

September, 2020  
Good Shepherd  
Matthew 18:15-20

The most difficult problem that pastors faced on the Apache reservations and still face today is the problem of the "Sunrise Dance." This celebrated the time when a young girl became of age and was considered to be a woman. Many Apaches thought this dance was just a celebration of Apache culture, but it isn't. That young woman, on the last day of the Dance, is believed to become Changing Woman, representing the power of life and fertility. As Changing Woman, this young woman is supposedly able to heal the sick and answer prayers.

There came a time when I heard rumors that a member at Peridot was a "singer" at these dances. He would help the medicine man, beat his drum, and sing for the dances. I hoped that some of our members would speak to this man about this sin. Eventually I had to visit Hart and I asked if he was a "singer" at these dances. He admitted that he was.

We spent weeks discussing what the Old Apache Religion taught and what God's Word said about being involved in a false religion. Finally I asked, "Do you want to continue to serve as a "singer" at these dances and go against God's Word, or will you put away this sin and return to your brothers and sisters in the Christian faith?" Hart chose to remain in his sin. This was a hard time for me, because I worried about Hart's soul.

Do you care about people? Sure you do! Do you care enough to speak to them if they are trapped in a sin that could destroy their faith and condemn them to hell? I hope so!

Today Jesus encourages us to take some bold steps with people who are trapped by sin. If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. We call ourselves brothers and sisters in Christ because we are members of God's family through faith in Jesus.

When we see a brother or sister in the faith sinning, our first response should not be to tell others about it. We should go to that person privately to help that person see that they are doing something against the will of God. We would like them to repent and walk with the Lord once again.

In Galatians Paul tells us, Brothers, if someone is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. People sin. We sin. Sometimes it is hard to stop sinning. If we continue in sin, our sin might lead us to hell.

If I was living in sin, I would appreciate a visit from Christians who would take the time to show me my sin and help guide me back to the Savior.

What if the brother or sister refuses to listen to you? You might be tempted to think: "Well, I tried! He won't listen. There is nothing more I can do." Listen to the second step. Jesus said, If he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. When a sinner won't listen to you about the danger of his sin, you can take other Christians along to show him, from God's Word, the error of his way. We have the best interest of the sinner at heart, the salvation of his soul. We want him to be in heaven with us, not spending an eternity in hell with Satan.

But if the sinner still refuses to heed God's Word, what should we do? Jesus says, If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. The word here for "refuse" has the idea of someone who doesn't want to listen. There was an argument between a teen age boy and his mother. The boy was deaf so they were communicating in sign language. You could tell that both were upset because both mother and son signed faster and faster. The boy became so frustrated that he put his hands over his eyes so he could not see what his mother was saying to him!

The "church" is the Christian congregation where the sinner is a member. Christians do not want their brothers and sisters to

destroy themselves with sin. Church members need to get involved to help the sinner open his eyes to see how bad the situation is and what the result could be. Perhaps, the sinner will repent.

And what if the sinner will not listen to the admonition of his Christian family? Jesus said, If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector. When the church takes this action, we call it **excommunication**. This is a public declaration that the bond of love for Christ has been broken. If the sinner repents, our Lord wants us to welcome the saint back into the family of believers.

Jesus says, I tell you the truth whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. When there is someone among us who is caught in sin, it is our responsibility to tell them that their sins are not forgiven – they have moved out of God's family. If they repent, it is our privilege to forgive them and welcome them back home.

These are general guidelines, not mechanical steps we are to follow when a brother or sister falls into sin. At any stage of the process, we may repeat our efforts a number of times. And all the while we need to keep in mind that this is an act of Christian love.

We hope that our fellow Christians will show this same kind of love for us if we ever go astray.

A man visited me one day at Peridot on a Sunday afternoon, and during our conversation, said that he didn't believe that Jesus was God and had risen from the dead. We discussed this, but he would not change his mind. I told him that if he didn't believe that Jesus died for his sins and rose from the dead – he had no Savior, he would not be in heaven. He walked away. During the week, Arnold died. I could not serve at that man's funeral.

Pastors love to talk to sinners who confess their sins because it is so awesome to tell them the good news that they are forgiven! Their faces light up with joy and shine with happiness!

These four steps are not easy, but we are not alone in this work. Jesus is with us. He hears our prayers as we reach out to the lost and straying. Jesus said, Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am with them.

Dealing with unrepentant sinners is not easy; it takes time and prayer. Jesus hears us. He is with us. He will bless us. And the Holy Spirit will even give us the words we need to say.

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