

Sometimes I wonder if we are just not too lax. I hear that a church member has been rude to a visitor, or picked up a telephone and poured anger and bitterness, even hatred into another's ear, wounding their heart. Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness, It used to be obedience, obedience, obedience. But now lawlessness reigns throughout the world, even in the church.

Listen to the people outside the church. They are disappointed in us. They say we are no different than anyone else. Hypocrites they say. We say, We are not the gathering of the righteous, but the forgiven. ~~we~~ We begin our worship with the confession of sins, admitting ~~our~~ our defeat from the very start. Accepting our sin, even getting pretty comfortable with it. Saying I'm a sinner with nary a tear in our eye.

Hear what God intends for the church: Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having ~~in~~ cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Happy
A people being cleansed, being sanctified through hearing God's word and being renewed, made new, by that word. ~~That is the church.~~

I can't help to say
~~But I say,~~ "I'm a sinner but so is everyone else, so don't you hassle me about it. My life is none of your business. Take me as I am or not at all.

But sin is not a private concern
~~I know that is not what God intends.~~ ^{God} He has placed me not in some cave, alone, but here in the body of Christ, the church. Through you God is making ~~me~~ me ^{toe}. I am a ~~finger~~ ^{toe} in this body of Christ, you are an arm. If I am infected with sin, the whole body is in pain, the whole body is in danger. My Grandmother always said, when your feet hurt you hurt all over. But I think that is true as well for the hand and the ear and the eye. As Paul says, If one member ~~is~~ suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored all rejoice together. ~~Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.~~

~~Because we are one body,~~ because I can't have health unless you are healthy, Christ has given to us these commands:

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} a brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by ~~the evidence of two or three witnesses.~~ 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.

Hear that first step: If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. That takes a lot of courage. No, it ~~does not~~ does ~~not~~ not take courage to dial the phone and swear at and insult another ~~person~~ person, to yell how rotten they have been. But it takes courage and faith and love to go to another who has truly hurt you and to speak ^{honestly} with tears in your heart of that hurt. Not to accuse and point a finger and condemn, that only piles sin upon sin, but to simply open yourself up and let another see how they have driven a knife into you, that takes more courage than any of us have, but not more than God can supply. Whether that offense against you has been great or small, this is the first step. Not harboring and nurturing and feeding the hurt with bitterness ~~and anger~~ and ^a desire for revenge, but going to the other that you might let it go, be freed of that hurt that ~~can~~ will enslave you.

And then, if that fails, the second step: Take others along. ~~The~~ The people ^{who work with} ~~in~~ Alcoholics Anonymous have this step down to a science. They call it an ~~an~~ intervention. The people who are most important to the alcoholic are gathered to be trained to together talk to the alcoholic. They are trained to one after another speak to loved one saying, "Dad, you missed my graduation, I felt so alone with all the other kids parents there, If you had not been drinking Dad, that would never have happened." And then another and another, each speaking from the heart, not to condemn but to save, to bring him back. ~~So Jesus tells us to go, two or three to bring him back.~~ So Jesus tells us to go, two or three to bring him back.

Then, if that fails, before the whole church. Before the rest of the body that there might be healing, not amputation. But if he refuses to listen even to the church, then let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Now what does that mean? Clearly they are to be cut off from the church. But when we realize that the writer of these words, Matthew, was a tax collector When we realize that when Matthew wrote down these words, the church to whom the gospels was given was a Gentile church, then we begin to hear what Jesus is saying. As one pastor put it, this means that they go to the very top of the evangelism list. They are the sick ones, in need of a physician, Jesus. ~~And of~~ This is reinforced when we look at the parable immediately preceding this section, the parable of the ninety nine sheep and the one. The shepherd leaves the ninety nine, ~~and~~ ^{not} seeks the lost one. Jesus concluded that parable saying, So it is the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

And immediately following our gospel for today Jesus said, forgive your brother seventy times seven.

~~You see,~~ there ^{active} ~~is~~ danger for the church. We are ~~tempted~~ tempted to believe that God wants us to be the gathering of the pure, that our responsibility is to cut off the sinner, to pluck out the eye that offends, to execute righteous judgement. Or we fall off the other side and say, Nothing matters, let us continue in sin that grace may abound. But Christ has brought us together, not because we are the ^{whole} ~~healed~~, but to heal. *This is not the new car show room - this is the joy* You and I are here not because we are the miracles in this world, but that he might ~~xxx~~ work a miracle in us, making a people who are common and profane into the cleansed ones, holy and without blemish.

How slow I am to learn this, how slow have all of us been. But beginning today, let us listen to our Lord. If your brother sins against you, go to him alone, not as his judge or his superior, not in pride, but in humility. ^{but as his brother, sister}

What is at stake? I think of Dorwin. Forty five years old, with diabetes ~~that could not be controlled.~~ Dorwin's body would not heal, his fingers and

toes ~~xxx~~ became infected, ~~xxxxxxkdxkxgixxis~~ tahn were possessed by gangrene. The doctor had no choice but to cut, joint by joint, finger by finger toe by toe. Day after day I would visit him in that hospital accross the street from our church, His pain, and his grief over losing his own body were overwhelming. ~~xxxxxxkdxkxkxmanyxamputationsxkxkxkx~~, ~~his legs were short stumps, only parts of a few fingers were left.~~

^{Christ - his own body.}
We in the church do well to feel the kind of sorrow Dorwin felt when members of the body are cut off. But in the body of Christ, amputation is not irreversible. The forgiveness of our Lord Jesus Christ can restore every diseased part, every plucked out eye.

You are the body of Christ. Not one part of this body is expendable. Go to those who have sinned against you, let Goddo what you cannot, restore and heal and reconcile. Let God make you and every member of this body, whole.