

Church Life: Discipline and Restoration

Matthew 18:15-20

August 5th, 2018

Intro –

What makes for a true church? What are the marks of a true church?

During the time of the reformation in the 16th century, this was an important question. They settled on an answer that may surprise you. What distinguishes a church from a generic gathering of believers. Prior to the reformation, this wasn't really a question. Validity was tied to an unbroken succession of bishops in the office of the pope.

Lutheranism – 13 years after 95 theses, Philip Melancthon – true church distinguished by two things: gospel is rightly taught and sacraments rightly administered.

Scottish confession 30 years later by John Knox – 3 identifying marks – added church discipline to the Lutheran list – true preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and last ecclesiastical discipline rightly administered.

Belgic confession – the true preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and practices church discipline.

Anglican – pure word preached and sacraments administered

Calvin's institutes – preaching of word and agreement of sacraments but then added discipline in a later letter – doctrine, discipline, and sacraments

Even those who see two marks would have folded church discipline into the administration of the Lord's supper.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus declared in chapter 16 that He would build His church. In chapter 18 He is giving some instruction for how his people are to function in his church.

Receive rather than despise

Pursue those who have gone astray (Matthew 18:10-14)

He values them so we should value them

Then He gives directions for when a brother or sister, one of these "little ones," is stuck in sin and refuses to get unstuck.

1. Church life: The context of discipline (18:15a)
 - a. If a brother sins. . . tell it to the church . . . if he refuses to listen to the church
 - b. Context in chapter 18 is how to treat His "little ones," His people who have come to Him through faith in Christ.
 - c. This is not how to deal with your neighbor, coworker, non-Christian family member, high school friend who sins.
 - d. Assumes:
 - i. Relationships within the body
 - ii. Accountability to one another
 - iii. Participating in church as a fellowship of believers with mutual accountability not merely church as something that is consumed for an hour one day each week.

2. Step 1: Talk to the brother/sister *privately* about their sin (18:15b)
 - a. Two concerns of Jesus – that the sinner repent and that the circle remain as small as possible.
 - i. There are off-ramps all along this process.
 - b. What sins are confronted this way and follow these steps?
 - i. outward, significant, and unrepentant
 - ii. Outward because can't read the heart and minds of people. Don't need to be the spiritual KGB. Difficult then to follow these steps for things like pride or greed. More obvious for situations like abandonment of a spouse for another person.
 1. 9 Marks panel discussion with Dever, Duncan, and McConnell - Only bring those issues that are indisputable. The local church isn't a private detective agency. Avoid the church being dragged into a distracting "he said/she said."
 - iii. Significant because sin is a present reality that all believers struggle with in some way.
 1. Is it consistent? Is it destructive to them and others? Is it known broadly?
 2. Jonathon Leeman - So what counts as significant sin? It's sin that makes it difficult to continue believing someone bears the Spirit of God and is a Christian, at least if he or she refuses to repent.
 3. Is "significant" somewhat subjective? Yes. That's why a body of believers and a mature elder board are essential to this process.
 - iv. Unrepentant is the key marker. Any sin – ANY can be forgiven. But sin that someone refuses to turn from is spiritual kryptonite. It destroys them. And it should cast doubt on their own profession of faith.
 1. **Ephesians 5:5** For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.
 - v. Jonathan Leeman, 9 Marks ministries in *Church Discipline*, "Formal church discipline is warranted when an individual seems to happily abide in known sin. There's no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable, other than the discomfort of getting caught. Rather, obedience to sin's desires are *characteristic*."
 - vi. Some question about whether this is specifically about sins "against you" or just "sins."
 1. Other passages that we will look at in a moment are clear that it doesn't just include sins against you.
 - c. If he or she "listens" the process is over.
 - i. Listen is a key word in this passage –
 1. If he listens to you, you have won your brother
 2. If he does not listen take one or two more
 3. If he refuses to listen to them . . .
 4. If he refuses to listen even to the church . . .
 - ii. Hear with a willingness to heed what was said

3. Step 2: Take one or two others along (18:16)

- a. Establishes a witness for all parties involved – is the problem really with the one who is seeking to confront? Are they making a big deal out of something minor or something the person has already repented of? Is this really just an area of person preference or a personality conflict?
 - i. There’s no room here for an authoritarian leader to just kick people out of church because he has conflict with them.
 - b. Primarily provides increased, loving, gentle pressure on the sinning brother or sister to repent.
 - i. The next verse says, “If he refuses to listen to them. . .” which shows they aren’t merely silent observers but speaking into the situation as well.
 - c. This doesn’t have to be an elder but it is good for it to be a wise, mature believer.
4. Step 3: Bring the sin issue to the rest of the **church** body (18:17a)
- a. The goal is not public embarrassment, slander, gossip. The goal is for the body to pray and pursue this individual.
 - b. May be the entire congregation, may be just members, may be those in youth group or college ministry. May be more detail, may be less. There’s room for wisdom here.
 - i. Grace Community Church, John MacArthur - may or may not involve public proclamation. Sometimes at monthly communion service, other times in the fellowship or study group that would know the person.
 - ii. Who knows about it or will know? Who can be influenced negatively by it? Who is in the best position to influence this person to repent?
 - c. Several years ago now there was a situation that reached this step after several months. Information was shared with the congregation that was detailed enough that all could pray and detailed enough that those who were aware of the situation would know to pursue the person. However, no name was given.
 - i. We were so encouraged as a church to see the way people responded. A few people were upset. Many prayed. Several engaged this person. They talked to them. Offered hope from their own situations that were similar. Encouraged the person to change course.
 - ii. And you know what, it worked.
 - iii. In one sense, if Jesus is obeyed the process always “works” but in this case the person softened. They said they didn’t realize how many people cared about them. It didn’t go any further.
5. Step 4: **Remove** the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)
- a. Gentiles and tax collectors were outsiders in the Jewish community. Jesus’ disciples would have immediately recognized what He was saying.
 - i. It doesn’t mean to be harsh or abusive with them. But it is to say that the other members can’t corporately recognize this person as a fellow believer.
 - b. 3 purposes for removing an unrepentant professing believer (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)
 - i. **Restore** the professing believer to fellowship with God (v. 5)
 - 1. The goal is restoration – their spiritual health – not punishment.
 - ii. **Protect** the church from the spread of sin (v. 6)

1. Why are such aggressive steps often taken to deal with cancer? Why are lymph nodes or sections of intestines removed if cancer cells are present within them? Because the cancer can spread and kill the whole person.
2. A church with a casual approach to sin, a casual approach to holiness, will see an increase in sin.

iii. **Preserve** the reputation of Christ in the community (v. 1, Romans 2:24)

1. The common attack, and sometimes warranted, by non-Christians about Churches is that they are full of hypocrites.
2. Rom 2:24 – God’s name is blasphemed among the gentiles because of you (speaking to Jews not obeying God)

iv. In Corinth, it appears to have worked!

1. **2 Corinthians 2:5-8** But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree-- in order not to say too much-- to all of you. ⁶ Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority, ⁷ so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort *him*, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love for him.
2. Now the instruction is forgive! Welcome him back!

a. Likewise in Matthew 18, this section is followed by 15 verses on forgiveness.

c. Some might wonder, should the person still be welcomed at church because, after all, non-Christians are welcome to come and attend.

i. Because Jesus doesn’t elaborate here, I could see why some would take it that way. That doesn’t appear to be the emphasis in other NT passages.

ii. 1 Corinthians 5 that we just read

iii. **2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15** Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. . . 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. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1. “put to shame” more literally means to turn about or turn in, it has an idea of inner reflection that may result in shame. But the shame isn’t an end in itself.

6. An affirmation of God’s **support** (18:18-20)

- a. What authority do we have to pass judgment? Very legitimate question.
- b. To bind or to loose mean to forbid or permit – whatever you (as a church, together, in this process) forbid is acting in according with what heaven (God) has already concluded. This unrepentant brother or sister should not be part of the church.
- c. The Father supports this so much that Jesus is described as in their midst. Not a reference to merely two or three Christians gathering for any old reason and then Jesus is there. He’s always there! It’s a reference to His affirmation of this process.

7. Common questions and objections

- a. It’s none of my business; it’s between them and God.

- i. Since they are part of the body, it is our business. To not be involved is direct disobedience to the Word of God.
 - ii. That's an individualistic mindset that is foreign to the concept of the church as the body of Christ.
 - iii. This is why we need to make sure it isn't merely an issue of personal conscience or a gray area along the lines of Romans 14-15.
- b. This will drive the person away and then we won't be able to help.
 - i. The goal is the exact opposite of driving them away. The goal is to drive them to Christ. Sin creates a barrier though to true fellowship.
- c. Isn't this like shooting the wounded?
 - i. A better take on the analogy is to say we are trying to help someone who is wounded see that they are wounded. Imagine coming across a car accident and the person is bleeding from the head, clearly injured but also in shock so they don't feel the pain and are disoriented, you may not to convince them they are wounded so you can help.
- d. How public does the repentance need to be?
 - i. It needs to be as public as the sin is known. If it comes to the point that the whole body is informed of the sin, then the whole body would need to be informed of the repentance so the person can be restored back to full fellowship.
 - ii. It's spiritually healthy for the one who has sinned because it provides a clean and clear break from their sin.
 - iii. It's spiritually healthy for the church because it removes a barrier that is in place to fellowship
- e. It's just doesn't seem loving.
 - i. By abstaining from discipline, on the other hand, we claim that we love better than God loves.
 1. **Hebrews 12:6-7** ⁶ FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." ⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?
 2. At its core, to love is to will the good of another.

8. Conclusion

- a. God cares about holiness in His people.
 - i. He purchased our positional holiness in Christ.
 - ii. He motivates and enables our ongoing holiness in the Spirit through regenerated hearts.
 - iii. In the OT He would bring other nations against the Israelites and remove them from their land. He would act directly against them in natural disasters and famine. In the NT God sometimes acted directly to discipline His people in the church.
 1. Ananias and Saphira
 2. But He has primarily given that responsibility to the church to police itself. However, He has loaded that with safeguards.
 - a. The circle is to be kept as small as possible for as long as possible.

- b. Others are to be brought in so it can't just be one person enforcing their will.
 - c. The whole church is to be involved and informed.
- b. Notice the way this passage is bookended
 - i. On the front end is a plea that we would value His people the same way He values them.
 - ii. On the back end is the exhortation to forgive, repeatedly, from the heart, because of the gospel



1. Church life: The context of discipline (18:15a)

2. Step 1: Talk to the brother/sister privately about their sin (18:15b)

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

2. Step 1: Talk to the brother/sister privately about their sin (18:15b)

Jonathan Leeman, 9 Marks ministries in *Church Discipline*, "Formal church discipline is warranted when an individual seems to happily abide in known sin. There's no evidence that the Spirit is making him or her uncomfortable, other than the discomfort of getting caught. Rather, obedience to sin's desires are *characteristic*."

3. Step 2: Take one or two others along (18:16)

4. Step 3: Bring the sin issue to the rest of the church body (18:17a)

5. Step 4: Remove the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)

3 purposes for removing an unrepentant professing believer (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

a. Restore the professing believer to fellowship with God (v. 5)

1 Corinthians 5:5 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.

5. Step 4: Remove the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)

3 purposes for removing an unrepentant professing believer (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

b. Protect the church from the spread of sin (v. 6)

1 Corinthians 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?

5. Step 4: **Remove** the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)

3 purposes for removing an unrepentant professing believer (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

c. **Preserve** the reputation of Christ in the community (v. 1, Romans 2:24)

Romans 2:23-24 You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? ²⁴ For "THE NAME OF GOD IS BLASPHEMED AMONG THE GENTILES BECAUSE OF YOU," just as it is written.

5. Step 4: **Remove** the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)

3 purposes for removing an unrepentant professing believer (1 Corinthians 5:1-13)

c. **Preserve** the reputation of Christ in the community (v. 1, Romans 2:24)

2 Peter 2:2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;

5. Step 4: **Remove** the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)

2 Corinthians 2:5-8 But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree-- in order not to say too much-- to all of you. ⁶ Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, ⁷ so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. ⁸ Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.

5. Step 4: **Remove** the brother/sister from fellowship (18:17b)

2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. . . . 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. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

6. An affirmation of God's support
(18:18-20)

7. Common questions and objections

It's none of my business; it's
between them and God.

This will drive the person away and
then we won't be able to help.

Isn't this like shooting the
wounded?

7. Common questions and objections

How public does the repentance need to
be?

It just doesn't seem loving.

Hebrews 12:6-7 FOR THOSE WHOM THE
LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE
SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE
RECEIVES." ⁷ It is for discipline that you
endure; God deals with you as with sons;
for what son is there whom *his* father
does not discipline?