

United In Our Holiness

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Date: 02 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Amen. You may be seated. Children, you can be excused to your King's Kids classes. And if you would open up your Bibles to Matthew chapter 18, 15 through 20.

It's on page 979 of your Pew Bible. And this is Jesus speaking.

Hear the word of the Lord. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

[1 : 09] Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

May God bless the hearing of his word. Our church has been saved by the blood of Jesus to be holy and blameless unto Jesus.

Individually that's personal holiness. Corporately that means relational holiness. How we conduct ourselves with one another.

So the question becomes, what do we do when one member of our church sins against another member of our church? What's the plan?

This topic is particularly important for us right now in light of a meeting we've got coming up. Last Sunday, Steve Bickle made an announcement. He's the chairman of our elder board, and he announced a special membership meeting next Sunday, February 9th.

[2 : 24] And that special membership meeting, unless we hear otherwise, we'll be taking a step as a church membership in this process of church discipline.

We're going to tell something to the church. We'll inform the church members this is a member-only meeting of a particular situation. We're going to name a name, Lord willing, and call the members of Christ the King Church to act.

The reason why we would do something like this is because we love Jesus, and we love His church, and we love members entangled in sin.

Maybe you've never heard a sermon on church discipline before. You've never heard those two words before, church discipline.

Or maybe you've heard the words church discipline. You know that there's something out there that should be some kind of process, but you've never been a part of something like that before.

[3 : 29] Or maybe you've witnessed church discipline done poorly. Or maybe you've witnessed church discipline done well.

We've been needing to grow as a church in this process that Jesus lays out in Matthew chapter 18, because we need to be a church that does church discipline well in love to restore and help.

Because we want to protect the name of Jesus. And we want to preserve the holy health of our membership as a church. And Jesus tells us what to do.

In Matthew 18, 15 through 17, in particular, He walks through four stages of church discipline. Step by step.

How to love a church member entangled in sin, and what to do if they don't listen. Here's the definition of church discipline from the start.

[4 : 43] Church discipline is the loving process appointed by Christ by which Christians seek to restore a fellow church member entangled in sin.

Church discipline is the loving process appointed by Christ by which Christians seek to restore a fellow church member entangled in sin. And so in light of next Sunday, the elders wanted me not just to kind of refresh your thinking about church discipline, but to prepare you for action.

So here's how we're going to proceed this morning. I want to share with you briefly just some general principles about church discipline. That will be kind of the first move. But then I want to walk through these stages with you, giving attention to stage one and stage three in particular, so that we understand it, so we know how to act.

Church discipline is the loving process appointed by Christ by which Christians seek to restore a fellow church member entangled by sin. And so let's just look at briefly some general principles about the process of church discipline.

I'm going to rattle off four for you. The first general principle is this. Church discipline is to be normal church practice. It's just to be normal.

[6 : 17] It's part of our life as a church. Jesus is a realist. And so when he tells us in 1815, if your brother sins against you, he's being realistic.

It's going to happen. He knew we would sin against each other, so he tells us what to do when a brother sins against us or a sister sins against us.

Now behind this is an understanding of what a church is. A church is a group of Christians in a specific time, specific place, with a specific leadership that they have committed together to follow Jesus.

It's a formalized commitment Christians have made to say we're living for Jesus together. And with that comes a responsibility for one another. So every time we have a membership Sunday, the members stand up and they kind of re-communicate their commitment to take these steps together, even submit oneself to church discipline.

It's a kind of mutual commitment we're making together. And then what Jesus does here is he authorizes us to act. If you look at verse 18, he says, truly I say to you, whoever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

[7 : 41] Because we have a responsibility with one another, he authorizes us to act. The you, the Y-O-U, in verse 18 is not a singular you, but a plural you, a y'all.

He's speaking to the church. He's authorizing the church to take steps to help a brother or sister entangled in sin.

And what Jesus is doing here is he's just normalizing something. This week, Kelly is going to send out on Tuesday in her email, there'll be a link in the email to an article by Colin Hansen and Jonathan Lehman on the nature of church membership.

I would really encourage you to take a look at that. So the first principle is church process is normal. This church discipline, it's to be normal.

We're dealing with sin in our lives. Second, church discipline is a sanctifying process. The goal is holiness. You see in verse 15, if your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault.

[8 : 53] But the goal is restoration. The goal is sharing in God's holiness to rescue a brother from their sin and then to restore that sinning sister back to a fellowship with God and one another.

It's shalom. It's peace. It's holy peace. Christians are simultaneously justified and sinful.

We have been saved, justified, and we're being saved in the sense we're being sanctified, and so we're not a sin-free community. And so we're going to need to be dealing with sin so that we would be experientially more and more holy and blameless unto Jesus.

Hebrews chapter 12 talks about we have a God, a Father, who out of love for us will discipline us so that we would share in His holiness, and that would happen together.

This is a sanctifying process. Both personal holiness and corporate holiness. It's a loving process to make us holy.

[10 : 05] Sanctifying. The third general principle is that this is an intensifying process. These four stages, as we walk through them, I just want to tell you right now, each one is going to intensify.

Jesus wants there to be this increasing public nature to each stage of church discipline. And the reason for that is to bring a brother or sister who's in sin to bring them to their senses, to help them see the seriousness of their sin.

We don't do these things to humiliate people. We're doing these things to call them back to Jesus. This intensification is to get people's attention in stage three where you tell it to the church. That's where the church membership is made aware. Remember that this is a loving process Jesus has given to seek to restore church members entangled in their sin. It's a loving process, which is the fourth principle. This is a loving process. Church discipline is a loving process. It's out of love for Jesus. Jesus, we want to honor Him. [11 : 35] We want to obey Him. It's out of love for His church, His bride, that He purchased with His own blood to make holy. This is us loving Jesus' people. This is us loving brothers and sisters entangled in their sin.

Not this week, but the week before in our life group, a brother asked, what is this love that we're talking about in Ephesians 4? Christian love is a commitment to do what's best for another Christian for the glory of Jesus.

We will exercise our commitment to one another so that Christ is magnified in each other's lives. That's how we love one another. That's Christian love.

I want to just point you to a passage. You see in Matthew 18 here, in 15 through 20, we have this process of church discipline.

If you just look up at the passage beforehand, it starts in verse 10 through 14. It's the parable of the lost sheep. It's this parable of the shepherd who leaves the 99 to go get the one, the sheep that's astray.

[12 : 50] Isn't it interesting that after Jesus speaks this parable, He then talks about church discipline? You can't help but make the connection.

Our good shepherd church is going to use us in order to go after straying sheep out of love for them, to bring them back to the fold.

These general principles, let me just reiterate them. Church discipline is normal church process. We are sinners. We will sin against each other. We need to be taking these steps. It's a sanctifying process.

The goal is to share in God's holiness. It's an intensifying process. It's not necessarily comfortable, but it's for other people's good, and it's loving.

This is an act of love to seek to bring people back, rescue them from sin, and restore fellowship with God and others. So with those in mind, let's turn now to the actual stages of church discipline.

[14 : 02] It starts with stage one in verse 15. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If your brother sins against you, that's the beginning of the early stages of church discipline.

It's more common than we think. It's to be more normal than we think. Now, if you're wondering, in Matthew 5, 23, and 24, Jesus addresses the one who's done the sinning.

He says, if you're on your way to the altar and you remember, you've caused an offense with your brother. If you've sinned against them, stop what you're doing.

Go to them. Make peace with them. But here, in 15, Jesus is addressing not the one who did the sinning, but the one who's been sinned against. If you, if your brother has sinned against you, he says, do this.

He says, go and show him his fault. You're not to wait for him or her to come to you.

[15 : 14] You are to initiate the conversation. Now, you may wonder why. I believe it's to not to allow sin to fester, to not to give the devil an opportunity to keep short accounts.

You know, I'm not sure if you've experienced this yourself. I'm guessing you have. When sinners are sinned against, we tend to sin back. But Jesus here is saying this.

If your brother sins against you, don't sin back. Love back. Go and show him his fault. Instead of sinning back, we love back.

It's the way of the kingdom. Freedom. It's the way of Jesus. And now you may be thinking, oh, how do you do that? Because that sounds extraordinary. The way that we do that is by laying hold of our Jesus, by abiding in him, by saying, Jesus, you are the controlling center of my life.

You're the treasured center of my life. And I'm going to live for you even in a situation like this. I mean, Jesus went to the tomb dead, and he came out of the tomb alive so that he would become the controlling center of our lives, that we would treasure him above all else, that we would obey him in all that he commands, even Matthew 18, that we would magnify him among all people, even among each other, and that we would belong to Jesus with the whole church, even those who sin

against us.

[16:55] The way we go about doing this is not trusting in our own power and wisdom, it's trusting in Jesus. It's tethering ourselves to Jesus. If Jesus was like an O2 tank, it's like starting to breathe in Jesus' air, the rich grace that comes from depending on Jesus.

Now, there's two mistakes that we tend to make when it comes to being sinned against. Mistake number one is the one I'm prone to, and that's to avoid it. You don't want to deal with it.

And what we're talking about here, when Jesus is the controlling center of your life, he must compel you to, to do what's pleasing to him, to obey him.

The other mistake is more of an inner Pharisee mistake. That's when you've been wronged, and you pull out both guns blazing, and you go after somebody.

both are not pleasing to the Lord. And here's how we can kind of temper our hearts when sinned against.

[18:07] Remember Matthew 7, 1 through 5? Remember what Jesus says there in the Sermon on the Mount? He says, before you try to take the speck out of your brother's eye, would you please take the log out of your own eye?

Before you go, when you're sinned against, before you go to someone, do the heart work first of self-examination of, say, hey, is there a log in my own eye?

Here's what that'll do. It'll tenderize you. It'll tenderize you to this brother who has sinned against you, because it'll make you remember, oh, they're not the only sinner in the room.

They're not the only one who is in desperate, habitual need of God's grace, for so am I. And what'll also help is make you realize that, yes, this brother may have sinned against you, this sister may have sinned against you, but they've also sinned against God.

They've grieved him. Jesus must be the controlling center of our lives before we go and tell our brother or sister of their fault.

[19:18] fault. Now, you may be asking the question, the weeds question, well, how do you do that? What does that look like? Well, it starts with a phone call. You say, hey, so-and-so, can we talk face-to-face sometime soon?

We have something serious to talk about. Just be honest. And then when you get with them, it's just between you and him alone, you say something like, you know what?

Thank you for getting together. I love you. But I want you to know that when you did this or did that or didn't do this, according to this passage right here in the Bible, I think you sinned against God and me.

And I just wanted to get together with you to tell you that. At that moment, you've been faithful to Jesus. You've done what he has called you to.

You're not responsible for your brother's response at that point. You've been faithful to him. Did you notice it's between you and him alone?

[20:26] This first stage is the most informal and private stage of church discipline. If you imagine the circle of people who are involved, it's the smallest.

It's you and the one who sinned against you. You. Now, stepping into this may be uncomfortable for many of us.

Let's say there's something in your mind right now, but you don't know what to do. I would say reach out to one of the elders. You don't need to name names, but you can be able to say, hey, this is a new step for me.

Am I doing this right? And whether it's an elder or a mature Christian, a life group leader, they then can help you, pray for you. Before moving on, I just want to say this.

Just take the moment. Has the Spirit of God put someone on your mind that you need to get right with? That you've either sinned against or they've sinned against you?

[21:33] Don't wait. For them to take a step. You've got precedent, both for Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 to initiate. You've been authorized. This is loving Jesus and loving one another.

Now, in verse 15, Jesus points to one response. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. If he listens to you, what that means is this. They're like, you're right.

I did sin against you. Will you please forgive me? That was grievous in God's sight. And at that moment, you've been part of what God is doing in rescuing a brother from sin and restoring him to fellowship with God and others.

Process is then done. But what happens if he doesn't listen? That's where we move to verse 16 in stage 2.

But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence or two or three witnesses.

[22 : 40] I'm just going to quickly move through this so we can get to stage 3. This is the step where the circle of people involved goes from two people now to three or four people.

So this is an intensifying process. More people are being brought into the situation. More people are aware of it. Now you might be asking, who are these witnesses? Well, it's a reference back to Deuteronomy 19.15 where every charge is to be established by one or two other witnesses.

And what they're witnessing is not the original sin, but they're witnessing this brother who's been sinned against, sister who's been sinned against, going back to the brother or sister that sinned against them and taking this step.

They're witnessing the charge made. And so if you've been sinned against, you go to your brother, he doesn't listen to you. At that point, you bring one or two other mature Christians in, preferably who know the person who sinned against you, and you bring them and you make the same case. But now it's being witnessed by one or two other people. It's intensifying. It's verifying it. It's validating it. It's establishing that this has actually taken place.

[23 : 59] And so if you find yourself in that situation, it would be like you saying something, what do you say? You'd be like, thank you for getting together again. I love you.

And because you didn't listen to me the first time we met, that's why I brought so forth and so and so. When you did this, or said that, or didn't do this, according to God's word, I think you have sinned against God and me.

And we've come to tell you that. And at that point, you've been faithful to Jesus in stage two, bringing one or two witnesses with you.

You've been authorized to do this. You don't need elder approval to do this. Jesus is telling us to do this. Practically speaking, I would encourage you to, if you find yourself in this situation, choose one or two mature Christians to go with you.

Ideally, that know the person who sinned against you. It reduces the embarrassment. And another note is when you reach out to these one or two people, you will need to explain what's happening.

[25 : 16] You will need to explain to them the nature of the meeting that you're bringing them to be a part of. One of the benefits is that these one or two people, they will observe you in the meeting as well.

To help you. So, Jesus doesn't say it, but if your brother hears you at this point, you've gained your brother.

You've gained your sister. They're taking responsibility for their sin. They've asked you and God for forgiveness. And now what we're talking about is a restoration of peace.

Shalom. But what happens if he or she doesn't listen to stage two, stage three? And we see that at the beginning of verse 17. If he refuses to listen to them, you and the one or two witnesses, tell it to the church.

It's this one sentence in verse 17 that represents the step of bringing into a whole membership, into an awareness of a situation. Now, you may be saying, well, that seems a little excessive.

[26 : 34] I just want to remind you, this is intensifying. This is a way we love someone who is demonstrating a arching. And not listening.

This is a way that Jesus has prescribed to bring all of a church membership into a process out of love for a member entangled in sin. And so now the circle of people involved, it expands to include a membership of a church.

It's a little bit more formal because now you have to have a church meeting like ours next week.

You've got to make people aware. It intensifies things. And that intensity is actually good.

It's Jesus prescribed. To raise the seriousness of sin. In verse 17, we read, if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

The it is the fault, the sin. It's the people, the person involved. You're going to name a name. You're going to explain a situation sufficiently, honoring privacy.

[27 : 45] Lastly, we don't want to air laundry unnecessarily. But enough for a membership to become aware of a situation. And so this tell it to the church is in one sense an informational meeting.

We just want to let you know what's going on here with one of our members and how serious this is. But it's also a call to action. What this stage is is a rallying of the membership of a church, not just to be informed, but to act.

To be used by our good shepherd to bring back a straying church member. We're getting all hands on deck in one sense.

Here's what this is going to look like.

The question that we need to be asking is this. When we enter a stage like this together, we're asking the question, what is the most loving thing we can do for our brother or sister entangled in sin?

[29 : 01] What is the most loving thing that we can do? And so when we make the church aware, the members of our church aware of a specific situation, first and foremost, it is a call to prayer.

A call to pray for this person who's entangled by sin. To ask God to move by His Spirit to bring about repentance, full repentance, full ownership of a wrong or wrong's done.

To take these things to heart. To call for fasting and praying on behalf of this brother or sister entangled in sin because we love Jesus and we love them and we don't want them to stray.

We want to give them every opportunity to come back. Baby, come back! So this step we'll take is a call to prayer for a particular person and particular name.

But this is also going to be a call to act for our members and the members who particularly, who know this person, who have a relationship with them.

[30 : 13] It's a call to act. To not avoid it, not to ignore it. Shoot them a text, shoot her an email, leave a voice message, say, hey, we had this church meeting.

I was brought, made aware of what's going on. I am praying for you and that God, you would humble yourself and turn back to the Lord and be restored. I love you.

I don't want you straying. Could you imagine a church that loves a straying sheep that way? Not looking to shame them to shame them, but to call them back to shalom.

And as for those members who don't know this person, don't have a relationship with them, but are aware of them, know of them, this informs what happens when you bump into this person at Woodman's or Festival or Chick-fil-A.

You don't talk about the Packers. perhaps, you say something like this. I'm glad to see you. I just want to let you know that I'm praying for you.

[31 : 26] That the members of Christ the King Church are praying for you. That you would, that you would turn from your refusal and that you would humble yourself and turn to the Lord and seek peace.

Would you please talk to the elders? elders. Speaking the truth in love. Not all speaking the truth in love shows up as church discipline, but all church discipline, every word of it is speaking the truth in love.

These are some practical steps we're going to be taking if we get to this point next Sunday. And I just want to make sure you understand and you're hearing loud and clear, this is out of love.

for a brother or sister who is entangled in their sin. But what happens if they, what happens if they don't listen? If they listen, we've gained our brother or sister.

We rejoice, but if, if they don't listen, then what? That's the second, second sentence of verse 17. Stage four, and if he refuses to listen even to the church, if he refuses, if she refuses to listen even to the church.

[32 : 48] I forgot to mention that process, that time frame when the church is brought in and we want to give that sufficient time, right, for God to use his church to have these conversations and to be praying.

so we don't necessarily have a time frame on it. It's not going to be 72 hours. It's not going to be two years. We want to give it sufficient time for God to work.

But if, but if this, if this member doesn't listen, doesn't even listen to the church, what then? Well, let me just, let me just help you see the pattern.

in verse 16, what if he does not listen? First sentence of verse 17, if he refuses to listen. Second sentence of verse 17, and if he refuses to listen even to the church.

There is this pattern of refusal. It's unrepentance. It's, it's an arching of the back. It's saying, I will not do that. And it's, it's made evident in actions, not so much in words.

[33 : 57] A straying sheep who is refusing to be brought back to the fold. Are they a sheep?

If we reach that point, Jesus is very clear that the members of Christ the King Church are to recategorize how we think about this person. Did you notice this?

In verse 15, if your brother sins against you. And at the end of verse 17, let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector.

How about that for intensification? You treat him first as a brother in Christ and then you're going to treat them as a Gentile or tax collector. In Jesus' day, what that meant are those people who are deliberately in sin.

They're hardened in their sinning. They're refusing to change. I think Jesus is speaking of treat them as a non-Christian. Treat them as someone who has not experienced the transformational grace of Jesus that they're not alive in Christ.

[35 : 11] Christ. And what we've seen here is the evidence of that. This is Jesus helping us see. Now what this means, what this step is, when we think of them this way, this is technically what we call removal from membership.

It's an act of discipline where we're saying, no, they're no longer a part of our church because they're no longer seen as a Christian. It also involves a step of excommunication and what I understand that to mean is they are no longer allowed to the Lord's table.

That's the reference when I was doing the communion meditation. It's got implications to that table of our participating together in what Christ has done for us.

It's terribly serious. But this brings closure for us as a church.

church. We've taken the steps. We've made the appeals. We've brought in the church. We've given it time. And now, the Lord Jesus is giving us release.

[36 : 20] Treat them now as a non-Christian. And this may raise a couple questions for you. Could this person who's been removed from membership excommunicated from the Lord's Supper, can they come to a service on a Sunday?

And the answer to that is, well, unless there's a legal reason why not or a safety reason why not, then yeah, we would welcome them as a non-Christian. Praying that they would hear the gospel and repent and believe.

Take full responsibility for what is done. Another question that may come up is this, well, wait, at that moment in stage four when you remove them from membership, did they just lose their salvation?

Now, this is not an easy thing to navigate. I do think there's this ever so slight possibility that an actual spirit-indwelt Christian could walk through something like this, but I think it would be incredibly rare.

Incredibly rare. In fact, Jesus says, treat them as if they're a non-Christian. So I think the better explanation in terms of did they lose their salvation would be kind of thinking in terms of Matthew 24, 13?

[37 : 55] The one who endures to the end will be saved. The book of Hebrews will make a claim that a saving faith is a persevering faith. So if someone falls away, likely they were never saved to begin with.

This is the practice Jesus outlines for church discipline. four stages and after the service next Sunday we'll be stepping into stage three where we tell the church.

Inform the church of the person involved, the situation, and call the church to act out of love for him. Church discipline is the process, the loving process, the loving process.

Appointed by Jesus himself, by which Christians seek to restore fellow church members entangled in sin. It's a normal process. This is responsibility for one another.

We've been authorized to do this. This is a sanctifying process that more and more people would share in God's holiness because that is good. It is an intensifying process.

[39 : 09] It becomes more and more public as a brother or sister refuses to listen. That's not on us. It's them. It's a loving process.

Love for Jesus, love for his church, love for members entangled in sin who need to be rescued and restored. Think about it this way. If you had a brother or sister entangled in sin and you did nothing, is that loving them?

It's not loving them. This process is a loving process to track down and bring back straying sheep. would you pray with me? Lord Jesus, we're thankful for this passage you've given us.

It's weighty. It's serious. It's important. It's messy. We don't do it perfectly.

[40 : 36] We make mistakes. Oh, but Lord, we want to please you. We want to guard your name among the nations and we want to preserve the health of your people.

So, Father, would you pour out your spirit upon us that as we walk through these situations together, whether this Sunday or down the line, God, would you by your spirit make us together courageous, gentle, restore a brother caught in a trespass and a spirit of gentleness, loving, faithful. And we pray for our brother that, God, you would grant him repentance and full restoration. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.