What Gives You the Right?

A 20-minute class — Pleasant Springs Church, Discipleship School

The full study online: ps-church.com/discipleship/what-gives-you-the-right

Before you start — notes for the teacher *(not read aloud)*

Timing. About **20 minutes** at a normal teaching pace. The bracketed times are cumulative. **[11:00] — the apostles — is the section to shorten** if you are pressed; read Galatians 6:1 and move on. **Never cut [16:00], the five tests.** It is the part people take home.

What this lesson is. Somebody in every room has heard "Who are you to tell me?" — or said it. The lesson takes that objection seriously, and then turns it around. The question assumes the goal is to make people into Christians and leave them there. But Jesus never told us to make Christians. He told us to **make disciples, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you** (Matthew 28:19–20). A disciple is someone under instruction. Correction is not a right we claim over each other. **It is the job we were all given** — and Jesus put fences around it Himself.

The hard part, read plainly. Ezekiel 3:18 is a frightening verse: the watchman who stays silent answers for the other man's blood. **Do not wave it away and do not overreach with it.** Its author and audience matter: Ezekiel is a prophet commissioned as watchman *for the house of Israel*, God's own people. The principle carries — **silence is not neutral** — but it is not a licence to confront strangers or to police the world. Paul draws that same line in 1 Corinthians 5:12.

What not to say.

- *"The Bible says don't judge."* — Matthew 7:5 ends with "then you will see clearly to take the speck out," not with "leave it there."
- *"If you see sin you have to say something, every time."* — the five tests exist because that is not true.
- *"You can tell what's in someone's heart."* — **You can't.** Jesus said fruit, not hearts (Matthew 7:16). You may see what a person does; only God sees why.
- *Any name or story from this church* — keep every example general.

Scripture. All English, ESV. Where a word matters — "make disciples" is one command with three actions hanging off it — the lesson says it in English.

Time of day. The script is deliberately time-neutral — it says "today," never "tonight" or "this morning" — so it reads correctly at the Sunday-morning class or in any other service.

THE SCRIPT

[0:00] Open — the question everyone has asked

Let me start with a sentence I suspect everyone in this room has heard. Maybe you have said it.

"Who are you to tell me?"

It is a fair question. It deserves a real answer, not a shrug. Because if the answer is "I'm a better Christian than you," then the person asking is right, and we should keep quiet. So today we are going to ask it honestly: **what gives one Christian the right to point out another's wrongs?**

I want to suggest the question has a hidden assumption in it. Let's find it.

[2:00] The commission we actually got

Turn with me to the last words of Matthew.

> **Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)** — "And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Notice what Jesus does **not** say. He does not say "go and make Christians." He does not say "go and get decisions." In this sentence there is **one command**: make disciples. Everything else hangs off it — going, baptizing, and **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**

A disciple is an apprentice. Somebody who is still being taught.

> **Luke 6:40 (ESV)** — "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."
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> **John 8:31–32 (ESV)** — "So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

[Pause.] So here is the hidden assumption. "Who are you to tell me?" assumes the job was finished the day you believed. **But we are not called to make Christians. We are called to make disciples.** And you cannot teach someone to observe what Jesus commanded without, sometimes, telling them they have not.

[5:00] The oldest answer — the watchman

> **Ezekiel 3:17–19 (ESV)** — "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul."

That is heavy. If I see you heading for the cliff and say nothing, God does not count my silence as kindness. **Silence is not neutral.**

But notice **who** Ezekiel is and **who** he is sent to. He is a priest carried off to Babylon, and God makes him watchman *for the house of Israel* — for God's own people. Not for the Babylonians. God says it again, almost word for word, years later:

> **Ezekiel 33:7–9 (ESV)** — "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. 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. 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."

So the watchman is a responsibility **inside the family of God.** Hold on to that — Paul is going to say the same thing.

[7:30] The law underneath it

Ezekiel did not invent this. It is in the Law of Moses.

> **Leviticus 19:17–18 (ESV)** — "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

Look at those two verses together. **"You shall reason frankly with your neighbor" and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" are the same command.** In God's eyes, the man who keeps quiet while hating his brother in his heart is the one who has failed to love.

> **Deuteronomy 22:1–4 (ESV)** — "You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him. And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment, or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find; you may not ignore it. You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again."

"You may not ignore it." If your brother's ox wanders off, you go and get it. That is love as something you **do**, not something you feel. If God says that about your brother's ox, what does He say about your brother?

And the Law also puts a guard on it:

> **Deuteronomy 19:15 (ESV)** — "A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established."

One person's accusation is never enough. Remember that verse — Jesus is about to quote it.

[10:00] Jesus sets the fences

Now, everybody knows the one verse. Let's read the whole paragraph.

> **Matthew 7:1–5 (ESV)** — "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Jesus does not say **"leave the speck there."** He says **take the log out first, and then you will see clearly** to help your brother. The log is not a reason to stay silent forever. It is the order of operations. **Me first. Then you.**

> **Matthew 7:15–20 (ESV)** — “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

Fence two: fruit, not hearts. You can see what a person does. You cannot see why. Jesus gives us permission to see fruit — He gives no one permission to read motives.

> **Matthew 18:15–17 (ESV)** — “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. 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. 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.”

Fence three: the procedure. Go to him. **Alone.** Then one or two others — and there is Deuteronomy 19:15 in Jesus' mouth. Only then the church. And look at the goal in verse 15: **“you have gained your brother.”** Not “you have won the argument.” Gained your brother.

And then His warning to the religious leaders, so we never become them:

> **Matthew 23:1–4 (ESV)** — “Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.”

[13:00] The apostles put it to work

> **Galatians 6:1–2 (ESV)** — “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

“You who are spiritual” — restore him. **Gently.** And keep watch on yourself. The goal is **restore**, the manner is **gentle**, and the danger is **me.**

> **1 Corinthians 5:12–13 (ESV)** — “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

Here is Ezekiel's line again. **Our job is inside the church.** We are not the world's hall monitors. Outsiders we love, serve, and tell about Jesus. Brothers and sisters we also correct.

> **Ephesians 4:15 (ESV)** — "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,"
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> **James 5:19–20 (ESV)** — "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins."

[15:00] Love is a verb

> **1 John 3:16–18 (ESV)** — "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."
>
> **Proverbs 27:5–6 (ESV)** — "Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy."

"Faithful are the wounds of a friend." The friend who tells you the truth wounds you on purpose, to heal you. The enemy flatters you all the way off the cliff.

> **Hebrews 12:5–11 (ESV)** — "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

God disciplines the ones He calls sons. **Correction is not proof that you are rejected. It is proof that you belong.**

[16:00] So what gives you the right?

Here is the answer. **Not** being better. **Not** being right. **Not** being offended. What gives you the right is that **Jesus told every disciple to make disciples,** and making disciples includes teaching them to obey. It is not a right. **It is an assignment.**

And notice where the authority sits. **It is not in you.**

> **2 Timothy 3:16–17 (ESV)** — "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

Scripture does the reproving and the correcting. Your part is to carry it to your brother gently, and not to add anything of your own.

But it is an assignment with fences. Before you ever say a hard word to a brother or sister, ask five questions:

1. **Is the log out of my own eye?** *(Matthew 7:5)*
2. **Is this fruit I can see, or a heart I am guessing at?** *(Matthew 7:16)*
3. **Is this person inside the church?** *(1 Corinthians 5:12)*
4. **Am I going TO him, or talking ABOUT him?** *(Matthew 18:15)*
5. **Is my aim to gain my brother, or to win?** *(Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1)*

If you can answer all five honestly, then love does not just permit you to speak. **Love requires it.**

[18:30] Close

> **John 13:34–35 (ESV)** — "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The world will not know we are His disciples by how right we are about each other. They will know it by how we love each other — and sometimes love sounds like a friend saying, gently, "Brother, I think you are heading the wrong way. Can I walk back with you?"

Let's pray.

[Pray in your own words, closing:] *... Make us disciples who can be taught, and disciple-makers who are gentle. Take the log out of our own eyes first. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

If you only remember three things

1. **We are not called to make Christians. We are called to make disciples** — and a disciple is someone still being taught.
2. **Correction is an assignment, not a right** — and Jesus fenced it: log first, fruit not hearts, inside the church, to his face, to gain him.
3. **Love is a verb.** Faithful are the wounds of a friend.

The Scriptures — Author and Audience

- **Ezekiel 3:17–19; 33:7–9** — *Ezekiel, a priest taken to Babylon in 597 BC.* Judah's exiles by the Chebar canal. He is made watchman "for the house of Israel" — a commission to God's own people, not to the nations around them.
- **Leviticus 19:17–18** — *Moses, at Sinai.* Israel, newly redeemed from Egypt. Reproving your neighbour and loving him as yourself are given in the same breath.
- **Deuteronomy 19:15; 22:1–4** — *Moses, on the plains of Moab.* The second generation, about to enter the land. Covenant law for life together.
- **Proverbs 27:5–6** — *The wisdom tradition gathered under Solomon.* Young people in Israel being trained to live wisely.
- **Matthew 7:1–5, 15–20** — *Matthew, the tax collector turned apostle, recording Jesus.* The Sermon on the Mount, spoken to His disciples with the crowds listening in.
- **Matthew 18:15–17** — *Matthew, recording Jesus.* The Twelve, taught how to treat a brother who sins — "your brother," someone inside the community.
- **Matthew 23:1–4** — *Matthew, recording Jesus.* The crowds and His disciples, warned about leaders who load others and lift nothing.
- **Matthew 28:18–20** — *Matthew, recording the risen Jesus.* The Eleven, on a mountain in Galilee. The commission the whole church inherits.
- **Luke 6:40** — *Luke, physician and companion of Paul.* Theophilus and the Gentile churches, learning what a disciple is.
- **John 8:31–32; 13:34–35** — *John, the beloved disciple.* Believers late in the first century; first, Jews who had believed Him, then the disciples at the Last Supper.
- **1 Corinthians 5:12–13** — *Paul.* A divided, permissive church in Corinth. The line between judging inside the church and outside it.
- **Galatians 6:1–2** — *Paul.* Churches in Galatia, pulled toward law-keeping as the mark of who is in.

- **Ephesians 4:15** — *Paul, writing from prison.* The church at Ephesus and the churches around it, taught to grow up together.
- **2 Timothy 3:16–17** — *Paul, in his last letter.* Timothy, his son in the faith, left to lead the church at Ephesus.
- **Hebrews 12:5–11** — *An unnamed teacher of the early church.* Jewish believers under pressure, tempted to go back. Discipline as proof of sonship.
- **James 5:19–20** — *James, the Lord's brother, leader of the Jerusalem church.* "The twelve tribes in the Dispersion" — Jewish believers scattered abroad.
- **1 John 3:16–18** — *John, the beloved disciple, as an old man.* Churches he calls "little children," shaken by people who had left them.

Discussion starters — if you have time after

1. Has anyone ever corrected you in a way that helped? What made it work?
2. Which of the five tests is hardest for you to pass — and why?
3. Why do you think Jesus' first instruction is to go to your brother **alone**?
4. What is the difference between correcting a believer and condemning an unbeliever? Why does Paul care so much about that line?
5. "Who are you to tell me?" — how would you answer that now, gently?

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