

Horizontal Sanctification pt2

REVIEW: We have been at this long look at salvation for a long time. To be honest, even longer than I anticipated when I first conceived of the series.

The first 14 weeks were very focused on our vertical relationship with God Himself. But last week we turned a corner. Last week we began the process of looking at how our salvation, or reconciliation to God, how that gospel affects our relationship with others. In particular we looked at owning our sin. Rather than trying to pick the speck of sin out of someone else's life, we need to be examining our own heart, and our own life before God.

As we talk about dealing with horizontal relationships, we began there, examining our sin, because we too often are excited to jump on the band wagon to go after someone else in their sin, but do not examine ourselves. We always need to turn the lens on ourselves before we turn it on others.

TRAN: So that was Matthew 7. Examine yourself and own your own sin. Which by the way is the area that turns adults into children faster than anything else. "It's not my fault!" "They started it!" "I wouldn't have sinned if they didn't do what they did!"

Sorry folks, but are we seriously going to act that way? The only thing you can really own in this life is your sin, and it is the one thing we like to own the least. Playing the blame game is the greatest form of childishness, and I have one thing to tell you, "Grow up!" Examine your heart, own your sin, and seek to be reconciled.

One area that I failed to mention last week that I will only briefly mention now is that you may have to own more than your share of the sin for the good of the relationship. I have had it on a few occasions where I have had to bear the greater weight of the sin, some of which really was not my to bear for the good of a relationship. That can sometimes be hard to swallow, but for brothers and sisters to live in harmony with each other, sometimes it is called for.

INTRO: Today we look at the other side of the coin, about confronting people about their sin. So turn to Matthew 18. We will be there the whole day.

Much of today's message comes from other resources, Matt Chandler, Ken Sande and that book I mentioned last week, *The Peacemaker*.

I. Typical responses to confrontation

A. Be honest folks, raise your hand if you avoid conflict

1. I think there are many people in this category

- a) Some almost equate conflict avoidance with being a good Christian
- b) Nothing could be further from the truth however

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2. There are some people that live for conflict
 - a) They enjoy the feeling of being offended
 - b) They enjoy the power that it gives them over others to confront other people in their sin
 - c) Some just like to be the sin police and run around busting on people
- B. Before I get into some of this, let me give you the primary way we as Christians should deal with being sinned against (especially by another believer)
 1. We absorb or overlook the offense
 2. Admittedly, that is not an easy task, and we may have to ask God for the ability to overlook or absorb an offense
 3. Let me give you a few verses for support of this idea
 - a) Proverbs 10:12 “Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.”
 - b) Proverbs 17:9 “Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.”
 - c) Proverbs 19:11 “A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.”
 - d) 1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”
 4. This is our default position - to overlook or absorb an offense
 - a) Just to be clear, to absorb or overlook an offense does not mean not to deal with sin
 - b) That is what we are about to deal with in Matthew 18
- C. So how do you know when sin can no longer be absorbed or overlooked?
 1. When bitterness begins to grow in your heart
 2. When you are easily frustrated, when you don't trust them any longer
 3. You are not absorbing or overlooking, because their sin is now affecting you and your relationship, and before bitterness and anger take root in your heart, you need to deal with it
 - a) Hebrews 12:15 “ See to it...that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”
 - b) Do you see it, a bitter root can defile many, it can affect those around you - you are in danger, but so are those around you
 - c) So you cannot avoid things any longer
 4. So a personal example about the root of bitterness and how it works itself out in real life
 - a) Two years ago we came across a very aggressive set of leaders for one youth group during the broom ball games

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- b) When we went to confront the leader, he played the blame game and blamed but never took any responsibility for his or his team's actions
- c) Later that morning I see this youth leader with his hands raised in the air in praise and worship - and I think, "Yeah right buddy! Put your hands down! You don't know the first thing about what worship is about."
 - (1) The bitterness began to grow
 - (2) And because we had already confronted him, and we got nowhere, I knew trying a round 2 would be fruitless, so I had to pray and ask God to remove any bitterness in me, not for his sake, but for my own and those around me
 - (a) I could not worship with that bitterness there
 - (b) So I needed to let that bitterness go
- D. Another common response to conflict is to run away
 - 1. This takes avoidance to the extreme
 - 2. It is not just avoiding talking about the problem, you hate conflict so much that you have to remove yourself from it
 - a) So I can't work things out at work - get a new job
 - b) Things aren't working out with my spouse so I'm get divorced and remarried
 - (1) If you can't figure things out in this marriage, why do you think you will in the next
 - (2) No offense, but you are still in the next marriage - you are just carrying your baggage with you
 - c) I watch this in churches too often - when people really become known, including both the good and the bad, they can't handle someone confronting them about sin, and so they simply run to another church
 - (1) To be honest, this is one reason I do not like church hoppers
 - (2) If I knew that this is why you start coming to our church, I would be real straight with you - go back to your own church, man up, woman up, and deal with your life
 - (3) Quit running away from it
- E. Another common response is the opposite end of the scale - most people avoid, some people become aggressive
 - 1. They want to be sinned against
 - 2. They have their verses memorized and are ready to pounce like a cat on the prowl for someone to screw up
 - 3. These people like to
 - a) Bully others

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- b) Their motto is “Vengeance is mine” - Not God’s, MINE
 - c) They stop at nothing - slander, gossip, injuring someone’s reputation - they don’t care because they want justice at all costs
- II. Matthew 18 - the Bible’s roadmap for handling sin and conflict in relationships
- A. Starting with verse 15 - “If your brother or sister sins...”
- 1. I have to explain a little Greek variant to you here
 - a) If you have the older version of the NIV it says “If your brother or sister sins against you...” - the new Bible does not use “against you”
 - b) Here is why - the Greek texts vary on this one, even back to some of the earliest dates (closest to the original)
 - (1) The thing is we cannot tell if the omission was what was added
 - (2) Or if the “against you” was added
 - c) The reality - it makes little difference because the outcome is the same
 - (1) If someone sins against you - you go to them privately
 - (2) If someone sins (and you see it - not hearsay) - you go to them privately
 - d) I tell you all of this because I want you to understand that there are explanations for differences in translation - you just have to ask a few questions
 - 2. So, if a brother or sister sins
 - a) Which this is assuming a close relationship with a person
 - (1) The sin is either against you, or you witness it
 - (2) This is why doing life together is so beneficial, why Life Groups are so beneficial
 - b) When you are in closer relationships, God begins to reveal areas of life that are not consistent with God’s Word
 - c) This is why we seem to like distance, we like big churches we can hide in, not small groups where people may actually get to know us
 - (1) We love Facebook and social media because it is a highlight reel of all our best
 - (2) How often you do see “selfies” of people crying their eyes out because they are depressed - no, we show the world what we want to on social media
 - 3. Now, if we go to a brother or sister to lay out their sin, we MUST go in a spirit of humility
 - a) Most of us probably have only 2-3 people in our lives that we would accept this kind of correction - we would be okay if they came to talk with us

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- b) It's all those other people we get offended by and reply with, "You want to talk about weaknesses and sin brother? Let me pull out the file I started on you last year after the first time you pulled this!"
 - (1) But we have to realize that God can point out our sin to us even through others
 - (2) Even others that we think, "Really God? This guy? This gal?"
 - (a) I had my own heart check the day one of the kids brought their friend to YG
 - (b) That was almost the exact phrase that went through my head, "Really God? What are you trying to do to me?"
 - (c) Answer - point out my weakness and sin
- 4. When you are that brother or sister that is being confronted, the first question you should ask is "is this true?"
 - a) Unless you are prepared to say, "Pastor Keith, I have nowhere else I can grow. I have topped out in all categories, and I expect that God will be sending my flaming chariot any day now to pick me up, because I am beyond this world of sin, and ready for heaven."
 - b) Anyone want to say that?
 - c) So then, why do we think that we are beyond these kinds of conversations happening on our lives?
 - (1) If God uses these to mold and shape our character
 - (2) Why would we think we are beyond it
 - (3) Why would we not expect our brothers and sisters to love us like this
 - (a) Because that is what they are doing
 - (b) Loving us
 - (4) When you would rather shoot the messenger than consider the message, you are putting ear plugs in when it comes to listening to God
 - d) We have to take seriously looking at the sin that the person is pointing out and see if it is true
 - (1) And often that will mean asking some of those closest too us
 - (2) And not some loser, yes-men that will tell you whatever you want to hear
 - (3) People that you have given permission to, to tell the truth
 - e) After the difficult conversation is over where we confronted someone or they confronted us, you don't get to cut and run
 - (1) We are a church family
 - (2) We are in covenant with one another - that is not a contract but a covenant - "I love and am with you, no strings attached"

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5. This whole conversation about sin has taken place between you two alone
 - a) “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you.”
 - b) No grandstanding, no public embarrassment
6. Here is what the whole goal is - I should have started with this because this is the basis for why you go
 - a) “If they listen to you, you have won them over.”
 - b) The ENTIRE reason you go and talk about sin, talk about repentance is to call your brother or sister back to the Lord
 - c) IT IS NOT ABOUT BEING RIGHT - or justice, or justifying yourself
 - d) It is about being concerned for that other person because they are drifting from the Lord
 - e) It is about loving your brother or sister SO MUCH that you will have the difficult conversation to seek to win them back
- B. Verse 16 “But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”
 1. So, you have confronted a person with their sin, and they basically reply, “I don’t care” - what do you do?
 2. Step two is clear that you take one or two others with you
 - a) What this does not mean is that you go find a bunch of haters
 - (1) We do not build an army of people that have been waiting for the day they could get back at brother or sister so and so
 - b) In fact, the end of the verse basically gives qualifications for those one or two people
 - (1) It is quoting several locations in the OT law where evidence is established by two or three witnesses
 - (2) In fact the law was clear, that certain penalties could not be carried out without witnesses
 - (3) So the one or two others you take with you should be witnesses of the sin you are confronting the person about
 - c) And their attitude and goal is still no different than your attitude and goal
 - (1) You go in humility
 - (2) And you go with the goal of winning your brother or sister back
 3. You go and all of you let him or her know, “We have seen this in you my friend. You know that we have known you and known you well for a long time. You know that we love you. But, friend, you are operating

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outside of what God's Word says, and it is not just hurting you but others around you."

- a) Many people at this point will ask for examples, so they can try to see what you are talking about
 - b) The problem in listing off examples is that often times they will want to go point by point with you and explain why you are wrong to use that as an example
 - (1) Don't fall into that game
 - (2) Let them know that you will not enter into that, and that the only reason you are there is because you love them - hard as it is to have the conversation, you love them. The only thing you have to gain is your brother or sister - there is no prize to be won - in fact, it may end with them not liking you but you are willing to risk the relationship to push each of you further in obedience and holiness
- C. What happens if after you go personally, and then you take loving friends and you have confronted in the most loving way you can and they still say, "I don't care. I will live my life my way."
1. Verse 17 "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."
 2. Let's break this down
 - a) "tell it to the church"
 - (1) Rather than lay out every scenario, I will cut to the chase and tell you how I think this should go
 - (2) If repeated attempts have been made by friends, by leadership to win back this brother or sister, a time will come when the church will need to be told
 - (3) I do not believe that it means that the sin needs to be put out there or announced
 - (a) However, in a gathering of the members of the church, people should be informed that numerous attempts have been made to brother or sister so and so and they refuse to repent of their sin
 - i) This really should be over the course of a year or more
 - (b) Then the person is removed from membership
 - b) "treat them as a pagan or a tax collector"
 - (1) In the first century, pagans and tax collectors were viewed as people outside the kingdom
 - (a) Now Jesus in His life and teachings were adjusting how pagans and tax collectors should be viewed

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- (b) For this passage Jesus was basically saying that by repeated flouting of God's Word, these people were revealing that they were not part of God's kingdom
 - i) John 14:21 - when we keep God's commands we reveal that we truly love Him
 - ii) When we do not - when we disregard God's Word, and refuse to obey, we are showing ourselves to be unregenerate, not true believers
- (2) Practically, what does that mean, how do we treat people?
 - (a) First you treat them as if they do not have a genuine relationship with Christ
 - i) Repentance from the things God calls sin is a prime requirement to follow Christ
 - ii) When they refuse to repent, they are showing they do not care to follow Christ
 - (b) In removing their membership, it means that they really would not be welcomed at the Lord's Table (communion)
 - i) This is an area that we may have to adjust in our own church - how we handle communion
 - ii) But for those under church discipline, would they be allowed at church? Of course!
 - iii) Would they be allowed to take part in communion?
 - (1) If they are knowingly continuing in sin, how could they?
 - (2) The Bible tells us to examine ourselves as believers to make sure there is no sin in us
 - (3) Why would the church allow someone under discipline to partake in communion when communion is about, in part, examining one's self?

III. Some final thoughts

- A. This is an attitude that I would like each of us to begin to adopt
 - 1. If someone comes and tells you that they believe you are sinning against them and against God, you should probably start from the place that they are right
 - a) They may not always be right
 - b) But if we are still on this road of sanctification, we have not been made perfect yet, they may very well be right
 - (1) And if you have that as your starting point, you will be less offended when someone comes to you
 - 2. Now, can someone falsely accuse you?
 - a) Of course

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- b) I have had people say things against me that were not true
 - (1) There was no basis in reality
 - (2) And in those instances I know the truth will win out
- B. Here is why I think it is so important to know how to handle Matthew 18, and how to make this a part of our lives
 - 1. When the outside world sees that the church lovingly handles discipline, takes serious its commitment to purity and holiness, the church becomes a weird, attractive place
 - 2. When they see us loving each other enough to point one another back to the Bible
 - 3. When they see that we do not get mad but that it strengthens our relationships
 - 4. That is quite the peculiar thing - and in an attractive way
- C. So my honest hope, and my desire for our church is to work on this part of life together
 - 1. Not to become legalistic and the judgmental sin police
 - 2. But to lovingly care enough for one another to point out sin, to point people back to God's Word, and push each other on to greater holiness
- D. Hebrews 10:24-25