

Conflict Resolution (part 2)

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[0 : 00] The text I'm going to be preaching from is Matthew 18, 15 through 17, but for the sake of context, I'm going to move up to verse 10.

Verse 10. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountain and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I say you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray.

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. 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, 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.

[1 : 12] And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. May God add a blessing to the reading of his word. Would you please be seated?

Back in 2015, an interesting survey took place on Twitter. Church members and leaders were asked to share about issues that caused fights, schisms, and conflicts in their congregations. And so I've handpicked 15 of those things. These are real things, by the way, that churches have fought over in the past.

The first are a couple related to appearances. In one church, there was a petition to have all church staff clean shaven, which I think would be, for our church, everybody would be good.

Eric doesn't have his beard. That would only apply to me, but I'm not going to do that. In another church, there was a dispute about whether the church should allow people to wear black t-shirts since black is the color of the devil.

[2 : 23] I thought the devil was red, right? A few disputes centered around money. In one church, there was an argument over the discovery that the budget was off by 10 cents.

By 10 cents. And it was finally resolved when someone pulled a dime out of their pocket to balance the books. In another church, there was an argument about whether or not to purchase a weed eater or not, which took the church two meetings to resolve.

Two meetings. Another church spent 45 minutes arguing over the type of filing cabinet that they should buy, whether it should be brown or black, if it should have two, three, or four drawers.

A lot of conflict centered around the church's property. One church member reported a fight over whether to build a new children's playground or to use that land for a cemetery.

I don't know how that one turned out, but I'm sure we're all dying to know. In one church, there was a dispute about whether or not to install restroom stall dividers in the women's restroom.

[3 : 35] I'm not going to touch that one. In another church, a quarrel broke out about whether the fake dusty plants on the stage should be removed or not.

So what's truly ridiculous is that many of these arguments were about food and drink. Food and drink. One church member reported an argument over the juice that was used for the Lord's Supper.

Someone had purchased juice that was a mixture of cranberry and grape juice. And we all know that Jesus and his disciples only drank Welch's grape juice, right?

Continuing with the Lord's Supper, one church reported a fight over whether to use or have gluten-free communion bread. I guess they were trying to avoid the sin of gluttony or gluttony.

Another church... Another church... I need Leandra up here on the drums to give me some rim shots. Another church argued over what type of green beans the church should serve.

[4 : 42] One person reported a major bone to pick that some members had with a youth pastor who borrowed the church's crock pot that had not been used in at least two years. Speaking of pots, one church argued over whether or not the term pot luck should be used instead of the preferred pot blessing since luck contradicts the theology of God's sovereignty.

Good luck trying to resolve that. One church... One church member shared about how she was chastised for bringing vanilla creamer for her coffee because it looked too much like alcohol. Another church member reported an argument over whether the church should allow deviled eggs at church meals because it contains the word devil. And I don't care what you call them just as long as you bring them.

Amen? Amen. Amen. These issues are ridiculous, truly, and they're comical. But I'm sure if you've been in the church long enough, you've probably seen or experienced something similar that you could add to the list that I gave.

And we can poke fun at ourselves about the silly squabbles that we've seen in the church. But not all church conflicts and confrontations are so petty.

[6 : 07] Some involve very serious matters that divide members, that split churches, and they produce a lot of hurt.

We call that church hurt. And church hurt is very painful. When a brother or a sister in Christ sins against you, it creates a deep wound that often takes a long time to heal.

And it leaves a lot of scar tissue. It's a wound that, if not treated, God's way will just fester. God's desire is that His church be unified and purified.

And He gives us instruction on how best to do that through the process of church discipline, which Matthew 18, 15 through 20 is there in its Jesus' explanation, how we are to seek.

He gives us the procedure, how we are to seek the church's unity and purity through confronting the conflicts that we might be in in a way that protects the church from sinful behaviors among its members and purifies the church's members by confronting their sin and seeking their restoration to God.

[7 : 27] And, along with that, renewing their fellowship with their brothers and sisters in Christ, who they may be in conflict with as a result. Now, before I continue, there are a few things I want to say about church discipline.

First, it's seldom pleasant. As a parent, I know that I have never enjoyed disciplining my children. I do it for their good, but I never wake up in the morning and think, you know, I hope that my kids get in trouble today because I just feel like letting them have it. You know, and as your pastor, I never go into my office on Monday and flip through the directory and think about, you know, who are all the people that I need to discipline this week.

Also, the purpose of church discipline isn't meant to be mean-spirited. It doesn't desire to let someone have it. It's not an opportunity to display how holier you think you are than other people in the church.

The goal of church discipline is restoration, restoring conflict that you have with someone in the church because you know how detrimental it can be to the church's unity if you don't.

[8 : 46] It seeks to restore another's relationship to God when they choose to live in ways that are sinful, that contradict who they claim to be as a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ.

It's also to be conducted with an attitude of love. Love for the person. Love for God. Love for His church.

And finally, the Bible's instruction on church discipline implies the necessity of church membership. The church members and its leaders are responsible for the well-being of one another.

And in the context of church discipline, Paul asks this question in 2 Corinthians 5.12, What business is it of mine to judge others outside the church?

Are you not to judge those inside? So you see, church membership is important in this. The procedures for resolving the conflict pertain to those who are a part of the church, who are a part of the body, who have hurt you in ways that maybe have fractured your fellowship with them, and who continue to live in undeniable sin that threatens the purity of our church and its witness and our impact collectively in our community.

[10:11] And so the main idea is this is the second part of a series of sermons, a two-part series of sermons on church conflict, is the same as last week. The Bible instructs Christians to resolve conflicts with unbelievers and believers.

So again, last week we saw what the Bible says about resolving conflict with unbelievers and those who are outside of the church. And this week, now, we will look at what the Bible says about resolving conflict with believers who are inside the church.

But you know, one of the most heartbreaking things to see is a child who is acting up in public. And to observe their parent just allowing it to happen, letting it to continue, letting them throw a tantrum and do as they please without there being any kind of attempt made to discipline, to try to come around this child and explain that their behavior is out of line.

Because undisciplined, out-of-control behavior will keep that child from forming meaningful relationships and performing well in any kind of setting. Ask a teacher.

They will tell you. But just as worse is a parent who embarrasses their child publicly, who calls them names, who curses them, and who is abusive to them as they discipline them in their bad behavior.

[11:44] Makes things worse. The Bible's instruction is that we shouldn't respond in either way and expect restoration to take place. If you want our church to thrive, if you want our church to be healthy and impactful, then you've got to make sure that you take your responsibility, your responsibility to unify and purify this church seriously.

And Matthew 18, 15 through 20 tells us how to do that. But first, a quick, a very quick review of last week. Number one, we saw last week how the Bible tells us how to resolve conflict with unbelievers.

The Bible tells us how to resolve conflict with unbelievers. And the primary scripture we looked at was Romans 12, 17 through 21. Let me read that to you again. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[13:02] And so if you remember, we talked about how as Christians, we are commanded by our Lord to be peacemakers. We are commanded by him to be his ambassadors, seeking through our actions to be used by him to resolve the greatest conflict that unbelievers have in their lives, which is ultimately their sin against their creator who is holy.

So now we look at how to resolve conflict with believers. How to resolve conflict with believers. But as we saw when we backed up to verse 10, before giving these procedures for resolving conflict in his church, Jesus told the parable of the lost sheep.

And that gives us the frame in which to understand what he's communicating to us in verses 15 through 17. There's a hundred sheep that this shepherd has.

One is lost. And so the shepherd goes and searches for that sheep. And when he finds the sheep, he brings it back to the fold, and there is rejoicing. And so the goal that we see in what Jesus says about church discipline is restoration, just like that lost sheep, that that lost sheep would be found and would be restored to fellowship with its shepherd and with the rest of the sheep in the flock.

And so in Matthew 18, 15 through 20, Jesus presents us with five elements that are involved in resolving conflict in the church. The first element is this.

[14:43] He talks about the person who receives discipline. The person who receives discipline. Beginning of verse 15, he identifies that person as your brother who sins against you.

In this context, as in many other places in Scripture, brother refers to any fellow believer, whether they are a male or a female. The person who is to be confronted is any Christian who sins, and the implication is that that sin is continuing in their life, that it's unconfessed, and that they have not repented of it, nor have they sought forgiveness for it.

Now, biblical scholars are not sure whether the words against you were in the original text. The New American Standard and the NIV do not include those words, but whether those words were in the originals or not is really a minor issue, because when we look at Galatians 6, chapter 1, it tells us, brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. So whether it's against you or whether it's against somebody else, we understand that it's our responsibility to seek that person's restoration.

If you witness a brother or a sister sin, the Bible says that God expects you to be the person who addresses it whether or not that sin was committed against you.

[16 : 20] You see, there's no loopholes here for us to find. You cannot excuse yourself from the responsibility because the sin wasn't committed against you specifically. You might do something like, well, I heard that, I saw that, but it wasn't really committed against me.

You know, I saw Joe, I heard him say some really mean and nasty things about Patrick, but you know, it wasn't about me, and really it's up to Patrick to be the one to go and talk to Joe and resolve that issue, not me.

That's not a case that you can make according to what Jesus says right here. He says, you are the one. If you see it, if you hear it, if you observe it, you are the one who must address it.

But in a spirit of gentleness, seeking their good and desiring to keep our church united and pure.

And if you are the one who has sinned against another brother or sister, and if you are the one being approached about it, don't resist it.

Don't resist it. Hear them out. Don't think that somehow you're above church discipline. Don't think that you are too holy, that you don't sin, or that your sin is minor compared to others.

[17 : 51] And don't come up with excuses to try to justify your sinful actions. If you've sinned, and it's clear that you have, apologize, and seek that person's forgiveness.

Don't elevate your pride over that Christian's obedience to God and desire to keep our church united, pure, and healthy.

And don't think that your position in the church or longevity with a church exempts you and makes you immune from correction if you have truly sinned against someone else in our church that warrants discipline.

Now, I might add here, too, that if the offense is small, maybe you just choose to let it go. Maybe it was a mistake more than it was a sin.

Maybe someone sat in your pew this morning, right? In your place. Maybe you just let that go.

Because you know what?

[18 : 56] These pews belong to the church. Amen? Amen. We're glad you're in them. Or, you know what happens a lot with me? I'll put my foot in my mouth, and I will say things that I did not intend to come out the way that they did.

And I think for a lot of people who know me, they know that I have a tendency to do that sometimes.

And so you say, ah, Pastor Mike's just putting his foot in his mouth again. That happens sometimes when he knows that he loves us, so I'm just going to let that go.

Or maybe someone makes a joke, and, you know, they think that they're being funny. Maybe it's a joke about your favorite sports team. Just let it go.

Just let it go. You be gracious. You be like Christ. You give them the benefit out of the doubt, and you just say, you know what? I'm just going to absorb that debt.

I'm just going to choose to let it go. I'm just going to turn the other cheek and move on, because I don't think that it was really that intentional or that serious. Ephesians 4, 1 through 3 says, I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

[20 : 04] With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. So now that we've identified the person who receives discipline, next, Jesus explains to us about the person who initiates discipline.

We've kind of hit on this a little bit, but we'll unpack it further right now. The person who initiates discipline, again in verse 15, brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

Now this part is really important. The person responsible for initiating discipline is any believer who is aware of another believer's sin.

Discipline is not simply the responsibility of the leaders in the church. It's your responsibility to address it. And telling other people about it is not fulfilling what Jesus commands of you here.

And if you're not careful about this, you could find yourself adding to the sinfulness of the situation by talking about that sinning brother or sister in a way that does not build them up or seeks their good or their restoration.

[21 : 16] Instead, it results in spreading gossip. Again, Ephesians chapter 4, verses 29 through 32. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. We must zealously guard and protect the character of fellow believers both for their good and for God's glory.

The more a person's sin is known and the more it is discussed by others, no matter how well-meaning they may be, the easier it is for the one who is in sin to become resentful and the harder it may be for repentance and restoration to take place.

So don't fish around for hints to find out who knows what. Go directly to that person. Go directly to that brother. Go directly to that sister. Love that person enough that you don't sit back and watch that sin continue to take place in their life.

[22 : 46] Love them enough to protect them from being the subject of gossip and you, the source of its spreading. When the sinning brother or sister is confronted privately and in a spirit of humility and love, there is a greater chance that that person will have a change of heart.

Now, if it's a leader in the church, we know that the Bible holds its leaders to a higher standard. They are to be above reproach. But if they sin in a way that disqualifies them from ministry, the Bible says that such an offense must be corroborated by two or three witnesses, 1 Timothy 5, 19. Not because they are above church discipline, but because that position makes them more susceptible to frivolous attacks and accusations. But the same process in Matthew 18 applies to them.

It may be the case where you would need to tell me or another one of our elders so that we can determine whether or not that person is fit to serve in the position that they're currently serving in. But the goal always is restoration. Even if for a time that offense disqualifies them from leading, the goal is always restoration.

[24 : 07] you know, it's sad, but it seems like more and more, almost like it's happening on a weekly basis, we hear stories about pastors who are not held to the same standard as their church members because their church members are afraid to challenge them for fear of what might losing that man might mean to the church.

But you know, if a pastor leaves the church and the church falls apart, then really that man's ministry was all about himself. That's an indication that they made things all about themselves. But if the seriousness of the sin makes them unfit for ministry, meaning they've got some sin in their life that they need to take time to focus on, to repent of, to eliminate, to seek forgiveness for, then other leaders in the church need to know and they need to step in.

if they are abusing their bodies with an addiction, if they're violating their marriage vows, if they're being verbally and physically abusive, I believe Scripture tells us that more needs to be done to hold them accountable to that.

But again, the goal is restoration. And if that person repents and if that person has sought the forgiveness of those they have sinned against, then we love them.

[25 : 30] we use by God to help heal and restore them. We help them move forward after the fact and we don't continually throw those sins back in their face.

We don't kick a brother, we don't kick a sister when they're down. But in most cases this step doesn't involve any kind of official organization or leaders in the church.

It begins again with you and the person. who has sinned meeting together in private seeking to make things right as you confront them in a spirit of humility, love, respect for them and hope that restoration will be the result of it.

And one more thing while we're on the subject of the person who initiates, the implication here again is that you go to that person face to face.

You speak to them directly. Jesus doesn't say if your brother sins against you glare at him. Just glare at him.

[26 : 42] Every chance you get just glare at him. Or if your brother sins against you avoid them. Go to a different Sunday school class. Join a different community group.

Leave that church and go somewhere else. Or give them a cold shoulder as if they don't exist. Jesus doesn't say if your brother sins against you communicate your anger towards them through your body language.

You know? Ha! Every time they come in the room, right? Or something like that. Or just turning around and leaving. Jesus doesn't say if your brother sins against you as quick as you can jump on Facebook or your social media app, whatever your favorite might be, and put them on blast so that everybody can hear it.

But you know what? Don't use their name. Just be really vague. Post Bible verses and quotes and say things that you know are intended for that person to read but you don't want people to know who you're talking about.

Well, guess what? That person knows that you're talking about them. And when that person reads that and what they come away with is, I think, a resentful attitude. Especially if they know Matthew 18.

[27 : 53] You should have come and you should have talked to me. We should have hashed that out together but instead you've decided to let everybody else know even if you didn't know, even if you didn't use my name. And it just makes, it just adds sin to the problem and it won't get resolved.

One thing that was really helpful for me in all of this was a lesson I learned while I was associate pastor of my previous church. church, the man who was the pastor there retired and then I served in his role after that.

But that one year that we had together was very, very helpful for me. He was a great mentor. And one thing I learned early on as I transitioned from youth pastor to associate pastor is that a lot of people would come up to me, a lot of church members would come to me and they'd say, hey, did you know about this?

You know about this? You need to do something about that. Something needs to be done about that. And so I was thinking, oh my gosh, we've got all these problems. And so I went to our senior pastor and I said to him, you know, did you know about this?

Did you know about this? All these things are going on? And he said, you know, and he asked kind of like, well, why haven't they spoken to one another? They really need to go handle that on their own in private.

[29 : 10] And if it's not resolved, then we'll take the next step. And so what he told me is a valuable lesson I'll never forget. He said, next time someone comes to you like that and it's a situation where that person should go speak to that other person together.

Tell them this, okay, I will go and talk to that person, but I want you to know that I'm going to make sure that they know that you're the source of the information that I'm about to confront them about. And once you start to, oh no, no, no, it's okay. Maybe it's not that big of a deal, right? But it's so important that we do what the Lord has commanded us to do.

And here's the thing that I've experienced as a pastor, as a Christian, that 90, probably more like 95% of the time, when this first step is taken, that person who's been sinned against or sees the sin goes to that brother or sister who has sinned and does so in private in a spirit of gentleness seeking restoration, it never moves on to step two.

Most of the time, the majority of the time, it gets resolved. Next, Jesus explains to us the purpose of discipline. The purpose of discipline.

[30 : 24] Again, in verse 15, if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. So again, the goal of confrontation, the goal of resolving conflict in the church is to seek and maintain its unity and purity by seeking the restoration of the brother or sister in Christ when they are entangled in sin.

The goal is not to throw them under the bus or feed your self-righteous pride and attitudes, but to bring them back. James 5, 19 through 20 says, 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.

When a church member falls into sin, when relationships are fractured by sinful actions and attitudes, the fellowship as a whole will suffer from that.

When issues aren't squashed, they fester and they begin to stink. More people become aware of the issue. Gossip begins to spread and may get to the point where restoration is no longer possible and the person leaves the church.

each individual believer, each member of our church is irreplaceable.

[31 : 53] We are compared to the body of Christ. No, we each are a member of the body of Christ. Each of us has a role, each of us has a function, each of us is important to the health of our church.

And so, we can never get to this place and you can never get to this place of thinking about yourself that they're better off without me or we're better off without you because each of you is unique and has been uniquely made and equipped and gifted by God for the benefit of this church as we seek to be a healthy thriving church that reaches out to our community making disciples as we disciple one another.

When Peter was intimidated by the Judaizers in Antioch, you remember that passage Galatians chapter 2 that Paul talks about?

The Judaizers had come and Peter was intimidated by them. He wanted to be in good with that crowd and so he began sitting with them and eating with them and turning kind of a cold shoulder neglecting the Gentiles and Paul says when he saw that happening, what did he do?

He says, I went and I opposed Peter to his face and Peter must have admitted his wrong in that case because years later he refers to Paul as his beloved brother in 2 Peter 3.15.

[33 : 30] So, that's important. You know, when Paul confronted Peter, Peter didn't say, well, you know what, Paul? I was one of the 12 disciples when you were a Pharisee.

Peter doesn't tell Paul, you know what, I was leading the church in Jerusalem that you were persecuting. Why or who are you, who do you think that you are to be critical of someone like me? I know what you've done in the past. No, he understood that Paul's rebuke was motivated by love, by unity and purity for the church and to keep Peter from continuing in that sin.

In a lot of these cases when the first step is taken again, not only is the issue resolved, but the people involved in the conflict have a deeper relationship with one another than they had before. Maybe not right afterward, but over a period of time, they grow to respect the courage and the love it took from that brother or that sister to confront them and to seek their restoration.

[34 : 37] Next, Jesus explains the process and place of discipline in verses 16 through 17. The process and the place. But if he does not listen, 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. Again, in the context of Jesus' instruction here, if the testimony of the two or three witnesses becomes necessary, it is not only to confirm that the sin was committed, but in addition to verify that the sinning believer has been properly addressed.

The first rebuke is private. The second is semi-private. And if they refuse to repent, then it becomes public. Now, when it comes to this step, we might be tempted to think, why tell the whole church? That seems harsh. Well, we tell the church so that the offender sees the seriousness of their sin and so that we, as a church, can tell them, we love you.

We love you. We want you to come back to Christ. We are upset about this thing going on in your life. We value you. We want you to be a part of this church, but we need you to do what you need to do in order for us to continue to be unified and pure.

[36 : 09] When you read that instruction, what you should read is this. God loves you so much that when you sin and need to be restored, He is going to send an army of believers to you to seek your restoration, to rescue you from that sin, to bring you back.

That's how much He loves you. But if that still doesn't work, we go on to the fourth and final step. This step might seem extreme in our day, but keep in mind that it is not optional.

If the person refused to repent, if they choose their sin over repentance and forgiveness, then I think we can wonder at that point, is this person truly saved?

Have they truly experienced the grace and forgiveness and the love of God? And then they are put out of the church that they would wrestle with those questions themselves.

that hopefully they would see how they have taken their sin lightly and they would seek to be restored. And if they do, if they do, we don't say, I doubt it.

[37 : 27] I doubt it. Or, it is too much. Even though God has forgiven you, we can't or I can't forgive you. No, what do we do? In context of the parable of the lost sheep, we rejoice.

We're enthusiastic. This was the point all along. We're so happy to have you back. But what I've seen in the church is people either avoiding the first step, going one-on-one, going to face-to-face with the person to resolve the conflict, and they move right to the last one.

You've offended me, you've sinned against me, you know, here's the right Buddha fellowship, we call it in some cases, right? Get out of here. You're not a part of this church or part of my life anymore.

They move quickly to that final step. We can't do that. That's not the process. They do that in order to use the process, I think, to preserve their power and their position within the church, but that's not the point.

The point is restoration. We have an example of this in 1 Corinthians. There, Paul addresses a church's refusal to forsake an incestuous relationship between a man and his stepmother, and so Paul commands them in chapter 5 to remove that person from their midst.

[38 : 42] Tolerance for sin had reached a point of arrogance, and so he says you have to do something about this. You have to do what you're supposed to do, but then in 2 Corinthians, we learn that that church did that, but now that man in that sin had repented and was wanting to come back, but they were unwilling to forgive him and bring him back into the fellowship.

And so Paul tells him, let him back in. Let him be restored. Let him be a part of the church once more. Now I'm sure that this is not a comfortable thing for us to think about and to hear about. God's word confronts our sin, right? And I'm sure that right now there's probably some of you, you've had a person's face in your mind or maybe a group of people in your mind and just to think about doing this scares you.

It makes you terrified. It makes you feel sick to your stomach. Because this isn't fun. But it's necessary. It's absolutely necessary.

If our church is going to thrive, if our church is going to be together, united, and pure, then we must take this instruction seriously.

[40 : 01] Confronting sin with the goal that there be restoration. And so the main point of application is resolve the conflicts that you have with believers.

believers. Resolve the conflicts that you have with believers. Again, I think it's important to keep in mind the parable of the lost sheep.

Sheep, it's interesting, right, that the Bible so often compares us, the people of God, to sheep. If you know anything about sheep, sheep are not very intelligent creatures.

And they do all kinds of dumb things. I don't know if you've seen this gif that has been on social media of the sheep that is caught in a ditch and its head is down in the ditch and its legs are sticking out, kicking.

Have you seen that? You have to see it. And the shepherd comes and pulls the sheep out, pulls it out, and once all four feet are on the ground, the sheep hops a couple steps and then jumps right back into the ditch.

[41 : 15] And its head is once again there in the ditch. And you just have to think, you know, that is us and Jesus is continually pulling us out. And even though we, you know, hop around, all is great, oh, there's that ditch again, I want to, what it looks like at the bottom, right, or something like that.

He's always there to restore. He's always there to forgive. He's been long suffering with us. And we think about the price that he was willing to pay to restore us. He gave his own life.

He shed his own blood. He endured the wrath of God for the sins that you and I have committed against him. And he did it willingly and lovingly that by faith in him we are saved through his sacrifice, through his life.

And we know on the third day that he rose again. And so, you know, Jesus is all that he said that he was. And he is able to accomplish all the things that he had come to do.

He's victorious over sin and death. And if he has been so gracious to us to do that, and he was willing to endure the shame and the torture of the cross for us, then can't we let go of our pride and let go of our discomfort and speak the truth and love to one another with the purpose that there would be restoration and that his church would be united and pure and together as we make much of Jesus Christ.

[42 : 44] So three questions of application for you to look at. I encourage you to do that today, do that this week. First of all, how should the parable of the lost sheep in verses 10 through 14 inform our view of church discipline?

How should the parable of the lost sheep in verses 10 through 14 inform our view of church discipline? Next question. How does avoiding these steps or skipping over some of these steps threaten the unity and the purity of the church?

If we don't go through the process as the Lord has told us to, what are the unintended consequences? And I'll tell you that they're not going to be good for you or the church. And then finally, is there someone in this church that you are in conflict with? Will you obey God's procedure to resolve it?

Let's pray. Lord, we know that for every one of us, ultimately, our greatest conflict was with you. [43 : 53] And God, you are the great and perfect peacemaker. Lord, all we have to do is look to the cross and be reminded of the love and the grace, the mercy and the forgiveness that is ours because you chose to come and to die and to give your life that by your death and your resurrection, we who believe in you have had that conflict with our Holy Creator resolved.

We are at peace with him. And Lord, we know that the Christian life is a life, you said, it involves taking up the cross and following your example and sometimes that involves us doing things that we'd rather not do.

God, it's so much easier for us when we've been sinned against to go and spread gossip about that person or if we've seen somebody sin to spread gossip about that person. It's so much easier for us to just avoid the situation altogether and maybe even just leave the church for good, but that's not your way.

And so, Lord, I pray for all of us that now that you have confronted us with your word and what it says about this important issue, Lord, that we would be obedient to you.

God, that we would be prayerful about these conflicts that we might be in right now or know about and that, Lord, we would seek your wisdom and the Holy Spirit's help as we go to those people with an attitude of humility and love and respect for them that they would be restored to us in this church and ultimately, most importantly, to you.

[45 : 26] God, I pray that we would be a church that is united. Lord, thank you for the good that you have done. Lord, we give you the glory for that. Lord, we pray that we would be a church that is pure, that we would never waver from your word and its instruction or what we know that we ought to do.

God, that we would be a church that is purified. And so, Lord, help us to do that and our prayer would be, Lord, that the result of all of it would be pleasing to you and would glorify you.

And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.