



WATCH VIDEO 2: *Members who left after being sinned against*



REFLECTION: How do we reawaken appetite for Word and Sacrament?

We know that Jesus taught us in the Lord’s Prayer and elsewhere to forgive as we have been forgiven. When a fellow believer tells us that they’ve been wronged, our first impulse may be to urge forgiveness and reconciliation. It may be premature to address that spiritual issue. For the victim, urging forgiveness instead of helping to resolve the problem can feel like a disregard for their pain and a minimizing of the sin that happened. Not many people can experience that situation without a loss of joy in fellowship and worship. If the sin involved a violation of trust, the church no longer feels safe. Gradually a person who was sinned against may stop attending church. The hurting member may still hunger for the Word—may even continue to have personal devotions—but it will take Christian love and faithful friendship to make church feel safe to the person who was sinned against. Christian love is the answer. Love is patient and sympathetic. Love protects.

Romans 7:19–21

For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

1 Corinthians 3:1–3

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

Matthew 18:15–16

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 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.’”

- What is the struggle of every Christian?

- Why should it not surprise us that a church member has sinned against a fellow church member?
- Since all church members sin and church members may sin against other members, should we accept this as a fact of life and ignore it when it happens?

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

- Why are we inclined to avoid getting involved when other members are in conflict?
- What role does compassion and kindness have in getting us involved?
- Sometimes we find it hard to see someone else's point of view. How do you feel about the person when you believe it's a case of overreacting?
- What relationship does "mourn with those who mourn" have with compassion?



REFLECTION: Sexual abuse in churches has been widely reported. What have we learned?

We don't like to think that a child could be abused in our church or that an active member might have committed such a sin. Reports of abuse in the church can teach us how not to process accusations and that we need to create policies to prevent abuse. Survivors of abuse often find themselves blamed by church members for what happened to them while abusers are being protected. Survivors of abuse which happened in a church sometimes stop attending church because they no longer feel safe. WELS has a task force, Freedom for the Captives, to address this problem and prevent abuse. Freedom for the Captives has developed training and will help churches form policies to prevent abuse. Taking steps to prevent abuse demonstrates that our churches want to protect people. On freedomforcaptives.com, survivors can find passages to comfort them and help them spiritually.

Matthew 18:6 If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

- Where is the flaw in allowing a person who has sexually abused a child and apologized to continue to have access to children?



REFLECTION: Satan uses our problems to drive a wedge between us and Jesus. The Lord uses our problems to bring us closer.

It might seem to some Christians that the only issue here is apologies and forgiveness. We need to be aware of Satan's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11) to use everything to drive us away from the "one thing needful" (Luke 10:41-42). Even while members struggle with tensions between them, we need to keep coming back to worship services where we are called to repentance, assured of forgiveness, and renewed in our new life.

Romans 8:38-39 I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalms 84:4 Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

- Of what truth about the Lord can we remind someone who has been wronged?
- What does God promise about those who continue to be in his house?
- In view of God's love and promise to bless us in his house, what should we urge someone who has been wronged?