

The Necessity of Church Discipline

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If we were to be honest, [we would admit that] whenever we hear the term “church discipline” it brings up cringing, negative thoughts [of] cruelty, humiliation, slander, ruining someone’s reputation, barbaric treatment of people in the name of Christianity, or whatever. Some have witnessed some pretty mean-spirited and cruel acts [that] were called church discipline, and so it’s understandable that their thoughts of church discipline are not very pleasant because they’ve never seen it done in a good way.

Other people say, “It just doesn’t work. I’ve seen it happen, and nobody ever repents. It just seems to be spreading around confidential information.” [Others may] call themselves Christians, [but] they themselves are in sin, and so whenever church discipline is mentioned, they think to themselves, “What if somebody finds out about the sin that I’m involved with and I’m not repenting of?” They don’t like church discipline because they don’t want it to happen to them.

Finally, I think there [are] a good number of people who just don’t understand what the Bible teaches, how the Bible applies in this situation, and how it all is [supposed] to work out. That’s what [I] want to talk about this morning.

I think there are important aspects of church discipline that, if we just underst[oo]d them, we would see what a great thing it is. When we hear[d] the term “church discipline,” instead of cringing, we would [say], “That is

so great.” But that is not what most people think or feel because that’s not what most people have experienced. So, what I want you to do is to turn to Matthew 18:1. I want to go through and show you the context of the classic text on church discipline. Then we will look at that [classic church discipline] text and several others.

Look at Matthew 18:1. I want to take you quickly through the first part of this chapter so you can see the flow of the context leading up to that text [with which] most people are familiar, [the one considered] *the* text on church discipline. Matthew 18:1[–3] reads:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ”Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, ”Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus calls up a little kid next to Him, and, using the kid as a prop, says, “See this little kid here? Unless you become like, or similar to, this child, you can’t go to heaven.” In other words, you are most certainly going to hell, if you want to look at it in a negative way. He goes on to say [in] verse 3: “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter. . . .” What does this term “converted” mean? It means to come to Christ. Children are those who trust in and rely upon their parents completely to take care of them. Christian[s are those] who trust in and rel[y] upon Jesus Christ alone to save them. They are converted to Christ, they are regenerated, they are saved, or whatever term you want to use. That’s what Jesus is talking about here: you have to become like a spiritual child.

Jesus goes on to answer the question [posed in Matthew 18:1] directly in [Matthew 18:]4, saying: “Whoever then humbles himself as this child,” pointing to the literal child next to Him, “he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” He answers the question that they were asking: Who’s the

greatest? [The answer is]: somebody who trusts in and relies upon [Jesus] the most is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus also gives a warning, if you look in [Matthew 18:]6. He goes on to say: “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” This isn’t a very pretty picture. Millstones were huge, huge stones that sometimes several horses or mules would pull around [to] grind grain. We’re talking sudden death here, to have a millstone hung around your neck and [then be] cast into the sea.

[Next], Jesus says, “Woe,” which is to pronounce judgment—condemnation—on those who cause believers to stumble. In [Matthew 18:]7, if you look there, He says: “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!” The phrase “stumbling block” is the Greek word *scandalon*, the word [from which] we get [the English word] “scandal.” It literally means “putting a little something in someone’s way that causes him to trip.” If you’re a skateboarder, you know all about this. You know that it takes a very small pebble to become a *scandalon* to you. You’re skateboarding down the sidewalk, and next thing you know you’re on your face and [then] you’re getting up quick[ly] so [people driving by] don’t see that you just wiped out because of a textitscandalon.

In a similar way, sometimes, by our behavior, we can be stumbling blocks to other people. Jesus says some pretty harsh words about that: “woe,” “millstone around the neck,” and “take a swim in the sea.” Look at [Matthew 18:]8–9, [where] Jesus uses some hyperbole. Hyperbole is when you exaggerate things, like when your mom says, “Take out the trash,” and you say, “I *always* have to take out the trash,” which means [you do it] once a week. [Jesus] is using some hyperbole here, He’s overstating it, [as] kids like to do sometimes. He says:

If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

This is a common text I think a lot of people use and know. What Jesus is saying is, “Do everything you can to not sin.” He’s not saying, “Literally pluck out your eye and cut off your hand.” Otherwise, we’d all be eyeless, handless creatures. He’s just saying, “Do whatever you can to make sure you don’t sin.” I think we all know that. I think we’ve probably all heard this text taught in that way, but what we need to realize is that when connected with its context, which is what gives you its more exact meaning, [the text is saying], “Make sure you do everything not to sin so that you don’t cause another believer to stumble,” because that is the flow of the context leading up to that statement.

This is clarified in [Matthew 18:]10, where [Jesus] says: “See that you do not despise one of these little ones,” speaking of believers, “for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” “Despise them” is another way of saying “cause them to stumble.” He’s talking about believers as little children, as “little ones.” Then Jesus gives a parable. Look at [Matthew 18:]12–14:

What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

Here I think we see that the whole concept being taught is that when a fellow believer goes astray, then we, not just the elders, we, as a Body, need to go after that person and try to rescue him and restore him to fellowship. Why? [Jesus] says [that it is] so that [the person doesn't] perish. [The] word [translated "perish"] can mean "to be destroyed, to perish in hell," and that is one way it can be translated. That [translation] couldn't be true for a believer, but that word can also mean "rendered useless, to ruin," so it works for both believers and unbelievers, really. If somebody professes to be a believer and is a believer, they can never lose their salvation. The Scriptures are clear about this. Yes, they might be given over to Satan for the destruction of their flesh so that their spirit may be saved in the day of visitation, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians [5:5]. In other words, they may end up going into the world and indulging in sin and possibly still be saved. Or, it may be that they profess to be a believer, but in continuing to sin, they get lured away from the Body of Christ and end up rejecting the Christianity they were so close to and go apostate. In either case, the word [translated as "perish"] works. We know that it isn't teaching that people can lose their salvation.

That is the context of the famous text on church discipline that we're going to read now: [Matthew 18:]15–17. I wanted you to get the big picture. [Jesus] is talking about believers as "little ones," He's speaking to His disciples, [and] He's saying, "Don't lead another person into sin. Don't be a stumbling block to another believer. God doesn't look well upon these things. Woe to that person [who] causes another person to stumble. If somebody has gone astray, make sure that you go after that person because there's always rejoicing when somebody who has gone astray comes back, like the prodigal son [see Luke 15:11–32]." He says, "Make sure that you take part in trying to see that person restored." Now He goes into exactly how that [attempt at restoration] works out. Matthew 18:15–17 is actually an explanation of what it means to go after that wayward sheep. Let's see what He says. Look at Matthew 18[:15–17]:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 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.

From this text and a few others that we'll look at, I want to show you three different categories [or themes]. Usually I go through a passage and I break it down according to the grammar and the syntax. In this instance, [however], I'm going to do it thematically. We're going to first look at all the people [referred to in the passage], then the practice or the procedures [of church discipline], and then the purpose of [church] discipline, so you can have a general overview of why God requires that His Church practice church discipline, how it's to be done, and [how] the process itself [works].

Look at [Matthew 18:]15. Let's understand the [first theme: the] people who are involved. [Jesus] says: "If *your* brother sins" [emphasis added]. Here we have a brother of yours sinning. When we talk about sinning, let's just be clear here. All Christians sin, and all Christians sin regularly. But, there is a difference between the person who sins on a regular basis and confesses his sin, and a person who sins, enjoys it, and doesn't confess it—won't repent of it, won't turn from it. That's what we're talking about here. Otherwise, we'd all be under discipline. We're not talking about isolating certain sinners who sin and confess, we're talking about dealing with those who sin and *don't* confess. They're unrepentant, not confessing their sins.

There are two people mentioned here right off the bat, right? You—"if *your* brother sins"—and "your brother." If you don't have the New American Standard Bible translation, your version probably reads something like "If your brother sins *against you*." Most of the modern translations have that. I think even the King James version has that. Why is there a difference? There's a difference because there are some later manuscripts—that

is, ones that aren't as old, that aren't as reliable—that have “against you” in that text. The oldest, most reliable manuscripts don't have that phrase.

The question is: Why do a lot of the modern translations incorporate [those words] into the text? Well, they did it because in the near context it's talking about causing another believer to stumble, to be a stumbling block. Jesus says, “Don't be a stumbling block to someone else.” So [the translators] say, “Well, obviously, He's talking about somebody who sins against you.” If you put [“against you”] in there, then that means that you don't have to deal with the sin of anybody *unless* they sin against you, which, of course, is not the case. We are to practice the “one-anothers.” If we see somebody sinning all on [his] own, we are to deal with it. We are our brother's keeper, unlike Cain [see Genesis 4:9]. We are to go after those [who] we see are falling into sin. It's not just sins against us that we have to deal with, but [we need to deal with] any brother or sister in Christ who has fallen into any sin. That's why the New American Standard translation is better in this instance.

We have the person who is in sin mentioned [and] the person who sees him in sin. What else do we learn from this? We learn from this that the entire church is to be involved. Notice [that Christ] doesn't say, “If a person sins [bring him up to] one of the elders.” He doesn't say that. He says “you.” And you know who “you” are? You, and me. Every one of us is to be watching out for the rest. Look at [Matthew 18:]16: “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.” Let's say you go to this person, you talk to [him] in private, and say, “Hey, you know, I've seen this in your life. You know what the Scriptures say. This is wrong,” and the person says, “You know what? I don't care. I don't care what the Bible says. I'm going to keep doing this. I like this sin. It's bringing me pleasure,” or money, or whatever. You confront [him, but he doesn't] repent. Then what do you do? You take a couple more people with you, and in private again, in gentleness and love, you bring to [him his] fault.

What [about] these two or three witnesses? Who are these [people]? They aren't witnesses who witnessed firsthand the person's sin, they are there to witness the confrontation of the person who is in sin. What you [will] find is [that] when [people are] in unconfessed sin, they're not hard to spot. They're defiant, they won't turn from their sin, [and] they don't want to confess their sin[s]. But let's say somebody thought you were in sin and [he brings] two other people [to confront you]. You'd say, "Yeah, you're right," and it would be over because you're agreeing, you're admitting [they're] right, and that you don't want to commit the sin [any longer]. You're not in rebellion.

[Note that the confrontation is] not punitive. Part of this section is taken from Deuteronomy 19:15. Jesus is alluding to the Old Testament system [in which] when you [had] a court case, you [brought] two or three witnesses who [were] firsthand witnesses of the crime in order to convict somebody, so that a sentence [could] be passed against him. In the Church, [however], we aren't setting up a court. Jesus paid the penalty—He is the once-for-all sacrifice, so we're not dealing out any sort of punitive damages against anybody, or sending [anyone] to jail. What we're doing is we're confronting [the person]. If you come lovingly and somebody won't confess, repent of his sin, turn from his sin, then you bring a couple other people. As we shall see, pretty soon the whole church gets involved, [but], of course, the whole church isn't a firsthand witness either.

Look at [Matthew 18:]17: "If he refuses to listen to them," that is, these two or three you've brought with you to confront [him] in private, lovingly, kindly, then "tell it to the church." The church is the local assembly of believers. So, if you ever wondered why the elders every once in a while get up here, and say, "So-and-so has fallen into sin. This is their sin," [it is] because if we don't, then we're sinning and we don't want to [sin]. We want to obey the Lord.

If you don't understand why all this is, we're going to get to that in a minute. We're just looking at the people involved now. So, we have the person who is in sin, we have the person who sees it and goes to confront

[him] in private, gently, kindly. If [the person in sin] confess[es], and say[s], “You know, you’re right; I blew it,” then it’s over, OK? [But], if that person does not confess, [we have] the two or three [other people] who also come, and then what happens is [that the person in sin is] then given another chance to repent. If [he doesn’t] do it, then [he’s] brought before the church. [Those are] all [the] groups [of people] who could potentially be involved [in church discipline].

Now let’s talk about the [second theme in this text: the] practice of church discipline. Let’s go back to [Matthew 18:]15 [and look at the first step in church discipline]: “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” If you see somebody sin, what do you do? You don’t come to me, [the pastor]. You don’t come to me, and say, “Pastor Jack, I saw so-and-so in sin. This person is in sin.”

[I would respond], “Well, uh, don’t tell me about it. Go talk to him.”

“I’m kind of scared. He’s pretty tall, and he’s big. This person lifts weights for a living. I’m kind of scared.”

[I would say], “Go to him.” Usually, at this point, if I know [who the person to whom you are referring is], I’ll say, “I’m going to ask him if you came and talked to him. If you don’t, then you’re going to be in sin.”

“Oh, no. I should have never said anything.”

“Yeah!”

You have to go do it. Why? [It is] because it’s the loving thing to do. Think about this. Let’s say you’re a parent, and you have some little rug rats who are lively, and like to play, and run around the yard. They [yell], “Mom! We’re going out to play on the freeway!”

Are you just going to say, “Well, I don’t want to tell them ‘no.’ It might hurt their feelings. They might not like it if I said ‘no’ to them. It might hurt their egos.” No, you’re going to say, “No, you’re not!” Why? [It is] because you love them. No parent who loves his or her child[ren] will let them put their lives in danger like that.

[Similarly], no Christian who loves his brother or sister in Christ will allow him or her to continue in sin. It is your responsibility. [It's] not [the responsibility of] the elders, the person sitting next to you, the person that you talk to about the person who is sinning, [the person to whom you] gossip, and say, "You know, I saw this. Do *you* want to go confront him?" No. It's you. [It's] your responsibility. It's how you show love to others in the Body of Christ.

Some people [have] come up to [me], and [asked], "When was the last time you guys did church discipline at Calvary?"

"Pfft. We do it every week, probably every day."

"You do?"

"Yeah, because you know what church discipline is? [It's] whenever you come to me, [or] whenever I come to you, and I confront you." If you're in a small group, this is happening all the time.

That's the whole purpose: to get involved in people's lives, and say, "Hey, I see this thing that isn't quite right."

[That person will often respond, saying something like], "You know, you're right. I'm blowing it here."

My wife practices church discipline on me all the time. She'll say things like, "Um, honey, I need to talk to you."

When she says that, [I think], "Oh, no. Here she is again. More church discipline."

Then she'll say, "You weren't quite kind," or, "You didn't quite do this right. I don't think this is honoring to the Lord."

"You're right. You're right," [I say], and I confess it.

She says, "And if you don't, I'll have to bring you up before the elders."

That's what it is. That *is* church discipline. We often think of church discipline as that final, public stage, but no—[in] almost all of church discipline, no one ever hears about it because it is between two people in private. It's happening *all* the time.

[The] second step of church discipline [can be found in Matthew 18:]16. Look there: "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you,

so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.” Again, you bring the people, they confront the person, [and] they see [one of two things happen]. [It may be that] the person has humbled himself, and said, “You know what? I realize I shouldn’t have blown you off. I should have listened to your counsel. I realize you’re starting to play hardball here. You’ve got[ten] a couple other people [involved]. I’m wrong. I’m going to stop. I repent. I’m going to quit doing it.” Great. Then it’s over. You’ve done church discipline again. Nobody [else] ever hears about it. It’s just you, the person who sinned, and the one or two extras you brought with you, and it’s over. We’re doing church discipline like that fairly frequently here [at Calvary Bible Church].

[There is another thing that could happen, however, when you bring along those one or two witnesses]. Look at [Matthew 18:]17: “If he refuses to listen to them,” that is, [he doesn’t repent as the result of] the first one-on-one [or] the following one-on-three confrontation[s], then “tell it to the church.” In order for this to happen, you need to get the leadership involved, because the leaders are responsible to oversee, shepherd, pastor the church. You come to the elders, and say, “Listen, I have talked to this person, I’ve brought a couple other people,” and then the elders [say], “OK, we’ll investigate.”

We investigate, and usually it’s very easy to find out if the person is in sin. [We ask], “Have you been doing this?”

“Yes.”

“Have you repented?”

“No.” If we confirm that, yes, the person is in unconfessed sin, then we obey the Scriptures, and we tell it to the church.

But what does this mean? What does it mean when one of the elders stands up, and in kindness, humility, and grief, says, “We have to bring before you this morning Brother [or] Sister So-and-so, who has fallen into these sins and refuses to repent.” Why is this necessary?

We’re going to get to that in just a minute, but [first] I want you to wake up if you’re sleeping. Wake up! Listen to me. The *entire* church is to be

involved in church discipline. We already said it once, [but the first step of church discipline is]: “If *you* see your brother.” OK? That’s your responsibility all the time. [The second step is], if somebody comes to you, and says, “Will you help me go confront so-and-so?” it’s *still* your responsibility. [We also need to understand that] when it says, “Tell it to the church,” that isn’t so the whole church can [say], “We know that person sinned and won’t confess! Now we’ve got some dainty morsel[s] to talk about.” No! [It is brought before the entire church because] it’s [time] for everyone to get into action, not for everyone to know something, but for everyone to know something so that they *do* something.

What should happen [when, in] a church our size, we have to do discipline, whoever the unrepentant person is should have 600–800 people contact him somehow. He comes home [from work], and his mailbox is stuffed solid with letters for three, four, or five days. His e-mail is clogged up. He’s getting text messages, people [are] calling him, [and] people [are] visiting him. It’s a bombardment by the whole Body. In many churches, this is where the failure is.

A lot of people say, “Church discipline just doesn’t work, man. I’ve seen it done. It just doesn’t work.” Just imagine standing before Jesus and say[ing], “You know, Lord, you really blew it in the Bible in that whole church discipline thing. I mean, You told us to do it and it didn’t work. It was just an evil practice. You made a mistake.”

Do you think He’d go for that, and [say], “You’re right”? No, I’ll tell you what He’s going to say, if you ever dared say that. He would say, “Church discipline works. What doesn’t work is the church. The [members] don’t all take it upon themselves to restore that sheep [who] has wandered away. They don’t take it upon themselves to get involved so that they, then, go after that erring sheep. That’s who isn’t working. My method is fine, but it’s flawed when the entire church doesn’t get involved.”

What I mean by that is whenever we have to bring somebody’s name up to you, this is what you should think to yourself: “I *have* to do something now. I have to visit the person. I have to call the person. I have to write the

person a letter. I have to send him an e-mail. I've got to do something. I have to contact that person. I have to do this," not, "Honey, take care of it and write him a note." No, you do it, your wife does it, the high schooler [and] the college student [do it]. If this church body is your home, then you take action, and you bombard the person.

You say, "Jack, is it necessary?" [It's] only [necessary] if you love him, you want to express love to him, you want to see him forsake his sin and follow Christ, [and] if you want to obey the Lord. See, when you do that, the combined impact of 600–800 people, saying, "I love you. I'm praying for you. I know you've fallen into sin. We all sin. I just encourage you, brother, or sister, to turn from that sin, confess it, so you can be restored to fellowship," I'm telling you, that's what works. [It] *works*, and the more people who get involved, the better it works.

But, you know, when we bring somebody's name up here, and we say, "So-and-so is. . ." and all of a sudden the person gets *two* letters, what does that tell that person? "Two people there cared enough about me to say anything. That church is dead." And it is dead. That's why G. Campbell Morgan said in his commentary on this text:

Any Church of Jesus Christ is weak in the proportion in which its members allow false pity or sentiment to prevent their being faithful to this great work of attempting to show an erring brother his fault in order that he may be restored.¹

The entire church goes after the person. But, when you don't love people, then, of course, you don't want to help. We don't want this church to be a church [of people who don't] have any love for one another, whose love has grown cold, like those described in the latter days. Hopefully we at least care for each other.

¹G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, Co., 1986), p. 232.

“But, Jack, I-, I-, I-. I hardly know the person,” or, “I don’t know the person,” [or], “I’ve only been attending here for a short while. Do I have to?” Yes, yes, yes! Don’t let excuses get in the way. When the name is given, you just resolve right then, each of you individually, “I am going to partake and do God’s will for me now. I’m going to write him a letter. I’m going to write a note. I’m going to call the office, or whatever. I’ll find out [how to reach him], and I’ll make sure that I contact him, encourage him lovingly, kindly, and appeal to him to turn from his sin.”

I’m telling you, I have talked to people who [have experienced this. One] said, “I sat there [at] my kitchen table, and opened up letter after letter after letter from people I had never even heard of. I [had] never heard their name[s]. [These letters] just [said], ‘I’m praying for you. [I] love you. Please turn from your sin.’ ” [Another] guy said, “I just broke, man. It just wasted me. I couldn’t even read the letters anymore. I just looked at them on the table. I was scared to open them up.” He said, “I’d cry for a while and I’d open some more, and cry for a while.” It fixed him.

But what happens when [the unrepentant sinner] gets two [letters]? See? It doesn’t work. The church doesn’t work, and when the church doesn’t work the process doesn’t work because the process is [meant] to include the whole church.

So, what if the person still won’t repent, after the whole church goes after him en masse? [This is the third step of the process, or practice, of church discipline.] If you look at the middle of [Matthew 18:]17, it says, “and if he refuses to listen even to the church,” which implies what? [It implies that] the entire church has gone after him. [There was] not just a public statement and a few people [who wrote him a note]. The entire church goes after him. [The verse goes on to say]: “Let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” You’re thinking, “I don’t know about the Gentile thing. I mean, I am one.” I think we can all relate to the tax collector thing, but what [does] that [statement mean]? Well, Matthew is writing to Jews, and [to them] a Gentile was somebody [who] was a godless person. A tax collector was a Jewish person who bought a franchise to exact taxes

and exploit [his] fellow Jews. [Both of these types of people] were seen as very godless. Both of these terms describe people who are godless.

Jesus is saying, “If the whole church goes after somebody, after [the] first confrontation, [the] second confrontation, [and] then [the] mass confrontation, and he rejects all of that loving, pleading, begging, prayerful outreach, then just treat the person like somebody who doesn’t know God—a godless person—because that is what he has proven to be.”

It is made clear, [however], that we are not to be mean to him. For instance, in 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15, another text on church discipline, Paul says:

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Don’t be an enemy, don’t be mean to the person. Keep admonishing, but you aren’t to associate with that person and give him all the blessings of fellowship in the Body. Your contact should be restricted to admonishing him to repent.

It was at this point that [we] elders asked ourselves [what we should do at this point in the process of church discipline]. (This is a while back—several months ago. We work at two speeds—slow and stop—so if you ever want the elders to do something, just be prepared. Slow and stop [are] our two speeds.) So, we talked about this, [wondering] how [we were] going to let the congregation know that [an unrepentant sinner has] fallen into the category of the godless person. [What happens if] we brought him before the church, the church [went] after him in force, and then the person [didn’t] repent and confess his sin and just [kept] continuing on? Then what? How do we get some closure here? That’s why we decided [that] from now on, about a month after [the person has been brought before the church], we have to make a public announcement. We will make another announcement

letting everybody know that the person hasn't confessed, repenting of his sin, [and] that he will be removed from membership. From that point on, you are to see him as an unbeliever who needs the gospel and needs to be saved. That's basically the thrust behind this sermon.

Let's talk about [the third theme in the Matthew 18 text:] the purpose of church discipline. This is probably the least understood of the three [themes]. Let me just explain [this theme]. I think when you understand the reasons for church discipline, it gives you a clue and shows you how great a thing church discipline is, that it is not a mean thing, it is a loving thing, and it is a good thing. That is why we need to do it.

There are basically five reasons [for church discipline] mentioned in the Scriptures. The first reason is, of course, to restore an erring brother to obedience. That's what we want. We want to see somebody restored to Christ. That's why it says in Matthew 18:15: "If he listens to you, you have won your brother." "Won your brother" what? "Won your brother" to repentance and following the Lord again. That's what it is.

Turn to Galatians 6. I'm going to have you turn to a few other key texts that address different aspects of church discipline so you can understand [church discipline] well. You can write all these texts down in the margin [of your Bibles] next to Matthew 18, then you can remember one verse and find all the other ones [by going to Matthew 18]. Galatians 6:1 [says]: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." Here, three [goals] are mentioned, but the[re is one] thing [in particular] that I want to show you. [The verse says that] you see a brother caught in a trespass, in a sin, and then [it says] "you who are spiritual." Who's that? [That is referring to] anybody who is walking with the Lord, anybody who doesn't have a log in his own eye [see Matthew 7:3-5], anybody who isn't living in unconfessed sin himself. "You who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." Notice [that you are] to be kind, "each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted." [So, while] there [are] basically three things [mentioned]

in [this verse]: the restoration of the person, self-examination, [and the] protecting of self and the Body of Christ (we'll get to [that a little bit later in the sermon]), the restoration of the person is clearly one of the reasons [for church discipline given in this verse].

[The second reason] we practice church discipline [is] out of love [for] Christ. Jesus said in John 14:15: "If you love Me, you will" what? "keep My commandments." That's the only way we can show love to Christ; there's no other way. If you don't obey Christ, you aren't loving Christ. The Scriptures are clear about that. It says it over and over in [Matthew] 14, 15, [and] 16. The Book of John is full of it, too. It amazes me that most churches refuse to practice church discipline, and yet they often say they do it out of love for people and love for Christ. That is not true. You do not let somebody continue in sin if you love him. You do not disobey the direct command of Christ, and say, "We love You." That is a contradiction, [and it] is not true.

[In] Revelation 2:14–16, Jesus is writing seven letters to the churches. Listen to what He says. This is Jesus' [list] of "the things I have against you, church of Pergamum." He says this in [Revelation 2:]14[–16]:

But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality. So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

Think about that. This church is rebuked because it is not practicing church discipline. Jesus says, "If you don't deal with these people, I'm going to come Myself and make war against them."

[To] another church, right after that, the church of Thyatira, down in [Revelation 2:]20[–23], Jesus says this:

But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

In both of these [passages], in two out of seven letters to the churches, what Jesus has against them is their failure to perform church discipline. [When He says] things like “I’ll kill you,” “make war with you,” “send pestilence upon you,” those are not pretty sights. We don’t want that on Calvary Bible Church. But if you ever wonder, “Why are you doing church discipline?” [it’s because] we don’t want Christ to make war with us. We want Him on our side. So, why do you do church discipline? [You do it] not only to restore [someone to the faith], but to obey Christ.

[The] third [reason] we practice church discipline [is] in order to maintain purity in the church. Turn to 1 Corinthians 5. This is probably a commonly known text to anybody who has been a Christian for a while. The whole text is about a man who [was] in the church [and] who had fallen into immorality. The Corinthians, who were a new church and [who] didn’t quite have everything fixed yet, didn’t quite understand what to do [in regard to this man’s immorality]. They thought they were showing love toward the person by allowing [him] to continue in sin. They thought, “We’re pretty good, because look how loving we are. We know the person is in sin, but we’re not doing anything to him because we want to show him we love him.” That is their mindset. Look at 1 Corinthians 5:1: “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such

a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife." That is, there was a man sleeping with his stepmother. [First Corinthians 5:2–3 continues]:

You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.

Paul is grieved because they haven't performed church discipline on the man living in immorality. Paul has passed judgment. He hasn't sentenced the man to hell, [but] he has passed judgment that the man is in sin and should be cast out of the church. Look at [1 Corinthians 5:]4[–5]:

In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

The “delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh” phrase is saying, “Put him out of the church. Let him go out into the world. Cut off all fellowship, encouragement, and blessing from being around believers and the spiritual gifts of the whole Body of Christ. Cut him off from that, send him out into the world, and let him die out there in the world, rebelling. If he knows the Lord, his spirit will be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. If he doesn't, he will perish, but at least he won't infect the church.”

[Then he gives] the rebuke. Look at [1 Corinthians 5:]6[–8]:

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so

that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

This [mention of leaven] is a reference to the Passover. When [the Jews] left Egypt, they had unleavened bread, and then [later] they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, [during which] they were not to have any leaven. [Paul is] using that same picture: Christ, like the Passover lamb, has been slain, and just as the Jews celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, so we are not to have leaven in the midst of the congregation, [which means] somebody who is living in unconfessed sin. You [are to] remove [that person] from the church. Why? So, like leaven [in a batch of bread dough], they don't corrupt the [whole] church. Look at [1 Corinthians 5:]9[–10]:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world.

Paul says, “Don't become a hermit. Don't become a monk and live out in the desert and hide from other sinners.” No, those are the people who need the gospel. They need Christ, so you work with them, you see them, you have neighbors, you're around people. He says, “Don't try and not associate with unbelievers. They need Jesus.” [Instead, in 1 Corinthians 5:]11 [he goes on to say]: “But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother.” Why does he say “so-called brother”? [It is] because the man says he's a Christian, but he's not walking with the Lord. So, now, his whole salvation is in question. [The verse goes on to say]: Do not “associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even

to eat with such a one.” In other words, [there is to be] no more Christian fellowship [with that person], no more blessing from the Body of Christ [given to him]. If a person claims to be a Christian, yet lives in unrepentant sin, the entire church is to turn to that person, at the instruction of the elders, to reach out to him, to encourage him to repent, [and] not to continue to fellowship with him, say[ing], “Well, you’re OK, I’m OK.” No, it’s not OK [for him to continue living in unrepentant sin and for you to continue fellowshiping with him].

[First Corinthians 5:]12 [says]: “For what have I to do with judging outsiders?” The Greek implies [that the answer is] “nothing.” We have no business judging outsiders. [The verse goes on]: “Do you not judge those who are within the church?” The Greek implies [that the answer is] “of course.” [First Corinthians 5:13 says]: “But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves,” so that he won’t be like leaven in the church. If somebody [who is unrepentantly sinning] is left in [the church], the [people in the church may think], “Well, listen, so-and-so is in sin, he’s doing this wicked act. I mean, it’s OK, I guess, with the elders if he does it, so I can do it, too. If he can get away with that sin, then I can get away with that same sin and it’s OK.” Then the sin becomes like leaven in the church.

There is another text [that] I just want to mention because it has been misused by many: Titus 3:10–11, which says this: “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.” Titus 3:10–11 tells us a two-strikes-you’re-out policy for what kind of person? [It is for] a factious person, a person who causes division. The Greek word [used in this instance] is heretikos, the word [from which] we get [the English word] “heretic.” This is a person who, because of complaining, disagreements, slander, gossip, anger, [or] whatever, causes a division in the church, and then the church begins to polarize because of this person’s wicked influence. The Scriptures are clear [that the person is] to be rejected, [which] means “shunned, dismissed, [or] driven out.”

Notice [that] Paul does not say, “Reject someone who disagrees with the elders.” He doesn’t say that. [Imagine] somebody realizes, “You know, the church isn’t doing this and the elders aren’t doing anything about it,” and he bring[s] his Bible to one of the elders, and say[s], “The Scriptures say this here, and over here, and over here. Why aren’t the elders doing anything about it?”

The [elders say], “Well, um. . .” [and give] whatever the excuse is and then nothing gets done.

Then the person says, “I’d like to talk with [all of] the elders.” The guy comes to the elder meeting, and says, “What are you guys doing?” and kind of rebukes the whole elder board, and says, “Isn’t it true that the Scriptures say this? I mean, tell me if I’m wrong. Do the Scriptures say that?”

Then all of a sudden, the elders say, “This person is divisive,” and they bring him before [the congregation] and they kick him out of the church.

That’s not what this text is about. This [text] is [not] talking about the person who is trying to conform to the Word of God, but [about] the person who is a heretikos, who is trying to get people to not conform to the Word of God, who is causing dissension, strife, and disunity [in the church].

Sometimes when people are in disagreement with each other, [or] with the leadership, [or] whatever, they may be right. Let’s just say somebody is right, [that] the elders are defiling the Word of God by not obeying it, that the Scriptures are clear and the elders aren’t doing [what they are supposed to do]. There are proper ways to deal with that. [Note this, however:] It’s never the proper way to [deal with such a situation by getting] a bunch of other people who are disgruntled, gather[ing] them together, and then hav[ing] a griping session. Then every day after church, [you] get in your little clusters and complain, gripe, and grow bitter and angry. That is never the solution. Even if the elders are wrong, if you do that, then you are wrong in your attempt to do right, and then you’ve disqualified yourselves as those who [can] confront [the elders] because you have a log in your own eye[s]. The way to deal with it is just as Matthew 18 says. Sometimes, if the leadership will not comply [and] there has been [a] confrontation, [or]

multiple confrontations, then you have to decide whether you can submit to them. [However], you can never start a split, a faction. That is a different sin [in] itself. You just can't do it.

So, this text [in Titus 3] is not to be used to beat up on people who disagree with the elders. No, it is a text about those who cause division in the Body, for whatever reason. Believe me, when the elders hear about this [type of divisiveness], when we see little clusters of people hanging around, and hear these negative vibes reverberating, man, we go like a heat-seeking missile into that group, and let them know, "One more time and you're all gone." Why would we be so firm? [It is] because the Scriptures command us and we don't want to be sinning, that's why.

[The fourth reason] we are to practice church discipline [is] for the purpose of making the entire church fearful of sinning. I want to remind you of an example [of this]. Do you remember Ananias and Sapphira? The Church is brand new, thousands of people are coming to the Lord, [and] everybody is so excited, [saying], "This is great, man! There are miracles. Thousands of Jews are being converted!" Then Ananias and Sapphira agree together to lie to the apostles. They [didn't have] to give [the entire] price of their property [to the Church, but they decided to say that they had because] they wanted people to admire them, [they wanted] to make people think that they had given all when really they hadn't. They agreed to keep part of this land, which was fine. It wasn't fine, [however], that they lied in order to make themselves look more holy or sacrificial than they actually were. So, God struck both of them dead [see Acts 5:5]. Acts 5:11 says: "And great fear came over the whole church." Well, no kidding! That was the first instance of church discipline: death by the Lord to let us all know that He's serious. He wants purity in the Church, He wants holiness in the Church.

Turn to 1 Timothy 5:19–20. This is a text that really isn't so much a church discipline text, but it relates to church discipline. I wanted to address it quickly so that you would understand how it fits in to the overall group of texts that address this situation. It's talking about elders, and it says in verse [19]: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the

basis of two or three witnesses.” This [means] two or three witnesses who are firsthand witnesses. Because an elder is [a] public [figure], he is up front, he is a leader, and because people love to attack [elders], God not only makes a higher standard for becoming an elder but also [for] being accused as an elder. Two or three [firsthand] witnesses are required.

Look at [1 Timothy 5:]20: “Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.” If it is discovered that an elder has continued in any unrepentant sin, that elder is to be brought before the congregation and rebuked in the presence of all. You [wonder], “Well, why is that?” This isn’t church discipline. Even if the elder confesses, and even if the elder repents, because he is a public figure, because he has been publicly appointed to the office of elder, he is to be publicly removed and rebuked so that the whole congregation will [think], “Whoa! Being an elder is gnarly, man. It is scary. I mean, the guy is broken and they still brought him up [in front of the whole church].” Yeah. Why? [It is] because that is what the Word of God teaches.

Now, if the elder says, “Well, I’m not turning from my sin. I’m still going to run off with the neighbor’s wife,” or whatever, then the process of Matthew 18 is to be done [as it would be for] anybody else. But regardless [of] confession, repentance, or not, any elder who has disqualified himself by continuing in any sin is to be publicly rebuked so that the whole congregation knows that he is no longer an elder, he is no longer qualified, [and they are to] no longer seek him out for counsel or leadership. He has blown it, and we just want you to know that. Now, if the person is hardhearted, then the rest of the steps of church discipline are to be practiced, just [as for] anybody else. So, it’s really not a discipline text, but more a public removal text and protection so that the rest [of the church] will be fearful of sinning. And, believe me, if you’ve watched [this process being] done, it makes you scared.

Finally, [we find the] fifth [reason we are to practice church discipline in] Romans 16. This is our last text and we’ll be done. [In] Romans 16

Paul is doing his typical end-of-the-book flurry of little comments, hellos, good-byes, and things. Toward the end, he says in verse[s] 17[–18]:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

Here in Romans 16:17–18, we have almost everything we’ve mentioned so far [about church discipline]. If you look at [this passage, you’ll see that] you’re keeping your eye out; it’s your responsibility; we have people who are causing dissensions, people causing hindrances, [who are doing things] contrary to the teaching [of God’s Word, and who are] violating the Word of God; the command to turn away from them; the commentary on them that they are slaves [and are] not of Christ, but of their own appetites. In other words, they’re not following Christ’s Word, they’re following their own lusts. They deceive people “by their smooth and flattering speech.” This is the leaven effect: deceiving the hearts of the unsuspecting. You [are to] make sure you deal with that.

[Romans 16:]19 [says]: “For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.” What I want you to see there in verse 19 [is] at the beginning: “the report of your obedience has reached to all.” That is [the fifth] reason why we do church discipline: because when we obey the Lord in this area, the report of our obedience in this area reaches a lot of other people. People [say], “Man, that Calvary Bible Church, you can’t go to that church and be shacking up with your girlfriend. You can’t go to that church and be living in any sort of sin. They’re serious over there.” Well, yeah, it’s because the God we serve is serious, and so we do what He says.

It is for these [five] reasons that we do church discipline. It’s not just for restoration, it’s [also] to obey Christ, to protect the Body, [to make people

fearful of sinning], [and] to be a good witness in the world. All those things are a part of why we do church discipline. That's why it's a good thing. That's why it's a bad thing not to do it.

The one thing I want to make sure that you leave here [with] this morning is this: [When] we bring somebody up before you, you [are to] think to yourself, "I have to do something now," and make sure you do it because the power in church discipline is when the whole church gets involved. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your kindness and goodness to us. We thank You for Your Word, which gives us clear and practical instruction for how we are to operate, how we are to love each other. I thank You that church discipline happens here every week—and probably every day—among people who love each other, in homes, discipleship groups, and [among] acquaintances, Father, as we encourage one another to do what is right when we see each other falling short of Your Word. I thank You that that happens frequently and that we never know about it, but we know it's going on because we have loving people coming to us, and we thank You for that. We're also thankful, Father, for the times when two or three have been gathered to confront somebody and the person has confessed, seeing the added pressure. And, Father, we thank You that You love us so much [that] You tell us that if that doesn't work, then the whole Body is to go after that wayward sheep. We are all to become shepherds, and all to leave the ninety-nine and seek out the one, to help him, to love him, and bring him back into the fold [see Matthew 18:12–13]. Father, help us all to take on that responsibility, [to] be faithful and loving [to] one another, as You have commanded us, so that You might have a pure Church, that we might be blessed, [and] that You might be glorified. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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