

See How Christ Disciples His Church

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[0 : 00] Today's sermon text is in Revelation chapter 2, very end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 2. We'll read from verses 1 through 7.

For our visitors, I'll just give some context that on the past one year as a church, we were mostly preaching through the gospel of John. We left off around John 14. Once we're finished with this series on the church, we'll pick back up where we left off and we'll finish preaching through the gospel of John.

Over the summer, we also had a special little break and we looked at one psalm every Sunday. So we started at Psalm 1 and we ended with Psalm 8. Lord willing, next summer, we'll start with Psalm 9 and we'll keep that going.

And so today, we'll have our fourth of seven in a series called Life in the Father's House. And that's a reference to what Jesus said in John 17, that he's going to his father's house to prepare a place for you, his church.

And while we're on earth, the church is the way that God prepares us for heaven, for his father's house. Today's focus is church discipline.

[1 : 07] And that just comes because we're following through our constitution three or four pages at a time. And that's the section we got to in Sunday school. So I wanted the sermon to complement that focus. And so in our constitution, we looked at formative discipline and corrective discipline.

And so as a point of reference, this text, I see it as Christ providing formative discipline, ongoing discipline as he walks among and speaks to his church.

As I read this, keep in mind, we believe this is God's inspired, inerrant, infallible, clear, and sufficient word. It's God's very own word for you, his church.

So when I'm done reading, I'll say this is the word of God. And if you believe this, you respond, thanks be to God. Revelation 2, 1 through 7. 1 through 8.

Verse 3. And as born and as patience for my name's sake, you have labored and has not fainted.

Verse 4. Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.

[2 : 42] Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of this place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hast hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. Verse 7.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. The Bible says that the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord, it endures forever.

Let's pray. Father, we ask that you will give the eyes of faith and the ears of faith.

[4 : 02] That though we're in this world that's fallen, and though the darkness hides you, that by the power of your Holy Spirit, you will open our eyes to behold the glory of Jesus Christ as he ministers to his church.

That you will minister here yourself, Lord Jesus. We pray, Lord, that we can hear the gospel, that we can hear the truth that Jesus Christ desires for his church, from his throne room in heaven, and from his ministry as the great high priest.

We ask all of this for your glory alone, and for Christ's sake. Amen. Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer for you and for me today is simply that we would see Christ discipling his church.

We read the word, you hear the word, but in Revelation, when John hears the voice, he sees a vision. That's why I think it's appropriate that we would ask the Lord to help us to see Christ through

his word as it's ministered from this glorious text.

And to see how Christ disciplines his church. Let me ask you that question. What do you think? How long does Christ need to discipline his church?

[5 : 37] How long does Christ disciple you? I read this week of a young man as a teenager, and he lived in England in the countryside, later moved into London.

His name was Robert Robinson. As a teenager, he and his buddies were mocking this lady who was on the street, and she was known to make predictions, and so they went around to mock her and ask her what the prediction was, and she looked at this man, Robinson, and said that one day your grandkids will know how to read, which was more than he could say for himself or his entire family.

But that stirred in his mind, and it actually led him to go hear a preacher preach for the first time. It happened that that preacher was George Whitefield, the first great awakening evangelist.

And the Lord did not save Robinson when he first heard the gospel, but the gospel, like Pilgrim's Progress, it worked on him for three years, and his own sin became like a burden on his back.

And later, the Lord saved this man and brought him into a church to be disciplined. The church he was taken into was the church in London. The pastor at the time was John Gill.

[6 : 48] John Gill came about 100 years before Charles Spurgeon in that same church. The reason I tell you about Robinson, after he was saved, after he was disciplined in a wonderful church for many, many years, he wrote this hymn, and the hymn begins this way.

Prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Is your heart prone to wonder like Robinson?

I know mine is. And doesn't that thought terrify you? So for how long does Christ disciple you?

Think about the perspective of our author here to give some context on Revelation.

It comes from the pen of the Apostle John. John was most likely the youngest of all the disciples of Jesus who walked with him in his ministry for three years. And John, his last thoughts before our Lord Jesus was crucified was of all of the disciples wandering away from Christ, forsaking him and abandoning Jesus.

They did not love Jesus to the end, did they? And maybe that's why the main message on John's tongue that he wanted to preach or that he wanted to put in every epistle and in his gospel, the main message is that Christ loves you to the end.

[8 : 16] For how long do you need to be disciplined? Look at our sermon text, verse 4. Verse 4 is the heart of this passage. And not only do I want us to see where the church in Ephesus needed reprimand, I want us to see how Christ disciplined them and brought that to them.

In verse 4, John writes, You, church of Ephesus, you abandoned the love you had at first. Remember and repent.

So we need Jesus Christ to disciple us, to call us to himself, for as long as our hearts are prone to wonder, don't we? That's how long Christ keeps discipling the church.

The word discipleship, according to the Oxford Dictionary, it comes from the Old English, a Latin phrase, or a Latin word called discipulus, and it means a learner.

A learner, and it comes from the term to discern. So what was it that John learned? He was a disciple of Christ.

[9 : 25] Well, when John introduces himself in the Gospel of John, he doesn't say I'm the last living apostle. He doesn't say I'm the senior pastor at the wealthiest, most prominent church, which was the church of Ephesus. He says, I am the one whom Jesus loved.

That's all you need to know about me. I ran away from Christ, and he loved me to the end. All of John's letters elevate the theme of love more than any other New Testament writer.

To give a comparison, 1 Corinthians uses the word love 15 times, and that's our glorious love chapter. But by comparison, the Gospel of John uses that word of the love of God and to love his people 39 times.

And in that short little epistle called 1 John, 26 times he writes for the church to have that love.

John's main point is stated really well in that epistle, 1 John 3.1.

He says, See what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called children of God.

And so we are. See, it's the love of God shown in Christ.

[10 : 36] You get to belong to the family of God. If you're a Christian, by the love of God, you are in the house of the Father. Well now, this vision that he gets in Revelation, it comes from banishment

to the island of Patmos.

Most likely before this time, tradition has it that John had been taken and tortured, a boiling vat of oil, and he was dipped inside of that and pulled back out before he could die.

So there's this old, disfigured man with chronic pain in exile, away from the church. But by God's grace, the Lord, he says, I'm worshiping on the Lord's day and I'm in the Spirit.

And what God gives him in Revelation 1.17 is a vision of heaven itself opened up. John writes, I saw Jesus. I fell at his feet as though dead.

What was it that Jesus said to him? Fear not. I am the first and the last, the living one. I died and behold, I am alive forevermore. And I have the keys of death and Hades.

[11:40] Verse 19, write therefore these things that you have seen, those that are, and those that are to take place after this. And so we come to our sermon text and what I want to walk you through are five descriptions that John gives to all the churches of how Jesus disciplines his church.

The first one is this. See how close Christ is to his church. By the language John uses, we see that Jesus Christ is very, very close to his church.

Three evidences from the text. First, John tells us that it is Christ himself who speaks to his church. Look at verse 1. Revelation 2, verse 1.

To the angel, the word angel is messenger, of the church in Ephesus, write the words of him. The Lord Jesus Christ wants John to write these letters telling the church, Jesus Christ speaks to you. that phrase, the words of him. It's used 60 times in the minor prophets. You've heard it translated, thus saith the Lord.

[13:02] Jesus Christ is the final prophet. And he stands from his throne in heaven as prophet speaking to his church. How close is Jesus? He speaks through his word to his church.

Jesus is acting like one of those minor prophet covenant prosecutors. But he's not prosecuting the Mosaic covenant.

He's shepherding. He's using words of encouragement and words of exhortation to shepherd his church in the covenant of grace until they're ready for heaven with him.

And it's words of encouragement and exhortation because we need both, don't we? That's how our Lord Jesus speaks to his church. Why is he telling these words to the church in Ephesus?

Think about what a powerful church this is. The apostle John became the elder of the church in Ephesus. Can you think of that?

[14:01] You know, the longest living apostle now, one of the elders, shepherding, preaching to the church in Ephesus. Apollos, a very gifted man of rhetoric who was discipled on the side and then came back preaching the glorious gospel.

He was a preacher to the church in Ephesus. Paul was a pastor or at least apostle ministering and preaching and teaching in Ephesus for three years. And when Paul left, you know who he left as the pastor, one of the elders to preach to the church in Ephesus.

It was Timothy. This is the church we're talking about. A mature, well-established church that had been discipled through Christ's messengers one after the other.

And yet, they still need Christ to disciple them now. They didn't arrive after all of that. Now, don't think that this message is only for one church at that time in history.

Look at verse 7 of our sermon text. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So, from the island of Patmos, the closest church would have been the church in Ephesus, right off the coast.

[15:12] And then, the Roman courier circuit would have included these seven churches in this exact order. Why seven? Well, there are many more than seven, and these letters were to be circulated among all of them.

Seven represents the number of completeness and fullness. So, by addressing individual churches, he's lifting up like case studies for all of the churches, even those who have an ear to hear now.

This is the ministry of God to you, church. My first application is that Christ actively speaks to his church every day. Whoever has an ear to hear must hear the words of Jesus Christ.

He is close to you, and he speaks. So, what the church needs today, just as much as ever before, to use the phrase from Haggai 1:13, is the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message.

He speaks through his messengers at every faithful biblical church the message of Jesus Christ himself. You see how close Christ is to his church?

[16:14] He speaks to his church. Second evidence of how close Christ is is that he holds his church. Verse 1 describes Jesus as he who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

In each of these addresses to these seven churches, there's a little prologue. It describes the speaker. It describes Christ. And each prologue has a point.

And the point is customized to what that church, that congregation needs to hear. To give you an example, the church in Smyrna was persecuted. And what Jesus tells them that they need to hear is a message from he who died and came to life.

You're persecuted. You're going to be martyred. Hear the message from him who died first for you and came to life. His resurrection is your hope. To the church in Pergamum in the prologue, they had allowed false teaching and heresy to creep in.

And the message to them is this. It's the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. In Ephesians, back to Ephesians chapter 6 tells us that's the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

[17:28] That's what they need. So what is the message to the church of Ephesus? What is it that they need to hear? In verse 1, it's that Christ, he is the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

Jesus Christ holds the messenger. He holds the spiritual representation of every congregation in his right hand in heaven.

They need to hear that this is Christ's church. Christ is the one who holds it. I think that this is an inference, but my best guess is that the church in Ephesus, based on what comes next, they might have been tempted to think that the kingdom of Christ on earth will rise or fall on them.

Think of all those who had preached to them. Think of how well established this church was. They need to hear Christ holds his church. It is not by your works that anyone will be saved.

You be faithful and you serve in the church out of love for Christ because he is the one who holds you, church, and there is no amount of manly effort that you can bring to the table because if you lose the love for Christ, your lamp will go out.

[18:55] It is Christ's church. You cannot hold it all together by your own strength. Isn't that a relief to us? It is Christ who holds his church.

And with that also is the promise that no matter what happens to his church on earth, spiritually, we are held by Christ. He holds us in his hands and we are persecuted but we are united to Christ.

In the week ahead, the next five days, each of us in our different industries and lines of work, we will go through hardship. In this world, we will have trouble, various kinds.

Christ holds you because in Christ you are united to God himself. We get this promise in 1 Corinthians 6, 15, and 17. Your bodies are the members of Christ and he that is joined to Christ is one spirit.

You and I are only truly held by Christ if we enjoy that union with Jesus himself as mediator. The third evidence that Jesus is very close to his church is that he walks among his church.

[20:02] Look at verse 1 again. Jesus describes himself as one who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

this is a word picture of the menorah. The menorah was the seven lamps that were set in the holy place so that the priest would go in and trim the wick and clean up the wax and add oil so they would be continually burning.

And the purpose of these seven lamps was to light the way into the holy of holies. So Jesus is describing himself as the high priest who ministers as a high priest leading you by the light of his work to the holy of holies itself.

That's who Jesus is. He's the one who walks among his church. He is the great final and everlasting high priest. Church, it is Christ who trims us.

It's Christ who pours the oil of his Holy Spirit in us, in our lives, our hearts, in a congregation. He is the one who keeps the lamp burning. He ministers.

[21:16] He prays God. Do you see how close Jesus is to his church? The second thing I invite you to see here is how well Christ knows his church.

He is so close to his church and he knows his church so well. in verse two we read Jesus says to the church I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance.

He gives this list of three and it's called a triad. He gives three of those. So three triads. This is the first one. I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance. that's how the church of Ephesus was known.

Christ says I see you getting up early. I see you arriving and going the extra mile. I see you sweating and laboring alongside one another. I see how you heard my message and you've been living it out.

The message in Ephesians, the same church Ephesians 4.28 was labor. Do honest work with your own hands and share with anyone in need. And it seems like the Ephesian church was obeying that.

[22 : 32] Paul had written to Timothy. Paul probably worked anyone under the ground. Paul was a hard worker. And Paul admonished Timothy, though he was weak and frail in the body, Timothy, labor in preaching and teaching.

Christ sees the toil of his church. What else does Christ know? Well, Christ commends his church for also hating what Jesus hates.

Look at verse 6. He says, this you have, you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. And Christ commends them for this. The Nicolaitans was a heresy and it got long gospel wrong. Nothing new under the sun, right? We get long gospel wrong, all kinds of problems creep into the church. The Nicolaitans had said that there is a special type of enlightenment that some people can access and when you do that, it doesn't matter how you live.

So it led to licentiousness and all kinds of evil sin and the Ephesian church says, no, that's not what the apostles revealed, that's not what God gave in his word, that's not what our Bible says.

[23 : 40] Paul had been there for three years and he is using disciplined language by saying this. He's saying, it's right for a biblical church that knows the Bible well, it's right for such a church to hate what Christ hates.

When there is false teaching that's harmful, you need to hate that. He's saying this is a good thing. Why? Because I hate that, says Jesus. They're preaching a lesser gospel. They're distorting the good news and they're distorting all that I have revealed in my word.

You need to know my word and it's good that you hate heresy. So Christ knows that they worked hard, he knows that they hated the right things and in verse two he says, you cannot bear with those who are evil but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not and found them to be false.

That's our second triad. Let me give some context to this. There was so much corrupted living in the city of Ephesus. The temple in Ephesus was called the temple of Diana and people would come from all over the world to worship the goddess Diana which would then, it was syncretism where it was combined with Greek mythology as well.

So like the twin sister of Apollo got merged with Diana and it was the goddess of fertility. So around this temple were all kinds of sexual practices that were extremely perverse. There were those who would take the silver and make it into little statues so all these pilgrims who came to worship at the temple of Diana could take back a silver souvenir.

[25 : 16] Well when the gospel arrived in Ephesus they wanted to kill Paul because the gospel undermined this entire industry. And because there was so much worship and people giving money to the temple of Diana it became a banking system so it was like the London of all of Asia Minor.

And Paul had written to them those who go the way of the world and those who bow down their knee to Diana this goddess of perversity.

It's Satan. It's represented in Revelation as Babylon and other things. You are choosing idolatry over the love of the true God. You're rejecting the love of Christ and you're turning to adultery.

And so he's admonishing the church to you need to discipline within the church any that are loving an idol more than they're loving Christ. If they're loving their sin more than they love the Lord Jesus their Savior it's right for the church to test that and to call it false and to not bear with that evil anymore.

It's right for the church to do that. Well Christ he knows their toil he knows they hate the right things and he also commends them for patient endurance for his name's sake.

[26 : 31] This is the third and final triad in verse 3. Jesus says to the church in Ephesus I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake and you have not grown weary.

Praise God. In Ephesians 4 they had been told as we are to walk in a manner worthy of Christ's calling. Do you remember that last week? And they're to walk with all humility and gentleness and patience bearing with one another in love and the Lord Jesus Christ saw them obey what he told them by the spirit and he commends them for doing just that.

You have been walking together as I called you to do. We've seen how close Christ is to his church and we see how well Christ knows his church. Number three, see what Christ cares most about for his church.

Verse 4. The words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Church, I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

He brings correction. He brings exhortation. But there were nine words of encouragement, specific affirmation to this church.

[27 : 50] Nine of them to one correction. That's the ratio Jesus sets up. Who are we to make up a different ratio than that, right? We should always be speaking the truth in love, encouraging one another, building one another up.

And when we need to, there can be a place for correction, but it's wrapped in so much love and specific affirmation that it's not critiquing and it's not nitpicking and it's not discouraging.

I'm convicted of my flesh and my tendency to bring any correction that way. I need to learn from the example of the Lord Jesus. This is how he disciplines. This is how he disciplines his church.

There's a tradition, I'm not sure, you know, if this is, you can prove it anywhere, but, you know, the message in 1 John is little children love one another.

And the one historian has it that the apostle John, before he got exiled, he had been imprisoned and he had to, you know, leave Ephesus, but he didn't get to come back one last time as an old man.

[28 : 53] And what did he preach to them? He said, little children of Ephesus, love one another. And that's the theme that's on John's heart as an apostle and it's not because it's John's idea, that's because that's what Jesus taught John.

And that's what the Lord Jesus himself had to say to the church in Ephesus. Love one another.

John Owen makes a good observation and I don't know of anyone who gets law and gospel better than John Owen, at least more thoroughly than John Owen.

And he said that some abandoned their first love for Christ because they think that abiding in Christ is a plant that needs neither watering, fertilizing, or pruning, but that will thrive to itself.

Have you fallen into that? Well, we know it's true from Ephesians 2.8 that by grace we have been saved through faith and this is not our own doing, it is the gift of God. Amen. We're not saved by works that no man should boast.

But in verse 4 of Revelation 2, we read that they had a love at the beginning that they no longer have now. The word there is that the love that you had, and that verb is possession, to have a love.

[30 : 13] The Greek term, it brings all these connotations. It means to have and to hold. It's to possess in your mind in a way that agitates the emotions.

It's to cherish, to hold fast, to keep, and to highly regard. That's how they viewed the Lord Jesus when He first saved them out of their sin.

That's how they viewed one another when they first got started. But somewhere along the way, by not watering and fertilizing and tending to that love, it was abandoned.

It was neglected. That little plant of their love, the leaves are starting to turn yellow. You can see some other stuff starting to grow. It's smaller.

It seems dried up. And the Lord Jesus is the gardener, and He's walking in the midst, and He says, you need to tend to this. You love because I first loved you.

[31 : 20] now grow in my love. He gossels them back to that kind of love. He gossels His church.

They need to remember how the letter of Ephesians began. Ephesians 1.5, In love God predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

How in love He did that. Ephesians 1.15, Paul encourages the church at that stage. He says, I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and I have heard of your love toward all the saints.

You need to get back to that place. You need to do that again. So fourth, I want us to see together how Christ disciplines His church.

Three observations on how Christ disciplines. look at verse five. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen.

[32 : 24] Jesus doesn't say, think about how you fell or why you fell. He says, remember from where you fell. Think back.

Recall. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen. Put your sight on that. That's what I've called you to.

Grow back into that. It's going to take work. It can't be neglected and abandoned. You must grow into that. Remember that vision I have for you.

I was trying to think of a good illustration of this. And I picture a family going on a hike up a climb. And I'm not going to put an age on this child who loses the love, okay, but you can picture whatever you need to.

One of the children in this family is still walking along, but they are emotionally checked out. They're still taking the steps, but they are very bothered by their sibling.

[33 : 27] They don't want to share their water. They're not enjoying this. They're just putting one foot in front of the other out of duty. Remember what it was like when we first started, when there was more shade, when the dirt smelled good and wet, and when you're having fun jumping up on the boulders and back down.

Remember that. That's how we want it to be. We need to get back to that. And the Lord Jesus next says not only remember it, but he calls them to take action.

He calls his church to repent in verse five. Repent and do the works you did at first. A mature, well established, well taught church needs to repent.

They need to return to the love that Christ first put in their hearts. He says to them, you are mature, you have sound doctrine, and you have worked hard for a long time.

But now you need to preach the gospel to yourselves again. You need to have joy in all those little things like you used to. Remember the gospel, church.

[34 : 45] Never forget that. Ephesians 2, 3 through 5. You once lived in the passions of your flesh. That's who you were. You were carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind.

And you were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. Have you forgotten that that's what you were? But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

That's what God did because he is love. And if you think of the gospel, it will be a reflex to obey.

You will do the works you did at first. At first, remember how you used to serve others. You used to have someone else over to your home. You used to encourage others, even when you were tired yourself.

You will do those works again when you gospel yourself back through this. When you ask God to fill you with his love because you ran out on your own, you will do all those little things again.

[35 : 55] And God will bring your joy back into your heart as you serve one another. It's an expression of your love for him. How else does Christ disciple and discipline his church?

He uses covenantal terms. He brings them curses and blessings. Like an Old Testament prophet, like Moses said this pattern in Deuteronomy 28 and 29.

If you go this path that leads to death, there are warnings. There is eternity at stake. But if you walk the narrow way, there are blessings for those who belong to Christ.

He lays out curses for disobedience and blessings for obedience. Jesus is a covenant prosecutor. What is the curse or the threat that he brings them for disobedience?

Look at verse 6. If you do not remember and do not do those works, I will come to you. Jesus Christ himself will come to his church and remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent.

[37 : 05] That means that that congregation's light in heaven will be extinguished. Their lamp will be turned off. Let me clarify.

I don't see anywhere here that necessitates this to be referring to an individual losing their salvation. I see this as congregational accountability.

That congregation, the doors will be closed. It will become a junior college. church. The work of Jesus as prophet and as priest is to fill the lamp with oil, the Holy Spirit, the love of God to trim and to manage it, maintain it so that it does burn brightly pointing the way to the Holy of Holies.

When a church does not do those things for which God intended it to do, what purpose does it have? It should shut down. It's Jesus himself who brings judgment and his judgment starts with the church.

When Christ comes, his second coming, it will be a day of terror. And the ones who should tremble the most are those who are in a church. You need to look around and be ready for that day within whatever church you're at.

[38 : 20] He begins his judgment with his own people. 1 John 4.20 If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love

God whom he has not seen.

That's why it's so important to remember the love, the union you have in Christ. It will play itself out in all your other relationships. All those works that I'm calling you to do, that's a simple expression of whether or not you belong to Christ.

Revelation 3.19 He reminds them, it's those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, Jesus says. So be zealous and repent.

And I will praise God if right now he's convicting you like he's convicted me this week and again now. I need to repent. I need to remember that love. Praise God.

Because that means that Christ loves you. He reproves and disciplines you if he loves you. What does this mean for congregational church discipline?

[39 : 29] That's our focus in the series a little bit with Sunday school. Well Hebrews 13.17 is the admonition that the elders of each congregation are to keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account to Christ Christ himself.

Church discipline has Christ in mind from the very beginning to the very end. We will give an account to Christ for every single soul entrusted to the care of a congregation.

And if the congregation as a whole has gone so far from forgetting Christ, they deserve to be shut down. Let that congregation close its doors. That's what Jesus says.

He'll do it himself. The church is the dwelling place of God in Christ. So church life is life in God's house.

He judges his own house first. So what do you pray? What's your response with the thought of Christ coming to judge and his judgment beginning within his own church? Let's go back to that hymn.

[40 : 42] Prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Take my heart, Lord. Take and seal it with your Holy Spirit in thy courts above.

I don't trust myself with my heart, with my soul. Seal me, Lord. May your Holy Spirit live in me and fill me so that I don't need to question that. Do I belong to you? Your Spirit will reassure me of that. And you seal me, Lord, in a place that I can't touch, in a place I can't mess up, in heaven itself. And then the fifth, last heading I've got here is, see how Christ disciplines his church.

We saw how he disciplines through covenant curses and threats, but he disciplines by also extending covenantal blessings. Blessings promised for obedience.

Look at verse 7. To the one who conquers. He's not talking about an entire congregation. He's talking about an individual now. To the one who conquers.

[41 : 45] I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. The Lord Jesus stands in heaven and he, he prosecutes his covenant of grace to his church.

Respond to my love and I will bless you. I am the second Adam, he says. But remember with the original Adam in the garden of Eden, he was under a covenant of works.

Adam had to obey Christ, obey God personally, perpetually and perfectly in every way. And Adam fell short of the glory of God. And all who are under Adam as the first federal head are under the curse of death because of sin.

Adam's sin as well as our own sin added on to that. And Jesus says, I am offering to you the blessing of heaven as the great and final Adam. Why can Christ offer this?

That we get to eat from that tree of life that Adam could never touch? It's because Christ already has it. He fulfilled that demand of the law. He himself put himself under the law.

[42 : 49] He accomplished the covenant of works that Adam fell short of. And Christ holds, he holds that fruit of the tree of life. So when he says that to the one who conquers, I will give this, it's because he already has it.

It's in his hands. There's nothing that can take that out of Christ's hands. He merited it, not because he lacked anything, but because we lack everything. And the Father has placed that in his hands. And it's to the one who conquers. To the one who conquers an apathy toward others. To the one who conquers being passive in your walk with the Lord.

You conquer by remembering that love of God for you, by gospeling yourself back through that once again. Do you see how Christ disciplines his church? He's the good shepherd.

His rod and his staff, they comfort us. His rod of correction puts us back on the path when we stray. And his staff, it guides us in the way of life everlasting.

[43 : 48] Christ's true church, every believer, has love only because God first loved you.

And he calls us to tend that love, cultivate it, take care of it. On this earth, it will always feel like a battle to cultivate this love that comes from God.

And that's because we have remaining sin in our flesh. Our hearts are prone to wonder. So how long does Christ need to disciple his church? As long as your heart is prone to wonder in mine. How long does Christ keep discipling us, his church? He keeps discipling us as long as he loves us. And his love is unending for his church. How long does Christ disciple his church?

As long as we are still on this fallen earth and he is in heaven. And there will be a day when he comes and his kingdom of heaven is fully on earth. That day will be prepared for eternity with him.

[44 : 48] But in the meantime, remember, beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how close he is to you, his church. How he speaks to you.

He holds you. He walks among us. Stay close to him one step at a time. I love the picture of the Lord Jesus of his yoke, his light.

You're yoked to Christ. But he does all the work. He's pulling and plowing and you're walking in step with him. And as you walk with him, he teaches you. And what he loves, you love.

What he hates, you hate more and more and more. What you lack, you see right here, yoked to Christ, I have it all. In John 13, 34 through 35, Jesus said, just as I have loved you, you are to love one another.

And by this, all people will know that you, dear church, are my disciples. If you have love for one another, your little lamp will be burning bright and the weight of the Holy of Holies will be visible.

[45 : 53] Don't hide that light. Let it shine brightly that the world can see you are ones who I've saved and I put my love in you and you point the way to the only one who can give such love to sinners that have been saved.

Never forget, beloved church, what Christ cares most about. And it's that we love him, that we love one another. Christ's heart never wonders from his church.

His love never runs out. He loved you until the end of his death on the cross and he loves you until the very end and into all eternity.

Praise the Lord of love. We're going to sing this in a moment. Crown him the Lord of love. Behold his hands inside, rich wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified.

All hail, Redeemer, hail, for thou hast died for me. Thy praise and glory shall not fail throughout eternity. We welcome the discipline of our loving Christ.

[47 : 09] He is so near to his church and he is so worthy of our love. And we do have the promise as a congregation, by God's help, that as long as his love remains in us, the lamp of this congregation will never go out because he is the one who holds his church.

And he who rescued us from our sin because he is love, he is the same one who disciplines us because he is love.

Praise this God we have. Would you pray with me? Lord, our love for you and for yours, it is so prone to wonder.

But Father, we put our eyes back on Christ. We see him ministering to us and we see how you rescued us from sin and danger, how we are purchased by your blood.

And we ask, Lord, that by your help we will walk on earth as a stranger because we are sons and heirs of God in heaven. Amen.

[48 : 27] Take some time to reflect on the gospel that you have heard. Let the Lord stir back up your love for him.