

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 33:7-9

Ezekiel Is Israel's Watchman

7 “So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. 8 If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. 9 But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

33:7 *house of Israel.* Both the nation and the individuals. Compare vv. 7–9 with 3:17–19. (CSB)

33:1–9 God changes Ezekiel’s focus. No longer does Ezekiel speak against the nations. Instead, God calls Ezekiel to serve once again as Israel’s watchman “to warn the wicked to turn from his way” (v 8). Today, God calls us not only to repent of our sins and receive the forgiveness He offers through Christ but also to warn others and to announce the Lord’s forgiveness for all who repent. Thankfully, the Lord is watching over us and will sustain us in this vital service. • Lord, You continually provide leadership and guidance through servants of Your Word. Grant us swiftness to answer Your call of repentance and service. Amen. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 13:1-10

Submission to the Authorities

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Ch 13 Luth: “In chapter 13 [Paul] teaches honor and obedience to worldly government. Although worldly government does not make people righteous before God, nevertheless it is instituted in order to accomplish at least this much, that the good may have outward peace and protection and the bad may not be free to do evil in peace and quietness, and without fear. Therefore the good too are to honor it even though they themselves do not need it. Finally, he comprehends it all in love, and sums it up in the example of Christ: as he has done for us, we are also to do, following in his footsteps” (AE 35:379). (TLSB)

There are aspects of life which, it would seem, are not fit materials for this worship, portions of life which prove to be stubborn and intractable stuff when men attempt to weave them into the seamless robe of the

new life. One of the most obvious and important of such areas of life would be the Christian's relationship to the Roman government, an institution completely identified with this world, a pagan power supported by pagan religious sanctions. To the Jews it seems a monstrously abnormal thing that God's people should live under pagan Roman rule. The coolly realistic Sadducees might come to terms with the anomaly of Roman rule, the Pharisees submitted to it in resignation as a judgment of God upon His people, the Zealots rejected it as intolerable and passionately rebelled. None found a really positive religious relationship to it. (Franzmann)

13:1 *be subject.* A significant word in vv. 1–7. (CSB)

This is a military term meaning to march in the proper order (cf Eph 5:21). (TLSB)

Paul's mandate that "every person be subject to the *exousiais huperechousais*" might have been a shocking statement to his original hearers, since Nero, then emperor of the Roman Empire, had been fiercely persecuting Christians around the Dispersion. 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. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

governing authorities. The civil rulers, all of whom were probably pagans at the time Paul was writing. Christians may have been tempted not to submit to them and to claim allegiance only to Christ. (CSB)

instituted by God.† Even the possibility of a persecuting state would not shake Paul's conviction that civil government is ordained by God. But Paul wrote these words in A.D. 56–57, when the Roman government during Nero's first five years as emperor (A.D. 54–59) was rated by later historians as one of the best periods of Roman rule, as Nero was influenced by two Stoic philosophers: Seneca (brother of Gallio; cf. Ac 18:12–17) and Burrus (commander of the Praetorian Guard). (CSB)

Paul's words are inclusive because all authority originates from God, the higher authority to whom ultimate obedience is due both from those in authority and under it (cf Ac 5:29). Although Jews had occasionally clashed with Roman authorities during the Dispersion, they had long recognized the wisdom in supporting governments under which they lived. Paul encourages similar attitudes among Christians. (TLSB)

13:2 *resists...God* –Resisting government authorities normally has dual consequences, both from the civil powers and from God, who authorized the government to rule the kingdom of his left hand. The exception comes when the civil authorities demand what is clearly forbidden by God, wherein we must obey God's higher power and joyfully suffer the punitive consequences of the government (Acts 5:29, 40–41). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Believers may at times resist governmental authorities on account of God's Word, but they must be ready to suffer the consequences (cf Ac 5:40–41). (TLSB)

judgment. Either divine judgment or, more likely, punishment by the governing authorities, since v. 3 ("For") explains this verse; see also v. 4. (CSB)

13:3 *one who is in authority* – When we think of Paul's experience in subsequent years, of how the ponderous machinery of Roman law moved to protect one citizen, Paul, in troubled Palestine and carried him to Roma upon his appeal to Caesar (Acts 22-28), one gets some conception of what Paul had in mind when he spoke of the "approval of those in authority." (Franzmann)

Luther's first use of the Law (a curb) explains the value of having civil laws that are designed to keep lawbreakers in check and to benefit the peace and safety of society as a whole (1 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 3:17; 4:15). God's people must be good examples of law-abiding citizens so as not to bring shame to the Church (1 Pet 3:15–16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

do what is good and you will receive his approval. 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)

A Christian's outward conduct toward those in authority should be peaceful and respectful (cf 12:18; 1Tm 2:1–2). (TLSB)

receive his approval. A general truth, yet there are also evil rulers. Although they receive their authority from God, He does not dictate how they use it. Governments all too often abuse their authority. (TLSB)

13:4 *he is God's servant.* In the order of divine providence the ruler is God's servant (see Isa 45:1). (CSB)

Gk *diakonos*, as in 12:7, but here the term is applied to those in earthly positions of authority who are to serve God and people. *sword.* God allows governments to use the death penalty. (TLSB)

As the Lord used the Persian King Cyrus as his servant in disciplining Israel, so he uses all government authorities as his *diakonos* to accomplish his ultimate will. That God gives the civil government the authority of punishing evildoers with the *sword* supports the use of capital punishment. As God's *ekdikos*, the government serves as the Lord's own hand in punishing the wicked (1 Ki 2:31; Rom 12:19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

good. Rulers exist for the benefit of society—to protect the general public by maintaining good order. (CSB)

the sword.† The symbol of Roman authority on both the national and the international levels. Here we find the Biblical principle of using force for the maintenance of good order—including capital punishment. (CSB)

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

Christians can, in good conscience, come to different conclusions about how to respond to governments that fall short of God's standard in varying degrees. (TLSB)

The eye of faith sees in the authorities the hand of God. (Franzmann)

Christians are not under God's Law but serve him willingly as motivated by the Holy Spirit as he works through Word and Sacrament. While civil laws and punishment were not designed for honest and obedient citizens, Christians obey the laws of the land both to avoid punishment connected with breaking them and to keep a clear conscience before God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:6 *you pay taxes.* Because rulers are God's agents, who function for the benefit of society in general. (CSB)

Jesus also asserts this (Mt 22:15–22. (TLSB)

Unbelievers may grumble and complain at paying taxes, but God’s people understand that this is how the Lord keeps peace, law, and order in society. Therefore, Christians welcome the opportunity to support those who serve in office on every level of government by paying their taxes. Whether they are Christians or not, the government officials are perhaps unknowingly serving God and his people by providing safety and services to the people they rule, even if it is imperfect or corrupt. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

If they are paying taxes in obedience to the Lord’s command, they are in principle recognizing the place and function of the Roman authorities as “ministers of God,” intent upon their duties as His ministers. (Franzmann)

ministers of God. Priestly term that elevates both the source of authority and the responsibility of those in power. (TLSB)

13:7 *respect...honor* –Paul is writing to the Romans during the first five years of Nero’s reign, that good beginning whose promise was to be belied by the excesses of that emperor’s later years. But it has been observed that of all the emperors under whom Paul lived there was hardly one who could be called, by ordinary standards of political justice, a “legitimate” possessor of his place and power. (Franzmann)

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

Paul’s experience with the state had not been uniformly good. His rights as a Roman citizen had been outrageously ignored by the magistrates of the Roman colony of Philippi (Acts 16:22, 37; 1 Thess 2:2). At the time when he wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians, a few months before his Letter to the Romans, he had been beaten thrice by Roman rods (2 Cor 11:25). Paul is speaking what has been revealed to him by the Spirit: he walks by faith here, not by seeing. (Franzmann)

Just as our Lord supported paying taxes to Caesar (Mt 22:21) and supported paying taxes to the Jewish temple (Mt 17:24–27), Paul encourages us to provide financial support, revenue, respect, and honor to all who are over us in every area of life: religious, employment, and governmental. Christians are not to be seen as rebels or troublemakers, but as those who bring honor and respect to Christ as they contribute to society and respect all who hold offices. There are no perfect rulers, just as there are no perfect parents, but the Fourth Commandment demands that we honor all parents, because it is in God’s order of society. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

13:1–7 While all governments fall short, Paul implies that the first-century Roman government was adequately carrying out its two essential functions: approving those who do good and punishing evildoers. Paul acknowledges that all authority comes from God, to whom ultimate obedience is due. “We must obey God rather than men” (Ac 5:29). Believers are to honor those in authority, obey the government, and pay their taxes (cf 1Pt 2:13–17). To fail to do so is to suffer the consequences from those in authority and possibly from God as well. God is the ultimate authority; He used His power to save us (1:16). • Thank You for caring for me through those You have placed in authority over me: my parents, teachers, and government officials. Guide them to use their authority according to Your will and help me to obey them. Bless those believers who live under corrupt governments, and guide their consciences to respond in ways pleasing to You. Amen. (TLSB)

Fulfilling the Law Through Love

8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

13:8 *owe no one.* 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)

Paul does not oppose all loans but urges us to pay whatever we owe. (TLSB)

Although these words have been used at times to prohibit taking out monetary loans, the sense is that we not *opheilete* any outstanding debts of acts of love. We should not have outstanding financial debts that we ignore any more than to withhold other acts of love, which become merely good intentions. It is the loving motive of our actions that displays a heart that is right with God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

except to love – Previously, Paul said to pay taxes as owed (v 7); here he speaks of a higher duty—to love others. (TLSB)

Literally it says, “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.” (PBC)

Although some civic responsibilities can be completely met, Christian service is open-ended. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

each another. Includes not only fellow Christians but all people, as the second half of the verse makes clear (“fellowman”). (CSB)

the law. The Mosaic law, which lays down both moral and social responsibilities. (CSB)

One who loves perfectly would fulfill the requirements of God’s Law and be righteous before Him (cf Lk 10:25–28). Earlier, Paul excluded that possibility because of our sinfulness (3:20). Here, we strive to live according to God’s Law because we have been declared righteous “by the mercies of God” (12:1; cf 1Jn 4:10–11). (TLSB)

When asked to identify the Law’s greatest command, Jesus condensed both the first and second parts of the Ten Commandments by saying: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” [a distillation of the first table, Deut 6:5]. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: “Love your neighbor as yourself” [the second table, Lev 19:18]. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” In other words, such a love, freely shown to God and to the neighbor, captures the Law’s deepest intention. (LL)

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

“Paul, when encouraging the regenerate to do good works, clearly presents to them the Ten Commandments” (FC SD VI 21). (TLSB)

Commandments Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, and Ten, along with the Fourth Commandment alluded to earlier, are part of the second table of the Law. They focus on our relationships with other people as

compared with our relationship with God. Loving God is defined by the way in which we love other people (1 John 2–4). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

Every commandment requires love for God and our neighbor. (PBC)

your neighbor. Jesus taught that our neighbor is anyone in need (see Lk 10:25–37), which is probably the idea Paul has in mind here. (CSB)

Jesus similarly identifies this as an apt summary of the Law (Mt 22:37–40; cf Gal 5:14). (TLSB)

as yourself. Not a command to love ourselves but a recognition of the fact that we naturally do so. (CSB)

13:10 *love does no wrong* – To love is to place another before self; this is to be a “living sacrifice” (12:1). (TLSB)

love is the fulfillment 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)

As Christians consider how to behave or react in various situations with others, it must always pass the test of *agapē*. Whether disciplining our children, responding to the hurts and attacks of others, exercising our freedom to eat or drink whatever we wish, or providing for the needs of others, all our actions must flow from the motive of true, godly love. Although this merits us no grace from God, it reflects Luther’s third use of the Law in instructing us how we are to live (Romans 12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 24, Part 3)

We love because He first loved us. As He kept the full Law out of His love for God, He enables us to submit to authorities by the power of His love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 4)

This kind of admonition in Romans does not come out of nowhere! The love these verses ask is not just a warm felling; nor is it a pious resolution to be more patient or longsuffering. Christian love (agape in Greek) is an act of the will; it can be commanded. But this love can only be willed by those who themselves have experienced God’s underserved mercy in Jesus Christ. Only the Gospel motivates and empowers any and all expressions of Christian love. The love Christians show to neighbors, and even to enemies, is so contrary to ordinary human conduct that it is the single greatest sign to the world of the authenticity of Christian discipleship (See John 13:35). (LL)

GOSPEL – Matthew 18:1-20

The Greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” 2 And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them 3 and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, 6 but 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.

Ch 18 Extensive teaching on sin, forgiveness, and the community of faith. (TLSB)

18:1 *who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven* – We might think of Abraham or Moses or the apostle Paul. When the disciples asked Jesus that question, however, they wanted to know which one of them would be the greatest. They all expected to have positions of importance in Jesus’ kingdom, and each of them would have liked to be Jesus’ right-hand man. It may have appeared to them that Peter, James and John were the likeliest candidates for that position. Earlier that same day Jesus had selected Peter to catch the fish with the coin in its mouth to pay the temple tax for himself and Jesus. It had been only a short time since Jesus took only Peter, James, and John with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration, and the rest of the disciples also remembered that Jesus had taken those same three with Him when He went into the house of Jairus to raise that man’s 12-year-old daughter from the dead. And Peter often assumed a role of leadership by speaking up in behalf of all the disciples. So we can understand why the other disciples wondered about their positions in the kingdom that Jesus was soon going to establish. The problem was that they failed to understand the concept of greatness in Jesus’ kingdom. (PBC)

In the previous chapter, the disciples have witnessed several miraculous events. Naturally, they would like to have a piece of Jesus’ glory, fame, and power, and are wondering how to become successful and “make it big” in the kingdom of God. Jesus’ response is shocking and counterintuitive to these competitive and self-absorbed disciples. Jesus intends to refocus them from adult patterns of reasoning and faith toward childlike ones. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The disciples seem to have had a recurring dispute about who was the greatest (20:21; Lk 22:24). Jesus used their question as the occasion for His fourth major discourse, in which He taught how Christians should act toward one another. (TLSB)

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

Jesus is proclaiming that the greatest in the reign of heaven is the one who is, in fact, in a condition of lowly powerlessness and who willingly acknowledges his own emptiness and utter inability in spiritual things. (CC)

Jesus places a small child (*paidion*) in the midst of them as a model of discipleship and faith. In a similar manner, the heavenly Father places Jesus, his one and only Son, in our midst through the incarnation. Jesus’ action suggests a theology of the cross, which can be juxtaposed against the disciples’ theology-of-glory approach to ministry and salvation. Ancient nativity scenes would depict the Christ Child lying in the manger in *cruciform*, for this small, cute *paidion* laid in the midst of humanity was sent with one mission: to be stretched out on a cross and die. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:3 *turn*. To change one’s thinking as to what makes for greatness in God’s kingdom. (TLSB)

turn. Hbr shub, “to turn, turn around.” A very common verb, used over 1,000 times in the OT. Appropriately translated “repent” in more than 100 cases, most often in Jer (Isaiah rarely uses the term this way). Repentance is God’s work that leads a person to renounce sin—requesting God’s mercy and returning to His way For a classic OT example, see David’s confession and prayer in Ps 51. (TLSB p. 1080)

like little children. Trusting and unpretentious. (CSB)

The child served Jesus as an object lesson in humility. (TLSB)

straphēte: The second aorist passive is reflexive; unless a person turns (and continues to turn) into a child—and away from being an adult—in his heart and attitude, he shall in no way, shape, or form enter God’s kingdom (as *ou mē* suggests). Only by seeing ourselves as babies in the arms of God can we begin to understand the nature of faith and the Christian walk. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The main point of comparison was the child’s humility. That is the basic Christian virtue. As a matter of fact, there can be no virtue in God’s sight without humility. (PBC)

Jesus is simply and powerfully turning the disciples’ perspective away from any thought of competition or comparison according to worldly standards of importance. He is proclaiming that as they live under the blessing of the reign of God in Him, they are to look at one another with new eyes and realize that when they see a fellow disciple who is struggling or hurting or alone and in desperate need, at that moment they have seen him who is the greatest in the reign of heaven. (CC)

Jesus is not primarily talking about literal children, although He does use a real child to illustrate His point. Jesus directs His teaching in the first place to His adult disciples, calling them to repent and to acknowledge that they are as needy and dependent on the mercy of God as a child is dependent upon others for life itself. Jesus further declares that it is precisely the needy and those who cannot fend for themselves who should be regarded as the greatest and the most significant. These “children” are the greatest in the *reign* of heaven and they are not limited to disciples who happen to be very young. (CC)

Throughout the entire life of discipleship, there is never a time when, in terms of one’s relationship with God, one ceases to be a dependent child. (CC)

Until Christ returns in glory,, there will always be powerless ones, weak and desperately needy Christians whom other disciples are to regard as the greatest and so worthy of welcome and concern and forgiveness. In a sense, what more eloquent picture could there be of a helpless human being, utterly dependent upon God’s mercy, than a little child who is being baptized. (CC)

18:4 *who 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)

Humility means, first of all, recognizing personal sinfulness and unworthiness and inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation wholly or even partially. Humility depends entirely on God’s mercy for forgiveness and salvation. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Savior, who offered up Himself as the perfect sacrifice for all sins. Humility is not about self-esteem; it is about Christ-esteem. Whoever humbles himself God exalts, and whoever exalts himself God humbles. (PBC)

The child is a model for the disciples’ spiritual growth because children possess nothing in themselves but depend on Christ, which is the essence of salvation. God wants us adults to become more like children. He sees the Holy Church on earth as a Church of children. Views of Baptism that make the faith or the reasoning ability of an adult the model of discipleship are to be rejected. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

Jesus provides us with the perfect example of God-pleasing humility. He came down from heavenly glory and became one of us. He was born in a lowly stable, and He submitted to all the laws God had given to His chosen people, Israel. He never used His divine powers for His own convenience or comfort. He allowed sinful people to mistreat Him, condemn Him, and crucify Him. And He endured all these things for us. That was the purpose for which He came into the world. (PBC)

The smaller we grow in our own estimation, the greater do we become in the sight of God. True greatness before God consists in that humility of spirit which excludes every vestige of selfishness and pride. (Ylvisaker)

18:5-6 Jesus is not praising every quality of a child, but by qualifying his discussion about receiving children “in my name,” he ties the discourse to a question of doctrine. Luther points out how the name of God is inseparable from his teaching. It is the faith of a child to which we strive as disciples of Christ. Each of the baptized has become a born-again child *of faith*. Not only that, but we also have a call to treat others as we ourselves have been treated by God (as precious children, 1 Jn 3:1, 10). This happens when we keep each other focused on Jesus instead of participating in one’s slipping away. Whoever scandalizes or offends another believer, causing him or her to stumble, whether intentionally or accidentally, can destroy that soul. The life of sanctification involves receiving others as children (dirty diapers and all!), for Christ is found sacramentally present in every single Christian. This may mean giving up some of our rights for the sake of a neighbor who may be weaker in faith. It may also require courage in keeping each other accountable in doctrinal matters. Luther teaches how a right distinction between Law and Gospel (believing in Law as punishment and in Gospel as unconditional forgiveness) is the essence of being a child of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:5 *receives one of these little ones* – We welcome a little child in Jesus’ name, first of all, by recognizing that children are gifts of God, not grievous burdens. We serve Jesus by providing for the needs of our children. That means not only food and shelter and clothing and loving care, but above all, bringing them to Jesus in Holy Baptism and training them to know and love and obey their Savior. (PBC)

One who humbly trusts in the Lord (v 4). Jesus identified Himself with such children (11:25; 25:40, 45). (TLSB)

18:6 *whoever causes one of these little ones* – If we are lacking in Christian humility, we may be guilty of causing little children to sin instead of serving them in Jesus’ name. We are personally responsible for children’s sin if we neglect to bring them to their Savior in Holy Baptism, if we fail to give our children Christian training, if we set a poor example in our homes. If we rely on others to teach our children the Word of God and then contradict God’s Word by the way we speak and act, we endanger our children’s faith. (PBC)

Prompting a fellow believer to sin through tempting words or bad examples. (TLSB)

The key concept here is “stumbling block,” in Greek skandalon. The word itself literally means a trap or snare. For example, Psalm 141:9 “Keep me from the snares they have laid for me.” The religious meaning of skandalon is a “temptation to sin, enticement to apostasy, false belief, etc.” Apostasy means falling away from the faith. (LL)

So who is it that’s hurt when parents fail to tell their children that so much on TV or radio is wrong? Who’s hurt when a person claims to be as good a Christian as anybody else but only shows up at church on Christmas or Easter? Who is hurt when a group spends its time maligning an absent person? Who’s hurt when Bible truths are forgotten in office politics or office parties? Who’s hurt? It is the quiet Christian who notices the discrepancy between what Christians profess and what they do. That

discrepancy easily trips up a childlike faith. It easily snares the Christian into sinful conduct. “Must be okay. Everybody’s doing it!” Sin leads away from Christ and away from saving faith. (LL)

To offend, in Holy Writ, implies to build up moral obstacles in word or in deed, in doctrine or in our manner of life, so as to cause moral mischief or even a complete moral breakdown. He who is guilty of this, and who thus either hinders a person from coming to God or causes a child of God to be weakened in the faith, or even wholly to forfeit his life in God, commits a sin so grievous that it were better for him to lose his physical life by violence or by the death of a felon than to commit this awful offense and forfeit eternal life, and with bloodguilt upon his conscience, be drawn into the abyss of eternal degradation. So highly does Jesus esteem one of His believers. We should consider them equally priceless. (Ylvisaker)

who believe. Faith and the kingdom of God are not limited by age or mental abilities. They are gracious gifts of God. *better.* Better to die by drowning than to suffer eternal punishment (cf v 9) for causing a little one to sin. (TLSB)

better. Better to die by drowning than to suffer eternal punishment (cf v 9) for causing a little one to sin. (TLSB)

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)

Such a person would be better off if he died a violent death before becoming guilty of such a sin. It would be better to be destroyed bodily than to be guilty of destroying a child spiritually. (PBC)

The millstones of this text are really the donkey millstones. Two kinds of mills were in use in Judea. The small house-mill, which could be placed on the table and be run by hand, and the larger variety turned by the donkey. Here there is reference to a millstone which would surely sink a person into the depths. (Ylvisaker)

18:1–6 Jesus demonstrates that humility is the hallmark of greatness in the Kingdom of heaven. Humility means confessing our inability to do anything at all to become worthy before God and earn salvation. Humility depends entirely on God’s mercy for forgiveness. It looks to Jesus Christ as the Savior who became one with sinners to redeem them. • Daily teach me, dear Jesus, to turn and become like a child. Amen. (TLSB)

Temptation to sin

7 “Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! 8 And 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. 9 And 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.

18:7 *temptations to sin!* Gk word is also translated “take offense” (11:6; 15:12; 17:27) and “cause to sin” (vv 6, 8–9). The world sets up numerous stumbling blocks over which people trip and fall into sin. (TLSB)

necessary. Because sin has corrupted this world, temptations will persist until Judgment Day (1Jn 2:16). Jesus pronounced doom on anyone who causes another person to sin. (TLSB)

woe to the one by whom the temptation comes – 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)

“Woe” (*ouai*), a verdict mixed with a heartfelt grief (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* [Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1943], 689). A God who loves us judges us for our self-destruction. A world of adultlike spirituality and reasoning is the cause of our own demise. It is ironic that the message of a religion that is almost universally despised, that of Satanism, is none other than our narcissistic focus on self-improvement at the expense of others. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

The effect of 18:6-7 on a believing follower of Jesus might be compared to a slap in the face. (CC)

Shifting from the danger of causing another to stumble, Jesus reminds His disciples that all must live vigilantly as they follow in His way. They must be aware that they too will encounter causes of stumbling. (CC)

18:8-9 Jesus offers a radical illustration to press home the seriousness of preserving a saving faith at any cost. Ultimately, Jesus’ instructions are impossible to fulfill for a Christian. We need a Savior from these sins. If one attempted to cut off one’s sinful limbs in order to cleanse oneself, the process of self-mutilation would be endless. In contrast, Jesus was truly maimed for us. He became sin for us in every way, shape, and form, and he underwent the ultimate slaughter on the cross, since “what he did not assume he did not redeem” (St. Athanasius). By preaching the Law, Jesus is allowing these adult-minded disciples, who are fixated on earthly glory, to see their desperate condition as children in need of the saving Gospel and its eternal glory. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

This text may also have an ecclesiological perspective. St. John Chrysostom comments on how the removal of a limb is representative of excommunication. In short, it is better for the Church to enter the kingdom of God with fewer people than not at all (David P. Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2004), 330). This idea then ties in with the discussion of the locking and unlocking effect of the Office of the Keys discussed in v 18. It is a necessary practice of exclusion, which is visually present in the administration of the Lord’s Supper. However, our Lord’s ultimate goal is reconciliation and restoration back to the Body (Scaer, 317). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

Cf 5:29–30, where Jesus spoke similar words to warn against sexual sins. He used such strong and hyperbolic language to emphasize the seriousness of sin.(TLSB)

18:8 *hand or foot* – Before you cripple or blind yourself, however, realize that no member of your body can be responsible for causing you to sin. The problem is how you use your body. Jesus used this same illustration in His Sermon on the Mount (see 5:29,30). The CSB comment is, “Jesus is not teaching self-mutilation, for even a blind man can lust. The point is that we should deal as drastically with sin as necessary.”

18:7–9 One need look no further than these words of Jesus to see how much the holy God hates sin. Here, the Law strikes us with all its fury. Who of us can say that our hand or foot or eye has not caused us to sin? We all deserve to be thrown into the hell of fire. Thank God that Jesus’ hands and feet were pierced for our iniquities and that His eyes beheld our sin in order to turn the Father’s face from it. By His wounds and precious death, we enter life. • Holy Father, I confess my sins of thought and word and deed. Forgive me for Jesus’ sake. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

10 “See 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. 12 What 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? 13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

18:10 *not despise* – The root word *phroneō* of *kataphronēsēte* suggests holding an attitude of judgment. A wrong understanding or worldview is being condemned, not just the belittling of children. To reject these words of Jesus and maintain an adultlike metaphysic regarding the faith is to despise children and reject their heavenly Father, both of whom are surrounded by angels. This, in essence, expresses hatred toward the Church, which is the community of worshipers (both human and angelic), and represents one’s own excommunication from the family of God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

E.g., cause a fellow believer to sin (v 6). (TLSB)

their angels. Guardian angels not exclusively for children, but for God’s people in general (Ps 34:7; 91:11; Heb 1:14). (CSB)

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)

This verse summarizes, rephrases, and captures the spirit of the teaching in 18:6-9. What is distinctive (and unusual) about this saying is the supporting clause that follows it: “for I say to you that their angels constantly see in heaven the face of my Father who is in heaven.” (CC)

Whatever else Jesus may be saying here in 18:10, He is teaching that God the Father’s heart is open to those who are in need and who cannot provide for themselves. To be sure, in the most profound sense, every disciple (and every human creature, for that matter) is a little one; all of us are poor in spirit in relation to God (5:3) and equally in need of His blessing. (CC)

In the process of overturning that way of thinking, Jesus teaches that the ones who might be most despised by the world – and by the worldly thinking disciples – are those whose angels are constantly in the very presence of the heavenly Father. The message is clear: the littlest ones must not be despised, because God Himself treasures and values them! (CC)

This single clause with “their angels” provides the only direct biblical support for the concept that in some way or in some sense or during some periods of time, God assigns particular angelic creatures for certain human creatures. (CC)

Although the seven churches in Revelation 1-3 each have an “angel” and throughout Scripture angels are sent for specific tasks and to minister to certain individuals (cf. Heb 1:14) or to fight for God’s people (cf 2 Kings 6:17; Dan 10:13-21), there is no other mention in the Bible of the idea that God has designated a particular angel or angels to guard each and every believer (all of the “little ones”). The closest parallel passage may be the obscure reference to Peter’s “angel” in Acts 12:15. (CC)

Rather than guess, I will leave the topic hanging in the face of our ignorance, rejoicing nevertheless in the goodness and grace of the heavenly Father, in whose eyes those whom the world would despise are so

precious that, in whatever sense Jesus intends, it is true that “their angels” have constant access to God the Father in heaven. (CC)

see the face. Angels have direct access to our Father in heaven, who cares greatly for each of His little ones. (TLSB)

18:12-14 Jesus shifts gears but continues with the idea that people are helpless children by comparing them to helpless sheep. Even after one sheep has stumbled away, God is committed to retrieving it. This happens through the confession and absolution of the repentant. God invites us to take an active (though humble) role in this mission of bringing back the baptized to his Son, who waits for them at his Holy Table of reconciliation. Although the world may often express a Darwinian “survival of the fittest” attitude in their dealings with others, the road to greatness in the kingdom of God comes through humility and selflessness. Though each of us plays a part in this divine shepherding, each of us is also a sheep gone astray, just as the Lord’s Prayer expresses it. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:12–13 God, like the good shepherd, will search for a single lost sheep and rejoice when it is found. (TLSB)

18:12 *has gone astray* – I agree with those (such as Carson, Matthew, 400) who think that Mt. 18:12-14 and Lk 15:3-7 are two related but distinct passages, rather than variants of the same unit. The two units share almost no verbal agreements in Greek. While they do exhibit a number of obviously common features, Franc, Gospel of Matthew, 685, notes importantly that in the Lukan text, the one sheep is already lost (to apololos, Lk 15:4), whereas here in Matthew, the one sheep is straying (to planomenon). Finally and most importantly, the meaning of the Lukan passage is directly Christological and evangelistic. Matthew, on the other hand, has recorded this teaching of Jesus, rooted to be sure in the Good News that Jesus is the Shepherd of Israel (see 2:6; 9:36; 26:31), primarily for pastoral purposes and an exhortation that fellow disciples should care for the little ones in their midst. (CC)

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. When that difficulty caused by the size of the congregation is coupled with the radically individualized thinking that comes so effortless to many in the societal context in which I and most of my readers have lived and worked, the very idea that Christian today would care for each other, look out for each other, and seek after even the littlest sheep who seems to be wandering seems like a foreign reality that will never be attained. This is, however, the will of the Father in heaven. (CC)

18:14 The heavenly Father wants all to be saved (cf 1Tm 2:4). (TLSB)

18:10–14 Jesus compares the Father’s love for His little ones to that of a shepherd who left his 99 sheep to search for the one who went astray. Do we show similar concern when fellow Christians stray from faith in Christ? May we never despise one of the little ones for whom Christ died. God did everything He could to seek and to save the lost. He spared not His only Son but gave Him up for us all. • Give me a heart, O Father, that cares about each of Your little ones. Amen. (TLSB)

A Brother Who Sins Against You

15 “If 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. 16 But 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. 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 be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again 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. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

18:15-20 Here Jesus gives a practical example of this principle: containing sin through limiting the spread of gossip. In the end, if the individual in question refuses to repent, he proves that he is not a “little one” nor a sheep. The Office of the Keys is an authority given by Christ to his Church to bind and loose judgment upon sins. Though it is publicly exercised by called and ordained ministers for the sake of good order, it remains a power given to the whole Church. Each member shares a responsibility for the other. A church is never a single individual, but consists of at least two or three, mirroring the nature of our God who, although he is one, also is essentially a community of three. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

This duty of the Church is not an easy one. To encourage his disciples, Jesus promises that he is present “among” (*en mesōi*) them, even among the smallest of churches. The Word, which was born to dwell among us, remains sacramentally hidden by grace through faith in the midst of the faithful. A tiny child may be barely visible in the midst of a large crowd. However, when it comes to Christianity, that tiny child is all that counts! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 18, Part 4)

18:15-17 *If your brother sins against you.* Context is important here. After Jesus had stressed the seriousness of sin (vv 8-9), He warned against despising a little one (v 10), told the parable about seeking the lost sheep (vv 12-13), and stated that His Father did not want a single little one to perish (v 14). The entire process that Jesus here describes must be carried out in humility (v 4) with the goal of gaining your brother. See LC I 276-78. Hus: “Teach, counsel, punish, console, remit, bear, pray” (*The Church*, p 92). (TLSB)

18:15 *brother.* A fellow believer. (CSB)

adelphos is a fellow believer, a member of God’s family in Christ (Mt 12:50 adds “sister” and “mother”; cf Mt 25:40; 28:10). Jesus is therefore discussing church discipline, not evangelism of unbelievers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

Brother is used here for the first time; it describes the loving relationship in God’s family. That person’s soul is precious and needs to be kept in the fellowship. (LL)

sins against – Sin by any member of Christ’s body is always sin against the other members, and against God (cf. 1 Cor 12:26). Concern for the welfare of our brother necessitates taking sin seriously as a threat to eternal salvation that must be rebuked. The other side of the coin is that we need to be ready to accept appropriate rebukes for our own sin. We need to also be careful not to confuse with person likes and dislikes. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

Galatians 6:1-2: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Once in a while a fellow Christian is guilty of a deliberate sin and shows no desire to forsake that sin and make amends for it. (PBC)

This is a fellow Christian who has succumbed to a flagrant sin and will wander from saving faith unless restored by confession and forgiveness. That person's soul is precious and needs to be kept in the fellowship – even if he has sinned against you. (LL)

The context of the larger discourse and its ascending sense of urgent care for a fellow Christian in need would suggest that this situation of a brother sinning is a serious matter. The powerful sequence of the conditional sentences also strongly supports the view that Jesus' words must mean something like "if your brother sins in a way that makes you fear that he will fall from the faith..." Perhaps most importantly, the fact that the brother needs to be gained virtually demands that Jesus has in mind a situation where one who has been a fellow disciple now seems to be in peril of no longer being a brother. He is in danger of losing all faith and salvation. (CC)

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)

tell him his fault – Is one possible translation of *elegcho*; stronger possible translations include "expose"; "convict"; "reprove, correct"; and "punish, discipline." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

between you and him alone – 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)

If your fellow Christian has sinned against you in an obvious way, keep the matter as quiet as possible. (LL)

if he listens – Jesus eagerly anticipates that the brother will "listen. *Akouo* can mean "listen to, follow, obey" This is the kind of hearing that generates confession and receive the assurance of pardon. That is Christ's strategy for winning back another offender. Spirit-led listening allows the Spirit to move a person to acknowledge sin and be rescued by God's grace in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The motivation must be to turn the offender to repentance – not to prove the accuser right or extract payment for the wrong. The point is to win back. (LL)

18:16 *take one or two others* – Prudent, thoughtful choice determines which witnesses are to be included in the strategy. Their testimony regarding what happens in the exchange will be pivotal later if the congregation must meet on the matter. Notice that Jesus upholds the divine law given through Moses regarding witnesses, even as in his own ministry he observed the principle (Jn 5:31-39; 8:13-19). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

To serve as witnesses that the accusation of sin was well-founded. (TLSB)

Note from Deuteronomy 19:15 – *single witness ... not suffice*. Protection against a wrongful conviction on the basis of inadequate or false testimony (vv 16–17). Cf 17:6. (TLSB)

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)

Here Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 19:15, “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Don’t bring a militia. (LL)

18:17 *if he refuses to listen* – If the offender stubbornly refuses to repent, he is to be treated like a pagan or tax collector, who were utterly despised by 1st- century Jews. In its final act of concern the congregation declares the impenitent sinner to be outside the family of God, excommunicated, banned from the Holy Table, dropped from membership. By repulsing the congregation’s call to repent, the sinner has rejected God and the community of believers. That is spiritual self-destruction. The congregation’s purpose in excommunicating is still to win the person over. By the Spirit’s power, let the reality strike home in his heart. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

church. The local congregation. Here and 16:18 are the only two places where the Gospels speak of the “church.” (CSB)

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)

The “church” is the gathering of believers in the local setting; the Christian congregation. Jesus anticipates the time when his followers will themselves be cast out of the synagogues and form their own communities of faith.
(Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

The purpose of calling it to the attention of the church is still to impress upon the brother the seriousness of his sin and to bring him to repentance. (PBC)

pagan. For the Jews this meant any Gentile. (CSB)

After all efforts had failed to convince the sinner to repent, he was to be regarded as outside the Christian fellowship. This did not preclude future efforts to regain him. See LC I 279–83. Hus: “A notorious sinner after the third warning or public citation, when he refuses to be corrected, ought on account of his criminal offence to be kept from [communion]” (*The Church*, p 271). (TLSB)

tax collector. This verse establishes one basis for excommunication. (CSB)

It can be and has been over-read in two directions. One view that takes an unwanted next step says, “Well, Jesus reached out and welcomed Gentiles and tax gatherers. That must be what He is telling the disciples to do: to continue to reach out to the fallen sinner.” Exegetically, this would be over-reading the text. Jesus’ words simply say that the person is a non-disciple, no more and no less. (CC)

The other over-interpretation is even more dangerous. It has especially occurred among groups of disciples who emphasize the fellowship of the visible church in a theologically unbalance way. I have good friends in the Anabaptist tradition, for instance, who have talked with the regret about the older practice of “shunning” a person who has been taken through the steps of church discipline as perceived here in 18:15-20. After the church member in question refused to respond in repentance and faith to the pleas of others, the congregation and (apparently) even the larger community ostracized the person socially and economically. Such an attitude would make loving outreach to the person being shunned virtually impossible. (CC)

18:18 *truly I say to you* – See Sermon Topic “Jesus – Teacher.”

Word is change agent. Comes up when appropriate (Gospel & Reconciliation Process)

binnd 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)

The action that the Church took regarding the sinning brother was valid in heaven. “He means sin being forgiven, eternal death taken away, and eternal life bestowed. ‘Whatever you bind’ does not speak of requiring punishments, but of retaining the sins of those who are not converted” (Ap XIIB 41). (TLSB)

Jesus’ promise about binding and loosing in 18:18 strongly echoes His promise to Peter in 16:19. The two teachings are similar of course. I would argue, however, that the context here in chapter 18 makes this promise both more specific and more corporate. In the commentary on 16:19, I argue (in agreement with others) that what has been granted to Peter and the other apostles is the authority to teach Christocentrically and in so teaching to use the keys to open (or shut) the way to the reign of God. I suggest as well that the modern application of 16:19 would pertain most especially to pastors, since these men are entrusted with the office of the keys that accompanies the apostolic proclamation centered in Jesus’ identity as the Christ and the Son of God. (CC)

Here in chapter 18, both the grammar and the context lead toward something more specific. The grammatical difference is obvious in Greek, although obscured in English. In 16:19, Peter alone is referenced by the second person singular pronouns and verbs (all translated with “you”), and it was necessary to determine responsibility who and what was included with “Peter.” Here in 18:18, the verbs have shifted from the second person singular forms that characterize 18:15-17 to second person plural forms, which continue in 18:19-20. (CC)

Accordingly, the binding or loosing of which Jesus speaks in 18:18 is precisely the retaining or the forgiving of sins. When concerned and loving Christians reprove one of the greatest in their midst and that brother repents again and believes, his sins are loosed from him, released and forgiven. The word of forgiveness that Christians speak together will be the earthly enactment and bestowal of what has already taken place in God’s own presence. In similar but sorrowful fashion, if the congregation finds that it must bind upon someone his or her sins and announce that the unrepentant sinner is no longer a Christian nor a member of the church, then that word that binds sins is a true word, fastening on earth what God has already done in heaven. (CC)

It needs to be said that in all of these matters, the promise in 18:18 applies only when Jesus’ disciples carry out their loving reproof and outreach in accordance with the truth. There is no basis for thinking that people can force God’s hand. In that sense, every word of losing/forgiving or binding/retaining sins is contingent upon the truth, as the words of absolution spoken in the worship service. (CC)

If there has been no true confession, there is no forgiveness. On the other hand, if Christians have wrongly concluded that a brother or sister has left the faith, then their word of exclusion is invalid. The necessity of uttering the appropriate declaration (getting it right) ought always and ever to add even more caution, care, and diligence to the task of urgently caring for one who is the most important in the congregation, the sinning brother or sister. (CC)

18:19 *two of you* – As with witnesses (v 16), God promises a certain power in numbers. Christians should not try to “go it alone” when they can enjoy the blessings of the communion of saints. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

This verse should not be read as a sort of blanket promise regarding all or any prayer that a disciple may utter. This saying of Jesus is given to us in a context, and to that context it belongs. It is a word of comfort and authority as Christian and the pastor and the Christian congregation seek how best to reach out in love to straying fellow disciples. As they love and pray, the promise is that God Himself will hear their request and be present in their common efforts. (CC)

In their labors to care for the greatest in their midst, Christians should not despair that they are only a few in number. Employing a kind of reverse hyperbole, Jesus takes the smallest group possible (two of you) and promises that the heavenly Father will hear their cries for help and wisdom and guidance. He is emphasizing just how attentive the Father in heaven is to His children as they reach out in love to the little ones in need. After all, it is not the Father's will that any of them perish (18:14)! (CC)

agree – When two Christians harmonize their intentions, they speak a powerful petition to God that he will answer. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 4)

symphoneisoin – This is the word for agree. It is important Biblical term. Scripture's values' arrangement has an emphasis on symphony and harmony, not hierarchy. (Qualben)

symphony is a large-scale musical composition for an orchestra. Since the late eighteenth century, composers have regarded the symphony as “the central form of orchestral composition”, similar to how writers of fiction regard the novel, and filmmakers the feature film. According to music historian Michael Kennedy, the symphony “is reserved by composers for their most weighty and profound orchestral thoughts, but of course there are many light-hearted, witty, and entertaining

anything. Gk *pragma*, “an issue,” as in a common legal case (Eng “pragmatic”). Likely refers to church matters such as dealing with a sinning brother. (TLSB)

they ask, it will be done. The heavenly Father will ratify the Church's actions done in Christ's name (v 20). (TLSB)

18:20 *there am I among them* – 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)

As with the saying about two agreeing in 18:19, Jesus is not proposing a sort of minimum attendance requirement that would guarantee His presence among and with His disciples. His words are a kind of exaggeration and have the force of “even if only two or three are gathered in my name, I am still there.” The stress lies, in other words, not on the number of disciples but upon the promise of the One in whose name they are gathered. To be gathered in the name of Jesus means that disciples come together on the basis of who Jesus is and what He has done. In the post-Easter, post-Great Commission church, disciples gather as those who have been baptized into the triune name (28:19) and who are teaching and learning all that He has said (28:20). (CC)

Most directly, Jesus is referring to the assembly of Christians, the congregation that has amassed to care for the needy and endangered brothers and sisters in their midst – to care for the greatest. In a remarkable turn of phrase, Jesus, who earlier had placed a child in their midst and named it as the paradigm for finally entering the reign of God (18:2-3), now promises that He Himself will be in their midst as they seek to care for and reach out to the little ones, even to the extent of lovingly excluding the impenitent from the fellowship of believers. The goal is all of this is to bring the straying or lost brother or sister back into the communion. This love and compassion are at the very heart of what Jesus is all about, the very heart of His name. (CC)

Jewish Mishnah states that God's glory is present when two or three men consider the Torah together (Avot 3:2). Here, the actions of believers are valid in heaven because of Jesus' presence among them. Cf 6:10. "God is superabundantly generous in His grace: First, through the spoken Word.... Also through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren" (SA III IV). "The Keys have been given to the Church, and not merely to certain persons" (Tr 68). (TLSB)

18:15–20 Jesus commands the Church to do all it can to regain an unrepentant sinner. To humbly and lovingly speak to such a brother or sister is to follow the example of the shepherd who searched for one lost sheep. Christ has promised to stand behind the actions of the Church in either forgiving or refusing to forgive sins. We need personally to cherish His gifts and to present His Law and Gospel to anyone caught in the grip of sin. Through the precious gift of forgiveness, the door of heaven is opened to each repentant sinner. • Loving Lord, help me to act as my brother's keeper, even as You care for me and keep me by grace. Amen. (TLSB)