

Christ-like Kindness, or Permissiveness?



1. Opening Thought

Many church organizations are allowing society to influence them rather than recognizing God's command that they are to be "salt" and "light" to the world. This attitude is characterized by a common thread "*we want our ministry to be kind and gracious, more like Jesus*".

Christ's ministry was indeed kind and gracious — yet never permissive. His love always included truth, and His grace always called sinners to repentance so forgiveness may be given. This study explores how Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions unite in teaching that confronting sin is an act of Christlike kindness.

2. Key Scriptures

A. Christ Confronts Sin Gently

- **John 4:16–18** — Jesus reveals the Samaritan woman's sin to heal her, not shame her.
- **Mark 10:21** — "*Jesus looked at him and loved him*" — then confronted his idolatry.
- **John 8:11** — "*Neither do I condemn you... go, and sin no more.*"

B. Christ Confronts Sin Boldly

- **Matthew 23:27** — "*Woe to you... hypocrites!*"
- **John 2:15** — Jesus drives out the money changers.
- **Revelation 3:19** — "*Those whom I love, I rebuke and discipline.*"

C. Why Confrontation Matters

- **Jeremiah 6:14** — False prophets offer "*peace, peace*" where there is no peace.
- **Romans 3:20** — The Law reveals sin.
- **Luke 24:47** — Repentance and forgiveness are preached together.
- **John 8:34** — Sin enslaves; confrontation frees.
- **Galatians 6:1** — Restore sinners "*in a spirit of gentleness.*"

3. Confessional Lutheran Teaching

Augsburg Confession XII — Repentance

Repentance has two parts:

1. **Contrition** (produced by the Law)
2. **Faith** (receiving absolution)

Avoiding sin prevents contrition — and therefore repentance.

Apology XII — The Law's Work

The Law must "terrify the conscience." Without this, the Gospel becomes cheap comfort.

Formula of Concord V — The Law's Necessity

The Law must "rebuke" and "expose sin." A ministry that avoids rebuking sin is not preaching Christ's Word.

Small Catechism — Confession

Christians confess "those sins which we know and feel in our hearts." If sin is never confronted, hearts never learn what must be confessed.

Office of the Keys

Christ commands His Church:

1. **Forgive the sins of the repentant**
2. **Retain the sins of the unrepentant**

A pastor cannot forgive sins he refuses to name.

4. Why “Kindness Without Confrontation” Is Dangerous

1. It creates false peace

Jeremiah warns against soothing words that ignore real wounds.

2. It blocks repentance

If sin is not named, repentance cannot occur.

3. It empties the Gospel

The Gospel forgives *sins* — not vague “brokenness.”

4. It leaves people enslaved

Sin unaddressed becomes sin unbroken.

5. It produces spiritual apathy

People conclude:

- Sin is not serious
- Repentance is optional
- Holiness is unnecessary
- Forgiveness is automatic

6. It misrepresents Christ

Christ’s kindness always includes truth.

5. Discussion Questions

1. **Christ’s Kindness** How do Jesus’ interactions with sinners show both gentleness and confrontation?
2. **Law and Gospel** Why must the Law precede the Gospel in pastoral care?
3. **False Peace** What does Jeremiah mean by “peace, peace” where there is no peace?
4. **Office of the Keys** Why is naming sin necessary for both forgiving and retaining sins?
5. **Practical Ministry** What does confronting sin with kindness look like in a congregation?

6. Application: Practicing Christlike Confrontation

A. Speak truth gently

Use Scripture, not personal irritation.

B. Aim for restoration

Confrontation is not punishment — it is rescue.

C. Keep the Gospel central

The goal is forgiveness, not humiliation.

D. Pray for humility

Confronting sin requires self-examination (Matthew 7:5).

E. Remember Christ’s pattern

He confronts to heal, rebukes to restore, and forgives to renew.

What if the sinner is a “weak brother/sister”?

I Corinthians 8 speaks of Christian liberty, but warns (v9) *“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak.”* Likewise Romans 14:13: *“Decide never to put a stumbling block in the way of a brother.”*

These “weak brother” passages (Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8) deal with **matters of conscience**, not **matters of sin**. These verses tell us to **love, protect, instruct**, and **restore** the weak in faith — but *never* to indulge, excuse, or ignore their sin. What Scripture commands is **gentle confrontation**, not permissive avoidance.

What these verses say:

Romans 14:1

“Welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.”

This is about **disputable matters**, not moral rebellion.

Romans 14:13

“Decide never to put a stumbling block in the way of a brother.”

This means: Don't use your freedom to confuse him. It does *not* mean: Ignore his sin.

1 Corinthians 8:12

“When you sin against your brothers... you wound their weak conscience.”

Paul warns strong Christians not to **harm** the weak — not to **pander** to them.

Galatians 6:1

“If anyone is caught in any transgression... restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”

This is the key text: Weakness changes **how** we confront sin, not **whether** we confront it.

What Scripture *never* says

There is **no verse** that says:

- “Avoid confronting sin if the brother is weak.”
- “Let the weak brother continue in sin.”
- “Be kind by ignoring sin.”
- “Weakness excuses disobedience.”
- “Weak brothers should be coddled.”

These ideas are **modern sentimentality**, not biblical Christianity.

Confessional Lutheran teaching

The Lutheran Confessions reinforce Scripture:

Formula of Concord V

The Law must “rebuke” and “expose sin.” Weak brothers are not exempt.

Augsburg Confession XII

Repentance requires **contrition** produced by the Law. If we refuse to confront sin, we block repentance.

Apology XII

The Law must “terrify the conscience” so the Gospel can comfort it. Weak brothers need this too — gently, but truthfully.

Small Catechism: Confession

Christians confess “those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.” If sin is never confronted, the weak brother never learns what must be confessed. Weakness requires **patience**, not **permissiveness**.

1. Weakness does not give authority to bind others

If a weak brother confuses matters of conscience with other people's freedom, we do NOT pander to him — we gently correct him. A weak conscience does not get to **bind** the strong. A weak brother's misunderstanding does not become a new law for everyone else. And his confusion must be **shepherded**, not indulged.

Scripture:

Romans 14:3–4

“Let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats... Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?” The weak brother is **not allowed** to condemn the strong.

Romans 14:13

“Decide never to put a stumbling block in the way of a brother.” This means the strong should be considerate — **not** that the weak get to control everyone's behavior.

1 Corinthians 8:8

“Food will not commend us to God.” The weak brother’s scruples do not define righteousness.

1 Corinthians 10:29

“Why should my liberty be determined by someone else’s conscience?”

Paul says plainly: **The weak conscience does not govern the strong conscience.**

2. When a weak brother tries to bind others

This is the danger: A weak brother may confuse **his conscience** with **God’s command**, and then try to impose it on others. Paul’s response is clear:

Colossians 2:20–22

“Why... submit to regulations... according to human precepts?”

Human scruples must not become divine law.

Galatians 5:1

“Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

If the weak brother’s conscience becomes a law, the whole church becomes enslaved.

Romans 14:22

“The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God.”

The weak brother must not turn his private scruple into a public rule.

3. Confessional Lutheran teaching

The Lutheran Confessions reinforce Paul’s teaching:

Formula of Concord X (Adiaphora)

Adiaphora (things neither commanded nor forbidden) **must not be turned into laws** by human opinion.

Formula of Concord SD Rule & Norm

All teaching must be judged by Scripture alone — **not by the conscience of the weak.**

Augsburg Confession XXVIII

Human traditions must not “burden consciences.”

A weak brother’s confusion must not burden the church.

4. What we do instead: gentle correction

We do not pander. We do not crush. We **shepherd**.

Galatians 6:1

“Restore him in a spirit of gentleness.”

2 Timothy 2:25

“Correcting opponents with gentleness.”

Romans 15:1

“We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.”

Bearing with weakness does **not** mean obeying it. It means **helping him grow out of it.**

5. Why pandering is spiritually dangerous

Pandering to a weak brother:

- **traps him in bondage** (John 8:34)
- **withholds the Gospel** (Luke 24:47)
- **offers false peace** (Jeremiah 6:14)
- **confuses his conscience** (Romans 14:23)
- **lets weakness harden into impenitence**
- **turns kindness into sentimentality**

Avoidance is not gentleness — it is spiritual neglect.

The Bible never tells us to pander to a weak brother. It tells us to confront sin — gently, patiently, and with the goal of restoration.

Pastor Glenn Oster

TheLutheranLayman.org