

The Discipline of the Local Church, Part 2

Selected Scriptures

Listen, the Bible commands your obedience to local church authority. But it also commands you to look after your local church authority. The men that God places in authority over you, these are men you know, whose lives you can see, whose families are part of your church. You've been in their homes. You've watched them parent their children. You've seen how they interact with their wives. You, you see how they react to trials, to difficult situations, to difficult people.

Are they perfect people? No. But their behavior is exemplary. It's worthy of emulation, as Paul said several times throughout his epistles. Just a few, 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 3:7, "You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us." And in verse 9, he's, Paul said he wanted to give them "an example for you to imitate." He told the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." And I love this, in Hebrews 3, 13:7, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you

the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." Those are the people you need to put before you as examples, so you can follow in their steps.

The men in authority over you are not two-dimensional images on a projection screen. They aren't bios you read on a website. They're not highly polished promo pieces that are written by clever marketers who know exactly what to say to get you to trust. These men are flesh-and-blood people whose lives and character you know. They're men you can see. Men you can observe. Men you can imitate. And if they aren't qualified, then they shouldn't be in leadership, right?

But if they are qualified, then you're responsible before God to obey and submit to their loving leadership. You need to recognize; you didn't put them there. God did. Christ did. Christ gave them as gifts to the church. And they're, they're Christ's gifts to you for your spiritual good. If you don't submit to your leadership, or their leadership, then you're not submitting to Christ.

So the Bible commands you to live under the authority of the local church. Commands you to look after those in authority as well. Point number three, point number three: Submit to the discipline of the local church. Submit to the discipline of the local church. Authority doesn't mean much without teeth. For authority to be effective, for authority to mean anything, there has to be a consequence for violating that authority. Just as law enforcement has various means of enforcing its authority, the rule of law, so the church has a means of enforcing its authority and the rule of Christ in the church.

We call it church discipline. And we introduced that last time in Matthew 18. Church discipline involves the authority of the local church, not the universal church, mind you. This isn't Catholic hierarchy. Church discipline provides the authority for each local church to care for its membership.

You say, discipline, that doesn't sound very caring to me. Listen, I understand that sentiment. I've been raised, as many of you have, in an American culture that's been training us to

think like Americans breaking from England, right? We're rebellious. We're independent. We've been taught to loathe discipline for a long, long time here in this country. And when youth culture dominates in the church, it's understandable that so many have an aversion to discipline, to correction. We call it judging, which mm, one must never, never do. That's the one thing our tolerant culture simply cannot tolerate, it's to be told it's wrong.

But you need to notice that the word discipline is very closely related to the word disciple. Think of discipline, then, just as you think of discipleship, in terms of training, discipline is training, and you'll be on the right track. We're to discipline our members, because that's the mandate from Christ in Matthew 28:19, "Make disciples of all the nations." Basically, discipline Christians, train them. Disciples are those who are disciplined followers devoted to Christ teaching.

And remember, beloved, uh, what the writer to the Hebrews said about discipline. Don't turn there, but just listen, Hebrews 12:5 to 5 and following says this, "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons," children, "My son,

do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when you're reprov'd by him, for," listen to this, "the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastises every son whom he receives." You know how the Lord disciplines those he loves? He does it through the teaching, discipling, disciplining miss, ministry of the local church.

Church discipline is where Jesus showed the apostles how to use the keys of authority, right? Jesus gave the local church authority to declare Heaven's judgment about who is and who is not a Christian. And at the local level, the local church makes judgments about those who speak for Christ, those who represent Christ. It guards the entrance into membership, and it guards access to the Lord's table. And all of that protects the purity of Christ's testimony through the church to the world.

That was certainly Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 5. 1 Corinthians 5, go ahead and turn to 1 Corinthians 5. I wanna read this passage to you. Just, not comment much, but just read it. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, it's actually the entire chapter. But 1 Corinthians 5 is so important, because chr, Paul was concerned, just as I said, for the purity of the church.

Look what he says here. "It's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." You know, wherever the line is drawn, culturally, with sexual issues or whatever, there is a line. There is a point at which the culture says, you can go no further.

Here this culture found it intolerant that a man had his father's wife, and it says in verse 2, "You're arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?" Basically, they were flaunting their liberty in Christ, saying, look, we're free to do whatever we want. There's, we're covered in Christ. All things, all people are equal. There's a radical egalitarianism in the church. We could just share and share alike and, no. You ought to have mourned.

Listen to what Paul says, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you." Well, he jumps all the way to fourth step, excommunication. Verse 3, "For," abs, "though absent in the body, I'm present in spirit, and as if present, I've already

pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you're assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you're to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord." Okay, so there's love toward this man. Excommunication seems harsh, at the moment, but it's actually the most loving thing you can do, to put him outside of the membership, so that Satan will torment and, and hopefully drive him back into the fellowship.

So Paul addresses the church now in verse 6, he says, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But I am, now I am writing to

you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother, if he's guilty of sexual immorality, or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler; not even to eat with such a one. 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."

Wow. Beloved, we are to judge ourselves. We're to clean out the leaven out of the church, so we're a pure body. So that our testimony to the watching world is about the purity of Jesus Christ, about the power of Jesus Christ and his Gospel to transform us. Shacking up with your father's wife is not evidence of transformation.

But that said, church discipline is not just about protecting the church's testimony about Christ, even though it is. And there's so much more we could say. We'll come back to it another time, maybe, but, it's also for the sake of the precious people that Jesus has bought and paid for. Jesus is very concerned about those, so turn, with that in mind, to Matthew 18. This is where I told you to turn at the very beginning. Now we're getting to it.



Matthew 18, thanks for your patience. I appreciate that so much. I, I find it int, fascinating here, just fascinating, that of all that Jesus could have said about the church's role in the world, he talked about its duty here to exercise church discipline. As a repository of God's truth, the role of the church in the world, that we learn from the rest of the New Testament, is to bring glory to God. The church lifts up the Gospel of Jesus Christ, proclaiming his name, pointing to his ministry, his work on the Cross. The church lives out the Gospel in increasing conformity to Jesus Christ.

By doing that, the church is shining like a light in a dark world, both to expose sin and unrighteousness in the culture, you can see that in Ephesians 5:8-14, but the church is also shining like a light in the dark cul, culture to point people to salvation in Jesus Christ. Matthew 5, "Let your light shine before men," right? Titus 2:11-15. That's why it's imperative that the church edify, and equip, and train its membership well. That's part of the church's role. But I want you to see the role of church discipline, and the role that it plays in the context of what Christ was teaching in Matthew 18. Because it's

fascinating. It's not talking about the culture; he's not talking about the world. He's talking about Christians.

Let me start by reading verses 1-4, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' Calling to him a child, he put them in the midst of them and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you turn,'"  
that's the concept of repentance there, "unless you turn," or repent, "and become like children, you'll never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.'" Now Jesus here is not stirring some Disney like sentimentality about some supposed innocence of children, okay? It's not this Pelagian idea that children have innocence, and as they grow and become corrupt, corrupted by the world, they become dark and bad and evil, and that's why we all hate old people, or something like that. That's not what's going on here.

He's very clear about the metaphor in verse 4. He says, "Whoever humbles himself like this child." Humbles himself. That's the connection. In Matthew 5:3-5, Jesus describes the humility that's required to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

You enter by acknowledging your poverty of spirit. You enter by mourning over your sin. That's where your poverty of spirit leads, is to mourning.

And that leads to a meekness, and a humility, and a lowness before God. It's one that others can see. That's the kind of person who enters the Kingdom. That's the kind of person who's saved; one who humbly accepts Heaven's judgment of his spiritual condition, and he's driven to repentance, to beg God for salvation. No demands, no expectations, no sense of entitlement, only a sense that his condemnation is, was, was well-deserved.

God's judgment is completely righteous, and the only hope he has is the gracious character of the one who will not only judge, sentence, and execute judgment on him; his only hope is in that one will show mercy. Those are the people who are precious to Christ. Those are the people who are like little children. They belong to Christ. They are those for whom Christ died. They are his precious possession, bought and paid for by his death on the cross.

And that's why, verses 5-8, look at it there, such a severe warning against offending any of those precious children. Take a look. "Whoever receives," one child, "one such child in my name receives me. 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 depths of the sea."

Wow. I've done some diving. I've gone to depth actually with an ear infection. OW! Couldn't clear. And the pressure on my eardrum was crushing. The pain was excruciating. And that's what Christ wanted to convey to those who would harm his little children. Take a millstone, big heavy stone used for grinding grain, pulled by an, by oxen or a team of oxen. Huge stone. Fasten it to your neck, throw you into the ocean. It would be better for that to happen, to be cast into the sea, hurling your way to the bottom of the sea. No time to drown. You don't die by drowning; you die by being crushed from the atmospheric pressure of the water above you. Your ears bursting, your body being crushed by the water and the weight. Painful imagery.

So listen, we gotta deal quickly, like he says here, verses 7-9, we gotta deal quickly and decisively with sin. Take a look at it there. "Woe to the world for temptations to sin. It's necessary that temptations come to a, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes. So if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. Throw it away. It's better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It's better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes and be thrown into the hell of fire." Wow.

For those of us who know and love Christ, for those of us who love his people, are fellow children of humility, this mandate to work out repentance makes perfect sense. We don't want to cause anyone to stumble. As Jesus said in verse 10, in fact, look at verses 10-14, "See that you do not despise any of these little ones." Not one of them. "For I tell you that in Heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in Heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, one of them's gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that went astray? And if

he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in Heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”

Every single one of those little ones, those sheep, those children of Christ, every last one of them is precious to God. So precious, in fact, that he assigns an angel as a guardian over them. Did you know that? Here's textual evidence for a guardian angel. Not in the cultural sense. Biblical sense. It's not a Precious Moments angel, either. It's a big, bad, tough, strong, fiery angel that'll kill people.

But notice it's only for believers, only for believers. The devil watches over unbelievers. Angels watch over us. That context, God's care and concern for these little ones, he don't want one of them to go, go astray, and he will make sure it doesn't happen. In that context, Jesus commands the process of church discipline, and he gives the church authority to excommunicate the unrepentant.

That in mind, look at verses 15-20 and this should start making sense. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother. 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," it's like an unthinkable thing for a believer, unthinkable that he would not listen to the church, "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven. Whatever you loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven. And again I say to you, if any two of you agree on Earth about anything they ask, it'll be done for them by my Father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them."

This section is all about winning over your brother. Because if you win your brother, well then you've shown the love and concern and care for one of Christ's little ones, and that pleases Christ greatly. That pleases the Father. So listen to the rest of that passage in Hebrews with this in mind, Hebrews

12:7-11, I'll continue reading, "It's 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're 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 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've been trained by it."

That's what God wants. God wants to produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness in the church. Jesus loves these little ones, and he wants them to be disciplined, discipled, to grow in conformity to him. That's for our good, beloved. I hope you see that. He loves us. He wants us to grow. And local church discipline is the means by which we grow. In fact, that first step there of church discipline, that should be happening



all the time in a healthy church. All the time. As Paul says in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," get this, "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." You know what that is? That admonishment is the first step of church discipline happening as a routine aspect of local church life.

A Word-infused church cares for one another, teaches and admonishes. And you know what? It stays at the first step most of the time. You know why? Because the offender repents in humility. He's a little child. He's humble. He's meek. He gets it. He's entered into fellowship like that, like a little child, so responding to correction in humility, that's in his nature, right? Because of his humble response to correction, no one else ever finds out about it. No one ever, el, else finds out about his offense. It stays private, stays covered over in love.

It's only when that offender refuses to repent of his sin, bristles a bit, stiffens himself, others have to be brought in as a witness against him. And if he refuses the small group admonition, then the elders are brought in to provide wise counsel, to adjudicate the, the matter through eyes of seasoned

maturity, bring the matter before the whole church. Where there's a continued refusal to repent, that's when excommunication needs to happen. Why? Because we can't allow that leavening influence to harm any of the other little ones who belong to Christ. We can't let that happen.

The Bible commands us to live under the authority of the local church. And because of that, it commands us to look after the authority of the local church. And then it commands us to submit to the loving discipline of the local church. We're all under it. Elders, congregation alike, we're all under that discipline. All under that biblical authority. That's the kind of accountability that's healthy, beloved. It's healthy for our growth. It's loving. It's not loving to let sin continue in the church. We need to confront it, help people grow in greater conformity to Jesus Christ. And that's what it means to live under the discipline of the local church. Let's pray.

Father, we're so thankful for the instruction of your Word, and what you've given for our good and our growth. Where we're gonna talk more about life in the local church, what it looks like, what we do together, what we get to enjoy as church

members. But it's so important that we set the context of the discipline so that we understand that you want us to grow, you want us to change, we wanna, you want us to share in your holiness. We're so grateful you've saved us to share in the very, one of the very attributes of the triune God, the Holiness of God. So please help us to be faithful, courageous, obedient to your Word for the sake of Jesus Christ and the glory of his Gospel. Amen.