

For the Good of Christ's Church

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[0 : 0 0] This morning, I want you to take your Bibles, and I'm going to read, to begin with, two different passages of Scripture, and I want to give you the second one, second reference first, so that you can just mark it with your finger, just make a little bookmark out of your finger and mark it, because we'll get to it. 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 1 through 8, so that's the, one of the passages I want to read this morning to begin with, and again, when you find it, just kind of hold your finger there, and let me give you the second reference, the one that I'm going to read first, and the one we're going to focus on through most of the sermon, and that is Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 through 20. Matthew 18, verses 15 through 20, so those two passages. First, Matthew, I want to read Matthew 18, verses 15 through 20. Hope you're ready. Here it is. Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. You've won your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them. Now the second passage, 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verses 1 through 8. It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that a man has his father's wife. And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have already judged, as though I were present, him who has done, so done, this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. All right. Now, our subject this morning is church discipline. Exciting, right? And most of you are thinking, not so much.

And yet, I want to say here on the front end, at the beginning, I want to give you a few reasons why I've chosen to preach on this subject. Not because I know of someone among you that needs church discipline. So I don't have any ulterior motive here to kind of set the stage for doing something to you. It's not that at all. But let me give you several reasons. In the first place, church discipline is taught in the Bible. Okay, that ought to be enough, huh? I mean, we want to learn and understand everything that is found in God's Word. And as a preacher, I want to preach, want to teach, want to instruct out of God's Word, the whole counsel of God's Word. So it's in God's Word. In fact, it is there more often than perhaps you know or have realized. I've just read two examples in the New Testament that deal with church discipline. These are not the only ones. And so very quickly, let me just tell you that you'll find the subject in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, in Galatians chapter 6, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, in 1 Timothy chapter 5. Wes is writing it down as fast as he can. Titus chapter 1, and also again in chapter 3. Hebrews chapter 13, 2 John, 3 John, and I'm sure I've missed one somewhere. Now all those passages in one way or another deal with one or another aspect of this thing we call church discipline, discipline within the body of Christ.

So I need to teach on it. I need to preach it so that we understand it. Second of all, though, church discipline has been included in our newly revised bylaws. And back when we were looking at those and ultimately approving additions and revisions to the bylaws, you perhaps remember that. And we all need to understand the biblical basis for that. In fact, I've been asked by a couple of you, could you teach on the subject so that we understand it from God's Word? So that's why I'm doing that this morning. I promised that I would. So now I'm doing it. Third, though, there's a third reason, and perhaps I think the most significant, most important, and that is the church discipline has all but completely disappeared from the church in America today. In fact, many of God's people sitting in churches just like this one don't even have the first bit of information, first bit of knowledge about what the Bible teaches about church discipline. It's not something that we teach on or preach on as we ought to, and it's certainly then, therefore, not something that we actually do very much in the church. It's just all but gone. And so most of the church today, not only do they not know anything about it, but if they do know something about it, they're against it, you know, based upon maybe a number of reasons, usually because we just don't understand what it is and why we should do it. And I think we could add to that that we in our culture, culture of Christianity in this country, we become very soft on sin. In fact, we have kind of allowed the tendency of our own culture at large to affect the way we view sin and disobedience and the breaking of God's laws. And we have just kind of gradually moved into a softness, a view that's very soft on sin and very tolerant of sin. If anything you could say about our culture, it is that we are taught and led and encouraged, even demanded to be tolerant when it comes to sin. And added to that, I think, we've become indifferent, complacent about the need for the church to be pure, the purity in the church.

We kind of just leave it up to each individual and not care or think we should not care about what's going on in the lives of other members of our body. And that's just kind of the mentality. And I would say to you that even though I'm teaching on the subject this morning and want to encourage us as a church to to actually practice biblical church discipline, I still believe it's going to be hard to turn the corner, hard to go back to the biblical teaching on this subject. And I would just ask you, why do you think so many churches in our day and for the last several centuries actually, why so many churches have become liberal in their theology? And why so many churches have kind of shipwrecked into false doctrine and splintered out into even cults and heresies of various kinds? Why has that been happening, really been happening in our country for a number of years? Why is that?

[9 : 31] And I would also ask, why do you think so many denominations, even mainline denominations in our country, have become so theologically unsound? They've really departed from the teachings of Scripture in so many different areas. Why is that? And why do you think so many churches split, have fellowship problems, ultimately split, and have the parting of the ways? Why do you think that so many churches are today in our country so filled with what we might call, quote, marginal Christians, unquote, if there is such a thing? And I really don't think there is. I mean, you either are one or you aren't. You can't be on the fence. But why is it so many churches have members who are just so complacent? In fact, it's very difficult to even call them Christian. Why is that? Well, why do you think that so many churches are filled with people who worship, they come and worship on Sunday, and then the rest of the week they live lives that might be characterized anything but Christian? Well, it could be that they're unsaved, or could be that there has never been any church discipline performed when the sin first started. I think that's probably the explanation. In part, at least. In fact, in large part. And so why are there so many churches that are sick, spiritually sick, and dying, and some even dead, and have become really irrelevant to our culture? Why is that? You all be very quiet.

We're just asking you some questions. Think about it. And I think the answer is, in large part, because of the absence of church discipline, as it is taught in the Scripture that I just read a moment ago, in Matthew 18, as it is taught in the Bible. And remember, Paul said, in that passage I read just a moment ago, in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, don't you know, he's saying to the Corinthian church, don't you know that just a little leaven, that is a little fermentation, a little sin, don't you know that just a little sin? Leavens or spreads to the whole lump of dough, that is, the whole church? And so he asked, don't you know that? Don't we? And we do know that. And so he said to them, he said, your glorying, that is your pride, is not good. It's not good. And what were they prideful about? They were prideful,

I think about their tolerance toward the sinner and the sin. You know, look how tolerant we are. Look how gracious we are. Loving and merciful. And look how non-judgmental we are. This is what they were feeling, what they were believing about themselves. As they allowed that sinning brother in the church, one who had committed a sin that Paul says not even named among heathens. They were just loud and they're going because they were open-minded and very tolerant and very gracious, they were thinking.

And yet Paul says, he rebukes them and he says, you should be mourning, not glorying. And you must purge out the old leaven, the sin. All right, so pretty strong words from the apostle Paul. And you say, well, that's because of the nature of the sin. I mean, that's an enormous sin. But is any sin worse to God or are they all equal? And they need to be dealt with in the church.

And so the Lord Jesus gives us instructions concerning discipline in the church. And that's what we want to look at this morning and understand this morning. And so as we look at Matthew chapter 18, verses 15 through 20, I want to just break it down into five very easy, very simple questions that Jesus answers for us about church discipline. Again, they're very simple questions to which the answers I believe will be instructive. And here's the first question. Who is it for?

[14:10] Discipline. Church discipline. Who is it for? Very simple question. And really the answer is so plain, so clear. What did Jesus say in verse 15? He said, if your what? Your brother.

If your brother sins against you. By the way, ladies, he means sisters too. Okay, I always have to explain that. Even though Jesus spoke totally in the masculine pronouns, he's talking about believers, male and female. If your brother or your sister sins against you. And so these instructions are for believers. These instructions on discipline for believers. And a little bit later in the text, Jesus says in verse 17, if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the what? The church. The church. So not just simply believers in the general sense, in the broad sense of all believers, but believers who are part of the church. You say, well, aren't all believers part of the church? Well, you're not understanding. The point is, he's talking about the local church. The local body of baptized believers. The local church. So discipline is something that is to take place within the immediate family. The local church. And so we don't discipline members of Bartlesville Southern. We don't discipline members of Eastern Heights or Trinity Baptist or First Baptist or any number of other New Testament churches that go by a different denominational name. We're not in the business of disciplining other family members. Members of other families. Just like I don't discipline children who are outside my family. And that's what these instructions are for. And we also, we don't discipline unbelievers outside of the body. Outside of this church. I mean, you can't discipline people who are not really children. So it's for believers. That's who it's for. And believers specifically who are part of a local body of baptized believers, part of the local church. Here's a second question. Where does it begin? Where does church discipline begin? Well, it begins, of course, with a sin. Okay. Begins with a sin. And I would qualify that to unrepentant of sin. I mean, we're all sinners. We sin every single day. There's not a day that goes by that you don't sin. I'm sorry. You thought maybe you could try to make it a day. Maybe, let's say, I made it a day. I'll make it two days. Maybe your goal is, my goal is to make it an entire week without sinning. It's not possible. You and I sin every single day.

In fact, we sin more than we know. We can't help it. We're not talking about just sin in the kind of generic sense. We're talking about sin that is deliberate, that is persistent, that is unrepentant of. Unrepentant of. So it begins there, doesn't it? That a member within the body, that local church, sins and does not repent. That's where it begins. And actually, the words against you are not in the best manuscripts. I need to let you know that. If you have a New American Standard, you'll see that those words are not there. Really, it is the only English version that I have found that does not include the words against you. It really should read, simply read, if your brother sins, sins and keeps on sinning, keeps on sinning. That is unrepentant sin. And the problem is, you know, the words against you tends to kind of, in our minds at least, limit it to sins of a personal offense, you know.

[18:22] And so maybe this church discipline is just for those kinds of sins might be committed to an individual person. But really, that's not the idea. And even if we were to leave the words against you in there, it's still talking about the entire body. Because, you see, every sin committed by a member of the church that is unrepentant of every sin violates in some way and certainly ultimately the fellowship, the fellowship within the body of Christ. It could be the sin of lying, slander, gossip. That's a big one thing. It could be the sin of sin. It could be the sin of sexual immorality, impurity, fornication. It could be the sin of marital unfaithfulness, adultery. It could be the sin of hatefulness. It could be the sin of unkindness.

It could be the sin of cruelty. It could be the sin of dishonesty, whether inside the church and the dealings of the church, dishonest in the way we deal with things and do things, or dishonest outside the church.

It's honest in the way you deal with the world, in business, and so forth. It could be the sin of dishonesty. It could be the sin of profanity, of blasphemy. It could be the sin of idolatry.

It could be the sin of drunkenness. It could be the sin of disobedience to the moral commandments of God. It could be the sin of divisiveness in the church. It could be the sin of believing in false doctrine and teaching false doctrine in the church. It could be the sin, sins against the church.

Refusal to attend. Refusal to tithe. Refusal to follow the leadership of the church. I'm not trying to give you an exhaustive list, but it could be all of these things and other things. It's sin that is unrepented of. Church discipline presupposes some deliberate, persistent, unrepented of sin.

That's where it begins, and then it must be discovered.

Must be discovered by at least one other person, one other member of the church. Now, grant you some sins are private sins.

[21 : 00] Known only to God, known only to the one who's committing the sin. Some sins continue to be private, remain to be private for a long time. In fact, some people die and take their private sin with them without anybody ever knowing. The Bible does say just be sure your sins will find you out.

And so, usually, private sins don't remain private. They become public at least to one other person. God, I think, makes sure of that. And so, it goes without saying then, based upon that, perhaps, that church discipline should begin when the sin is first committed.

First committed, first discovered. And it's not always discovered when it's first committed, but and so, I guess I should say it begins when it's first discovered. Jesus said, if your brother sins, go.

Go. Go. That is, go now. Go right away. You see, you're not doing your brother or your sister any favors by turning a blind eye.

Not doing any favors by just waiting and seeing. You need to go right then as a loving brother, loving sister. The longer the sin is allowed to persist, the harder it is for it to be brought to a positive end.

[22 : 29] Positive to the sinning member. And positive, a positive end for the church at large. All right, so, where does it begin?

It begins with the sin, unrepentant of sin. And with its discovery by someone in the church. And then, with that one who knows about the sin, going.

Going to that brother or that sister. Brothers or sisters. Sinfulness is gender inclusive. Okay? Jesus said, if your brother sins against you, that is, you discover it, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

Now, that's a very key part of the passage. In this, technically speaking, this is where actual church discipline begins. Begins here. And, hopefully, ends here.

In fact, that's the desire. The desire of the Lord who gave these instructions is the desire of him right now. That believing brother who sees the sin, goes to his brother, shows him his fault, and that he would repent then.

[23 : 49] That's the design of church discipline. The hope for it. Now, the concerned brother then, who has discovered this, or sister, is to go.

Now, don't call him or her on the phone. Don't send a letter.

Don't send an email. Or some private little note on Facebook. Don't send a text. Don't send a text. The idea here is to go personally.

Personally. Now, I know Jesus didn't know anything about telephones. Well, he did, but he knew they didn't exist then. Nothing about telephones or email, internet, or any of that kind of stuff.

Phones, texting.

But he says, go. You go. Literally. He said, you go to the sinning brother or sister.

[24 : 50] You go. You go personally. And let's not forget, or somehow skip over it. Go privately. This is so key.

He said, go alone. I mean, this is just right there in the text. You don't even need this knucklehead up here telling you. It's right there, plain to see. Who has to explain it? It's right there.

Black and white. Well, actually, and red and white in my Bible. Go privately. Now, here's some, I think, some important tips.

First, pray about it. Not pray whether you ought to go. Pray about it. Pray about this before you go. And pray alone.

This is not the time to call up, you know, half a dozen of your friends and say, would you pray for me? I've just discovered that so-and-so did such and such. And I don't want you to tell anybody. But I want you to pray for me about this whole thing.

[25 : 51] No, you don't call up anybody about it. Now, if you want to call someone for clarification about what the Scripture says about a certain sin, that's fine.

But you don't say anything else. And so, you pray about it. And then, second, you check your own heart.

This is very important in the process. Check your own heart. Jesus said in Matthew 7, verses 3 to 5, Now, I'm glad he didn't just end it there, you know, first remove.

Because sometimes, you know, sometimes we might say, well, I'm just as bad a sinner, and so who am I to go? And just leave it there. No.

Jesus says, remove the plank in your eye. That's important. Remove that plank in your eye, from your own eye. Then you will see clearly to remove the plank, or the speck, rather, from your brother's eye.

[27 : 03] So these are instructions dealing with church discipline. Far from being judgmental. I mean, you're going to help a brother remove some speck in his eye, some sin in his life.

Paul wrote this in Galatians chapter 6, verses 1 and 2. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness.

They're spiritual. That is, you don't have any unconfessed sin in your life. That doesn't mean you are free from all sin, have never committed any sin. No, but you are fessed up.

You've repented. You are in right standing, right fellowship with God. You who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness. Gentleness.

That's a key word. Considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens. These are, you know, church discipline is all about love.

[28 : 15] Love and compassion and mercy. In the spirit of gentleness. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ. What is the law of Christ in this context?

It's the law of love. And then third, go in gentleness and love. I've already said a little bit about that. But Paul instructed Timothy in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 1.

He said, do not sharply rebuke an older man. Now the context is sin in the church. Someone has sinned. And so maybe it's an older person.

Older than you. And he says, do not sharply rebuke the older man. But what? But rather appeal to him as a father.

As your father. How would you approach your father? You see? Gentleness.

[29 : 15] Respect. And love. And he goes on. Two younger men as brothers. Older women as mothers. Younger as sisters.

With all purity. That is no ulterior motive. No axe to grind. No desire to make a person squirm like a worm on a hot tin roof.

You know, sometimes we want to go and just make them suffer. No. We're to go in purity. In gentleness. In love. And then number four.

Get your facts right. You better make sure you have your facts right. You don't go on the basis of hearsay. Or gossip.

Let's just call it what it is. Do not go on the basis of personal opinion. Not about opinion.

[30 : 17] It's about facts. Better make sure you have those right. You also don't go on the basis of your own personal convictions. It may have taken you beyond the teaching of Scripture.

You know, there are some believers who are very dogmatic and call certain things sin. The Bible doesn't really say is sin. I mean, specifically. Literally.

Better make sure you've got it right. And make sure, then, that there is actual sin here. Better make sure about that. The only way you can do that is, well, first know the facts.

Make sure you know. And if you don't know, then you don't have anything. But check it out with the Word of God. And so then that leads to the fifth tip.

And that is, use God's Word. Use God's Word. Jesus said here in our text, go and tell him his fault. Some versions have show him.

[31 : 19] And that really is the idea behind the Word. Show him his fault. This is legal terminology. You know, it means to convince in a court of law.

That's the idea behind this expression. And a court of law is only interested in facts entered into evidence. Okay? And so, you know, it's not hearsay. It's not opinion. It's not circumstantial evidence.

And you putting two and two together and coming up with five instead of four. Or, you know, you have to have facts in evidence here. And so, what do you do?

You show him his fault or her fault, their sin, by showing them from the truth of Scripture, from the Word of God.

Now, that leads to a third question then. When is it finished? When is church discipline finished? Well, simple. When the sinning brother or sister repents and is restored.

[32 : 24] That's when it ends, and not before. In fact, it could be said that church discipline remains in effect until that person repents or dies and goes to heaven.

So, repentance and restoration is, of course, the goal of church discipline at every step of the way. Jesus said, if he hears, that is, not just hears with the ear, but hears with the heart. It really means to listen to the point of obedience. If he hears, you have gained your brother.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. That's what you want. You're not wanting them to suffer. You're not wanting to prove a point.

Grind an axe. You're not wanting to go to show your spiritual and biblical superiority. You're going to be kind of holier-than-thou type of approach.

[33 : 28] Here to go, genuinely desiring that that brother be won back. Back into fellowship is the idea there. And when that happens, that's the end of it.

If that happens, that's the end of it. No need to go any further with it. And it stays private. You know, get up, you know, on Wednesday night prayer meeting and say, well, I just have to share with you, you know, about old Wes.

And he was just a terrible sinner. And I went to him and, you know, and he repented. He's restored. Let's all just praise the Lord. No, it stays private.

No need to go there anymore. Nothing left to do. But, of course, what if the sinning brother does not repent? I'm sorry I used you, Wes.

Okay. Okay. There's nothing hidden there. Okay. In my reference to Wes. All right. So, don't all of you look at him. I wonder what he did. Well, I wonder, too.

[34 : 38] What did you do? Well, what if he doesn't repent? Well, Jesus tells us what to do. He says, call up all your friends and start a little prayer chain.

You know, we have this Alexander Graham Bell-itis. Ever heard of that? Just got to call somebody. Tell them. Although we don't hardly use the phone anymore.

Even though we carry those phones in our pockets, we don't use them for phones anymore. Well, he didn't say that, did he? He didn't even say, take it to the elders. Not yet.

Call up the pastor. That's not what he said. What did he say? Verse 16. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.

And that's a quote from Deuteronomy chapter 19 and verse 15. Two or more, two or three witnesses. The first brother or sister who went and then taking one or two others to make at least three, two or three witnesses, a thing will be confirmed, established.

[35 : 54] All right, so you take someone with you, one or two. And I would add to that, be wise in who you take. And also be very discerning about how the two or three of you go.

You don't want to look like a Spanish Inquisition. Banging on the door. Repent. We're here to make sure you do.

Now, the very same principles that apply to the individual going applies to the two or three who are going. Go compassionately. Lovingly. And making sure of the facts.

And all those things. Now, what if that doesn't work? Well, it's clearly spelled out here for us. Jesus says in verse 17, And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

And that, I think, should begin with the elders of the church who represent the body and it's brought before the church. So, what started private and should have ended in privacy now becomes public.

[37 : 17] And if that doesn't work? Jesus says, but if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector, a publican.

That was just a term that the Jews would have identified with as being the worst possible of sinners. All right?

Now, let me add here. I really believe. I want you to hear me. I really believe that a sinning, unrepentant believer, member of the church, even after it's been brought to the church, should not be barred from attending our worship.

I don't think that's what Jesus is saying. I really don't. And maybe there might be an exception. Maybe that sinning member has become combative and divisive and is only coming to create trouble.

Then, I think, as elders of the church, we have a decision to bar them from our public worship. Other than some rare exception, I don't think they should be barred from worshipping with us, to attending.

[38 : 47] I don't think that's what Jesus means. I mean, if we are open to unbelievers attending, regardless of what kind of sinners they are, I have had open, practicing homosexuals attend.

The worship of the church. And they're not excluded, not barred. They're loved. So, just like we allow unbelievers to attend our worship services, and we should, then our worship service should be open to a member who is under discipline.

In fact, historically, among the history of Baptists, that's been the case. They've been allowed to worship. But they've been barred from fellowship, certain things in the church.

So, we should allow them. In fact, we should encourage the sinning member to attend. And the sinning believer should attend.

Should attend the worship. It might very well be the means God uses to bring that one to repentance. Let them be like a heathen.

[40 : 15] If we were to bar the person from even coming into the doors and being part of any of the gathering of the church for worship, then we are actually judging them to be unbelievers.

But he didn't say that. He said, let them be to you like a heathen. Like a heathen.

Like an unbeliever. Not one of them, but like them. And this is a very important distinction here. And just like we do with unbelievers who attend our worship, they're not allowed to teach.

Not allowed to serve. Not allowed to lead in any capacity in the church.

And, most importantly though, it's hard for us to understand this. And it just really reveals a disconnect that really has developed within the churches here in the West.

[41 : 26] And, they are not allowed at the Lord's table. They're not allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper.

You say, what's the big deal about that? So what? And that reveals something that's missing in our thoughts about our understanding.

And missing in the significance we place upon the Lord's Supper. You see, the Lord's Supper is, when we partake of it, it is the visible expression of the very body of Christ.

Not actually his body, but a visible expression of it. And when we gather around that table, in a sense, even though we don't put up chairs around the table, when we gather around that table, we are identifying ourselves as true followers of Christ.

We're actually identifying ourselves as the body of Christ. It's a distinctive that points to who we really are.

[42 : 41] When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we're acknowledging fellowship. A very close fellowship with Jesus. Even to the partaking of his body and his blood.

Fellowship with him. But also, and that's why it is a meal in a sense, it also points to the fellowship we have with one another. We're identifying with one another.

It makes it very special. In every culture, even in ours, eating a meal together signifies what?

Fellowship. And unity. And oneness and love. That's what it signifies.

We've kind of lost sight of that when it comes to, you know, the ordinance here of the Lord's Supper. And so we're dealing with the question of when is the discipline finished?

[43 : 50] And the answer is when the sinning brother repents. And by the way, how many opportunities does the sinning brother have to repent? Don't say four.

Because it's... Many, many times to repent. Many, many times. Think about it. Think of the mercy of God that's built into this.

I mean, after he sins, or she sins, there's the opportunity to repent, as is the case with every one of us when we sin.

We should repent. In fact, God is so gracious to give us multiple opportunities to repent. He doesn't just strike us dead the moment we sin. And so we have opportunities to repent.

And God is ready to forgive. And he calls upon us to repent. And so, I don't know how many times that sinning brother or sister has to repent before the sin is ever discovered.

[44 : 56] But then when the sin is discovered, and a loving brother goes to that sinning member privately, then there is the opportunity to repent.

And I think it's right to take liberty here and say that, you know, that loving brother or sister is certainly free to go back to him, her, multiple times to plead for repentance.

And then after two or three brothers go, there's opportunity to repent. And they too, I think, can show mercy and patience and exhibit the long-suffering of God and give that sinning member several opportunities to repent.

Multiple opportunities. In the Spirit of the Lord. Not just dismissing it and letting it go, but we can go numerous times.

And then after it is brought to the attention of the elders and the church at large, then there is the opportunity to repent right then.

[46 : 11] I mean, think about it. Jesus is not giving us some kind of cold, calculated, you know, kind of formula or procedure for excommunication.

That's not what this is about. If it's done correctly, it reveals the love and mercy and long-suffering of God.

We know He has that. That's how He deals with each of us individually. And we, as His representatives, the body, we're to deal with people in the very same way.

With patience, with long-suffering. Not just letting it go. But being persistent and pleading and loving that person to the place of repentance.

That's the design of all this. And that's when it ends. When there is repentance. And therefore, restoration. Fourth question, very quickly.

[47 : 17] What does it accomplish? What does church discipline accomplish? Well, three things. And this is how it's worded in our bylaws. First of all, to glorify God by maintaining purity in the church.

That's why this is so important. And why many churches, as I've said, have gotten off track and splintered off into cults and groups of heresy or just become dead in false doctrine.

It is to glorify God by maintaining the purity of the church. 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verses 7 and 8. Therefore, purge out the old leaven.

That is that old sin that you may be a new lump. A purified lump. Since you truly are. Since in reality you are unleavened. How?

He says, through the sacrifice of Christ. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. So you are unleavened in reality before God.

[48 : 23] And so when sin crops up in the church we're to purge it. To bring purity. Second, to edify believers in the church by deterring sin and promoting purity.

1 Timothy 5.20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all that the rest also may fear. And third, to promote the spiritual welfare of the sinning believer by calling him or her to return to a biblical standard of doctrine and conduct.

Galatians chapter 6 verse 1. Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one. And Jesus said in Matthew, if he repents, you've won him.

Won him back. Not won him to salvation. You've won him back into fellowship with God. Then one more question. And it deals with the last three verses of this passage that are to many very confusing and to many also sadly misinterpreted, misapplied.

And here's the question. Why does it work? These instructions for church discipline, if they're followed, it works. Why does it work? Because God puts his seal of approval on it.

[49 : 51] Not just because it's in the word, in his word, and he has spoken it and here it is. But he puts his seal of approval upon it when the church acts with discipline.

He approves of it. And that's what the remaining verses in this passage are all about. Verse 18, Assured I say to you, whatever you, now what's the context here?

The church. Whatever you, the church, bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Now what in the world does that mean?

I've seen entire books written on the subject of being loosed and they're absolutely wrong. They've taken the scripture totally out of its context. Well what does it mean?

It means that if the church will follow the instructions in this passage, Jesus' instructions, the church will have the backing of God, will have literally the backing of heaven itself.

[50 : 59] That God will support this decision, this disciplinary action, if you follow the scriptural instruction. And so what about binding and loosening?

Well the word bind then in this context refers to the church's decision to not forgive the unrepentant sinner. Now the question is not salvation, the question is fellowship.

to not grant forgiveness if there's unrepentance and then to disfellowship with that believer. That's what it means to bind.

And the word loose, to loose refers to the church's forgiveness, forgiveness of the sin for the repentant sinner, for those who repent, repent, and then to restore them into fellowship.

And again what's at stake here is not the sinner's salvation, but rather the sinner's fellowship. Fellowship with God, fellowship with other believers.

[52 : 05] And the point is that God signs off on the decision of the church body. That's what he's saying. And why would he sign off on it?

Because God is approving, approving the church, proving as the church deals with the sinning brother or sister, according to the instructions of Scripture.

God is approving. Verse 19, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

And this is not a prayer promise that we can apply to any and all kinds of praying. Somehow two or three of you get together and you agree with God that all three of us will be given Cadillacs.

Well, we agreed on it. That's not what it means. Sorry, Albert, no Cadillac for you. Even if all of us agreed on it, alright?

[53 : 20] That's not what this means. This is a promise concerning the disciplinary actions of the church. When it has come to that point, when the believer does not repent, and when one goes privately to the believer and he still does not repent, when it is brought to the church and he still does not repent, then the church decides that the fellowship will be broken.

Places of leadership will be removed. Places of teaching can no longer be done by this one. He's disfellowshipped. He's welcome to come to the worship service, but when we have the Lord's Supper, he's not welcome at the Lord's table until he repents and gets right with God and with his church.

So God is approving of it. That's the whole point. I approve of the decision of the church in this disciplinary action, and he is approving because he is actually present in that decision.

He's actually present. And that's the idea behind verse 20. for where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them.

I'm present. When the church comes together, assembles to take action according to the Bible, God says, I'm there too.

[54 : 55] And I'm approving, and what is decided is recorded in heaven. And it will be done. that's what makes church discipline work.

And it's backed up by the authority of heaven. But to conclude, it all comes back really to the most important thing.

And that is, what is our desire in this? Well, first, what is God's desire? And therefore, our desire. that the sinning brother or sister would repent and be restored in right fellowship with God and with the body of Christ.

That's what we want. Not to exclude, expel, make people feel bad, but lovingly bring them in. But lovingly bring them in.