

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Ezekiel 33:7-9). Ezekiel spent his ministry in Babylon among the exiles. These three verses are verbally almost identical with 3:17–19. Ezekiel's call or commissioning and were intended to impress upon him the (literally) life or death gravity of the vocation he was entering. In chapter 3 the message came in private, but here it is public and is intended to clarify to the people what he had been about all these years. He must be faithful or his lack of action would show his own unfaithfulness.

Epistle (Romans 13:1-10). Paul's mandate that "every person be subject to the civil authorities (vv. 1-7) might have been a shocking statement to his original hearers, since Nero, then emperor of the Roman Empire, had been fiercely persecuting Christians during the years of persecution. As our Lord Jesus traced all human authority to God (Jn 19:11), it was important for these first-century Christians to understand that government is not the enemy. Verses 8-10 literally it say, "Do not owe anybody anything, except...to love." It is one obligation that should never get completed, one bill that dare never be marked "Paid in Full."

Gospel (Matthew 18:1-20). Verses 1-9 have the disciples coming to Jesus to check out as to who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. They probably did this to determine whether one of them might hold this distinction. Jesus uses a child as a teaching tool to point out value it has because it totally trusts and therefore the greatest. He also adds some pretty strong threats to anyone who might offend a child or anyone with a weak faith. Verses 8-9 do not suggest self-mutilation but to take sin very seriously. Verses 10-14 have Jesus nailing the point made in verse 1-9 with a parable the value of one lost sheep and the effort to find it. Verses 15-20 point to the importance of being patient and loving to anyone who may have offended you. They are to make every effort to win the brother over in private before taking the issue public. A portion of the Office of the Keys is again repeated in this section.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 33:7-9

⁷“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. ⁸When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. ⁹But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.

33:7 a watchman. It means to keep watch or to look out for. Ezekiel is to keep watch, to look out for Israel with regard to the word of the Lord. He is to make sure that they hear the Word of God. A watchman standing on the wall of the city is to warn the inhabitants of any approaching danger so that they may be ready. (Concordia Journal – July, 1987)

33:8 hold you accountable. If the prophet does not warn the wicked of God's judgment, he will still die in his guilt, but the prophet also will share a responsibility for the wicked' death. Does this mean the prophet will also die? It would if his neglect were an indication of his unbelief. (Concordia Journal – July, 1987)

33:9 will have saved yourself. This verse speaks of the other side of the prophet's faithfulness in his task. (Concordia Journal – July, 1987)

EPISTLE – Romans 13:1-10

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. ⁴ For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. ⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. ⁸ Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

13:3 do what is right and he will commend you. Paul is not stating that this will always be true but is describing the proper, ideal function of rulers. When civil rulers overstep their proper function, the Christian is to obey God rather than man (see Ac 4:19; 5:29). (CSB)

13:5 because of conscience. Civil authorities are ordained by God, and in order to maintain a good conscience Christians must duly honor them. (CSB)

13:7 respect. Includes fear. *honor.* Implies a positive attitude. (TLSB)

13:8 continuing debt. To love is the one debt that is never paid off. No matter how much one has loved, he is under obligation to keep on loving. (CSB)

13:9 Further explains the last statement of v. 8, namely, that love of neighbor encompasses all our social responsibilities. (CSB)

13:10 love is the fulfilling of the Law. In appreciation for having been accepted by God, the Christian now wants to show appreciation by living the new life that conforms to God's commandments. Such a life reflects the love toward God and our neighbor that Paul urges here. (PBC)

GOSPEL – Matthew 18:1-20

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² He called a little child and had him stand among them. ³ And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. ⁶ But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! ⁸ 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 maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown

into eternal fire.⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.¹⁰ “See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.¹² “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?¹³ And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.¹⁵ “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.¹⁶ But 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.’¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.¹⁸ “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.¹⁹ “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”

18:2 little child. He is essentially a lowly and dependent figure and this understanding provides the central key to this chapter. (CC)

18:4 humbles himself. A child’s humility is evident esp in dependence on and trust in a superior. Greatness in the kingdom is characterized by humble trust in the Lord. “Just as a child neither takes nor seeks sovereignty for himself, so this shows that there is not to be sovereignty among ministers” (Tr 8). (TLSB)

18:6 anyone who causes one of these little one to stumble. Prompting a fellow believer to sin through tempting words or bad examples. (TLSB)

18:6 large millstone. Lit. “a millstone of a donkey,” i.e., a millstone turned by a donkey—far larger and heavier than the small millstones (24:41) used by women each morning in their homes. (CSB)

18:7 woe to the man through whom they come. There will be many things in this sinful world that will cause people to sin. That is inevitable. But that does not excuse the guilty. The sinner is guilty, and so is the person who causes another to sin. (PBC)

18:10 their angels. Believers can be certain that angels keep watch over them (Ps 91:10–11). This text is the basis for the depictions of “guardian angels” common in art. (TLSB)

18:12 wanders away. Long before a congregation reaches what might be thought of in North American terms as large, it becomes distressingly easy for the little ones to begin to stray without anyone noticing when they begin to falter. (CC)

18:15 brother. A fellow believer, a fellow believer, a member of God’s family in Christ.

18:15 go. No waiting game here. Take the initiative. Don’t wait for the other person to come to you first. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:15 between the two of you. The first step is to meet with the brother privately. No gossip. Don’t run to the pastor or elder. Compassionately, lead the offender to admit guilt and request forgiveness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:16 take one or two others. Such person should be chosen very carefully. They should be mature Christians who have the respect of your erring brother. Perhaps two or three of you together can settle the matter. If you are unsuccessful, you have witnesses who can testify in the case. (PBC)

18:17 If a brother refused to listen and repent, the Church was informed of his sin. The entire believing community had the opportunity to regain him. (TLSB)

18:18 bind on earth...bound in heaven. Where God's forgiveness is refused, no neutral vacuum remains. God's judgment fills the life from which God's forgiveness has been expelled. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

18:20 there am I in the midst. Jesus guarantees his presence among all who are connected to him through faith in his name. Jesus' presence gives us his energy, protection, guidance, and comfort, which we receive through confession and absolution. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)