

Ministry of Grace

Matthew 18

Preface:

Last time we met, we learned about Jesus' transfiguration on Mt. Hermon where His Shekinah Glory was partially revealed to Peter, James, and John. Then, after coming down from the mountain, Jesus healed a demon possessed boy that the 9 other disciples were not able to heal. Following that, He told His disciples that he was going to be killed and raised again, which they still didn't understand. And finally, we were told about the miracle of the Temple Tax found in the mouth of a fish.

This week's message is about our interaction with other Christians. Why is it that we have such a difficult time getting along with other Christians? We're going to spend eternity with our brothers and sisters in Christ. Surely, we can apply the golden rule to them here and now. I read a poem the other day that seems to capture the essence of our relationships in God's family.

To live above, with saints we love
Will certainly be glory.
To live below, with saints we know –
Well, that's another story!

Let's see what Jesus had to say about our spiritual family relationships here below.

Who Is the Greatest

Matthew 18:1-5

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ²And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me,

Mark 9:33-37 – ³³And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. ³⁵And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

Luke 9:46-48 – ⁴⁶An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side ⁴⁸and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

Notes:

Mark tells us that this discussion happened in “the house” in Capernaum. It was probably Peter’s house since that appears to have been their base of operation while in Galilee. Along the way the disciples had been arguing among themselves and apparently tried to keep it a secret from Jesus (good luck with that, right?). When He asked them directly what they had been “discussing” none of them had the courage to answer. I wonder what prevented them from answering. Guilty conscience, perhaps?

Eventually, one of them asked Jesus, “[Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?](#)” What do you think prompted the previous argument and this question? Knowing human nature (that is, our sin nature) we have to assume that the disciples had been thinking about how much attention Peter, James, and John had been getting from Jesus. After all, He had taken these three up the mountain alone with Him (although, they probably didn’t know about the transfiguration yet, because the three disciples had been told not to tell anyone about it). Perhaps they were jealous of the attention Peter had received from Jesus. He had walked on water, he had been called a “rock,” and Jesus had paid his Temple Taxes for him.

In response to the question of greatness, Jesus gave them an object lesson on humility. So, what is humility? One definition of humility is, “that grace which, when you know you have it, you’ve lost it!” Or, “True humility is not thinking lowly of yourself; it is simply not thinking of yourself at all.” However, a better definition of Christian humility is one that Warren Wiersbe gives. He says that humility is: “knowing yourself, accepting yourself, and being yourself, your best self, to the glory of God.” This is radically different from the world’s attitude on humility. A typical worldly response might be, “Hey, it’s hard to be humble when you’re as great as I am.”

The disciples had still been ignoring the fact that Jesus was about to die and they were still focused on His kingdom and what their important place would be in it. Notice that their question was not, who is the greatest disciple here on earth, but who is going to be the greatest **in the kingdom of heaven**. At least they got part of it right. Their focus was not on attaining greatness in this life. Their focus was on the kingdom. Perhaps they had remembered what Jesus taught them earlier as recorded in Matthew chapter 6:

[But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. \(Matthew 6:33\)](#)

They were focused on the kingdom, but for some of the wrong reasons. Jesus, in His typical fashion didn’t respond to the question directly. Instead, He taught them, “If any of you wants to have the greatest honor, you must first reject it and seek the least honor of all. You must learn to be the servant of all,” (my paraphrase).

He then called a young child to himself, and setting the child in the midst of them, he said,

[Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.](#)

The word translated “[turn](#)” is a form of *strephō*, which in fact, does mean “to turn.” It could mean to turn physically, or it could refer to turning mentally, that is, changing your way of thinking. Therefore, this word is frequently translated as “convert.” It is expressed here in the passive voice, so the best translation might be “unless you are converted ...” or, perhaps we might say, “unless you are turned around in your way of thinking ...” However, Jesus’ comment is far more severe in the Greek than it appears in the English translation. He was basically saying, “Unless you allow yourself

to be completely changed, and become content with the lowly position of a little child, **there is no way that you will ever** enter the kingdom of heaven.” In other words He was saying, “Stop focusing on being made the greatest in the kingdom and focus on just getting into the kingdom at all! Instead of seeking power and glory, focusing on yourself, seek childlike humility and focus on doing good to, and for, others! That’s what the kingdom is all about.”

Although this discourse is specifically about little children, Jesus is metaphorically talking about “children of God.” When we got saved it was because we humbled ourselves before God, recognizing our own sinfulness and recognizing that we have no worth within ourselves, deserving only the punishment of eternal fire. When we received the sacrifice of Jesus as payment for our sins we became the children of God. Here’s how John put it in his gospel account:

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, (John 1:12)

And anyone who is truly saved will have the witness of God’s Spirit that we are the children of God. Here’s how Paul expressed it in his letter to the Romans:

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (Romans 8:14-16)

So, as we look at this part of Matthew’s gospel account, we need to recognize that Jesus is not just talking about little children. Since Jesus’ metaphor was that we must become as a little child to enter the kingdom of God, this entire section teaching about children is also clearly a reference to believers, children of God. That’s you and me along with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The next thing that Jesus did, according to Mark, is that He took the child up in His arms and said, “**Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.**” In the first century, the notion of “receiving” someone was that you were to show them respect and honor. In Roman, Greek, and Jewish societies, however, the lowest position was that of a child. In fact, children were even lower than servants. Therefore, to receive a child was not something that a person normally did. At best, a child was ignored, or just told to go away. But, if the child was the child of a king, he or she would be received, and honored, in the name of their father, the king. Think about this: whenever we meet another Christian, we are meeting a child of God and we need to give him, or her, the respect and honor that he or she deserves as a child of the King.

Stumbling Blocks

Matthew 18:6-9

⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

⁷Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! ⁸And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. ¹⁰See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in

heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. ¹¹[For the Son of Man came to save the lost.]

Mark 9:42-50 – ⁴²Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. ⁴³And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁴[Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched] ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁶[Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched] ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' ⁴⁹For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Luke 17:1-4 – ¹And he said to his disciples, "Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ²It 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. ³Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, ⁴and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

Notes:

We need to look at these verses in light of the ones we just talked about. As we noted before, although this discourse is specifically about little children, Jesus is also clearly talking about "children of God." Before we cover these verses, though, we need to take a brief diversion.

As I have told you previously, I generally like the English Standard Version translation. First of all, because it is primarily a literal translation, not a paraphrase, but also because it is based on a somewhat more reliable Greek text than the King James and it is easier to read because it uses more modern language. However, the ESV translators occasionally take liberties with the translation. Instead of a literal translation, they interject their own theology into it. Verses six and seven, here, are examples of this. The word translated "sin" in verse six is not the Greek word for sin. That would be *hamartia*. Instead, it is *skandalidzō*, which means "to stumble." Although it **could** be a reference to sinning, it could also refer to someone having doubts about God's faithfulness or about what God's will is or what God's direction for their life is. In other words it could be a reference to someone stumbling in their faith-walk with God where sin is not involved.

And, in verse seven, the word translated "temptations" is not the Greek word normally translated "temptation" or "trial." That would be *peirasmōs*. Instead, it is the noun form of the word *skandalidzō* which we just looked at. It is *skandalon*, which means "a stumbling block," or "that which causes someone to trip or fall." The ESV says "temptations to sin" but, neither of the Greek words for temptation or sin are in this verse. Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that these two verses and the ones that follow are not talking about sin, just that they are not necessarily talking about sin. Verses six and seven should probably be translated as:

but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling

blocks come, but woe to the one through whom the stumbling blocks come! (Matthew 18:6, 7) [my translation]

As human beings, we are all tempted by our sin nature, but we are also tempted and distracted by the world. John tells us,

because all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. (1 John 2:16)

The word translated “world” in both 1 John 2:16 and in Matthew 18:7 is *kosmos*, which refers to the world system. Jesus tells us that stumbling blocks will come and that we all will fall occasionally. And, we are told that the world system is constantly putting stumbling blocks before us. But we need to be particularly careful to make sure that we don’t cause another Christian to stumble. How do we know what will cause others to stumble? We have to look at our own life to answer that. Since we know that we are all tempted by our sin nature and by the world system, we need to make sure that we don’t provide additional inducements to sin (stumbling blocks) to others.

Verses eight and nine seem to talk about cutting off our own body parts. Jesus is not advocating self-mutilation here! He is talking metaphorically again. If there is anything in our life that causes us to stumble in our relationship with God, we need to get rid of it. If watching a certain kind of movie, or television program, or visiting a certain web site on the internet, causes our minds to focus on areas where we shouldn’t focus or that cause us to otherwise drift away from God, then we need to “cut it out.” If attending a certain kind of event or going into a particular establishment causes us to have unclean thoughts or if it prompts us to take actions that we shouldn’t take, then we need to “cut it out.” And, if it causes us a problem, we certainly shouldn’t invite other Christians to do the same thing. We probably shouldn’t even talk about such things because it might cause a brother or sister to stumble.

Verse 10 is a particularly difficult one to interpret. It starts off with:

See that you do not despise one of these little ones.

The word translated “despise” is *kataphroneō*, which literally means “to think down on” or “to think evil of.” Again, the “little ones” may be talking about children, but more likely, Jesus is referring to God’s children, that is, other Christians. We are not to make assumptions about other Christians based solely on their appearance or on hearsay. Keep in mind that we **are** supposed to judge other Christians, that is, to assess their spiritual state, but we are not to think them less worthy than we are no matter what their spiritual status may be.

Let’s talk about judging others for a minute since that is a hot topic that is grossly misunderstood by most Christians. We talked about this a few months ago when we were looking at the seventh chapter of Matthew:

Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. (Matthew 7:1, 2)

Not only does this verse **not** mean that we are never to judge anyone, but we are later told specifically to judge some people. In verse six it says:

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you. (Matthew 7:6)

How are we to know who the dogs and the pigs are, if we don't make judgments about people? In other words, we **have** to pass judgment on others. This judgment, however, is to be a realistic evaluation based on our love for others, not a critical condemnation.

Most often we are critical of other Christians because looking down on them and condemning them somehow makes us feel better, perhaps a little superior. However, as **Matthew 7:2** states, "with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged ..." And, as we read in this 10th verse of Matthew 18,

... for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

Now, this verse brings up a whole new bag of worms. Does this verse say that everyone has their own personal guardian angel? No. Does it say that all Christians have their own personal guardian angel? No. Does it say that little children all have their own personal guardian angel? No.

Then, what does it mean? Well, what does the writer of Hebrews say in reference to angels?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (**Hebrews 1:14**)

It appears from these verses that one of the purposes of angels is to minister to believers. Remember, after Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, angels came and ministered to him. Not because He is God (although He is), but because He is the Son of God. Christians are not gods, but we are all children of God who will inherit salvation. Therefore, **Matthew 18:10** and **Hebrews 1:14** tell us that angels are watching out for all of God's children, all Christians. But, again, this verse does NOT say that we all have our own personal guardian angel.

Jesus next emphasizes His care for even the lowest of His children with this parable of the lost sheep.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Matthew 18:12-14

¹²What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Luke 15:1-7 – ¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable: ⁴"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Notes:

In order to help His disciples understand how damaging pride is and how important it is for us to focus our love on, and demonstrate our care for, other Christians, Jesus tells the parable of the lost

sheep. This is a metaphor of a child of God who is struggling with sin. The Good Shepherd does not discount the wandering sheep. He does not say, "Oh well, I have ninety-nine others who aren't wandering. I'll just wait for him or her to come back." No! In fact, our Shepherd is especially concerned for any one of His sheep who has stumbled and has fallen because of temptation. Jesus says that the shepherd will leave the others and intentionally seek out the one who has gone astray.

We have to keep in mind what Isaiah says about all of us;

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

Not only does our Good Shepherd focus His attention on bringing us back into the fold when we stumble and fall, He has already taken the blame for our fall. If our Shepherd feels this way about all His sheep, who are we to look down on any child of God. And – when the wandering sheep is returned to the fold, there is rejoicing in heaven. Here's how Luke expressed it:

... I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

Considering how our Good Shepherd sees us and cares for us, how can we ever treat another Christian as less important than the rest of us?

"But," you may say, "what if another Christian has intentionally harmed me?" How can we love them as a brother or a sister? Well, let's see what Jesus said about that.

If Your Brother Sins Against You

Matthew 18:15-20

¹⁵If 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 brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If 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. ¹⁸Truly, 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. ¹⁹Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

Notes:

This is a lesson that few Christians pay attention to. When we are hurt by another Christian some of us have a tendency to hold a grudge against them and not say anything. This is absolutely the worst thing we can do. It only creates more conflict. Others of us act more "Spiritual" and pretend that we are doing as this passage tells us to do. But instead of approaching the brother or sister with a humble, loving attitude, we confront them and give them a piece of our mind (even though we probably don't have any extra to spare). Incidentally, the words translated "go" and "tell him his fault" are in the imperative mood. In other words, they are commands, not suggestions.

Remember how this whole discourse started? The disciples were arguing about who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Well, if we are focused on our own greatness, then we are ignoring our own sinfulness. And, if we are focused (without forgiveness, I might add) on the terrible deed that a

brother or sister has done to us without realizing that they have angels looking out for them, we may be inviting the chastening of the Lord, not on our brother or sister, but on ourselves.

In these verses Jesus outlines the process for dealing with an offending brother or sister, and His instructions are very clear. Remember throughout this process, however, that the object is to love him or her back into fellowship. We must be extremely careful that we do this with a humble, loving attitude. And, remember, it is not our responsibility to make someone else change their attitude. We are only responsible for our own attitude. We must leave the rest up to God.

Before we move on, though, let me once again point out what Jesus said to all 12 of His disciples:

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. (Matthew 18:18)

This is not the verse that Catholics use to prove that Peter was the first Pope. If that were the case, then there would have initially been 12 Popes!

We are not placed on this earth to be only concerned about ourselves. As Christians we are to support and build up each other because we are all part of the body of Christ. And, the most important thing we can do is to pray for each other. As we gather together for prayer, God is in our midst and there is special emphasis on the prayers that we pray together. You and I originally started this church because we believe that we are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. We must not just come together for fellowship; we must come together for praise and for prayer and, for God to speak to our hearts. Our purpose of coming together is to build up each other in love.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

²¹Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" ²²Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. ²³"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³²Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Notes:

Good old Peter! What would we do without him? We would probably miss out on half of the lessons that Jesus has for us. He never hesitates to ask the questions that all of us are thinking but afraid to ask. When we are offended or hurt by a brother or sister in Christ and we handle it in the appropriate manner we can easily forgive him or her. Incidentally, do you know what it means “to forgive?” The Greek word translated “forgive” is *aphiēmi*. This is made up of *apo*, meaning “away,” and *hiēmi*, meaning “to send.” Therefore, *aphiēmi* literally means “to send away.” Here’s how it is expressed in the Psalms regarding God’s forgiveness of our sins:

as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. (Psalms 103:12)

And in Hebrews we are told:

“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,” then he adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” (Hebrews 10:16-17)

Forgiveness means sending the offending act as far away as possible and NOT REMEMBERING it. We can’t hold a grudge if we don’t remember what the problem was.

In the first century, the rabbis taught that we are to forgive someone three times, but not four. Peter probably thought that he was being generously gracious by offering to forgive seven times. But what was Jesus’ response? Not seven times but seventy time seven (490 times). After all, most of us would lose track after about the eighth or ninth time. In other words, Jesus says, don’t keep count. Just keep forgiving and forgetting.

He then tells the parable about the unforgiving servant. I don’t want to belabor this point so let me just explain a couple of facts about this parable. The ten thousand talents that the servant owed his master is roughly equivalent to \$2 million today. With an average daily wage in the first century, which would be equal to approximately \$100 today, it would have taken the unjust servant about 55 years to pay his debt. The debt the other servant owed him is equal to about \$20.00 in today’s money.

If we consider the sin debt that we each owe God (our King), let’s not condemn our brother or sister over a few pennies.

So What?

As I said earlier, this entire chapter is about children of God getting along with each other. This chapter started out with an argument the disciples had about who was the greatest in the kingdom. The root of this problem comes from comparing ourselves with other Christians. This will always create tension and strife between us. Instead, we should be comparing ourselves to Jesus. The result of this comparison is always quite humbling. When the Scribes asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment, here’s how He responded:

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

We don't seem to have any problem loving God. After all, He sacrificed His own Son for us. But loving others is a lot more difficult. How do we know what it looks like for us to love others? Previously in Matthew's gospel he recorded Jesus as saying:

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 7:12)

This is the famous "Golden Rule." And, Jesus equates it to the two greatest commandments. So, the bottom line is, if we want to demonstrate our love for others then we should do to them the same things we want them to do for us. But, how do we do that?

According to Jesus, we start by not putting a stumbling block in their way. If we are all honest with ourselves we will recognize that we stumble frequently. Our first demonstration of loving others is to not do anything that might cause them to stumble. We all have a sin nature and we live in a fallen world. They are both constantly telling us, "look out for yourself because no one else will." But Jesus tells us that we should be looking out for the good of others. That's upside down thinking.

The second demonstration of our love for others is: if we do see a brother or sister stumble, we need to reach out to them and help them back on their feet. We need to treat them the same way our Shepherd treats us when we stumble. We need to go out of our way to help them.

The third demonstration of our love for others is to be humble and honest with them. We all make mistakes and accidentally hurt others, sometimes without even knowing it. When another Christian hurts us, we need to go to them and let them know that what they did hurt us. But when we do this we need to exhibit the fourth demonstration of love. We need to forgive them. It's the difference between going to them and saying, "Hey, you really hurt me when you ..." and saying, "I'm sure you didn't mean it, but it kind of hurt when you ..."

This fourth demonstration of love is probably the hardest. But think of it this way, each and every sin we have ever committed or will commit has a penalty of death attached to it. Our entire debt has been paid for us and we are completely forgiven. If a brother or sister sins against us, compared to what we owed and have been forgiven, that is only pennies. Now, are we going to demand that we get paid our pennies, or are we going to cast their sin away from us as far as the East is from the West and forget it? And, are we going to do it again, and again, and again, and again ...

Now What?

Is there a brother or sister in the Lord who has hurt you? Are you going to demand payment, or are you going to start practicing forgiveness? Go to them with a humble, forgiving attitude and reconcile yourself with him or her. That's what love would do. Or, maybe there's a brother or sister in the Lord that you have hurt and you've never done anything about it. Now would be a good time to go to them and apologize.

Let's pray.

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