



REDEMPTIVE COMMUNITY – PART 3
Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1-5

Well, good morning. You can have a seat and, as you do, if you have a Bible, and I hope you do, you can open with me to Matthew 18. In fact, it would be good if you could have Matthew 18 open, and then mark a place over in Galatians 6. It's a place we're going to go in a little while. We're in the final week, week three, of talking about church discipline in the context of this community of faith.

The overarching series, we're walking through "Covenant Community" as we look at our church covenant, which you see at the top of your notes there, starts by saying, "As members of The Church at Brook Hills, we affirm this covenant with one another by God's grace, for our good, and ultimately for God's glory..." Then, a few paragraphs down, I haven't included the whole covenant this morning, just in light of space, but a few paragraphs down, we say, "...We will humbly and gently confront one another and receive correction from one another in accordance with a New Testament understanding of church discipline and restoration."

Now, why would we say that? Why would we include that sentence in our church covenant? The answer that I hope we're seeing in Scripture is because we want Christ that much. We want the glory of Christ in the church that much. So, what you've got in your notes there is a quick review. Especially, if you've missed one or both of the last couple of weeks, I want to try to get us as best as possible, in a real short summary on the same page when we think about church discipline; a review of what we've seen up to this point. We've said, "Why not church discipline? Why do people say you shouldn't do church discipline?"

We've said that some people say that church discipline is legalistic, and we're praying that God would help us to see church discipline as loving. People say, "What about Matthew 7:1, or you to will be judged?" What we said was keep going to Matthew 7:5. "You take the plank out of your own eye so that you can see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." So, the whole teaching in Matthew 7 is about helping one another avoid sin and get out of sin. We've said, "Well, some people will leave." We've said, "Okay, we're going to trust that this is God's church to grow and not ours."

"We don't know how to practice church discipline." Then, we are saying, "Let's learn how to practice it." We've looked at church discipline in two ways. We've defined two facets of church discipline: One, formative church discipline, which is the continual training we receive from the Word as disciples of Christ, as followers of Christ, as we are continually being sanctified and growing in the likeness of Christ. Then, along the way, corrective church discipline, restorative church discipline, the care that the body of Christ gives in matters of unrepentant sin in a brother or sister's life. What we've said is the foundation for church discipline is the grace of God.

Church discipline is about the love of God. God disciplines those whom He loves, and He puts discipline in the context of His people out of love, out of grace that's the foundation

here. We saw that in the whole context leading up to Matthew 18:15-20. As we approached discipline, we saw that we need childlike humility. We need a deep concern for holiness. We will not practice discipline in the church if we do not care about the holiness of God. When we care about the holiness of God among His people, then we take passages like Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5 seriously.

We need a passion for the hurting. Please keep Matthew 18:10-14, this picture of a shepherd going after a lost sheep...keep that image in your mind. This is not just the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. This is Jesus, right before he talks about church discipline, talking about pursuing, running after a brother that's caught in sin because you love him, because you care for him. Passion for the hurting, and we need forgiving hearts to forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

Now, last week we talked about applying church discipline. We walked through Matthew 18:15-17, and we saw four steps that Jesus outlines here. Step one: Private correction. We are going to look at these here in a little bit again. Step two: Small group clarification. Step three: Church admonition, and step four: Church excommunication. We asked...last week, we asked the question, "Why would you ever expel someone as the church, to use Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 5? Why would you ever say to someone, 'You're not welcome as a member of this church'? Doesn't that seem to go against everything that we think of when we think of church? To say to someone, 'You are not welcome as a member here', why would we ever say that?" What we did last week was we dove into 1 Corinthians 5 when the New Testament church said exactly that, and we said, "Why?"

We saw three primary reasons. First and foremost, for the purity of the church. We saw last week that church members are accountable before God and for each other. We are responsible for each other's sin. God, help us to see this. If there is a brother or sister in this faith family that is continuing in unrepentant sin...unrepentant in sin, then you and I are held accountable for that. We are responsible to God for that. It's not just a private matter, this is a community matter, and we are accountable before God for each other. As a result, we must be humble.

Last week, we saw a much different picture of humility and pride than we would expect, a picture of humility and pride that really turns our contemporary thinking on humility and pride upside down. We saw Paul addressing pride as toleration of unrepentant sinners in the church. 1 Corinthians 5 teaches that it is prideful for God's people to tolerate sin in the church like it is no big deal. It's prideful to sit back and, under a banner of grace or freedom or openness or whatever you want to call it, to say, "Well, it doesn't matter what you've done, you can be a member here. That's pride," Paul says. "You're boasting about this." He said, "You need humility." Humility, 1 Corinthians 5, is exclusion of unrepentant sinners from the church. Humility does the hard work of addressing sin in the church.

Humility does not tell God how to be gracious; humility submits to God and obeys God with fear and trembling. Humility does the hard work of exclusion of unrepentant sinners from the church for the purity of the church. The church membership is essential, we said; it's a huge deal in 1 Corinthians 5 when this man is expelled from the church. We think, "Well, big deal. Today, you're not a member of the church anymore." It was a huge deal in 1 Corinthians 5.

We saw the church defined as a member and not as an individual, and we saw the isolation from the church reflect separation from Christ. The New Testament knows nothing of a follower of Christ who is not committed to a local body of believers. So, all of this for the purity of the church, and then, for the good of the individual, the salvation of the individual.

This is for his good, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. It's what 1 Corinthians 5 teaches.

So, for the purity of the church, salvation of the individual and, ultimately, for the glory of God, because we do not want God's glory to be compromised in His people before a watching world. We will not do the hard work of church discipline until we care more about the glory of God than we do popularity or success as our culture defines it, even our church culture. We will not do church discipline if our concern is to take the easiest, most popular route. We will do church discipline if our hearts are enthralled with a desire for the glory of God among His people. That's when we will refuse to ignore 1 Corinthians 5 and Matthew 18, for the glory of God.

Church Discipline in Action ...

So, that brings us, this morning, to church discipline in action. Okay, what does this look like in the context of The Church at Brook Hills? How does this look in the context of this faith family with thousands of people in it?

That's what I want us to dive into this morning. I do not want to presume, though, that we are going to answer every single possible question or address every single possible scenario that could ever come up in church discipline. The reality is, there is an infinite number of scenarios. What I want us to do this morning is to get a practical basis that takes the biblical foundations that we've seen in Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5. We're going to look at Galatians 6 this morning too and put them all together and say, "Okay, in practice, what does this look like in this faith family?"

Before we dive into it, I want to show us what it does not look like. So, I want to invite you to revisit with me what our church discipline team is not about in the context of Brook Hills. Watch this with me.

[Video Plays]

Let me say very clearly that the intent is, in no way, to make light of a very serious conversation going on in our country today, but the intent is to point out that, sometimes, when we think about church discipline, as soon as we hear that, we picture a hurtful process. We need to remember, though, that the whole design of God in church discipline is to keep His children from the hurt that sin causes. This is huge.

Yes, Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, you can only imagine the pain involved in the process, but realize what God is doing here. He is guarding His children from the disastrous, deadly consequences of sin. He is guarding His people from the inevitable hurt that is caused by sin. That's the picture of church discipline. So, what you've got in your notes there, "Church Discipline in Action," is five ways, so to speak, that we as a faith family are going to take the truths of Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5 and begin to put them into practice.

We will obey with the love of Christ.

Number one, we will obey with the love of Christ. This is where we are going to camp out most of our time on this first one. We will obey with the love of Christ. Matthew 18:15, let's read this passage one more time. Jesus says,

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony 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, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose in earth will be loosed in heaven.

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Now, flip with me over to Galatians 6. Matthew 18:15-20, and we saw that whole picture of treat them as you would a pagan or tax collector; excommunication from the church addressed in 1 Corinthians 5. Now, look at Galatians 6 and listen to what Scripture teaches there. Galatians 6:1, Paul writes,

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and this way you fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. And then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load.

Come back to Matthew 18, and here's the picture. What you've got is Jesus spelling out a process, the New Testament church practicing that in 1 Corinthians 5, and then in Galatians 6, a direct command, *"If a brother is caught in sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."* The New Testament tells us that this is a matter of obedience; church discipline is a matter of obedience.

We will obey...here is the key...with the love of Christ. The whole context here in Galatians 6, 1 Corinthians 5, and Matthew 18 is love. It is...Jonathan Edwards talked about "gospel discipline" and that's the picture. In church discipline, we see a picture of the gospel. We see a picture of God who does not let His people continue in sin, who enables them to turn from sin and pursues them out of love and mercy and grace for redemption. If you looked at the top of the notes the last three weeks, you've noticed the title of this whole picture has not been "Church Discipline 101"; it's "Redemptive Community" because this is key.

The goal of church discipline is spiritual restoration. The goal of church discipline, Matthew 18, is to gain your brother, to win your brother over. 1 Corinthians 5, for the good, for the day of the Lord, so that his spirit may be saved. Here in Galatians 6, to bring him back from being caught in sin. The whole goal of church discipline is spiritual restoration. So, when we think about the whole process that we are about to dive into, that we've seen some, we're going to look at practically, remember, this is the goal. It is James 5:19-20. James says, *"My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."* What love...what love it is to address sin in each other's lives.

I'm praying...I'm praying that five years from now, that if Christ has not come back, that five years from now, we will look back over five years of intentionally obeying Matthew 18

and 1 Corinthians 5 in this faith family, that we would look back over five years of doing that and we would say, this is the most loving thing we've ever seen in the church. Is that possible? Yes, it's intended. That's the picture here.

Now, how do we make sure that we obey with the love of Christ? What I've done there in your notes is I've taken these passages Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5 and Galatians 6 and put them together and all that we've seen over the last couple of weeks, and I wanted to put before you some practical ways that we could make sure to keep the gospel of redemption of love and mercy and grace at the heart of church discipline in these ways.

First, we must be humble; we must be humble. This is the whole picture that we've seen. Church discipline can easily degenerate into a vain self-righteousness that is suspicious of others, that is eager to point out the faults of others, and we've got to guard against that, and one way we guard against that is remembering that we are all desperate for grace at every moment, and every single one of us in the body of Christ has a present, ongoing need for a Savior, and as a result, this changes the way we view others.

As God is gracious with us, we are gracious with others. As God is loving towards us, we are loving towards others. As God is patient with us, we are patient towards others. This is where Proverbs 19:11 is so insightful. We don't have time to turn there, but write this down. Proverbs 19:11, "*A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense.*" Did you catch that? Patience, to his glory to overlook an offense. There are times that we need to overlook offenses. Church discipline is not about whenever somebody rubs you a little wrong, "Okay, I have to go after them on that one." Whenever somebody says something, and you don't just love what they said, and you go running after them.

It takes patience, grace to overlook an offense. We all have areas where we are growing. Get that out on the table. We all have areas where we are growing, and we can all point out areas in each other's lives that we need to grow. I know in my own personal, spiritual journey, there are times when I will come to a realization...God will teach me an area of my life and show me an area of my life where I need to grow. I'll think I've just come to this huge spiritual realization, and I'll go to Heather, and I'll say, "I want you to listen, Heather, to what God has taught me." I'll think that I've got something new that I'm bringing to the table. She will in a gentle, loving, humble way, that only my precious wife can and will look back at me and say, "I've been waiting for you to realize that." It's one of those moments that I realize, in so many ways, she's so much farther ahead than I am, and she's just waiting for me to catch up, and she's patient with me. God is patient with me, and we need to be patient with one another.

So, there's patience, there's a humility, overlooking offenses; overlooking minor offenses, and we think, "Well, I thought sin was all major; all sin is serious no matter how small it is, so how do you know when to overlook something and when not to?" That leads to the second word of exhortation here: Be humble and be biblical; be biblical. Let's be clear: Church discipline is not about confronting pet peeves; it's not about confronting pet peeves. This is clearly where we must guard against legalism, extra biblical rules and regulations that we start to impose on one another. It's what Paul talks about in Romans 14:1. He talks about not disputing over different matters, that there are differences among the body of Christ where people in the body of Christ agree to disagree. Titus 3:9 says, "*Avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law. These are unprofitable and useless.*" Be biblical.

Look at that which is addressed in Scripture. When you look in 1 Corinthians 5:11...I'll just read it to you here. Paul says, "*Now I am writing you that you must not associate with*

anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler." Those things are pretty clear. They are revealed in Scripture. It's the whole picture in Matthew 18, "*When your brother sins against you...*" Galatians 6:1, "*If your brother is caught in a sin...*" The picture is sin. When there is sin that Scripture reveals and a brother or sister that is caught in it, well, how do you know? How do you know?

What I wanted to do is I wanted to give you just a list of questions to, at least, just think through as you're processing through, "Is this something that I just need to overlook or is this something out of love and obedience to Christ that I need to confront and/or address my brother or sister in?". Question number one, ask this question: Is there sin that is dishonoring God? Is there sin that is dishonoring God? Obviously, this is the point of 1 Corinthians 5. Immorality and all those other things that are listed, they were bringing dishonor to God. So, ask the question, "Is my brother or sister dishonoring God, disobeying His Word, and in the process, dishonoring God?" Is there sin that is dishonoring God, and if so, then yes, address that out of love.

Second question: Is there sin that is damaging the gospel? Is there sin that is damaging the gospel? We see this all over the New Testament, Paul warning about false teachers. You go to 1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:17-18, Paul says, "There are members in the church that need to be confronted, because they are spreading teaching in the church that is contrary to the gospel." The New Testament gives us a picture of a need for church discipline and restoration when a brother or sister is teaching that which is contrary to the gospel, which is, when a brother or sister, whether it's myself or anybody else, is spreading things among the community of faith that are not in accord to the gospel and the Word of Christ and that needs to be addressed. Is there sin that is damaging the gospel?

Third: Is there sin that is hurting the unity of the church? The unity of the church. I want to point out two levels here of unity of the church. This could be on a personal level, kind of like Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you..." Matthew 5, "If your brother has something against you..." If there is sin that is separating you and a brother, something that is hindering your unity to a brother or a sister, some individual basis, then it needs to be addressed. If it is not addressed, then it snowballs and roots of bitterness grow. The unity that God has designed for us as members who belong to one another is undercut completely.

So, if there is something that is hindering unity between you and another brother or sister, then go to them, address that. Then, not just on an individual level, but on a corporate level, so to speak, and the larger church as a whole. If there is sin that is threatening the unity of the larger church as a whole, then it needs to be addressed. Romans 16, Paul says, "*I urge you brothers to watch out for those who cause division.*" Watch out for them. Titus 3:9-11 warns against those who bring about division. 1 Timothy 5 warns against widows who go from house to house gossiping. We must address sin that is hindering the unity of the church on a personal level and on a larger level.

Is there sin that is dishonoring God, damaging the gospel? Is there sin that's hurting the unity of the church and is there sin that is hurting the witness of the church? Obviously, in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul is saying, "Not even pagans do these things. You are compromising the picture of the glory of Christ, and the people and the nations around you." Is there sin that is hurting the witness of the church?

Now, this list is not necessarily exhaustive; it's actually pretty general, but I wanted to give you at least some practical handles as you think through obeying Matthew 18 and being

patient in a way that overlooks offenses; overlooks, certainly pet peeves, things that maybe just rub you a little bit wrong. What needs to be addressed is is there sin that is dishonoring God, damaging the gospel, hurting the unity of the church, or the witness of the church, then yes, be biblical in that. Remember, our authority to address sin in each other's lives is completely based on this Word, not on our preferences anyway. So, be biblical.

Third, be pure; be pure. This is the point of Matthew 7:1-5, "Do not judge lest you be judged." When Jesus says, "How can you move the speck that is in your brother's eye when there is a", what in your own eye? When there is a plank in your own eye. So, what Jesus is teaching there in Matthew 7 is this whole process is designed to help you see your own sin. We know this, don't we? We know that we often see in others what we struggle with ourselves. Isn't that right? We often see in others what we are blind to in ourselves. So, first thing, when you see a brother or sister caught in sin, examine your life. Look for evidence of that sin in your own life.

This is where church discipline is so good, because God has designed this whole process not just for your brother's sanctification, but for your sanctification. Think about if we don't do this. If you see a brother or sister caught in sin, and you say, "Well, that's his deal", and you stop at that point, and you don't think about it anymore, "That's his problem", well, at that point, you're missing out on the process of sanctification that God has designed for you in that process. Now, when he sees that in you, he's going to do the same. "Leave him to deal with that on his own."

Now, we are walking along in the community of faith and missing the whole point of the community of faith. Covering over each sin, turning a deaf ear to each other's sin and missing out in the entire purpose of communal sanctification; us, together, growing into the image of Christ, the very design of the body of Christ. This is why this is so important and so good. God doesn't just sanctify others in this process; He sanctifies us as we love each other enough to address sin in each other's lives. We become so much more sensitive to sin in our own lives, and that is a very good thing. So, be pure.

Examine your life and examine your motives. There are all kinds of wrong motives that bring about the abuses we see in church discipline. Motives of anger, self promotion, self advancement, abuse of authority, desire for control, all of these wrong motives to honestly ask the question...now, all of these things, you're thinking about before you even go to that brother or sister, to ask the question, "Why am I going to that brother or sister? Is it to serve them? Is it out of love for them, or is it to serve myself? Is it about concern about myself or my brother or sister?" So examine your motives. Be pure.

Next, be prayerful; be prayerful. This seems so basic, but it is so huge. We, in order to address sin as Christ does, we need the heart of Christ. We realize, don't we, that if a brother or sister is caught in sin, no matter how hard we try, no matter what we say, apart from the power of Christ in their lives, they will never be delivered from that sin. Do we realize that? It's not our persuasive ability. This whole picture is dependent on...it's the grace of Christ this whole picture is dependent on.

That's why I love what Paul says to Timothy. He says, "Instruct your brothers in sin, so that God may grant them repentance." This is the work of God. Restoration is the work of God, not of man. Now, we don't just sit back and wring our hands in pious concern and say, "Oh, that's God's work." This whole process is us being the instruments by which God does this work, but we do it in dependence on and a desperation for God to change our brother or sister's heart, to bring them out of sin. Only Christ can give them freedom from that sin, so

we pray. We don't just pray tritely. We pray deeply for, during, and after, and in every facet of this process, be prayerful.

That leads to this next one: Be quiet; be quiet. Talk to God and not other people; talk to God and not other people. "Go to your brother or sister," Jesus says. Keep it just between the two of you. We excuse this so often. We pretend like it's not a big deal to talk about our brother or sister's sin. We justify it as normal and, along the way, we kill the unity of the church with gossip. What would happen in the picture of Christ in the world if, in the church, our names were safe, completely safe in each other's mouths? There was no backbiting or gossip or slander.

This is the picture: Go to your brother or sister just between the two of you. Zealously guard the character of Christ in your brother or sister, and if somebody comes to you to talk about another brother or sister's sin, tell them to be quiet. There's other language that we could use there, but, "Be quiet; don't talk to me about this. This is not...you're involving me in your sin." God will give us the boldness to speak like that to each other and to keep one another from sin. People will come to me and say, "Pastor, you know what a brother or sister is doing?" Stop right there. Have you talked to this brother or sister? If you have not, then you do not need to be coming to talk to me about them.

We know people will go to each other; we'll bait each other. We'll start kind of putting out a little bit of line and say, "Hey, have you heard about this or that?" Don't take the bait; don't take the bait, church. Stop that conversation at that point and say, "Go to God and to other people. Just between the two of you."

Be quiet and then, next...next, be quick. Be quick. What I mean by that, don't...I don't mean to rush the process; I don't mean to rush the process of church discipline. However, Scripture does teach us that if there is sin that needs to be addressed, it needs to be addressed now.

It's the whole picture in Matthew 5 when Jesus says, "If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you..." What do you do? "...leave your gift there in front of the altar. First, go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift." Just do it immediately. We know that sin snowballs. It's the whole picture in 1 Corinthians 5. "A little bit of yeast works through the whole batch of dough." Sin is deadly. It's dangerous and needs to be addressed immediately. So be quick in going to that brother or sister. Once you've asked those questions, "Is there sin that is dishonoring God or defaming the gospel?" "Is there sin that is hurting the unity or the witness of the church?" If so, then address that now. Be quick to address that and not let that sin just continue to grow. The more that sin grows, the more challenging this restoration process becomes. Be quiet. Be quick.

Now, all of these things are before we even go to a brother or sister. When you go to that brother or sister, next, be gentle. "*You who are spiritual should restore him gently,*" Galatians 6:1. Gently. Now, this doesn't mean we're light on sin. There's a firmness on sin, but it's a firm gentleness; it's the character of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit coming alive in its people, and we all know, you think about either conversations that you've had in those kind of situations or you will have about another brother or sister in their sin. We all know that our attitude in that conversation speaks far more loudly than our words, and we come to someone from a position of being above someone as opposed to beside someone, a position of superiority, announcing what all they've done wrong without a gentleness that sees your need for Christ at the core of your heart and approaches this brother and sister in sin based on that heart of Christ in you.

We realize sin is always a heart issue, right? Our words, our actions, our behavior, what we do in sin, all are symptoms of a core heart issue. There's a problem at the heart of who we are when we sin. We're not trusting God. We're not believing the promises of God, and so we're doing things our own way and these are symptoms. Oftentimes, we can find ourselves in all kinds of conversations about the symptoms out here and avoiding the heart issue, and so, be gentle and approach this knowing it's a heart issue.

In the process, next, be careful. Right after Galatians 6:1, Paul says, "*But watch yourself or you also may be tempted.*" When we are talking about sin, when we are confronting sin in the church, there is spiritual warfare going on here, and there are temptations for you to sin all along the way, so be on guard. Be careful.

Be humble, biblical, pure, prayerful, quick, quiet, gentle, careful, and then, be intentional; be intentional. This is where we take Matthew 18 and the picture we see in 1 Corinthians 5, and we say, "Okay, we are going to follow Christ as he has outlined this process. Step one, we are going to start with private correction, and we are not going to involve anybody else." Let me pause real quickly and say here, there are obviously, rare, extreme circumstances where someone else would need to be involved from the start. Something as extreme as child abuse, for example. Obviously, clearly wisdom tells us somebody else needs to be involved than an eight year old going to a mom or dad to address that, but in most cases, the picture Scripture gives us is Jesus says it is private correction. Keep it between you and your brother.

If your brother or sister does not listen to correction from the Word, continues unrepentant in sin, then step two, small group clarification. You go to another brother or sister, maybe two. Obviously, you go to someone who possesses these characteristics and qualities that we've just talked about, who's trustworthy, who will be quiet, who will look at this from a gospel-centered standpoint. My encouragement would be, when you go to that other brother or sister to involve them in this picture, my encouragement would be to give them as little unnecessary details as possible.

Because you are obviously coming from a pretty biased standpoint at this point, and you want a brother or sister who can look at this situation and see it as clearly as possible, and you want a brother or sister who can point out to you, if you're abusing this whole picture and not being biblical or not being humble about this. You want a brother or sister who can speak, not only to that person, but then to you in this situation. So, you say to that brother or sister, "Will you come with me to talk with this person about something in their lives?" Then, that way when they come, it makes a whole difference now in the context of this conversation, because now, it's not two or three people ganging up; it's two or three people now involved in the conversation with this brother or sister about...about issues that may or may not need to be addressed in this brother or sister's life. It changes the tone there. So, you involve one or two others, small group clarification.

Now, if there is sin that needs to be addressed and that brother or sister still does not listen, now the two or three people who are saying, "Here's the Word. We want to call you back to Christ", if that brother or sister continues unrepentant and will not listen, then step three: Church admonishment; tell it to the church. Now, we talked about this last week. That word is "*ekklesia*". The gathering; the assembly of believers. So, tell it to the gathering, and this is where things get really interesting, especially as you think about the context of this faith family. Does this mean that, at the end of our gathering today, we need to pause and just ask if there's anything that anybody has got to share? Any group of two or three in this room, who's got to deal with a brother or sister in this room, and you'd like to bring to all 2,000 of our attention and just wait for a response and see what happens from there?

Probably not the best way to carry out Matthew 18, but how do you tell it to the church then, tell it to the gathering, tell it to the assembly?

This is where I mentioned a few times already, the elders, even since I first came here, have been diving and praying, "Okay, what does this look like in the context of our faith family?" About a year ago, we began exploring the possibility of us having in the context of this church, and it's the next thing on your notes there, a restoration team. The picture would be a team of men and women, brothers and sisters in this faith family, who are knowledgeable Scripturally about how to address conflict in the church, who are trustworthy personally. Brothers and sisters of integrity, gentleness, humility, all of these things, that can be a point person, so to speak, for when that small group clarification happens, and the brother or sister continues in unrepentant sin, that you could come to this group of believers in this church and say, "Hey, we would like help in restoring this brother and bringing this brother or sister back from sin."

So, the elders commissioned Don Acton, who is one of our elders, to lead up a team, and it just so happened that a couple of other men that are now elders were on that team from the beginning: Dale Kendrick and Jim Meriwether and then Jim Houston from our pastoral care staff and some others. What they began doing was praying, studying Scripture, talking with other churches of all sizes, including this size of church. "How do you all do church discipline? How do you obey the commands of Christ here?" I met with them this last Wednesday, and we've been meeting on and off at different times, working, and basically, the picture has been, "How can we outline a process that is best, so that this is a team that would help guard us against some of the abuses here, to make sure that we are not going off into legalistic pursuits after this or that, that we are carrying out, that two or three are not confronting another brother or sister unnecessarily or in a way that does not reflect the character of Christ, but that this could begin to be a bridge between...between that small group clarification and announcing something to 2,000, 4,000 people?"

So, a restoration team that would work next to the elders. At the elders discretion, there would be a process by which this restoration team would be a part of trying to bring that brother or sister back, and that whole picture that we saw in the first two steps of keeping this circle as small as possible, as long as possible. Now, you've got a team of folks with a variety of different resources to bring to the table to help restore that brother or sister, and then, if that brother or sister continues unrepentant in sin, then the elders, then, at their discretion, decide when it is appropriate to bring that to the church, and in what context that would be appropriate to bring that to the church?

So, we've been working on a process, and it's not finished at this point, but, basically, the goal has been, "We need in Scripture, as a faith family, to dive into the biblical foundations here. All along the way, a team diving into the same thing for the last year. Then, for us to begin to put handles in and say, "Okay, what does this look like exactly?" So, in the coming days...not today, but in the coming days...hopefully there will be something that we can communicate clearly, to our body to say, "Hey, as we carry out this process, this is how it looks, especially, from step two to step three in Matthew 18." You might think, "Well, what if before you communicate that process, what if there's an issue that needs to be addressed in the church and a brother or sister is unrepentant in sin after that step too?"

Well, a couple of thoughts. First of all, remember, the majority of church discipline and restoration, 95 percent of it, we said happens in the context informally of our relationships with one another all the time. We do not need a pastor or leader or anybody else to be involved with you going to a brother or sister in their sin. Or, maybe you and two others,

one or two others going to a brother or sister in their sin. So, don't forget, the majority of church discipline we can do apart from any other help, so to speak.

However, then if there is something in a brother or sister's life, and they are continuing unrepentant in sin that needs to be addressed in a member of this faith family, then I would encourage you, at this point, simply to contact Jim Houston. He's the best point person, basically, on that team, because he's on staff here, and he can begin to help you walk through, to make sure that regarding some of these things, and then to begin to work with that team and the elders and anything else that needs to happen.

Obviously, there does come a point in Matthew 18 where step four happens. There is, God forbid, church excommunication. That is an action that is taken by the body of Christ. So, the point is, what we are saying is that as a faith family, in the days to come, we want to be intentional about obeying these steps that Jesus has laid out in a way that brings honor to Christ and His church for the good of each other, for the purity of the church, the salvation of each other, the good of each other, and, ultimately, for the glory of God's name. We want to be intentional in those things.

Okay, we will obey with the love of Christ. Not every question answered there, but hopefully a basis by which we can begin to move forward as a church. Now, let's be honest, we will obey with the love of Christ, Matthew 18, and we will do 1 Corinthians 5. That is hard stuff. I will be the first to admit that there is a tendency in us, in me, to shy away from obedience here. I'm convinced Jesus knows there's a tendency to shy away from obedience here. That's why He tells us what He does in Matthew 18:18-20.

We will trust in the authority of Christ.

I want you to see these next truths, ways that we will implement church discipline in action based on the promises of Christ. We will obey with the love of Christ. Second, we will trust in the authority of Christ; we will trust in the authority of Christ. We're going to fly through these, but Matthew 18:18, Jesus says...and these next three verses are some of the most abused verses in Scripture, because people take each one of them, rip them out of their context and say all different kinds of things.

So, let's see them in their context, Matthew 18:18, *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."* That verse has been used to claim divine authority for the church to forgive sins. This is the picture we've seen all throughout the history of the Catholic Church, divine authority to forgive sins. The church pronounces whether or not you are forgiven.

Same picture we've seen. We've got people walking around binding and loosing all kinds of things as if God is waiting for us to bind or loose something to respond and say, "Okay, now it's bound." The picture here...don't miss it...is that in the context of the church, God has entrusted the authority of Christ to the church to speak on His behalf against sin and about sin, such that...look at it this way: If someone comes to the church and says, "I have sin in my life, and I'm unrepentant in it. I am not turning from sin. I'm not turning to Christ", then we can say, the church can say to that person with complete authority, "You are not forgiven of your sin. You are bound in your sin, not forgiven of your sin."

Now, they are not unforgiven because we said so; we're simply reflecting what has been said in heaven based on the authority of Christ, and our words as a church are a reflection of what Christ has done in heaven. The same way, if a brother or sister says, or if a person says, "I have sin in my life, and I'm turning from it. I'm repenting of it. I'm turning to Christ", then we can say with great confidence and authority, "You're forgiven of your sin."

Not our words that make them forgiven, but Christ forgives them. It's Christ's words, and we speak as the church based on the authority of Christ. It's the whole picture we talk about in preaching and communication of the Word. We pronounce what is true in heaven.

It's the same picture that we see the Lord's Prayer. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That's the picture. The church speaks with the authority of Christ against sin. I love what one writer said. He said, "Never is the church more in harmony in heaven and operating in perfect accord with Christ than when dealing with sin to maintain purity." "Never is the church more in harmony with heaven and operating in perfect accord with Christ than when dealing with sin to maintain purity." By what authority do you do church discipline? By the authority of heaven as a reflection of the words and the authority of Christ.

We will pray according to the promise of Christ.

Third, we will pray according to the promise of Christ. We will trust in the authority of Christ; we will pray according to the promise of Christ. Matthew 18:19, again, abused, "I tell you..." Jesus says, "...that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my father in heaven." That verse has been used, "Well, let's get a couple of people together. As long as we agree, then God's got to do it. You agree, I agree, poof, it happens." It's not the way Matthew 18:19 works. The context here, two or three, what's the picture? Going to a brother or sister in their sin. Know this: What Jesus is saying here in Matthew 18 is that, "When you are going to address sin in that small group picture, two or there gathering there to address sin, know this: You have the full support of my Father in heaven in that situation, and you ask for the gentleness and the humility and the grace and the wisdom, my Father stands ready to give it. He will give you everything you need to carry this out." This is Jesus saying, "I know this is going to be tough. You speak with my authority, and you have the full support of my Father."

We will experience the presence of Christ.

Then, next, we will experience the presence of Christ. Trust in His authority, pray according to His promise and experience the presence of Christ. Probably the most abused verse, Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." How many of us have heard someone say, either in praying or in a worship gathering saying, "Well, where two or three have come together, there Jesus is. So, since we've got more than two or three here, we know that Jesus is here."?

What's the problem with that? You have a buddy over here who had his quiet time this morning, and he was by himself thinking, "Man, if somebody else would have been invited in, then God would have showed up. Otherwise, I was on my own." How many people does it take for God to show up at a prayer meeting? One. Like, you don't need to get another invitation for God to decide He's going to come. The picture here is not, "Okay, since we've got a quorum, God's presence is now here." The picture here is, "When two or three of you are going to address sin in the life of another believer, and you are doing the most difficult work that the church does, know this: That I am right there in your midst. You are not alone. I am with you in this process, and you will see and know and experience and feel my presence in that context in a way that you would completely miss if you continued on turning a deaf ear to that sin. Know this: You have the authority of heaven, the support of my Father, and you have the promise of my presence with you right in the middle of that conversation." Know that in the most difficult work you do in the church, you will know the presence of Christ.

Know this, Church at Brook Hills, this is what Jesus was saying; this is encouragement for us. There is a tendency in us to shy away from obeying Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5. What Jesus is saying is, "You don't need to shy away because you have the authority of

heaven. You have the support of my Father and, Church at Brook Hills, you will experience my presence in a way you would never experience otherwise. When you obey my commands here, you will experience the presence of Christ."

We will honor the cross of Christ.

And ultimately, last, we will honor the cross of Christ. I want to invite you to go with me to 1 Corinthians 5. This is where we are going to close out. 1 Corinthians 5. Do you remember when Paul, in the passage we looked at last week, talked about the yeast and the dough? Talked about the yeast and the dough. He talked about a little yeast spreads throughout the whole dough. Yeast in Scripture, leaven, yeast is a picture of sin, a symbol for sin, and the picture Paul is giving here is a little bit of sin spreads throughout the whole church very quickly.

Listen to what he says, verses 6 and 7. Paul says, *"Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new batch without yeast - as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."* Underline that sentence right there, "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." What does Paul do here? He reaches back in the Old Testament, and he says that the Passover feast, the bread they ate, was unleavened bread, and the reason why was because leaven was a picture, the yeast was a picture of their old life in Egypt and slavery, and they were being delivered out from that.

So, it would make no sense to celebrate deliverance with a picture of sin in your midst. So, you have been delivered from that. That's what the Passover is all about. Paul reaches back into that picture, and he says, "Today, Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. He has paid the price for sin to be done away with. So, do not operate with sin in church." You're free from it. He's freed you from it. He says that you may be a new batch without yeast as you really are. When you tolerate sin in the church, you're living like Christ hasn't been sacrificed and the old leaven is not gone. By tolerating it in your midst, you are saying, "There is sin still here just the same as before, and it's not. Christ has died to cover that sin and died to freed you from that sin so live like it. Christ has been sacrificed, so for the sake of the cross of Christ, by the mercy at the cross of Christ, be rid of sin in the church."

This is where we see the church at Corinth, under a banner of grace, freedom, openness saying, "Christ died on the cross, therefore, you are free to be a member, no matter what you do", and Paul says, "No." He rebukes them for it, and he says, "No. Christ has been sacrificed, therefore, get rid of impurity in the church. By His grace, be rid of impurity in the church." This is where we are confronted with a question, the same question that they were confronted with in 1 Corinthians 5. The question is this: We want a Christ who pardons, we want a Christ who forgives our sins, but do we want a Christ who purifies? Have we become so content in the contemporary church to bask in the forgiveness of Christ while we live like the rest of the world?

Christ died on a cross, not just to cover our sins, but to cleanse us from sin and to empower us over all sin. Do we want Him to purify us, not just pardon us? When we live...when we live content with sin and giving ourselves to sin, we need to realize that by tolerating sin in the church, when we tolerate sin in the church, when we treat sin like it's no big deal or somebody else's problem...when we tolerate sin in the church, we trample on the sacrifice of Christ. If we pretend like sin is no big deal, then we are gathering together every single week pretending like Christ's death on the cross is not a big deal, trampling on the very sacrifice of Christ. He has died to free us from sin, so let us live like it.

Let's live like it. Let's experience what has been bought for us. We need to realize that the death of Christ on the cross transforms our lives in the church. Don't miss this. Everyone who trusts in the crucified Christ lives a transformed life. It's impossible not to. Everyone who trusts in a crucified Christ lives a transformed life. It's not possible to trust in the power of the cross and continue day after day after day in unrepentant sin. So, turn from sin and purge it from the church, for Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed and that is what communion is about.

It is about fixing our eyes and our minds on the sacrifice of Christ. Listen to this with me. You've heard me quote from David Brainerd before, missionary to the Native American Indians of the Northeast. A pagan Indian tribe heard the gospel and responded, had so many things to be cleansed and purified of, purged of. How did you do it? How did you lead them to be holy? How did you lead this Indian tribe to be holy. Listen to what Brainerd said: "I never got away from Jesus and Him crucified, and I found that when my people..." Listen to this. "...when my people," These Indians. "...when they were gripped by this great doctrine of Christ and Him crucified, I did not need to give them instructions about morality. I found that one followed as sure and inevitable fruit of the other. My Indians began to put on the garments of holiness, and their common life began to be sanctified even in small matters when they were most possessed by the doctrine of Christ and Him crucified."

Did you catch that? The great deterrent to sin in our lives and the great deterrent to sin in this church is pure, unadulterated focus on the cross of Christ. Because when our lives, and when we as a community of faith are possessed by the cross of Christ, then we see the sacrifice for our sin, we realize just how serious sin is, and we cannot walk away from a life possessed with the cross and give ourselves to this world, because we know He has died to free us from the sins of this world.

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