

MORNING SERMON OUTLINE

“IF HE LISTENS” OR “IF HE DOES NOT LISTEN”

Matthew 18:15-17 (B)

We have been moving with care through our Lord's teaching in Matthew 18, teaching of the utmost importance for the spiritual & moral well-being of the children of God and the church of Christ: how we are to care for & encourage each other and, when one of Christ's "little ones" wanders away in sin, seek to find and restore the lost sheep to the Lord & to His flock.

We have seen that, while the passage (vv.15-20) sets out steps to be followed in "church discipline," the overarching concern of the chapter is with deliverance & restoration not rejection (though that may happen, v17).

Last Lord's Day we focused in particular on our duty to "go" – to "go in private" seeking to "win your brother." That is one side of confronting sin for the purpose of deliverance and restoration.

Today we focus on the other side, signaled by the word "**hear**" ("**listen**") repeated four times in verses 15, 16, & 17 (twice).

1. **Listen to God: You must hear & heed His Word.**

God the Spirit saves sinners by moving them to hear, *truly* hear, & believe the Word – 1 Peter 1:23, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 1:5

Hearing God as He speaks to us in His Word is essential to our conversion AND to our growth & perseverance in Christ. John 17:17

At Jesus' transfiguration, God the Father spoke to Peter, James, & John: "This is My beloved Son ... *Listen* to Him" (Matt.17:5).
Jesus' said of His sheep: "My sheep *hear* My voice, and I know them, and they *follow* Me" (John 10:27).

This "*hearing*" is more than sounds passing through ears & hitting brains.
Illustrations from family life ...

The Lord condemned Israel because, when He sent them His Word by prophets, they would NOT listen & turn from their sin to Him:

Jeremiah 29:18-20, Ezekiel 20:7,8, 2 Kings 17:13,14, etc.

"They have ears, but do not hear" (Jer.5:21) is not a medical problem, but a sin problem – a problem of heart rebellion against God.

When you surrender to Christ and trust Him to be your Savior, you MUST also be submitting to Him as your *Lord* – Lord of your life.

Saving faith in Jesus entails a *commitment* to listen to His Word (Bible) & to *heed* it. "Be *doers* of the word and not just hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22).

2. **Listen when God speaks through your fellow believers to correct you.**

God's salvation brings us into union with Christ *AND with His church*.

God's children are to be in fellowship with brothers & sisters – in which there is mutual accountability & responsibility.

This is clearly implied in Matt.18:15-17.

If I must listen to Jesus when I read His Word (hear & heed), then I *must also listen* when a brother or sister (or 2 or 3) come to me and open the Word to me to point out sin I need to repent of.

This is true at each level of encounter:

with a caring brother in private (15),

with a larger group who admonish me (16),

or with the body of elders who shepherd the church (17).

King David committed himself to receiving rebukes from a brother, Psalm 141:5 (he meant it, or he might have killed Nathan instead of repenting).

Christ through Paul instructs us: "With all *humility* ... strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace" (Eph.4:2,3).

Commitment to Christ entails commitment to listen to our brethren when they come to us with truth from God's Word. Listen & *heed*.

This is *for our good*, that we might receive correction & live.

An important qualifier:

This does NOT mean we must submit to a concerned brother's misinterpretation of Scripture or misapplication of it to our case.

People with good intentions can read bad stuff into the Bible.

When you come to Christ, your surrender your thinking to Him as Lord, but you do NOT blindly surrender your mind & conscience to everything a sister or pastor or board of elders may say.

Examples from cults and Luther at the Diet of Worms.

But when a faithful brother (or brothers) or your shepherds admonish you truly from the Bible, it is not just they who speak; it is Christ.

For your soul's good – *LISTEN*. Hebrews 13:17.

3. **If you refuse to listen ...**

Our Lord envisions the "brother who has sinned" NOT listening, Indeed, REFUSING to listen.

If the brethren truly love their wandering brother, there will be escalation in trying to win him back from his sin.

But at the end of the road – when they have gone as far as they can, a professing Christian who persists in shutting his ears to the Word, may have to be put out of the Christian fellowship (vs.17).

This has come to be called "excommunication" – that is, put out of the church & not welcome to the Lord's table.

Some clarifications:

- a. This is not consigning someone to hell (only God can do that), or declaring he is not a Christian.
- b. It IS saying, your refusal to repent of sin leaves us not further corrective action than to excommunicate you.
- c. In other words, this is NOT punishment, BUT correction - *if* the Lord in grace uses it to bring about repentance (1 Corinthians 5:5).
- d. AND, the reason someone is put out of the church must **never** be that he or she committed a serious sin, BUT ONLY that, when called on from God's Word to repent, they refused – "he refuses to listen even to the church," that is, refused to listen to the Lord speaking through the church rightly applying His Word.
Any sin, repented of, must be forgiven & the person be restored.