

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for June 3, 2018

Church Discipline
Matthew 18:15-20

I. The process of church discipline (18:15-17)

- Notice that Jesus lays out a four-step process for the church to practice when it comes to church discipline
- Notice also that it is the identification of sin that begins this process
 - “If your brother sins against you...” or “If your brother sins...”

A. Personal contact

15 *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”*

- Sin must be addressed
 - Jesus clearly states, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault”
 - 2 assumptions must be made at this point
 - First, Jesus is not talking about unseen sins of the mind or heart
 - He is talking about when sin has become visible and harmful to both the sinner and the community of people around him or her
 - Second, Jesus is assuming that these particular sins are past the point of overlooking
 - The Scriptures do speak about overlooking offenses among one another
 - Proverbs 19:11 “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.”
 - 1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”
 - However, we can assume here that Jesus is not talking about such offenses; otherwise, He would have instructed us to let love cover over such offenses
 - In fact, we will find that Jesus is talking about sins that are willfully rebellious and patently obvious according to God’s Word
 - This is not about lacking love toward another, this is about disobeying that which is clearly stated in God’s Word
 - Thus, when someone is walking in clear and continuous rebellion against the Word of God, then this process should apply

- As Paul states elsewhere in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 “And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”
 - Galatians 6:1 “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”
 - “Although many offenses can and should be overlooked, some problems are so harmful that they must be discussed.”¹
- Sin must be addressed privately
 - Jesus states “go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone”
 - This is a most loving aspect in this process
 - Once a clear and rebellious sin has been identified, one must be willing to go to such a brother or sister in Christ in order to tell them their fault
 - Notice that this going is private
 - It is not acceptable to spread the news to others in hopes that someone else will talk to this sinning brother or sister
 - That only causes more harm and damage through gossip and slander
 - Instead, love must guide us to one another in private for the purpose of discussing the fault or sin that is present
 - “The broad and somewhat uncomfortable truth implied in this text is that any qualified believer who is aware of the entanglement of another believer in sin is to prayerfully, privately approach him with the hope of restoration.”²
- Sin must be addressed with the hope and goal of restoration
 - Jesus states, “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”
 - The goal is for them to be reconciled and restored
 - Check the context!
 - Matthew 18:12-14 Rejoicing over rescuing the one sheep that went astray
 - Matthew 18:15 “If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”
 - Matthew 18:21-35 We must be merciful and forgiving toward others because of God’s mercy and forgiveness extended toward us
 - Since the goal is restoration, this attempt must be properly balanced with truth and love
 - Truthfully identifying the sin while lovingly calling them back to obedience

¹ Ken Sande, “The Peacemaker,” 143.

² Stephen Davey, “In Pursuit of Prodigals,” 37.

B. Group contact

16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

- Addressing sin requires persistence
 - There is no giving up on this sinning individual
 - Thus, Jesus gives the next step of contacting this person with two or three people
- Addressing sin requires involving more people for the sake of truth
 - There is loving protection of the sinning brother/sister in such a situation
 - Verification before publication
 - Deuteronomy 19:15 “A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.”
 - This group contact would maintain the same goals as the personal contact
 - Showing the wayward brother/sister their fault according to the Word of God
 - Seeking restoration of the brother/sister

C. Church contact

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

- After refusing two clear and obvious attempts, then the church is informed of the sinning brother/sister
- The church is told in order that they might join the rescue team
- The church must consider how they might engage the sinning brother/sister in order to reconcile and restore such an individual
 - The church’s involvement will vary according to each individual within the church
 - Some might simply resolve to pray for the individual
 - Others might actually reach out to the individual in order to speak the truth in love
 - Each member should consider what God would have them to do at such a moment given their relationship with the sinning brother/sister

D. Non-contact

And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

- After loving pursuit from an individual, a group of individuals, and the church there is a final step for the church to take

- After the church's efforts, the sinning brother/sister is to be considered as a Gentile or tax collector
 - Gentiles were not viewed favorably by the Jews of Jesus' time
 - Tax collectors were potentially worse off in social standing since they worked for the Gentiles
 - The Jews would naturally formulate a distance between themselves and the Gentiles or tax collectors
 - Thus, Jesus is telling the church to distance themselves from such a person who persists in their sin after three waves of attempted restoration
- Some people will object to such an idea because they think Jesus is saying something different
 - Instead, they state that we are to treat such an individual as an unbeliever as we constantly seek to win them to Christ
 - Thus, some people think we ought to befriend this person more and spend more time with them in hopes that something good will come from it
 - Unfortunately, this is unacceptable because the Scriptures would have us to treat such an individual differently
 - First, we are told not even to associate or eat with such a person
 - 1 Corinthians 5:11 "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one."
 - 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 "If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother."
 - Titus 3:10-11 "As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."
 - Failure to practice this runs the risk of the erring individual thinking that everything is fine in their life
 - Second, we are warned that the sin of others will spread among the body of believers
 - 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? 7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. 8 Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven

of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”

- If we fail to separate from a rebellious individual, we allow their sin a foothold to permeate our own lives and the lives of the congregation
- Third, the individual’s separation from the body of Christ is a part of God’s work to restore them
 - 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.”
 - The deliverance of this person outside the congregation allows them to be given over to their fleshly desires such that they might see the error of their ways
 - They will recognize their folly and rebellion in order to have their “spirit saved in the day of the Lord”
- Thus, the way that we as a church can love such an individual is by helping them see that they are not living a life characteristic of one who is a follower of Christ
- While the goal is holiness, we all know that we fall short of Christlikeness daily
- But the issue is not an issue of a brother or sister failing to be perfect because all of us would fail that test!
- The issue is a failure to repent
- The church must separate from such an individual because they have failed to repent and turn from their sin
 - This repentance is a vital component of being a Christian
 - As Paul states in Romans 6:1-2 “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”
 - The failure to acknowledge or pursue repentance is the lifestyle of an unbeliever—one who remains in their sins
- We cease fellowshiping with someone who prefers to remain in their sin in order to lovingly show them that they are not one of us

II. The participation in church discipline (18:18)

18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

- Jesus states that there are extra members participating in this process of church discipline
 - There is an affirmation from heaven when the church on earth has to go through difficult moments of church discipline

Valley Bible Church
3347 West Avenue J
Lancaster, California 93536
www.valleybible.net

- Jesus specifically states “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”
 - Binding = lack of repentance
 - When the church identifies someone as still bound in their sin due to their lack of repentance
 - Loosing = forgiveness
 - When the church recognizes that one has been forgiven from their sin due to a response of repentance
 - These words are better translated “whatever you bind on earth will have been bound and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven.”
- Thus, the church on earth has the backing of heaven to the extent that it is ministering the Word of God to the people of God
 - “But when the church administers discipline according to the pattern of Matthew 18:15-17, it can have perfect confidence that it acts in the authority and power of heaven, as promised in verses 18-20... when the Lord’s people sincerely seek to purify His church in His way, they have the energy, approval, and authority both of the Father and of the Son.”³

III. The promise in church discipline (18:19-20)

19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

- These verses are not to be taken out of context
 - “To use this statement to claim the Lord’s presence at a small worship service or prayer meeting does not fit the context of church discipline and is superfluous. Christ is always present with His people, even with a lone believer totally separated from fellow Christians by prison walls or by hundreds of miles.”⁴
- Promise of agreement for unified praying group of believers (two or more)
 - Referring back to the two people of verse 16
 - “When the church acts in God’s behalf and in accordance with His Word in matters dealing with sin, He acts in their behalf by confirming and empowering their faithful decisions and actions.”⁵
 - “During the discipline process, the church on earth may be assured that the heavenly Father will guide and confirm its deliberations and prayers.”⁶

³ John MacArther Jr., “Matthew 16-23,” 138.

⁴ John MacArther Jr., “Matthew 16-23,” 139.

⁵ John MacArther Jr., “Matthew 16-23,” 138.

⁶ David Turner, “Matthew,” 446.

- Promise of presence in the difficulty of church discipline
 - “Jewish tradition requires at least 10 men (a minyan) to constitute a synagogue or even hold public prayer. Here, Christ promised to be present in the midst of an even smaller flock—’two or three witnesses’ gathered in His name for the purpose of discipline (see note on v. 15).”⁷

⁷ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1426.