

Text: Matthew 18:1-19:12

Section 1

1At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" 2And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, 3and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4"Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5"And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; 6but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. 7"Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! 8"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. 9"If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell. 10"See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] (Matthew 18:1-11)

We ended last Sunday's lesson discussing this passage, and I indicated to the class that we as Christians sin when we act in a way that causes people to disbelieve or even for weak professing Christians to fall away. There was a bit of contention on this point, so let me begin today by saying that each of us is indeed personally responsible before God. At the last judgment each and every one of us will answer for ourselves before Him. Unless our names are written in the Book of Life, we will stand condemned.

11Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Each individual, **great and small**, will stand before Him, and no one will be able to say "well, he made me do it, and because of that it's not fair that I be denied eternal life." God is a righteous Judge, and everyone whose name is not written in the Book of Life will be condemned to the lake of fire for all eternity. That's unpleasant, but it is just, and it is reality.

Next, my example was of a professing Christian that falls away and ends up going to Hell (and Cody was only an example here—I was not accusing him of being a false professor of Christianity—only God knows the state of his or any of our souls). Our "knee-jerk reaction" to this is "WHAT? That can't happen! What about "Once saved, always saved?" The Doctrine of Eternal Security, or Perseverance of the Saints as it is sometimes called, is absolutely a Biblical concept. No one that is truly converted is going to lose his or her salvation!

27" My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29" My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

But, as plainly as Jesus taught Eternal Security, He taught that not all professors are truly converted. Some do indeed fall away, because they were never truly converted. Unless they repent and believe at some later time, they will die in their sins and end up in the lake of fire.

14" The sower sows the word. 15" These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16" In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18" And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20" And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." (Mark 4:14-20)

Because of this, both Paul and Peter admonished believers to constantly examine themselves to make sure that they are not false professors. God is the one that saves us, and God is the one that keeps us, but consistency of belief, confession, and obedience are marks that we must look for to ensure that we are indeed truly saved. If these are lacking, then we are still in our sins, and must repent and believe if we wish to be saved!

5Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

1Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ: 2Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; 3seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 5Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. (2 Peter 2:1-11)

As we read in Romans last week, we are to some extent responsible for the spiritual well-being of our fellow believers. It is, after all, for instruction, encouragement, and, as we will study shortly, *discipline* that we are commanded to gather together.

19Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:19-25)

As I mentioned as we were departing last week, Ezekiel received a command and admonition from the Lord to proclaim His message to the people, and was told that if he neglected this command this would be regarded as sin in him.

7"Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. 8"When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require from your hand. 9"But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your life. (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

In the illustration given by God to Ezekiel the wicked man did not repent in either example, but as long as Ezekiel warned him Ezekiel had done his job, and was not in sin. Each person is responsible before God for his own sin, but if we as believers fail to warn people of God's wrath and exhort them to repent they will die and go to Hell, receiving the just punishment for their iniquity. If we warn them and they still do not repent, they will likewise die and go to Hell, receiving the just punishment for their iniquity. We are to preach the Gospel, and trust God with the results (since it is He, not us, that saves people). If we are diligent in proclaiming His message we have fulfilled our mandate, and do not sin. If we remain silent, we have sinned, and must repent. By extension, if we behave in such a way—verbally or non-verbally—that drives people away from Christ, we have sinned.

I don't know about you, but I was convicted just while studying this passage. Folks, sometimes I've been guilty of regarding "lifestyle evangelism" as a sham—and sometimes it is, if you think that people will be saved just by watching you and never hearing the Gospel. However, if our lifestyles do not match our confession—if "our walk doesn't match our talk"—we may well be driving people away from Christ and toward the pit of Hell. This should both humble and frighten us, and lead us to seek His enabling at all times simply to walk in a manner that honors Him, and to be given opportunity, wisdom, and courage to be His witnesses.

We must discard everything from our lives that keeps us from serving Him completely. Jesus uses graphic imagery here, saying that we should remove parts of our bodies if they cause us to sin. Please understand that this is just imagery—the Bible is against self-mutilation.

28'You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:28)

19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

I know that not all tenets of the Levitical Law apply in the Christian era, but God does not change. Having seen no New Testament repudiation of the injunction against cutting or tattooing oneself, I would think it best to avoid doing so. We are the temples of the Holy Spirit, therefore let's do everything we can to keep those temples clean, fit, and holy.

Jesus used this graphic imagery to emphasize the necessity of fleeing from sin, even at great personal cost. I can think of no better example of this than that of Joseph, while he was a slave in Egypt:

1Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt; and Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the bodyguard, bought him from the Ishmaelites, who had taken him down there. 2The LORD was with Joseph, so he became a successful man. And he was in the house of his master, the Egyptian. 3Now his master saw that the LORD was with him and how the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand. 4So Joseph found favor in his sight and became his personal servant; and he made him overseer over his house, and all that he owned he put in his charge. 5It came about that from the time he made him overseer in his house and over all that he owned, the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house on account of Joseph; thus the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field. 6So he left everything he owned in Joseph's charge; and with him there he did not concern himself with anything except the food which he ate. Now Joseph was handsome in form and appearance. 7It came about after these events that his master's wife looked with desire at Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." 8But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Behold, with me here, my master does not concern himself with anything in the house, and he has put all that he owns in my charge. 9"There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"

10As she spoke to Joseph day after day, he did not listen to her to lie beside her or be with her. 11Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. 12She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside. 13When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, 14she called to the men of her household and said to them, "See, he has brought in a Hebrew to us to make sport of us; he came in to me to lie with me, and I screamed. 15"When he heard that I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled and went outside." 16So she left his garment beside her until his master came home. 17Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me to make sport of me; 18and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." 19Now when his master heard the words of his wife, which she spoke to him, saying, "This is what your slave did to me," his anger burned. 20So Joseph's master took him and put him into the jail, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; and he was there in the jail. 21But the LORD was with Joseph and extended kindness to him, and gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. 22The chief jailer committed to Joseph's charge all the prisoners who were in the jail; so that whatever was done there, he was responsible for it. 23The chief jailer did not supervise anything under Joseph's charge because the LORD was with him; and whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper. (Genesis 39:1-23)

I suspect that Joseph knew he might have been falsely accused after fleeing from his would-be seductress, but he refused to betray his earthly master or to sin against God. Although the personal cost to Joseph was great, God honored Joseph's obedience by allowing him to prosper in all that he did and, as we know, eventually allowing him to become the viceroy of Egypt.

Our faithfulness and obedience may not always yield earthly rewards, but we know that the eternal rewards are great for those that believe in and serve the Lord Jesus.

1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new " And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6Then He said to me, "It is done I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7"He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:1-8)

If that's not a motivation to serve Christ and flee from sin, I don't know what is!

Section 2

12"What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13"If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14"So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish. (Matthew 18:12-14)

"These little ones" refers to believers (refer back to verse 6). To argue that it refers to all people makes this a statement of Universalism, the belief that all go to Heaven, and contradicts multiple Biblical passages (including the one we read in Revelation just a moment ago).

To the believer, this passage is a comforting reminder that God knows those that are His, and that those who are truly converted will be kept by Him, saved from Hell and granted everlasting life.

27"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; 28and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. 29"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. 30"I and the Father are one." (John 10:27-30)

35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36Just as it is written,

"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;

WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

Section 3

15"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.** 17"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. 18"Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. 19"Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. 20"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:15-20)

Church discipline is an aspect of our collective lives as believers that has sadly been neglected in our times, yet Jesus Christ, to Whom we refer as Lord and Master, commanded us to exercise it. It is to be administered lovingly and fairly, with correction and restoration of the affected brother or sister as the goal. Also at stake is the effective witness of the church. Unbelievers can spot a hypocrite a mile away, and when we as a church allow professing believers to commit willful and flagrant sin while still claiming the Name of Jesus Christ and remaining members in good standing of our congregations the message unbelievers receive is that all Christians are hypocrites, they're no different than anyone else, and there's really nothing to this Jesus, if He even exists. Jesus warned us to put such individuals out of the Church, as did Paul.

1It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. 2You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. 3For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. 4In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6Your boasting is not good Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; 10I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. 11But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. 12For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES. (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

Jesus followed in verse 18 by stating that *whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven*. Rather than “reinvent the wheel,” I will quote John Calvin’s very able explanation of this matter.

The substance of it is this: Whoever, after committing a crime, humbly confesses his fault, and entreats the Church to forgive him, is absolved not only by men, but by God himself; and, on the other hand, whoever treats with ridicule the reproofs and threatenings of the Church, if he is condemned by her, the decision which men have given will be ratified in heaven. If it be objected, that in this way God is made a sort of petty judge, who concurs in the sentence of mortal men, the reply is at hand. For when Christ maintains the authority of his Church, he does not diminish his own power or that of his Father, but, on the contrary, supports the majesty of his word. As in the former case (Matthew 16:19) he did not intend to confirm indiscriminately every kind of doctrine, but only that which had proceeded out of his mouth, so neither does he say in this place that every kind of decision will be approved and ratified, but only that in which he presides, and that too not only by his Spirit, but by his word. Hence it follows, that men do no injury to the authority of God, when they pronounce nothing but what comes from his mouth, and only endeavor faithfully to execute what he has commanded. For, though Christ alone is the Judge of the world, yet he chooses to have ministers to proclaim his word. Besides, he wishes that his own decision should be pronounced by the Church; and thus he takes nothing from his own authority by employing the ministry of men, but it is Himself alone that looses and binds.

In short, when the Church administers discipline it does not act as judge, but rather as the minister of Christ’s righteous judgment, so long as we act in accordance with His Word.

Jesus promises to be in our midst when we gather in His Name, and to grant any prayers about which two of us agree. True unity, truly gathering in His Name, is achieved not by our desires or our own power, but by the power of God Himself.

22" The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:22-23)

If unity among believers is achieved only through His power, then it is impossible for truly united followers of Christ to ask anything contrary to His Will. When we abide in Him—seeking Him, serving Him, *obeying* Him—we have confidence that our prayers will be heard and answered affirmatively. Only when acting in His strength can we pray expecting an affirmative answer, because the Holy Spirit within will not allow us to make requests that are contrary to His Will.

7" If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:7)

14 This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1 John 5:14-15)

Section 4

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' 29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:21-35)

Jesus commanded His followers to be forgiving people, and used a very poignant illustration to make His point. He tells of a slave that owed ten thousand talents, presumably of gold, to his master. A footnote in my Bible indicates that *one* talent was equal to about fifteen years’ wages for a common laborer. In other words, at a withholding rate of 100%, 150000 years would be required for this individual to repay his debt. This debt was obviously impossible for him to pay, so he requested and received mercy. How much more than this is our debt to our Creator, who in His holiness cannot allow even the smallest sin into His presence! Yet, in spite of the tremendous magnitude of our transgressions, He grants mercy through Jesus Christ to all that repent and believe.

23For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

There was a problem with this slave, though. After being forgiven a debt of 150000 years' wages, he found another slave that owed him 100 *days'* wages, and gave neither mercy nor clemency. Upon hearing this, the slave's lord cast him unto the torturers.

What are we to make of this? Is lack of forgiveness such a tremendous sin that one can lose his salvation? That can't be true—we've already seen today that it is impossible for a true believer to lose his salvation. However, those that truly repent and believe receive a tremendous Gift, the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Book of Galatians tells us that the Spirit's presence produces certain "fruits," markers that are contrary to fallen human nature and are evidence of His presence within us:

19Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:19-23)

While the fleshly nature makes us angry and factious, the Spirit leads us to be patient, kind, and gentle. Only His work within us produces a nature that is inclined to forgive, and able to obey the following command:

31Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31-32)

If our hearts are hardened and unable or unwilling to forgive, then the fruit of the Spirit is absent. If that is so, the Spirit Himself may well be absent. If *that* is so, salvation also is absent. We must each examine ourselves daily, repenting of actions, thoughts, and attitudes that dishonor Him, and making sure each day that Jesus Christ truly is Lord and Master of our lives. If He is not Lord He is not Savior; if He is not Savior, we remain in our sins and destined for Hell. If Jesus Christ is not your Lord and Savior, repent of sins, confess Him as Lord, and believe that He is indeed the risen and reigning Christ. He'll save you!

9That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

If He is your Lord and Savior, but you find yourself laden with unconfessed sin, confess them and be cleansed and restored. He promised through the Apostle John to grant forgiveness when we confess our sins:

9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

What great promises we have from a God that is infinitely powerful, wise, just, merciful, and good: No matter how dirty and sinful we are, He will save us from the just penalty of that sin if we will only repent and believe. Let us be about the business of serving Him, striving to live lives that bring honor unto His Name, and sharing the Good News of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to all that will listen!

Section 5

1When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; 2and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. 3Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" 4And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH'? 6"So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" 8He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." 10The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." 11But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12"For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it." (Matthew 19:1-12)

"I hate divorce," the Lord said. No, really, He said it in so many words!

16"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously." (Malachi 2:16)

The Lord God takes sexual immorality VERY seriously. Fornication, adultery, homosexuality, and even lust are identified as sins that make us worthy of a one-way ticket straight to the pit of Hell!

9Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

27" You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; 28but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

I have read, and perhaps you have too, the comments of unbelievers, and even some ostensibly Christian denominations that say "Well, if God really did say that, then He is just a prude. He needs to get with the times. Society has changed, and maybe Christianity needs to as well." Number one, God does not change.

29"Also the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." (1 Samuel 15:29)

And, I'm sure that I don't need to remind you that God created everything. As such, He is the only One possessing both the power and the right to determine how this world should operate. This goes for natural laws *and* the customs, laws, and mores governing society. In other words, He is not obligated to change based on rebellious sinners' "evolving" concepts of morality—He alone possesses the right to determine what is and what is not moral!

1In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

4'You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God. 5'So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD. (Leviticus 18:4-5)

In that last passage God gave commands, and then reinforced them by saying **I am the LORD**. God is the only Being in the universe for whom "Because I said so" is an unequivocally good reason!

So, Jesus said that divorce violates the created order—which He instituted and declared still unchanged and in effect—and constitutes adultery. There are only two cases in which divorce is permissible: One, which Jesus discusses here, is when one partner in the marriage has violated that covenant and committed adultery with another. This partner has therefore already sinned and the other partner is not bound to remain in the marriage. Paul brought up another instance in which divorce is allowed:

12But to the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he must not divorce her. 13And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, she must not send her husband away. 14For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy. 15Yet if the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave; the brother or the sister is not under bondage in such cases, but God has called us to peace. 16For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

Paul here describes cases in which one partner in the marriage is a believer, and the other is an unbeliever. Let's be clear, he is describing a situation in which both marriage partners were unbelievers when they married, and one was saved and the other unsaved. For a person already professing Christ to marry an unbeliever is sinful and not allowed according to the Scriptures.

14Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15)

However, if one marriage partner becomes saved and the other does not, and the unbeliever wants to leave, the believer is no longer bound. Likewise, if one marriage partner commits adultery, violating the marriage covenant, the faithful, believing spouse is no longer bound. Take notice that in both of these cases, the righteous, believing spouse is not the instigator of the breaking of the marriage covenant. The entire concept of "irreconcilable differences" is an abomination before the Lord God, and should never be found among professing Christians. The prevalence of divorce in our Lord's church is an embarrassing and damnable hypocrisy, bringing dishonor

to Christ and ridicule to the church. (Remember, unbelievers can spot a hypocrite a mile away!) This problem should be dealt with through church discipline as prescribed in Matthew 18, and as we discussed previously. Otherwise, this and other unconfessed sin will remain a festering malignancy in Christ's church: a hindrance to those that might come to Christ, and a barrier preventing His blessings upon us.

Finally, we have this discussion of "eunuchs." In case you're not familiar with the term, it does not refer simply to a court servant or chamberlain—the term refers to one that has been castrated in preparation for service. Now, I don't think the Lord Jesus was commanding anyone to physically become a eunuch. If He was, this would represent a massive contradiction within the character of God, in Whom we know there is no contradiction.

17Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

1"No one who is emasculated or has his male organ cut off shall enter the assembly of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 23:1)

So, we are talking about those that, while retaining their physical wholeness, abstain from sexual intimacy because of lack of desire, being forced into service, or voluntarily foregoing these pleasures in order to devote themselves wholly unto God's service. Jesus spoke highly of this, as did Paul:

1Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. 2But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. 3The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. 4The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. 5Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. 6But this I say by way of concession, not of command. 7Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. 8But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. 9But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7:1-9)

Singleness, and therefore sexual abstinence, should be regarded as an opportunity to focus one's energies solely upon God's service. However, both Christ and Paul warned that not everyone has this gift. If you desire "the pleasures of the flesh," then you are to marry so that the temptation to sin through physical or mental fornication is lessened. Married couples are not to deprive one another for the same reason. As God's people we are to pursue holiness. If you are able to do this while remaining single, great. If not, get married.

I will end this discussion with a sort of "appendix." I said that singleness should be regarded as an opportunity for a single-minded focus on God's service. However, this should not be taken so far as to accept the Roman Catholic concept of a celibate priesthood. First of all, we've seen how well *that* has worked. Secondly, the Bible commands that we are only to appoint those men that are married and have well-behaved children as pastors/elders and deacons in the church. The Bible declares demonstrated good management of home, wife, and children to be a prerequisite for service in such a leadership position in the church.

1It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. 2An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. 4He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5(but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), 6and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. 7And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. 8Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, 9but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 11Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. 12Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. 13For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

We are to obey God's commands, keeping in mind to regard the whole counsel of God. Scripture interprets Scripture, and we must take care to avoid studying and responding incorrectly to one passage while ignoring another that speaks to and clarifies the same issue. Many a church and denomination has made errors that could have been avoided by following the simple rule "Never read a Bible verse."