

**The Discipline of God's Children, Part 2**

Scripture: Matthew 18:15-17

Code: 2331

We're returning our study of Matthew's gospel to Chapter 18. Matthew Chapter 18. Last week we began to examine verses 15-20 and we want to return to that passage for our study again this morning. Let me read it to you so that you have it in mind as we approach the Word. Beginning in Matthew 18 at verse 15.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, in order that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

"Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

As I shared with you last week, this is a passage that deals with discipline among God's people. Now when I use the word "discipline" I want simply to remind you that discipline is not a negative word. It is a positive word. It is a word about training. It is a word not unrelated to the word "discipling." To discipline is to conform someone to a standard. And when we talk about discipline in the church, we are talking about bringing people into line with God's standard. That is for the glory of God, the ongoing of His kingdom and the blessedness of the individual as well.

So discipline is a good word. It's a word about training and that is its intent as I use it. Now, this passage helps us to understand that there are basically two ways people are trained or two ways people are disciplined. This is definitely true of children. And since this entire chapter deals with the childlikeness of the believer, we should draw our analogy from childhood.

Remember that in this teaching setting in Matthew 18, Jesus has a child in His arms, an infant. And with that infant as His living illustration, He talks about His kingdom. And His main point is that the people in His kingdom are like children. They enter like children. That's in verses 3 and 4. They are to be protected like children. That's in verses 5-9. They are to be cared for like children. That's in verses

10-14. And now in 15-20, they are to be disciplined like children. And then in verses 21-35, He'll remind us that they're to be forgiven like children.

We are children. And children need to be disciplined, and basically they're disciplined two ways. By what we call positive enforcement and by negative enforcement. Now positive enforcement simply says if you do this, I'll reward you. If you behave in this manner, I'll give you this, or give you that. And we use that all the time with our children, don't we? Clean up your room and I'll take you to McDonald's, or whatever. You want that new bicycle you've been asking for? Well, let me see you fulfill this particular obligation, get your grades up, or whatever is. In other words, we use positive reinforcement with our children and we also use negative reinforcement.

And the Scriptures have told us that if we spare the rod, we spoil the child. And so there is also that kind of reinforcement that says if you don't do this, here are the consequences. Now we find the same thing is true in God's family. There is positive affirmation in the Bible where God says, "If you do this, I'll bless you. If you do this, I'll reward you. If you do this, I'll fulfill your life with joy, and peace, and all the things that anyone could ever wish."

And then there's that negative reinforcement that comes along if you don't do this there will be chastening. For every son the Lord loves He scourges and chastens. And so we have both of those kinds of reinforcement and at various points in the Scripture, one or the other might under discussion. In this particular text our Lord is telling us the importance of the place of the negative reinforcement. That where you have people who are sinning against God it becomes the responsibility of the assembly of God's people to bring them into line, to bring to bear upon their lives certain consequences, to draw them back to where God wants them to be.

Now, I mentioned also last week to you that for the most part the church has neglected this area. Now that is not to say there haven't been churches that have done it in all periods of time, even our own. For there are churches, but they seem to be in the minority. But this is not a new thing. When you introduce a thought as Jesus does in this particular passage to us to this generation, people sort of are shocked and they say, "Well, we can't get involved in confronting people about their sin. And we can't be telling the whole church that they've done evil, and we can't be putting them out. After all, we want to be loving, and accepting, and so forth, and we find this very difficult to handle in our particular mindset."

But it's nonetheless the word of Christ to His church. And it's a word which the church has found difficult to accept for a long time. I was reading this week the writings of Jonathan Edwards. He preached a sermon in the 1700s and in it he said this. "If you tolerate visible wickedness in your members, you will greatly dishonor God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the religion which you profess, the church in general, and yourselves in particular. As those members of the church who practice wickedness bring dishonor upon the whole body, so do those who tolerate them in it."

And then he went on to say this. "If strict discipline and thereby strict moral laws were maintained in the church, it would be one of the most powerful means of conviction and conversion towards those who are without." And then he asked this ultimate question, "How can you be the true disciples of Christ if you live in the neglect of these plain, positive commands?" So this is not a new word for the church.

The great man of the church in the 1700s, Jonathan Edwards, faced the same neglect as we face today. It is an essential ministry to be about ministering to the Lord's church on the behalf of its purity and its holiness.

Now the whole Chapter, as I said, deals with the childlikeness of the believer, and you and I both know very well that children must be conformed to obedience by some kind of discipline, some kind of enforced rule, some kind of consequences for their misbehavior. The same is true spiritually. The neglect of dealing with sin not only allows the person sinning to drift away further and further, but it sets a standard that allows others to walk in the same path of sin feeling no consequence will be forthcoming.

But where you act against sin you not only pull the person sinning back, but you reestablish the right kind of model of virtue. In the Old Testament when God set out to punish the people of Israel for their disobedience to His word, He said in Deuteronomy 13:11, "And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more such wickedness as this among you." In other words, you punish a few and the others get the message. And so there is then to be discipline. The church must be pure.

Now we started into the text and you can look at it now for a moment, and we said there are several elements of discipline that come out of this text. First is the place of discipline. And if you'll notice verse 17, it is in the *ekklesia*, the church. The word is used twice there. The *ekklesia*. It does not have a technical meaning here, not the Baptist church or the Presbyterian church or any other denomination. Not even the post-Pentecost church as we know it, but any assembly of God's redeemed people.

In this case, Jesus is speaking to the apostles who are collected around Him sitting as His feet in a house in Capernaum. And even though the church, as we know it today, has not been born and will not be until after His resurrection in its official character, what we see here is the assembly of God's redeemed people, and in that context discipline is to occur. And of course, He anticipates the church of which we're a part, as well. But wherever God's redeemed people come together there is to be a dealing with sin.

Secondly, we see the purpose of discipline and it's indicated to us at the end of verse 15. "Thou hast gained thy brother." The intention of discipline is not to put people out, it's to keep people in. The idea as we saw last time is that when a person goes into sin and disobedience to God, they are lost to the

fellowship. They are lost to the intimacy. They are lost to the ministry. They are lost to the communion of God's people. And it is that we wish to gain them back, and the word there is a commercial word. It has to do with losing a treasure and wanting to recover it, and not being happy about the loss, because of its value.

So we are endeavoring to gain back a valued brother. That's the purpose. Always keep it in mind, folks. Church discipline is not to put people out. It's to bring people back. Thirdly, we noted last week the person in discipline. The place and the purpose and then the person. Who is the person? Well, if you look at verse 15, "Moreover if your brother shall trespass against you, you go and you tell him his fault between you and him alone: For if he shall hear you, you gained your brother." Now, it's fairly clear who the person is. It's you and me. It's an individual thing. There are no spiritual SS. There are no CIA members in the church. There's no particular search and seizure committee. There's no commando units. This is everybody.

We are all involved in going out to seek one another to restore one another to gain back the sinning brother who has drifted away from the community of God's people. By the way, I suggested to you last time that there are some prerequisites. First is willingness. You have to be willing to go, and these commands imply that you have to act on your will. Jesus is saying, "You go and you tell him." And that indicates that you need a responding will to that.

Secondly, there must be a zeal for God. David said in Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for thine house has eaten me up; the reproaches that are fallen on thee are fallen on me." David had such a tremendous sense of God's glory that when God was wounded, David felt the pain. And we need that same kind of response so that when God is dishonored, we feel the pain. Our heart is so knit with God's heart.

And the third thing is personal holiness. You can't go, as Jesus said in Matthew 7, to take a splinter out of somebody else's eye if you've got a two by four in your own. So willingness, a zeal for God, and personal holiness. Paul sums it up wonderfully in Galatians 6 when he says, "If a brother is overtaken in fault, ye that are spiritual restore such a one." And so you're the person. I'm the person. We're all to be involved in this. And I've thought about this so often in these recent days how marvelous it would be if all of the assembly of God's people were totally committed to the recovery of every sinning brother and sister. We would become ministers of holiness.

And as I said last week, we've got ministers of this, and ministers of that, and ministers of the other. And everybody wants to be trained to teach, and preach, and disciple, and evangelize, and so forth, but where are the ministers of holiness who pursue for the purity of the church?

Well, that takes me to a fourth point. Now we'll get into our study for today. The provocation in discipline. What sets it off? How do you know when to do this? How do you know when to approach someone?

Verse 15, "Moreover," it starts with the word "moreover." It basically means "now." In other words, having said all that we've just said about the care and protection of God's people, having established all of that, that they're like children and they have to be protected, and they have to be cared for, and sometimes they have to be sought after when they go away, as verses 12-14 point out - the good shepherd seeking the lost sheep. Having said all of that, now specifically what do we do if thy brother shall sin against thee?

Now what are we going to do? Now notice what it says. Here's the provocation. "If thy brother shall sin," *hamartan*, the basic New Testament word for sin. It means "to miss the mark." God sets the mark and men miss it. It is to violate His law. It is the word *hamartan*, from which we get our theological word hamartiology, which is the study of sin. And so what do we do if thy brother sins against thee? That's the issue.

Now, we asked the question because it's so very important. It says here "If thy brother shall sin, go and tell him." The question is what constitutes a sin that needs discipline? What's the answer? What sins need to be corrected? Which ones? All of them. That's why the text is general. All of them. You know, there aren't good sins and bad sins. And there's not sort of a scale in the middle with poles on each end. Sin is sin and it is the antithesis of the utter holiness of God. And the sin, any sin, puts a stain on the fellowship. It mars the communion. And so any sin is a sin that ought to be corrected. If any member of the Christian fellowship sins in violating God's standard in any way, the process immediately goes into action. That's God's desire. And it should be immediate. The issue is holiness, any sin.

Now look further at this text. You'll notice it says "If thy brother shall sin against thee." Now this is an interesting little thing, this "against thee." Some manuscripts have it and some don't. And so I spent some time this week, because it seemed that nobody could agree on whether it was in or out and I'd read as much as I could on the subject of whether this belongs in the text or out of the text, and my conclusion is that nobody knows. Some ancient manuscripts, trustworthy as they are, have it. Other ancient manuscripts, equally trustworthy, do not have it.

And so we cannot tell in terms of looking at what's called lower criticism, analyzing texts, whether it belongs in or belongs out. You say, "Well, what do you think we ought to do?" Leave it in. I mean, if there's any question at all, leave it in. And I really don't think there's any question at all in spite of what the manuscripts say. If you'll notice verse 21, I think it might help you to clear up the issue. Peter here responds to what Jesus says. And he says, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin - " what? " - against me, and I shall forgive him?" And by the fact then, there's no - by the way - no manuscript problems on that one. And so by the fact that Peter picks up the "against me," I'm assuming that that's what he picked up from Jesus.

The comparative passage in Luke 17:3 where Luke records our Lord teaching on the same subject says, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him." So in Luke's word there to us quoting Jesus it is "against thee." So I like to think that it belongs in the text.

Now, some people immediately say if its there, it's a problem. Because what it means then is that the only person responsible to go out and seek this person is the one against whom he sinned. You see that? In other words, that's the debate. If you say if your brother sins against you go, then I'm only responsible for somebody if they've sinned against me.

You want to know something? That's right. That is exactly right. If they don't sin against you, you're not responsible. But let me tell you what that means. There are two ways you can be sinned against: Direct and indirect. Let's talk about the direct way. The direct way that you might be sinned against would be if somebody punched you in the nose because they were mad at you. If somebody stole from you. If somebody deceived you. Somebody lied to you. Somebody abused you. Someone slandered you. Someone committed a crime of immorality against you, taking your purity. These are sins directly against you.

And the text says if such a person sins a sin against you, go and tell him. Why? In order to gain your brother. It isn't that you go and say, "You dirty, I want to tell you what you did to me. And man, I'm going to work the rest of my life to make sure you don't survive." That's not it. This is a marvelous thought. When you get sinned against, deceived against, lied against, slandered, abused, whatever the sin is, and this is a brother, we're talking about in the family now, folks, a Christian does this, you go and tell him the sin, and get him to confess and repent that you may gain him back as a brother or gain them back as a sister in Jesus Christ.

In other words, you are showing the most magnanimous heart attitude that says, "You have sinned against me, but that is not the issue. The issue is I've lost you as my brother, and I've lost you as my sister, and my heart longs to restore you to that." I mean, that'll blow the mind of somebody who is waiting for your retaliation, who's waiting for your bitterness.

But our tendency is somebody does something we don't like, somebody touches us in our life some way and wounds us, or sins against us, or commits an act of disobedience to God which affects us directly, and we put them on our grudge list, don't we? And we let bitterness cultivate in our hearts, and resentment, and anger. And Jesus said, "If you get sinned against, go and gain your brother back with an attitude of forgiveness." And if you compare Luke's passage, he says that. "Go to him, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him." Marvelous.

How many people can you think of in your mind that you've got a grudge against that you just won't speak to. You have nothing to do with. Every time they come up in conversation your mouth curls a funny way. Do you have anger toward them, bitterness? Because they've done something to you. Listen, Ephesians 4:32, "Forgive one another as God, for Christ's sake, forgave you." Who do you think you are to hold a grudge when God's forgiven you so much? So you go, and you confront, and seek to gaining your brother.

But what if it's indirect? And this is very important. Not all sins against me are directly against me. They could be indirectly against me. Now listen carefully. This is a very important point. Any sin in the assembly of God's people is against any of God's people, because it stains all of us.

I remember Sam Erickson, when he was here before he went to the Christian Legal Society in Washington said to me one day, "I just had a shocking experience." He said, "I invited an attorney down in the city of Los Angeles, a fellow attorney, to come with me to church." And he said, "Well, what church do you go to?" He said, "I go to Grace Community Church." He said, "Oh," he said, "I know that church. The most crooked attorney in the city goes there. I wouldn't go to that place."

Now sin was not directly sinned against Sam by that attorney, but it affected him, and it affected me, and it affected our whole church. It affected everybody because we had some attorney who was living an ungodly life and saying he went to Grace Community Church. All of us were affected by that. Christ's body was stained. I remember the next Sunday, I got up and told that story and said I don't know who you are out there, but I wish you'd either get your life straightened up or leave because you're not making a very good witness for our church.

You see, when anyone sins, they're lost to our fellowship and it touches all of us. When anyone is living a disobedient life, they bring reproach on Christ, and we are Christ, and we bear His reproach so that indirectly all of that sin is against us. If I know about it, it's against me, because I'm willing to stand for the holiness of God's name and the zeal for His glory.

To look at it the other way would be if, for example, we are only then to react to sins directly against us. Then does that mean we have no responsibility when someone lies to an unsaved person outside the church? Or goes to a harlot? Or slanders somebody else? Or abuses somebody else? In other words, if you narrow this thing that we are only supposed to respond to those who sin directly to us, then people could be sinning on the outside with people in the world who aren't apart of the assembly and have absolutely nobody to go to them. See, that doesn't make sense.

The point is that any sin is a sin that stains the fellowship, whether it's direct or indirect. And it's summed up in the words of the apostle Paul. He said it twice, once in 1 Corinthians 5 and once in Galatians 5. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." You can't isolate sin. It leavens. And leaven is the illustration in the Bible always of influence, of influence. That's why they had to take unleavened

bread out of Egypt. Don't take the little starter that came from the last dough that you baked in Egypt. Don't take any remnant of Egypt out to penetrate your new life. No influence. You cut the cord. You cross the sea. That's over. You don't bring a soured starter for your new bread. You have unleavened bread with nothing of the past in it. And so leaven is influence, and a little sin will influence everybody.

So we're called to discipline any sin. In our church, we have dealt with doctrinal error. I'm thinking of some of the discipline that we've been involved in. We've dealt with immorality, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, divorce, dishonesty, lack of submission, cruelty, divisiveness, gossip, blasphemy, slander, profanity, and I suppose even more; any sin for God's glory and the purity of the fellowship, and any sin anywhere will touch you. So if you know about it, that should provoke the process.

Now that brings us to point five, the process in discipline. What do you do? You know what's to happen in God's redeemed assembly? You know you're the person. You know the purpose is to gain your brother back. You know any sin qualifies. Now what do you do? How do you go about it? Four steps, four steps, very clearly delineating and outlined.

Step one, verse 15, "Go and tell him his sin between thee and him alone." That's simple enough, isn't it? Go and tell him his sin. Go, present imperative. Get in motion. Get going. Pursue, the idea of the present imperative is the idea of you continue to go. Pursue this thing. Don't be distracted. Pursue. And then it says, "tell him," and that is an aorist imperative, which has the idea of make your point, be convincing, get the point across.

The verb, *elench*, means "to expose to the light." In other words, hang in there and until he really sees it. You don't just go and say, "Hey, you know, I haven't seen you at church and I was just wondering are you drifting around?" No, just go, and confront, and make it clear, and open up the sin, and help them to see that sin. Expose it. That's the idea of that aorist imperative there. Show it to him so there's escaping it. Take the time and the effort that is needed. It's a difficult task. It's a delicate task. It's difficult with the people you know, because they know you, and when you go and start talking about their sin, they may have something to say to you.

It's difficult with the people you don't know, because you're going to say who am I to do that? I don't know them. We tend to be fearful over the people we know. We tend to be indifferent over the people we don't know, but it's a responsibility that Jesus has given us. You know what happens when you do this? There's a marvelous union of two souls knit together, if you go in the right attitude. And what is the right attitude? Here's the right attitude.

Galations 6:1. We keep coming back to that. "If a man be overtaken in fault, ye who are spiritual - " here it comes " - restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The first thing is meekness. You go in humility realizing that it could be you, that you could have been tempted. You go in meekness, and then it says you go bearing his burden and fulfilling the



law of Christ. And what is the law of Christ? It's the royal law, the law of liberty, the law of love. It's the law of love.

So you go with love and you go with a sense of wanting to help him carry the burden and you go in meekness. That's the attitude. You don't go pontificating. You don't go in a pious way. You don't go in self-righteous way. You don't go for self-satisfaction. You don't go for spite or vengeance. You go out of loving humble care to bring him back, to restore him.

And would you notice that it says you go alone, just the two of you? Alone between you and him alone, face to face. All this to gain a brother lost. You go alone. You know what our tendency is? As soon as you hear about somebody's sin, tell everybody. "Did you hear about?" "Oh, it's so sad. We're praying brother so-and-so." And the word starts spreading around.

No, if you know about a sin, you go, one to one. Doesn't ever need to get beyond that. You go. If, on the other hand, you just start talking about it, you will create a situation which may make it impossible to ever have a meaningful relationship with that person, even if they do come back. I promise you if you go to that person without saying anything to anybody else, and you go one on one, and you confront that sin, in love and humility, and that person repents, you will have a bond of intimacy that nothing would ever be able to break. If you've really restored your brother. It's a marvelous thing.

That's how the intimacy in the body is protected. That's how the secrecy in the body is protected. God doesn't say shout it from the housetops. He says, you just go and let it between the two of you, and you know human nature well enough to know that we're all sinners, and you have built in that one to one relationship a deep bond of commitment to one another. That's the way to go, one to one alone. Now it might not always be possible. There might be somebody else listening when you do it, but still it should be one to one.

And it says in verse 15, "if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." And that's what you're after. Don't tell everybody else about it. Go to the person. When is the last time, ask yourself, the last time you went to someone who was sinning, one to one, never said a word to anybody about it, when you found out about it, just went? Oh what an important thing this is. You know, stuff floats around and all these opinions drift all over about what's going with somebody's life and long before that could have been stopped one to one.

What if he refuses to hear? Well, we'll get to that in a minute. Your responsibility is to go. Is there any illustration in the New Testament of this? Yes, there is. Galatians Chapter 2. Galatians 2. Peter sinned. He sinned in cutting himself off from the assembly of God's people to identify with some legalizers when he was in Antioch.

Galatians 2:11. "Peter was come to Antioch," Paul says. "I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." That's step one discipline. There's a perfect New Testament illustration. Did Peter respond? Yes, he did. He responded so much to that.

In 2 Peter, listen to what he says. Second Peter 3:15, "Even as our beloved brother Paul - " What do you think he meant by that? Well, for one thing he meant that Paul was his beloved brother. How did they get such a love bond? Probably because Paul was willing to confront him with his sin, cared enough, loved him enough, and there was born between those two men a wonderful bond of intimacy. You confront a person on a one to one and your hearts will knit together.

But what if he refuses to hear? Let's go back and see. Then you go to step two. Verse 16, "But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, in order that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." And of course, the Jewish people knew well that God had established that law in Deuteronomy 19:15. That all things were to be confirmed "in the mouth of two or three witnesses." This was for protection, so that no one was passing on slanderous information about anybody which was unconfirmed. There had to be the affirmation of two or three witnesses.

And so the text says this is step two. If there's a definite refusal to be convicted, if as Lenski says, "The Devil has plunged into the pit of impenitence." If they will not respond, then step two. Take one or two more with you. Now, this begins to put the pressure on. You take a couple of people and the same objective in mind. You want to gain your brother. So you're pursuing again. You're going again. And the idea is to show him his sin, so that he really understands it or that she really understands it, and you've opened it up so that it's very clear, and very obvious, and there might genuine confession, and genuine repentance, and restoration. This is the second attack in the battle for this drifting brother or sister.

Now why have one or two more? Well, I think it intensifies the approach. It multiplies the caring concern, the love, but there's a reason even beyond that given here. "In order that - " here's the purpose " - in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." Very important. Listen carefully. These are not one or two people who saw the sin or who knew about the sin. I don't think that's the intent. They are witnesses of the confrontation who can come back and confirm the words that were spoken there.

In other words, it is really as much a protection for the one being approached as it is the one approaching. So that when a report comes back a biased person doesn't say, "Well, I tried to confront him, but his impenitent and his heart is hard. And so forth, and so forth, and so forth," as if one person could make that ultimate determination. Especially one person who may have been sinned against and be somewhat bitter. So to protect against that, you take one or two others who can witness the second confrontation. And they'll come back and report either yes, there was a heart of repentance; yes, there was a heart of confession; yes, there was a heart of turning away from sin; or no, there

was not. In other words, now you can act because you know this to be the case. You have the witnesses to verify it beyond just the one individual.

So it isn't so much two or three witnesses of the sin, as it is the two or three who go to him in that group are affirming what he said. And then if he ever later says, "I didn't say that. That's my not attitude. I don't feel - " They can affirm that, in fact, it is, because they witnessed that. So God wants the confirming either of the repentance, the confirming of the impenitence in the mouth of two or three witnesses. In other words, He wants to be sure. This is a way to be sure of the attitude.

God is concerned with this. He doesn't want wrong reports given of His people. He doesn't want it to be said that they're not repenting if they are. He doesn't want it to be said they are if they're not. And so the two or three protect against that. Well, hopefully he would respond to that. Hopefully when the two or three came and again the sin was exposed in the pleading to repent and turn from it and come back, hopefully he would respond. That's the desire. If he didn't, they would report, and he could never argue because there were two or three witnesses who can affirm it.

Has this ever occurred in the New Testament? Is there an illustration here like there was of the first step? Yes, I think there is. Look at 2 Corinthians Chapter 13. Now this is a somewhat difficult passage to translate. I will just basically share its idea with you. In 2 Corinthians 13, it says, "This is the third *time* I am coming to you." Paul is writing to the Corinthians. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established." Now he throws in that Deuteronomy 19:15 principle, and we know we're in a discipline situation. "I told you before, and tell you beforehand, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them who heretofore have sinned, and to all others, that, if I come again, I will not spare."

Now, what is he saying? You that are sinning in the Corinthian assembly, I've told you once. I've told you twice. It has been confirmed - verse 1 says - in the mouth of two or three witnesses. And if I come and you still have not repented, I won't spare the discipline. There is an illustration where Paul calls the Corinthians to respond to the second approach to their sin, those that are sinning. Now let's go back again to Matthew Chapter 18. It's so helpful that the New Testament gives us that illustration of this working out principle.

What happens if they don't hear the two or three who come? Verse 17, "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* to the church." Tell it to the whole assembly. Now this may mean a public proclamation to everybody. It may mean that you tell enough folks representative of the church so that the word gets out that this person is sinning and not coming back, but the intention is the key here, folks. When you tell it to the church, and certainly by now the church leadership, to some extent, are involved because the word has come back from the witnesses.

This is an impenitent person. We must tell the church. And so through whatever means are chosen, the church is told. Sometimes the leaders disseminate it through the groups. This is how we do it here. Sometimes we may say it at a communion service. Sometimes it may be said at a class, or a fellowship, or a Bible study, or association where the person is known. But the statement is this: They're sinning. Our brother is lost to us. Tell it to the church for what purpose? What is always the purpose of discipline? Restoration.

So what do you tell the church? Church, go after them. An individual went, no response. Two or three went, no response. Now we all go. That's right and we just - we drown them. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Can you imagine, you know, in so many times in the life of a church, people just drift away. And I have examined my heart over the last years and I've said how many people that I know who drifted away into sin and I've lost them, because I didn't follow up on step one, or having gone step one and I said, "They're not going to repent." And maybe went step two and then just tried to let it go.

And you hear people say, "Oh well, they're gone. They were never much help anyway," or all kinds of things. The point being, if a brother drifts away into sin, you go. You just don't let that happen. If you don't see them or if you know something's wrong in their life, you go and then you take somebody, and then we need to tell everybody to go. And we just make life miserable, because we're just crowding around them. That's the idea. We just go with pursuing meek love, calling them back from sin, calling them back to the fellowship.

By the way, as a footnote here, there's no different standard for elders or pastors. First Timothy 5:19-20 says that elders are to be disciplined the same way. Any accusation against them should be confirmed in the mouth of "two or three witnesses," says Paul to Timothy. And when they sin, too, and continue in it, they are to be rebuked before all that others may fear, so that others won't follow the same sinning pattern because they'll know of the public consequences.

So, when they fall into sin, the pattern is set in motion. One goes, two or three go, then we all go. We all go pursuing them. We all go wanting to restore them. I really don't know that the church even thinks of doing this. Churches, I don't know if they do this. I said to someone the other day the Lord brought back across my path after many years, I said, "I failed you. And I failed you because I didn't pursue you. I let you go. I failed you, and I failed the Lord in that."

Now this isn't the task of one person. We don't have one person who is in charge of this. They had one person in charge of this in only one church that I know of and it was a disaster. You want to meet him? His name is Diotrephes. John wrote about him in his third epistle. He says, "I wrote to the church - " can you imagine this? "I wrote to the church: - " this is John the apostle " - but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, received us not." Now this is this guy with an amazing ego. He can't - he won't even receive John the apostle. Of course, he's intimidated by him.

“Wherefore, if I come I’ll remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content with that, neither doeth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth *them* out of the church.” Here was a self-appointed guy throwing people out of the church. This is not one man’s task. This is not one man to decide this. If we ever have to put a person out of the church – listen - if we ever have to put a person out of the church, it isn’t after one person went to them and didn’t repent. It isn’t after two or three went and they didn’t repent. It’s after everybody went and they didn’t repent. So that there’s nobody calling all the shots. We’re all out there trying to restore that person, and if they still do not respond, then the motion goes into effect. Put them out, but not until the whole church has gone after them.

Now, is there a case in the New Testament of this? Do we see any third stage discipline? I think we do. Look at 2 Corinthians Chapter 2. 2 Corinthians 2:5 it says this - and I’ll read from the New American Standard. It’s much clearer. “But if any has caused sorrow, - ” that is, bringing sorrow to the assembly because of sin “ - he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree - in order not say too much - to all of you.” Sin, he’s saying, doesn’t just affect me, it affects everybody. And that’s again back to our point that we said you can be sinned against indirectly. Any sin touches the whole body.

So he says, “Look, if any has sinned, it’s not just to me, but to all of you.” But then assumes, then, that all of the church is aware of this, and all of the church is concerned about this. Verse 6 then, “Sufficient to such a man is this punishment which was *inflicted* by majority.” In other words, apparently the whole church said, “This guy’s in sin.” And the whole church knew, and they went after the guy, and he repented.

And so verse 7 says, “on the contrary - ” on the other hand “ - ye rather should forgive *him* - ” which assumes that he has repented in response to the whole church coming after him “ - and then comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with over much sorrow.” And then he says in verse 8, “confirm *your* love to him.”

Now here’s the case where the whole church knew, and the whole church went, and apparently the guy responded, and he says, “Now that he’s responded, don’t let him stay out there. Don’t hold him at arms length and browbeat because of what he did. You embrace him again, and you forgive him, and you love him.”

That’s the way the church is supposed to do it. You say, “Well, how long do we do that?” I don’t know. I guess until you feel he’s getting harder and harder. Sometimes when we’ve gone out like this to go after someone, you can see them breaking down. You can see, “I’m not going to stop my sin. I’m going to do what I’m going to do. I’m going - ” and sometimes you see them softening. Sometimes they’re getting harder, and I guess the Spirit of God has to give you that sort of subjective wisdom as to when it’s time to just say, “That’s it. They’re not responding.” I think it’s usually a shorter time than

we think, because God wants response.

So what if they don't respond? Look at verse 17 again. "But if he neglect to hear the church - " and that phrase is between each step. It's after step one, it's after step two, and it's after step three. If he doesn't hear the whole church. Are we doing that as a church? Do you know of somebody that you need to go after? Maybe somebody's gone after. Maybe two or three have gone and you say, "Well, that's not in my area." Lots of folks are doing that. The whole church ought to go. If you know about it, you ought to go. Maybe just write a card. Maybe drop them a note. Maybe you see them, and you're bold enough to confront them.

But what if they don't respond? Then it says, step four, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector." You say "Boy, in the New Testament, the tax collectors really take it in the neck." And in a sense, that's very true. In Israel, there was the covenant people. And basically, a heathen was somebody outside the covenant and outcast. It wasn't that they didn't want to include him, it's just that if he wouldn't be included, he was outside. He couldn't associate with them. He didn't assemble with them. He didn't worship with them. He wasn't a part of them.

But the other kind of outcast in many ways might even be worse, was the Jewish person who had sold himself to the Roman government to exact taxes from his own people. He was not only an outcast by birth, he was an outcast by choice. He had defected to the enemy. And so, when you talk about a heathen man and a tax collector in the parlance of the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, the people would have understood him to be speaking of those outside the fellowship, outside the synagogue, outside the covenant, and that's exactly what Jesus is intending to say. Not that you don't care about those people. Matthew who wrote this passage down in this gospel was a tax collector and Jesus was in the business of saving tax collectors and sinners.

Think of the wonderful story of Zacchaeus. It isn't that this is something that's cast as disparaging remarks on those people. It is simply to say that you treat them when they sin as if they were outside your fellowship. What does that mean? I means two things, and I'm going to draw this to a conclusion right here. Listen carefully, because what I'm going to say in the next five to seven minutes is key. The first thing, what happens when the whole process is unproductive? Step one, put them out. Put them out. Put them out of what? Put them out of the fellowship. Put them out of the assembly. Don't let them associate. Don't let them have the blessings and the benefits. Put them out.

First Corinthians Chapter 5 makes this very clear. In the Corinthian church there was a man who was having sexual relationships with his father's wife, his stepmother, a form of incest, abominable to God. And instead of being brokenhearted over the incest, the people were proud about it. Paul says, "You're puffed up and you haven't mourned." Instead of being sad, you're glad. You think it's a notch in his belt to have an affair with his own stepmother. That's pretty sick.

He says this, verse 4, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of Lord Jesus Christ - " next time you come together in your assembly, " - deliver such a one unto Satan." Put him out. And that's why at the Lord's Table when we come together in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, if a person has been resistant to all those processes, you will hear us mention their name, and we are putting them out. No longer can they fellowship here. No longer can they know the blessedness of God's people, the sanctifying grace of assembly of His chosen ones if they are to live in continued sin. You turned them out, "delivering them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

In other words, their spirit may be redeemed in the end. God can hold onto the spirit, but they may have to have the destruction of that flesh, that flesh which pulls towards their sin. Sin is of the flesh, as we've been seeing in Romans 6. And that's going to have to be devastated. And putting them out, they may go even down further. And you have to do it. Verse 6 says, "because a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Purge out, therefore, the old leaven." Get it out. It's got to be put away.

In 1 Timothy 1:20, Paul says, "I took Hymenaeus and Alexander and turned them over to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme." That's remedial training. They needed to learn. They couldn't do that. They needed to get fully into the consequence of their sin. What happens you see is when you put someone out, the sanctifying graces of God's assembly are no longer there, and they're left without that thing, and when they don't have it all and they can't get near it all, then they begin to think about how much it really meant to them. You understand that? But if a person can have the people of God, and the church of God, and be accepted and have his sin, too, they may continue longer in their sin. So you say as I've said to people - I hate to think of all the people I've said it to - "You have a choice. It's either the world and the Devil or the people of God and God, not both. Not both."

Second Thessalonians 3:6 speaks to this same issue. "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition in which he received of us." The word "withdraw" means "to flinch" or "avoid." You avoid them. You don't let them in your fellowship. You don't let them in your assembly. You don't let them in your communion. You don't let them have that sanctifying grace that comes from Christ. Now we're not talking about people who don't know the Lord. We're not talking about outside people. We want them to be exposed to this. We're talking about sinning members of the family.

Second Thessalonians 3:14, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." Leave him to his shame. Leave him to his sin. God, if he belongs to Him, won't let him go, but may have to drag him very low. Back to 1 Corinthians 5:9. Paul says, "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators." "And not," he says, "not the fornicators of the world," not the outsiders, or with covetous, extortioners, idolators, not those or

he'd have to leave the world. I'm not saying don't meet with those people. Don't fellowship with those people, they need you. "But I am writing - " verse 11 " - so that you not keep company if any many that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, idolator, railer, drunkard, extortioner - " and here it comes " - with such one no not to eat." Don't have a meal with him. That's symbolic of fellowship, hospitality, cordiality, sociability. None of that.

When you put a person out, you put them out. You don't have them over for a meal. You don't treat them like a brother. You treat them like an outcast. You put them out.

Second thing, are you ready for this? Call them back. Put them out. Call them back. Second Thessalonians 3:15 says, "Count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother." And so there's a sense in which you never really let him go. You put him out of the association, but you keep calling them back. People say to me, "Well, you know, I'm going to meet with my brother and he divorced his wife, and he's been living in adultery, and I'm going to see him. Is it okay if I see him? Is it okay?" And I always say, "It's fine if you see him, as long as the whole time you're with him you just admonish him, admonish him, admonish him, 'Come back. Get your life right. Confess your sin. Repent of your sin.'" Those are the only terms you can be with him. That may end the meeting if he knows that's coming, but those are the terms.

Has this ever happened? Sure. Is this step four in the New Testament? I just read you 1 Timothy 1:20. Paul says, "I turned Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan." In Romans 16:17, Paul says, "I beseech you, brethren, mark them who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you've learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own body; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the innocent." Sure, step four is in the New Testament.

And so there's a balance. You put them out, and you call them back. Now, when you get to this point in the text, you're saying to yourself, "Boy, this is heavy stuff. I mean, this is heavy. Who am I to do this?" You want to know what your authority is? And this is absolutely shocking. If you want to know, come back in two weeks, because I'm going to be gone next week, but I'll be back two weeks and I'm going to tell you what is the absolute epitome of this whole passage as to why we should do this. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, this is a good word and an important one to our hearts. We are sentimental about You. We feel emotional about You. We like to sing the songs. We like to feel good, and hear the nice music, and all of that. But we really don't like to confront sin. Maybe sometimes we don't even like what it makes us become. But Lord help us to do this. Help us to know that You don't really want us to sing the songs, and feel good, and have nice times, and enjoy the Bible study, and leave it at that. You want us to be just as anxious to be ministers of holiness, pursuing the sheep that went astray.



And may we act on behalf of You, for You're the good shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, leaves the 99 to bring the one that's lost back. Give us some of those. Let us wrap that sheep around our necks and walk it back to the fold. Help us to be as anxious to do the hard thing by the energy of Your blessed Spirit as we are to receive the blessing. Help us to have a zeal like David did, like Jesus did, for Your house, Your people.

And Father, help us to pursue holiness in our own lives that we may be instruments of holiness in the lives of others, that you might be glorified in all things. Thank you for blessing us even though we've been disobedient in these areas. May we not abuse that grace but seek to be all you would have us to be. We pray in Christ's name, amen.

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