lays out the steps for us.

II. The first step is to, **“go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”** Go alone; in private and explain what you saw. There might be denial at 1st but you are an eye witness, so stick to the facts. Explain how this is serious and how you don't want to see this sin come between them and God. Speak from a heart of Christian love and concern. If they listen and repent, you can rejoice and assure them that their sin is forgiven. But if they are stubborn and defiant, then Jesus says, **“take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”**

These additional witnesses show the seriousness of the sin and you also have witnesses to establish that you talked to the person and their response. Our prayer is that they would listen and repent of their sin but if they continue to be defiant Jesus says, **“tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”**

The pastor and Elders will work with the person but if they refuse to listen, then the church has the responsibility to separate themselves from this person because they are rejecting God, his Word and his forgiveness. This last step we call excommunication. Many view it as kicking the member out of the church, but it is really a separation done out of Christian love to try and help the person to see the seriousness of their sin.

When a church takes this step, it is a sad day because they are binding this person's sin to them – in other words telling them that it is not forgiven because there is no repentance.

III. God gives us the means to perform this duty in his Word – in the Law and Gospel. The purpose of the Law is to show us our sin. We don't like to hear the Law, because it is a mirror – accusing us of disobeying God's commands. No one wants to be held accountable, but the Law is necessary to lead us to repentance and to lead us to the Good News of the Gospel.

After we confess our sins, we rejoice to hear the comforting words, “Your sins are forgiven – they have been loosed from you and cast away.” The Lord's Supper is another way in which we receive forgiveness for our sins and a strengthening of our faith.

This is the 1st time I have preached on this sermon text in 17 years of ministry. You might say I have avoided it, because it isn't an easy topic – we all have sinned and fallen short of God's demand that we be perfect. And none of us likes to hear about our sins so it's even harder to

confront someone about their sin, but when there is a serious sin, it becomes a life and death situation.

If we had a family member fall out of a boat and we see them struggling to keep their head above water we would want to do whatever it takes to save them. So it is when we see someone in a harmful and sinful situation – they are struggling, whether they know it or not – and we want to do whatever we can to save them.

Our motivation is always the love that Jesus has shown for us – how he has called us to faith and brings us the assurance of forgiveness on a regular basis. Listen to the words of our Savior and remember them as we try to reflect his love in all we do. Especially remember his words when we have to minister to a member of our church family in whatever way is necessary.

Family is important – our physical family as well as our church family. Family gatherings are just as important because Jesus tells us, **“where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** May we always look forward to gathering around God’s Word with our church family to hear our Savior speak to us and may we always remember our Savior’s love for us and his Word to guide and strengthen us as we minister to one another. Amen.