



## **REDEMPTIVE COMMUNITY – PART 1** **Matthew 18:15-20**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Matthew 18. Unfortunately, now you just have to sit there and listen to me, and even more so, you have to sit there and listen to me as we talk about church discipline. I mean, talk about a horrible transition from what we've just experienced to church discipline.

This is something we've been talking about for a while. We've said it's coming. We're going to dive into this. Last Sunday, when we were driving away, I mentioned to Heather that we would be talking about church discipline this week, and she said, "Well, I'm looking forward to that." She said, "I've never heard a sermon on church discipline before." I had to agree with her on one part, and not on the other part.

On the second part, yes, I don't think I've ever heard a sermon on church discipline before, and so this will be the first one I've heard...well, second if you count 9:00. However, I don't agree with the second part, "I'm looking forward to it." Like, I've not been looking forward to this week. This is a topic that is often neglected and ignored, or if paid attention to, abused. That presents a lot of challenges for our time together in the Word this morning.

You've got, on the front of your notes there, our church covenant, and everything is just great, encouraging and uplifting, in this picture. Remember, our church covenant is an expression of who we are, what the Bible says about us as the people of God, and specifically, as the people called The Church at Brook Hills. Follow along with me. Just read it and remember where we've gone to this point when you come to that last sentence we're going to look at this morning.

"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." We studied Nehemiah 9 and saw that.

*Having been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to surrender our lives to Him, and having been baptized as Christians in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we covenant together to glorify God by making disciples of all nations.*

*Together, [We saw this in Hebrews 10, and then we looked at it in 2 Timothy 3 and 4.] we will draw near to God and worship. We will delight in the glory of God, depend on the presence of God, grow in the knowledge of God, and submit to the Word of God as the all-sufficient authority in our lives and in His church.*

*Together, we will hold fast the hope we profess. We will regularly participate in communion as we solemnly and joyfully remember the past work of Christ*

*on the cross, celebrate the present work of Christ at the Father's right hand, and anticipate the future work of Christ in His return for His bride.*

*[We saw this last week in Romans 12.] Together, we will spur one another on to love in good deeds. We will meet with one another consistently, pray for one another regularly, and serve one another selflessly. We will share each other's joys, and bear each other's burdens. We will edify one another with our speech and encourage one another with our example.*

*[Then, we come to this sentence.] We will humbly and gently confront one another and receive correction from one another in accordance with the New Testament understanding of church discipline and restoration.*

You see these three passages, they're listed there, that we're going to be diving into over the next few weeks.

So, let's be honest. Let's just put it out on the table. Church discipline is a pretty negative topic in many of our minds. As soon as we mention church discipline, there's all kinds of ideas, images, pictures, of the holy police that come to our mind. Some of our guys have been working on trying to depict some of those images that might come in our minds. So, I want you to watch this video with me. Maybe this is how you picture church discipline. Watch this with me.

*[Video Plays]*

I'm thinking this is not what Jesus had in mind when he talked about church discipline. So, I want us to dive in, and I want us to hear from Jesus, how He approached this issue and this topic, and the church. Matthew 18:15. I'm convinced that this whole picture of church discipline, this is one of those words... "discipline" even...that just needs to be redeemed in our day.

You think negatively when we think of discipline. That's not how Scripture approaches discipline. We need to redefine, understand again what Scripture means when it uses that kind of picture of terminology. So, Matthew 18:15. 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 tax collector.*

*"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. 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 I am with them."*

Father, this whole passage ends with a promise of your presence and your response in prayer, and so we come to you this morning. We pray that you would help us to understand your Word. Help us to understand this whole picture that we often neglect or ignore. We don't know how to put this into practice, and so we pray that, by your Spirit, you would teach us and train us and mold us into a people who are obedient to your Word, even when

it seems difficult to do. We pray that your Spirit would guide and lead our time, not just in your Word this morning, but as we consider what this looks like in the context of our faith family. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

It's really interesting when you think about it. This is Jesus' first initial instruction to His disciples about the church. We've seen the word "church" mentioned one other time in the Gospels. Matthew 16 with Peter's confession of Christ as Lord, and Jesus is saying that the church is going to be built on that confession of Christ as Lord. However, then, you get to Matthew 18, and this is His initial instruction to the church...which in and of itself, that should just leap out of the pages of Scripture before us. First, to realize this whole issue of church discipline was not number 99 on a list of 100 things that Jesus said were important in the church. This is at the top. Right after confession of Christ as Lord, we see Jesus talking about church discipline, confronting a brother or sister in sin in the church.

This is extremely important. This should signal to us. This is not an option to the church. This is not extra credit. This is essential. This is fundamental. Yet, it is so often neglected that I'm guessing many of us have not heard a sermon or seen church discipline practiced. Some of us have, but many of us, I'm guessing, haven't. It, obviously, shows us we need to see what Jesus is talking about here and consider how to implement it.

## **Why Not Church Discipline?**

### **Four Objections to Church Discipline**

Now, there's a lot of reasons why we don't do church discipline. There's excuses or objections to church discipline. You've got them listed there in your notes. Why not church discipline? Some say, "Well, church discipline is legalistic. You can't be a church of grace and a church of discipline. Church discipline contradicts the grace of God and the love of God." Mark it down. Without doubt, a church that starts to talk about church discipline and a pastor that starts to talk about church discipline will immediately be open to the charge of being legalistic. It's inevitable. People say, "Church discipline is legalistic." Now, we're going to come to each of these and think about how Scripture addresses these thoughts that we might say, but let's just run down them.

Secondly, "What about Matthew? What about Matthew 7:1? Do not judge or you, too, will be judged." Matthew 7:1. This is the verse that it's almost a catch phrase that comes out whenever you start talking about church discipline. "Well, you don't judge. Don't judge or you, too, will be judged." We live in a day where the intolerable sin is to say that something is wrong. You don't say that something is wrong in someone else's life, or that something is wrong in the culture around you. "Who are you to say that? Don't judge lest you be judged." Or, maybe we quote John 8:7. "Let he who is without sin, let him cast the first stone. Anybody in here not have sin? Okay. Well, then, none of us can really point out sin in each other's lives." We use phrases like that. "What about Matthew 7:1? Do not judge lest you be judged."

Third, "People will leave." Let me tell you what's not at the top of the charts on church growth magazines: The trend of church discipline. "We're a church that disciplines sinners," just doesn't work well on billboards today. You've got all kinds of catchphrases for churches. "We're a church that loves." "We're the church that cares." "We're the church of joy." "We're the church that meets needs." Brook Hills: We're the church that disciplines. You put that on your billboard, your website, you're not going to achieve high attendance Sunday the next week. It's not going to happen. It doesn't work. People not only won't come, they'll

leave. Even the thought or the topic, of this, is probably causing us around this room to think, "I don't know if I'm in for this."

Sometimes, if people don't leave, sometimes this one causes the pastor to leave. I was having a meal with a fellow pastor this last week, and he was asking what we were studying, and I was telling him what we were diving into over the next few weeks. These were his exact words. His exact words were, "Well, why don't you give me a call in a few weeks if you're still there and let me know how it goes." That will bless your heart. So, either, you'll leave, or you'll make me leave if we dive into church discipline. I don't know.

Next, "We don't know how to practice church discipline." Particularly, in a church this size, how do you practice church discipline? I've had people tell me you can't do it. It's not possible in a church this size. Don't even try.

Now, you look at those four phrases, and it may surprise you, but I think those four phrases actually have some validity in the sense that we don't understand what church discipline is, and we're reacting very clearly in some of these things to abuses of church discipline. However, we've got to be careful whenever we think of an abusive church discipline, not to throw church discipline out the window in light of its abuse.

For example, "Church discipline is legalistic." There's no question that throughout the history of the church, there have been times where things have been done in the name of church discipline. Oftentimes, things are added to the Word: Rules, regulations put on people, "You need to do this, this, this, this and this", that are not in Scripture. Oftentimes, things done in a wrong spirit, in a wrong attitude, which we're going to talk about in a moment.

### **Church discipline is loving.**

However, when you think about that phrase, "Church discipline is legalistic", that does not add up with biblical church discipline. Biblical church discipline actually says the exact opposite. Scripture doesn't say, "Church discipline is legalistic." Scripture says that church discipline is loving; loving. That's the picture that Scripture gives of discipline. We think it's noble or compassionate to sit back and to say, "Well, that's someone else's sin, someone else's decision, someone else's responsibility, and they're going to live with what they do, so I'm going to let them do whatever they think is best." That sounds noble, compassionate, even spiritual to us, but let's be thankful that the God of the universe doesn't love us like that. Doesn't leave us alone in our sin. "Well, it's your decision." He comes after us. He pursues us. That's the whole picture in church discipline is love. Hebrews 12:6, "God disciplines those whom he..." What? "...loves." A parent disciplines those whom he loves. Discipline is a very loving thing. To be indifferent toward a brother or sister in sin is the exact opposite of love. It's cowardice. It hides behind a cloak of false love and false humility. Church discipline is loving. It's caring to reach out to someone.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote an incredible book on Christian community while he was a follower of Christ in the middle of Nazi Germany. This little book called *Life Together*. I want you to listen to what he says. It's a great quote. Deals with this, a picture of church discipline being loving. Bonhoeffer said...follow closely. "Nothing is so cruel as the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin." Did you catch that? Bonhoeffer said, "It's cruel to be tender and let a brother walk away in sin. It's compassionate to offer severe rebuke that calls a brother back from sin." Church discipline is loving.

### **Keep going to Matthew 7:5.**

"What about Matthew 7:1? Don't judge lest ye be judged." Well, keep going to Matthew 7:5. This is the whole picture when Jesus said, "If you have a plank in your own eye, don't be trying to remove the speck from your brother's eye." Then, He gets to verse 5, and He says, "*Take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will be able to see clearly...*" And do what? "*...remove the speck from your brother's eye.*" The implication is that, as you grow in holiness, you will help others grow in holiness. This is the whole picture.

So, what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7:1 is in no way contradictory to what He's saying in Matthew 18:15-20. They go together. Obviously, there is a sense in which God has authority to judge that we don't have, and there's a sense in which humility must be a part of this whole picture, which we're going to talk about. However, Jesus is not saying don't point out sin; don't help other brothers or sisters turn from sin. He's saying the exact opposite. He's saying, "Grow in holiness, so you can help others grow in holiness as well." That's what Matthew 7:1-5 is about. That's what Matthew 18:15-20 is about.

This next picture. "If we talk about church discipline, if we implement church discipline, people will leave." This right here may be the most important truth that we see today. It's really much larger than just church discipline, but it applies to church discipline, and it has huge ramifications for everything we do as a church. So, don't miss this.

### **This is God's church to grow, not ours.**

People will leave. Brothers and sisters, this is God's church to grow, not ours. This is God's church to grow, not ours. As I was studying this week, I was just struck with the reminder, "There are easier ways to pastor, and there are easier ways to grow a church, a lot easier ways." I can come up with a list of things that we could do to try to increase the crowds. I get lists of things across my desk every single day in the mail. "Soften the message. Play secular music. Give people money. Do a series on sex." That's the new thing. You can draw a crowd all over the place. It's a popular thing to do. Get new trends every day. New catchy things to do. "Draw the crowd with this, or this, or this, or this, or this."

Can I be honest with you? I want to avoid every single one of those. I want to avoid them deliberately and intentionally, to go out of the way in avoiding them. You know why? Because I want to be a part of something that can only be attributed to God, and not the creativity of the pastor, or the trend of the day, which we are bombarded with week after week, month after month, year after year. There are more trends put before us, but that's not the way God grows His church.

You want to know how God grows His church? Go with me to Acts 5. You've got to see this. We've looked at this text before. Acts 5, only explained by God. Look at this. Acts 5. I'll show you a picture of church discipline that God directly handles, that God takes into His own hands. Acts 5:1. Imagine the scene. "*Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself.*" So, we've got deception. We've got lying going on here.

*"They brought the rest and put it at the apostle's feet. Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan so filled your heart that have lied to the Holy Spirit, and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men, but to God.'"*

Listen to verse 5. *"When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died."* How about this for an understatement? *"Great fear seized all who had heard what had happened."* Can you imagine that? Somebody gets killed in the offering by God? Great fear all over the room. *"Young men came forward and wrapped his body and carried him out and buried him."*

Verse 7,

*About three hours later his wife came in not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?"*

*"Yes," she said, "that is the price."*

*Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."*

*At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. And the young men came in, finding her dead, had carried her out and buried her beside her husband. [Second time it said this.] Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these things.*

Now, you read that, let's be honest, put this together with Matthew 18, and you're thinking, I'm thinking, "What are you doing here, God? Why is your first instruction to the church not a word about how to create a cozy environment for people to feel warm and welcome? Why is your first instruction to the church about confronting brothers or sisters in sin? Why is the first picture we have of the church in Jerusalem, God striking people down dead at the offering?"

How do you grow a church? Tell them people die at the offering. That'll do it. That's weird. This doesn't add up with us, but look at this. Don't miss it. Verses 13 and 14. *"No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their numbers."* How does that happen?

You notice verse 14, "were added." Passive. Who was adding them? Takes us right back to the language in Acts 2:47. *"The Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved."* So, don't miss the picture we're getting here, because this is so different. God is apparently about growing the church in very, very different ways than we are. How is God growing the church? I want you to see the relationship between the holiness of God among His people, and the growth of the church. Don't miss this.

God is growing the church by creating a people who are so radically committed to holiness and obedience and righteousness that everyone around them in the world is afraid to join, and yet they're joining because God is adding to their number. Let me repeat that. How's God going to grow the church? By creating a people who are so committed to holiness and righteousness and obedience to Him that there's no other explanation. The people around see the holiness of God, revere the holiness of God, and God draws them to Himself in a way that defies explanation.

God, do it. God, do it in our day. God, trump all the ludicrous phrases and catchy trends that we come up with when we take church growth into our own hands to try to appeal to people, and in the process, say things like, "Well, when people are at the front door, we need to make sure not to talk about serious commitment to holiness and serious

commitment to righteousness and radical obedience. Don't talk about those things." Why not? People in the front door were dying in Acts 5. Let's put radical commitment to holiness, obedience and righteousness at the forefront of the church and let's trust that God knows what He is doing in growing His church.

He's able...more than able, better than all of our trends put together, to draw people to Himself. This has been His plan throughout Scripture. Old Testament. Ezekiel 36:22-23. *"It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name which you have profaned among the nations...The nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show them how holy I am through you."* "I'm going to show my holiness through my people," Ezekiel 36:22-23.

Same picture 1 Peter 2. *"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation declaring the greatness of the one who has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* We don't...we don't show the world how holy God is by becoming like the world, and by showing them darkness that they're familiar with. We show the world light, holiness, radical commitment to holiness, and God entrusts people to His church. God grows the church and now...don't miss it...who's getting the credit for church growth? Not the creative pastor, not the trendy church, but God alone can get the credit for that kind of growth. This is God's church to grow, not ours.

Do we believe that? The elders, literally, since right after I came, we have been praying together about this picture of church discipline and really anticipating, even what we are doing this morning, for years now. Praying and studying; seeing the importance of this. Praying that God will give us grace as the faith family to obey His Word, and I know...I know that there is a chance that some people will say, "I'm not in." As shepherd in this faith family, I pray that you will see this picture as a good thing, but we're going to go with the Word, because we're going to trust that it's good, and God knows what He is doing. It's God's church to grow, not ours.

### **Let's learn how to practice church discipline.**

While we don't know how to do it, let's learn how to practice church discipline. Let's learn how to do it. Richard Baxter wrote one of the classics on pastoral ministry, a book for pastors. This was hundreds of years ago, called *The Reformed Pastor*. I want you to listen to what he said. He said,

My request to the ministers is that they would, at last, without anymore delay, unanimously set themselves to the practice of those parts of church discipline which are unquestionably necessary and part of their work. It is a sad case that good men should settle themselves so long in the constant neglect of so great a duty. The common cry is, "Our people are not ready for it. They will not bear it." But is not the fact, rather, that you will not bear the trouble and hatred which it will occasion you?

So, let's be a people saying, "We want to obey the Word. We're ready to obey the Word."

## **What Is Church Discipline?**

### **Two facets of church discipline ...**

So, what is church discipline? What is church discipline? What it's not...it's not a witch hunt. It's not looking to get even with somebody. It's not an investigation of rumors. It's not an

interrogation. There are no badges involved in this thing. What is church discipline? This is where I want us to see two facets of church discipline. One that's reflected...come back to Matthew 18. One that's reflected here, and one that's not, but I think we need to see both facets in order to understand this picture in Matthew 18. Two facets of church discipline, both extremely important.

First, formative church discipline; formative church discipline. Now, to put a definition there. Continual training...we see this in the Word. Continual training that believers receive from the Word in the body of Christ as their lives are transformed into Christ's likeness. Let's all get this on the table. We need discipline, right? Everyone needs discipline in this room. We all need discipline. Anybody not need discipline? If you speak out, like you've proved the point, okay? We all need discipline, and we're all under-discipline. We're all under-discipline at this moment. We are disciples of Christ. We're learning from Him. Matthew 11:28-29, *"Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me..."*

The whole picture of the Great Commission. Matthew 28:18-20, "Make disciples, teaching them to obey." We're all learning to obey. None of us is the finished product, so to speak. None of us has arrived. We're all growing; we all have areas where we need to grow more, and the whole process of discipleship is a process of discipline. That's a good thing. Formative church discipline: Everything we do in the church...preaching, teaching, small groups...everything that happens in our lives. Do we realize every single detail that happens in our lives, God intends for our sanctification, for our growth in Christ?

You think about that. The great things that have happened to you this week? God has intended to mold you more in the likeness of Christ. The difficult things that have happened to you this week, this month, in your life, in your family, even those things. This is how you rejoice in trials, because you know that testing your faith develops what? Perseverance. Perseverance finishes working so you're mature and complete, not lacking anything. That's the picture.

Even the worst things we face, God is conforming us more and more into the image of Christ. That makes everything around us good. That's why Romans 8:28 says, *"All things God works together for the good of those who love him, and who have been called according to his purpose."* What's His purpose? That we would be...two verses later... *"conformed in the likeness of his Son."* Everything...everything in our lives is God disciplining us by His love, teaching us, training us in Christ's likeness. That's the picture. That's the picture of being well disciplined.

You think about...think about a battalion of soldiers. If you were to say, "Man, that group of soldiers is well disciplined", you would not be saying that they are...they're constantly in conflict and constantly disobeying their commanding officer. No, you would say that's a group of people that has learned, that has been trained to follow their commanding officer.

Same thing in the home. If you saw children, you say, "Well, those children are well-disciplined." You're not saying that if they were always disobeying their parents, and they were always being punished for that. You would say they're well-disciplined because they have learned to obey. The same picture in the church. God, make us a well disciplined people. That doesn't mean we're always going around at each other talking about, "Hey, do this, do this, do this. This is an area of disobedience." No, well-disciplined people are people who are obeying our commander, following after Christ. God creates that kind of discipline in us. To use Richard Foster's words from his classic on the subject, *Celebration of Discipline*,

that's what the Christian life is: A celebration of discipline. So, that's formative church discipline.

Second facet of church discipline is restorative church discipline. This is where Matthew 18 comes in. Specifically addressing corrective care taken by the body of Christ in matters of unrepentant sin in a brother or sister's life. Don't miss this. This is not about...Matthew 18 is not about the daily struggle we all have with sin. We all struggle with sin in our lives, and we're constantly growing in the image of Christ. So, don't think as we're talking this morning, "Well, man, I struggle with this sin. I'm about to get kicked out of this place." That's not what Matthew 18 is teaching.

Matthew 18 is specifically addressing when a brother is caught in sin, to use the language from Galatians 6:1, caught in sin and when that sin is addressed by the Word in his or her life, then they continue in it, and they don't listen to the Word, and they don't listen to correction from the Word. So, they continue on unrepentant in sin. That's the picture that's being expressed here in restorative church discipline.

### **One foundation for church discipline ...**

Now, regardless, whether it's formative, restorative, whatever it looks like, I want to point out there's one foundation for this entire picture of church discipline, and this is key. This cuts right at the heart. This goes right to the teeth, so to speak, of that idea that church discipline is legalistic, so don't miss that. The one foundation for church discipline is the grace of God. Grace. Grace is the one and only foundation for biblical church discipline.

Now, I want to show you this in context here in Matthew 18. This is a part of the study for me this week that just came alive in a way. I'd read through, studied in some ways, Matthew 18:15-20 before, but I'd never seen it in the richness of the context that surrounded it. It is just sandwiched in the middle of startling pictures of grace in Matthew 18. We think...we hear grace and discipline, we almost say they're oxymorons, that they contradict one another. They don't go together. However, what Scripture is showing is that discipline and grace beautifully are intertwined together; beautifully intertwined. I want to show it to you.

Look at Matthew 18:1-4. Listen to the context. This is what leads up...we're just going to kind of go step by step to what leads up to verse 15. Listen to verse 1. "*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'*" So, that's how this whole picture starts. Listen to what Jesus does.

*"He called a little child, and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."*

## **Approaching Church Discipline...**

### **We need childlike humility.**

So, this is how we approach church discipline. I want you to see how Jesus approaches it. First...gather this in your notes...we need childlike humility; childlike humility. Jesus sets the stage for a conversation about church discipline with the picture of the humility of children. I want you to think about how that kind of humility is required, is necessary, in this whole picture in Matthew 18:15-20.

To go to a brother or sister and to address sin in their lives requires deep humility, childlike humility. To go to a brother or sister in pride or in arrogance, in a picture of superiority or inferiority, misses the whole point. That's an abuse of church discipline. However, go in humility, knowing we are all in need of grace. There's level ground here at the foot of the cross. You struggle with this, I struggle with this. We struggle with different things, and we need...we all need the gospel. We need the grace of God every moment of every day. So, we approach a brother or sister in humility.

Now, not a false humility. There's a false humility that sits back and says, "Well, who am I to say something about their lives?" That's false humility. It's indifference towards your brother or sister. True humility goes to them in humility, humbly, gently, addresses sin. Now, it also takes humility to receive that kind of correction, doesn't it? I mean, who likes that? I can speak from personal experience on this one, and I'm not going to go into, like, specifics, but I can think of a variety of times when a brother or sister has come to me and has said, "David, there's something here in your life I want to ask you about." Man, as soon as they start talking, defense mechanisms just rise up to the surface. Do you know that? You know that feeling?

I start reacting, "No, you don't understand. I'm a pastor. Like, a preacher." I can even turn one of those into a teaching moment for the person who's confronting me. "I appreciate your concern, but what you need to learn from this is..." It's horrible, these mechanisms rising up that we don't want. That's why we receive correction from one another. However, this is the picture...this is the picture of what it means to be the body of Christ, isn't it? Don't we want people around us? Don't we all have blind spots? Don't we all have things we do, say? Don't we all have patterns, struggles that we want a brother or sister around us who loves us enough to humbly come to us in the middle of those, even when they know it might kind of sting a bit, and crush our pride? Our pride needs to be crushed, brothers and sisters.

"Pride cannot live beneath the cross," as Spurgeon says. Let's rise with humility. This is the picture. To say to a community of faith, "I need you to help me avoid sin." Are you willing to say that? We need to be willing to say that. This is humility, and then a humility that comes to you in that childlike humility that we need. I sin. I sin, and I hate that fact. I want to sin less, and less, and less, and less. I want brothers and sisters around me who want me to sin less and less and less and less. I want brothers and sisters around me who hate sin as much as I do and will keep me from taking this step that leads to this step, and leads to this step, this step. I want somebody stopping me at the first step. Somebody whom I'm in community with that humbly approaches me, and God, give me humility to respond to that. We need childlike humility.

### **We need a deep concern for holiness.**

That leads into the second one: We need a deep concern for holiness; a deep concern for holiness. Listen to where the shift comes here in verse 5: "*Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. But if anyone causes one of these little ones - who believe in me - to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*"

Listen to verses 7 and 8.

*"Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be*

*thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."*

"Sin is serious," Jesus says. Extremely serious. If it's that serious, then we want to guard each other's holiness. We need a deep concern for holiness. This is really where we've got to ask ourselves the question, as a faith family, "Do we want to be a holy people?" I mean, really. 1 Peter 1:15-16, "*Be holy, because I am holy.*" Do we want that? Do we want to make it hard for one another to be complacent? Do we want to make it hard for one another to enjoy sin? Yes. Yes.

Now, we oftentimes react against that. A pastor friend of mine up in Washington, D.C. wrote this. I read it, and it just pierced my heart because I saw my own tendency in it. He said,

Imagine this church. It is huge and it's still growing numerically. People like it. The music is good. The people are welcoming. There are many exciting programs, and people are quickly enlisted into their support. And yet, the church, in trying to look like the world in order to win the world, has done a better job than it may have intended. It does not display the distinctively holy characteristics taught in the New Testament. Imagine such an apparently vigorous church being truly spiritually sick with no remaining immune system to check and guard against wrong teaching or wrong living. Imagine Christians knee deep in recovery groups and sermons on brokenness and grace being comforted in their sin, but never confronted. Imagine those people made in the image of God being lost to sin because no one corrects them. Can you imagine such a church? Apart from the size, have I not described many of our American churches?

Isn't this our tendency? I'm not saying sermons on brokenness and grace are bad, but our tendency is to gravitate towards people who don't think sin is that big a deal, and to gravitate towards churches that don't think sin is that big a deal. Look at the landscape. This is what we gravitate towards.

So, to be around people and to be a community of faith, do we realize the strategy of the Adversary here to even get us to look at church as a place where we can be comforted in sin and never confronted in our sin? God, make The Church at Brook Hills a place where it's not easy to lapse into sin and to run off into sin! Where we love each other enough, and we love the glory of God enough to say, "We want to be holy; we want to be pure." None of us is perfect, and different ones of us struggle with different things, and we need to understand those struggles in each other's lives and come alongside each other. We're not going to be indifferent towards each other. We're going to serve one another in humility. We're going to help one another pursue the holiness of God. God, may that be so. A deep concern for holiness to realize how serious sin is.

Listen to the follow-up here. Verses 10-14. "*See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.*" Listen to verse 12.

*"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In*

*the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost."*

**We need a passion for the hurting.**

We need childlike humility, a deep concern for holiness, and a passion for the hurting. You recognize this image. This is Luke 15. This is a parable of the prodigal son, but don't miss it. It's applied here to Jesus' pursuit through the church of those who are caught in sin. That's the context here. Do we realize, in this room, that when we are caught sinning that that is evidence of mercy and grace? Do we realize that? How many of us...probably all of us can think of points where we wish we'd been caught here instead of way down the road.

Somebody look out for me here. Show mercy and grace. Praise God, He comes pursuing after us. Listen to this. Now, we've got an understanding Matthew 18:15-20. This is God saying, "I love you so much that, if worse comes to worse, I will take an entire people that will come pursuing after you in love." The goal of church discipline is not to kick people out. The goal of church discipline is restore brothers and sisters by the mercy and grace of God to intimacy with Him.

**We need forgiving hearts.**

That leads to this last part. We need a passion for the hurting, and we need forgiving hearts, because right after this...right after this in verses 21 through 35, is the parable of the unmerciful servant. When Peter asks Jesus, "How many times do I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times." In other words, keep forgiving. As he repents, you forgive. That's the picture in the whole picture of church discipline. That when a brother or sister repents and turns from sin, that forgiveness is waiting with open arms. Not, "Well, you know, he did this in the past." We follow the One who remembers our sins no more. So, we don't hold that in that way. Again, we forgive. Forgiving hearts. We're ready to forgive.

You look at all of these together. Childlike humility, deep concern for holiness, passion for the hurting, forgiving hearts. Who was our model in all of these things? Christ Himself. Christ Himself who, in humility, came with a deep concern for holiness, a passion for the hurting, the seeking Shepherd, who stands ready to forgive. Christ does these things in our lives, and it's good.

We're not going to have time to dive too much deeper in, but what we're going to see is that Christ is doing this in the church. That's why He's given these words to the church, to show His grace, and show His love, and show His mercy. God, help us to see this.

I got an email from one church member. I won't mention their name. You'll see why. This was a while ago.

Dear Pastor,

Two weeks ago on a Sunday morning my wife came to you after church with a dire request for prayer. It was indeed dire, for I was on the verge of making a huge mistake that would have haunted me for the rest of my life. I was in the process of leaving my family in search of who knows what. Something better. Something straight out of Satan's playbook. I was on the edge of a cliff with one foot over. My wife and everyone she knew were praying that I would come back, and because of their prayers and their words to me, the Lord did not leave me to do what I thought I wanted to do, but, rather, He poured out grace on me and my family, and we are once again whole. Thank

you. Those prayers shielded me from justice until I was shaken to my senses and could ask for mercy.

This is the picture. This is the picture of a people who care. Who care enough about a brother or sister next to them. Whether it's a small staff or a large staff, they're beginning to wander away from Christ and the abundance that comes in Christ, a brother or sister that will put an arm around your shoulder and say, "No. Let me help you. Let me come alongside you. Let me do the hard work for you in searching after you, and walk with you through this."

We're not going to have time to dive into that last part, but let me say this. I'm convinced, confident that there are likely brothers and sisters around this room this morning that have your foot hanging over a cliff. Before you put your stuff away, just listen to me real closely. I'm convinced there's some brothers and sisters in here who are likely about to take a big step, who have been flirting with this or that, and by the sovereign grace of God in bringing you to this room at this moment, I want to urge you to repent and to not take that step, and to turn back.

Brothers and sisters around this room who have taken that step and who've gone down the road, I want to urge by the grace and mercy of God to turn back. His mercy comes running after you. His power is available for you over sin, and He alone is sufficient for that task. Turn to Him. Be forgiven. Turn and be forgiven, and experience His power. Don't continue down that road. Maybe some of you, for the first time, you've never trusted in Christ to cover over your sins. I invite you to trust in Christ today. Turn from your sins. Trust in Him. He died on the cross to cover over your sins, to give you His righteousness. Trust in Him today, and brother or sister, do not continue down that road, no matter how small you think you may be. "Well, I'm sure there's some big things in here that he's talking..." No, there's small things all across this room. Small things where we're giving the Adversary a foothold. Take it back. By the grace of Christ and the power of Christ, take it back. Walk in discipline before Christ. Experience the grace and mercy of the Word of God saying to you this morning, "You need to stop in your tracks."

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