

6. Christian Restoration

INTRO: How many times have you heard believers claim this verse: “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst”? What is usually neglected in a claiming of this verse is a consideration of its context: Christian discipline! It has nothing to do with prayer meetings, Bible studies, or evangelistic visitation.

Someone once said that church discipline is God’s way of putting teeth into holiness.

1. According to Hebrews 12:4-11 and Revelation 3:19, what is an integral part of God’s love for us? (House Church* Discussion Question 1).

2. According to Proverbs 12:1, what choice faces every believer? (House Church Discussion Question 2).

3. How does God the Father use the Word and the Spirit to discipline us? (House Church Discussion Question 3).

4. What should happen when a brother or sister refuses the conviction of the Spirit and the clear teaching of the Word (Mt 18, Ga 6)? (House Church Discussion Question 4).

******5. In Matthew 18:1-9, what different examples did Jesus use to show the seriousness of causing someone else to sin? (House Church Discussion Question 11). 1.) Millstone, 18:6 2.) Woe, 18:7.**

How did Jesus illustrate the seriousness of sin in Matthew 18:8-9? With the hyperbole of cutting off hand or foot and gouging out eye if it causes you to sin. (Jesus would have made a great shock radio talk show host).

What effects were the various sin statements of Matthew 18:1-9 designed to have on Jesus’ disciples?

******To what extent will the Father go to rescue a wayward Christian, based on Matthew 18:10-14?**

Based on Matthew 18:14, how does the Father feel toward Christians enslaved to sin?

6. What application should Matthew 18:10-14 hold for us? (*House Church Discussion Question 12*).

Based on Matthew 18:12-14, what attitude should we have when dealing with a Christian in sin? One of great love and concern, not disgust, not anger, not revenge, not like the Gestapo.

7. According to Matthew 18:15-17, what are the steps of the church discipline process? (*House Church Discussion Question 5*).

Step 1 ~ You talk with him alone, 18:15.

Step 2 ~ You take along one or two others to talk with him, 18:16.

Step 3 ~ You tell it to the church, 18:17a.

Step 4 ~ Treat him as a pagan or tax collector, 18:17b.

What in this passage indicates whether we are dealing with believers or unbelievers in doing this? Compare 1 Corinthians 5:12-13. The word "brother" signals that this is a process to be followed between professing believers only. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 specifically states that this is to be the case:

ESV 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

8. What questions regarding motive should someone ask himself before taking the first step in the discipline process? (*House Church Discussion Question 6*).

~ Step 1 ~

How public should this first step be (Mt 18:15); i.e., how many people are to be involved?

Is this the first step (Mt 18:15) to be taken by the church leadership or someone else? How so? The text states that "you" are to do it; no prior consultation with the leadership of the church is required or appropriate. We are all deputized!

Review: What mind set (state of mind, attitude) should be taken in approaching this sinning brother? Matthew 18:10-13. See also 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

ESV 2 Timothy 2:24-26 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his

opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

What would it mean for the confronted brother to “listen” (Mt 18:15) to you?

It means he agrees with you that he is in sin, and he agrees to take appropriate action to end it.

What should happen next if he admits that you are right and agrees to sin no more? Mt 18:15b. Case closed; you have won your brother. As with the shepherd in Matthew 18:13, there should be great happiness. In my opinion, 90% of all church discipline will start and end here (with success).

~ Step 2 ~

What should happen next if the brother does *not* listen to you (Mt 18:16)?

9. Based on Galatians 6:1, what type of Christians should you take along with you as a witnesses? (*House Church Discussion Question 8*).

ESV **Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

10. According to Jesus, what is the purpose of taking along several witnesses in the second step of the discipline process (Mt 18:16)? (*House Church Discussion Question 7*). In agreement and as witnesses.

Exactly what “matter” are these witnesses supposed to “establish” (Mt 18:16)?

- 1). They could be witness to the crime itself, if it was of a public nature (not a common scenario)
- 2). They are witness the confrontation process itself (i.e., the 2nd step in restoration) and to encourage the brother to repent (the most likely scenario).

Why would it not gossip to tell these one or two other people in advance about the sin? It is not gossip because they are an essential part of the solution. It also is not gossip because this is how Jesus told us to proceed in such cases. However, be sure no one is told who is not called upon to be a witness.

What if you can't find anyone else who agrees with you that the accused brother is in sin? If no witness can be found who agrees with the charges being made, then that is the end of the case. Perhaps it will serve as a learning experience to the misguided accuser.

Real Life. Just as some outlaws in the Old West were “trigger happy”, so too less mature Christians can sometimes confuse areas of freedom (or gray areas) with certain sin and are too quick to begin the discipline process. They have a zeal, but not according to knowledge. Examples of more disputable issues that could easily be abused: Sabbath observance, drinking wine, hair length, spending habits, music styles, disputable doctrines, child training, finances, celebration of holy days (Christmas, Easter), etc.

Trigger Happy Examples:

- One overzealous Arminian tried to do church discipline against anyone who was a Calvinist, saying he worshipped a false god. The problem is that he could not get anyone to agree to be his second witness.
- A narrow-minded Calvinist tried to do church discipline against a fellow church member who, while out of town on a trip, attended an Arminian Baptist church and participated in their Lord’s Supper. He was accused of fellowshiping with demons by partaking of the Lord’s Supper in an Arminian church. He could not get anyone else to agree with that it was sin.
- An unwise brother withdrew fellowship from a pastor in another church. The reason? The unwise brother’s church does not allow women to speak in the meeting (1Co 14:33-35). The pastor’s church understood that passage differently. The unwise brother declared that to allow women to speak in a church meeting was no different than hanging a pornographic picture on the wall.
- One brother decided that anyone who had remarried after a divorce (for any reason) was living in adultery. He determined that the proper course of action was for any remarried couple to divorce and for each to remarry the first spouse. He confronted each divorced couple in his church. When none agreed with his suggested course of action, and when no one could be found as his second witness, the brother left the church in protest (rather than submit to the wisdom of the entire body).
- One fellow decided a pastor was an overbearing, dictatorial, iron-fisted ruler who was abusing his ministry as elder. He spoke to the elder, who disagreed. Not being able to find a second person who agreed with his assessment of the pastor, he violated Matthew 18 by writing letters of accusation to everyone in the church.

Application: When following Matthew 18, be sure to only deal with actions that are universally accepted as sinful: lying, stealing, immorality, drunkenness, etc.

What is the difference between the first step in the Matthew 18 process and taking an immature believer aside to disciple him? Matthew 18 involves unmistakable sin. Discipling someone involves areas of growth and maturity (such as personal finances, husband/wife relationships, child training, a good work ethic, etc.). Sometimes great wisdom is needed. Sometimes it is important to give people time to grow.

ESV 1 Peter 4:8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Test: A brand new Christian comes to church, fresh out of the world. He has long hair, smokes cigarettes, curses some, has his fingernails painted black and he is living with his girl friend (it has not occurred to him that it might be wrong). **What do you do?** You do not jump him about everything at once. Love him, get to know him, build a relationship with him. Then, in the timing and wisdom of the Spirit, you might begin to bring up areas that need attention, but more as a process of discipleship rather than church discipline.

What happens if he finally listens to you in this second step (Mt 18:16) and changes his ways? Case closed; mission accomplished! This would be as public as the matter ever needs to be.

Test Case. A young single woman comes to the pastor with the information that she has become pregnant. She is repentant, admits it was wrong, is committed to future holiness and she absolutely believes that abortion is murder. She will carry the baby to term and raise the child as a single mother.

1.) What should the pastor do?

Upon hearing of it, and despite her repentance, one church member cried, "Make an example out of her. Kick her out anyway!" **2.) What is the right action for the church to take?**

11. What if, during this second step, the one or two witnesses hear the accused's side of the story and decide that you are in error for finding fault? See Proverbs 18:17. The sword cuts both ways! The witnesses serve as a sort of safety valve. It may well be that the one bringing the charges is himself in error about what constitutes a sin.

ESV Proverbs 18:17 The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

~ Step 3 ~

What should happen next if the sinning brother refuses listen to you and the one or two witnesses? Mt 18:17a. The third step in the discipline process is to tell it to the church and have the church speak to the man.

What impact might telling it to the whole church have on the sinful brother? Knowing that his sin might go before the whole church may be a big incentive for the accused sinner to repent. First is the embarrassment factor, followed by the potential loss of all his friends and support group.

Insight: This step may also act as a safety valve. Others in the fellowship may have an angle to the alleged sin that you and the witnesses had not considered, thus exonerating the accused person. For instance, all three of the restorers may be overzealous legalists who are incorrect in their understanding of what is and is not sinful behavior.

12. What is the ideal goal during each step of the church discipline process? See also James 5:19-20. (*House Church Discussion Question 10*).

What happens if the sinful brother refuses to listen to the church? Mt 18:17b. See 1Co 5:9-13.

What is the proper setting for bringing such a matter before the whole church (i.e., the Sunday meeting, a special Wednesday night meeting, etc.)? Jesus did not specify. It may be wise to discuss it first with the church leadership to determine the best setting. A consideration when bringing it up in a regular Lord's Day church meeting is the presence of children and any visitors. Another option might be to call together a special meeting specifically to discuss the matter.

Test: A brother suddenly erupts in a church meeting, hurling accusations against someone. When asked who his witnesses were (the 2nd step of the process), it becomes evident that he had skipped that step. In fact, it is not even clear that he had ever spoken to the accused before in private (the 1st step). **What should the church do?** This is where leadership is necessary. First, had the accuser spoken to the elders about the best time to bring an accusation, they may have been able to determine beforehand that the accuser had bypassed all the required steps, and thus saved the man embarrassment. Second, since the man had skipped the steps that Jesus said to take, the man's accusations are not to be considered (there has been no due process).

How does Matthew 18:17 illustrate the importance of participatory church meetings where any of the brothers could speak? Compare 1 Corinthians 14:26. Otherwise, there might be no natural outlet for the Matthew 18 process. One should probably wait until no visitors are present and, depending on the situation, perhaps the children should be dismissed.

How does the Matthew 18 process illustrate the norm for churches to be smaller rather than larger? This process, especially the last step, becomes very awkward the bigger the church is.

13. Why are church leaders not mentioned in this whole Matthew 18 process? Because authority resides in the church corporately, not in its leaders. The leaders may prompt and teach to influence the church, but they

are not generally to make decisions on behalf of the church. It is the church as a whole that must decide if the accused brother is in sin and it is the church as a whole that must deal with the accused brother. It is wise to present a matter to the elders before taking it before the whole church, but to require the correcting brothers submit a discipline issue to the elders first, before taking it to the church, is an unbiblical.

~ Step 4 ~

What is supposed to happen if the sinful brother refuses to listen *even* to the church (18:17b)?

14. What does it mean to deal with someone as a Gentile or tax collector? How did the typical Jewish person of Jesus' day treat pagans or tax collectors (Mt 18:17b)? (*House Church Discussion Question 9*). Pagans (Gentiles) were seen as unclean, barbaric outsiders. Thus, Orthodox Jews would not enter into a pagan's home, eat his food, or dine with him. Tax collectors were Jewish men who worked as tax collectors for the hated Roman oppressors. Not only seen as traitors, they were notoriously dishonest. Thus, the Jews kept aloof from both pagans and tax-collectors. (Jesus scandalized the Jews when he associated with tax collectors). In Southern parlance, they were scallywags. Jesus' point is that the church is to remain aloof from those so-called brothers who refuse to repent.

How does 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 help us to have the right attitude toward the expelled brother?

ESV 2 Thessalonians 3:15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

THE ANABAPTIST PERSPECTIVE: In the Schleithem Confession of 1527, the Anabaptists declared that baptized believers who fall into sin and refuse correction are to be banned from fellowship. Further, since the government's sword is ordained by God to be used by worldly magistrates to punish the wicked, the only weapon to be used in the church is excommunication (*The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought*, p. 140). This was declared in contrast to the state churches that often used the government's sword to execute church members under discipline.

15. What is the point of Matthew 18:18 as it relates to church discipline? Compare 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. The point is that the church has divine authority to dis-fellowship or to restore fellowship. An example of this can be seen in what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

ESV 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

What is the meaning of binding and loosing (Mt 18:18)? Binding and loosing were rabbinical terms, meaning to forbid or to permit. The church has the authority to decide what is and is not proper Christian behavior. In this sense the church is not so much legislative (making laws) as it is judicial (applying laws).

NOTE: The Greek behind the verb “will be” actually carries the idea of “will have been” (see marginal translation of most versions). It is not so much that heaven is responding to what we do on earth, but rather that God had already decided from heaven concerning what the church needs to do in relation to issues of discipline, and when the church finally acts, that same decision already “will have been” made in heaven already.

******Based on Matthew 18:19-20, what should always go along with church discipline?** Prayer and agreement.

To what does the word “again” (Mt 18:19) refer back to? Evidently back to 18:18.

From the context, for what purpose will the two or three be gathered together (Mt 18:20)?

16. What literary function does Matthew 18:18-20 serve in relation to the whole of Matthew 18:15-17? (*House Church Discussion Question 13*). Matthew 18:18-20 are verses of encouragement and support designed to help believers carry through with the tough assignment of 18:15-17.

******According to Matthew 18:21-35, how willing should you be to forgive a brother when he sins against you?**

What, in Matthew 18:35, shows the critical importance of forgiveness?

17. Jesus felt the need to caution us about forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-35. Why would a church have a hard time forgiving a repentant brother? See 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. (*House Church Discussion Question 14*). Perhaps a lot of resentment will have build up against the sinful brother. Perhaps harsh

and unkind words were spoken by the sinner while he was still in sin. Perhaps the church is tempted not to trust the supposedly repentant brother's sincerity.

In **Luke 17:3-5** Jesus said, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." In reply, the apostles said, "Increase our faith!" Forgiving someone who has sinned against you and then repented can be difficult. **Why can it be so hard to forgive a person who has asked for forgiveness?**

Example: Sometimes when someone is in sin and does not want to repent, he will behave irrationally. You may even begin to wonder if this is the same person you knew before. He may lie, lash out at you, be stubborn, argue with you to rationalize away his sin, be mean and hateful, or even pretend to be interested in repentance only to the result of wasting your time. Especially if in his sinning he hurt others, the temptation is strong to be resentful and not to forgive him when he finally repents.

Jesus said nothing in Matthew 18 about the possibility of later repentance by the person who is put out of the church. What do you suppose that was? Perhaps because it is not very likely that such a one will ever come back.

18. Based on 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, what course of action should be taken if the church withdraws fellowship from a convicted sinner who later repents? He should be accepted back into fellowship.

Note: There is serious question whether this passage even has reference to a person who had repented after having been dis-fellowshipped. It may refer to a different situation entirely.

19. Test: Where/how does the example of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 fit into the process described in Matthew 18? In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, the final step of the Matthew 18 process (treating him like a Jew would treat a pagan or a tax collector) seems to have been reached. This seems to be a situation where his name has been brought before the whole church and the whole church is in the process of shunning him because of his sin. There is definitely an estranged relationship between the church and the idle man. He is not to be associated with. Note that the brothers under discipline are not to be treated as enemies, but rather as brothers with whom you have nothing to do!

A biblical example of Matthew 18 carried out can be found 1 Corinthians 5.

****In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, what did Paul want the church to do? To expel the immoral brother.

Why did Paul not just simply put the man out himself? Paul was not there, and anyway only the church can expel someone (not its leaders).

******What danger is there in not dealing with sin a fellowship (1Co 5:6-8)?** It is contagious and can spread, and Christ wants His church (his dough) to be holy (without the yeast of sin).

******Based on 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, what are the practical aspects of putting someone out of fellowship?**

Which immoral people is it perfectly permissible to associate with (5:20)?
Lost people.

*******Why did Paul not worry about judging lost people (5:12-13)?** It was none of his business; God will judge them.

Who are we perfectly authorized to judge? 5:12.

******Based on 1 Corinthians 6:1-5, what did Paul write to convince the church that it is capable of making such judgments?**

20. Judging from James 5:19-20, why is church discipline so important?
Compare Acts 5:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 11:27-32.

ESV **James 5:19-20** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

The events described in Acts 5:1-10 totally circumvented the Matthew 18 process. Why do you suppose that God was so harsh with Ananias and Sapphira?

Can you think of another case where God just directly killed someone apart from the Matthew 18 process? 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 is another case of the Lord actually killing sinning Christians apart from the church discipline process (11:30). The sin was that of division within the church (11:18). The rich believers so loathed eating with the poorer believers that the rich arranged to get to church early so as to be able to eat the Lord's Supper apart from the poor. The rich failed to recognize the poor as part of the Lord's body (11:29). As a result, by time the poor arrived, all the food was eaten and some of the

rich were drunk (11:20-21). The poor went home shamed and hungry (11:22). The sin was eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner due to a failure to discern the body of the Lord in the poor brethren.

21. What do you think: What is the eternal state of someone who is put out of fellowship and who never repents? Consider Matthew 7:22-23, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 John 3:7-10.

1 Corinthians 5:5 indicates that he may indeed be saved: "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

On the other hand, **1 John 3:7-10** (read) clearly indicates that those who practice unrighteousness do not belong to Jesus.

Further, Jesus said, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (**Mt 7:22-23**, ESV).

22. Why is it that most churches today utterly ignore Matthew 18:15ff? See 1 Corinthians 5. (*House Church Discussion Question 15*). They are too big and impersonal, not participatory, they fear litigation, there is often a lack of commitment to Scripture, etc.

What criticism did Paul have of the Corinthian church for failing to discipline a wayward member (1Co 5:1-8)?

23. Why is church discipline not a direct contradiction of the command in Matthew 7:1-5 to "judge not"? See John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 5:12, 6:1-5.

ESV **John 7:24** Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

24. How is church discipline consistent with the Bible's command to "love one another"? Proverbs 13:24, 27:6, Hebrews 12:4-16, Matthew 18:1-9, 18:10-14.

ESV **Proverbs 13:24** Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

NAS **Proverbs 27:6** Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

25. What should you do if you find yourself in a church that refuses to obey Matthew 18? See 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. (*House Church Discussion Question 16*).

26. What caution or word of balance can be gleaned from Proverbs 10:12, Proverbs 19:11 and James 2:13?

ESV **Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

ESV **James 2:13** For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

What If: A woman is brought before the church for consistently failing to even try to submit to her husband. Many people had already been involved over much time in counseling her and her husband. Yes in the end, she still said, “I do not care what the Bible says. He is an idiot. The men who wrote the Bible did not know the situation I’m in. And anyway you all have perfect marriages and don’t understand.” After much discussion and prayer, the whole church agrees to put her out of fellowship. All that is except one hold out. This one woman is herself in a bad marriage and just cannot bring herself to agree to put the sinning woman out. **What should the church do?** This is precisely where **Hebrews 13:17** is applicable. Though elder-led congregational consensus is the norm (Matthew 18), after much persuasion and dialogue, sometimes the church (or more likely a few holdouts) is called upon to yield to the leadership of its elders.

In your opinion:

If a Christian husband consistently fails to love his wife as Christ loves the church, is that basis for church discipline?

If a wife refuses to in principle submit to her husband, is that basis for church discipline?

If parents are habitually lax in properly training up their children, is this basis for church discipline?

If a perfectly healthy husband is a stay at home dad while his wife is out in the work force earning a living, is that basis for church discipline?

If a professing teenager is in rebellion to his parents, is that basis for church discipline?

Is sending one’s children to public school (rather than home schooling them) basis for church discipline?

OPTIONAL FURTHER READING: *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

*All *House Church* Discussion Questions are taken from the chapter entitled, “Truth Practiced — Church Discipline” Discipline”

**** = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud.

Next Lesson: E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask everyone to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

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