

# Church Discipline

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please open our Bibles to the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 18. Matthew chapter 18.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Matthew and we'll be looking today at verses 15 through 20. So Matthew 18. All right, let's read together beginning in verse 15.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

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. 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.

For where two or more, excuse me, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we again want to ask that your spirit would be with us as your word is open.

[ 1 : 38 ] That you would speak through your messenger and that you would be glorified in the preaching of your word. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Now as we're continuing through Matthew and as we're looking at chapter 18, I want to review for a moment the flow of chapter 18.

I think it's really helpful for us to understand what Matthew is doing in this passage and really what Jesus is doing at this time. So the flow of chapter 18. You may remember chapter 18 began with the disciples asking the question, who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And we've talked about this, but they're asking because they're arguing over which one of them is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. So what they're really asking is which one of us is the greatest in your kingdom or in the kingdom of heaven?

And Jesus responds by setting before them a child. And he really calls them to humility and dependence upon God as their father. And he warns them that unless they become like this child, they won't even get into the kingdom of heaven.

And then he goes on to warn those who tempt God's children or causes them to stumble spiritually. So become a child with your heavenly father.

[ 2 : 49 ] So what it means to be a Christian really is becoming a child. And then he warns what happens, though, to those who attempt God's children. And he issues this warning. And then he warns the children that they also must cut off temptation.

So there will be people who attempt you and know that they'll be judged. But know also that you can't give in to temptation. You have to fight against temptation, even drastic measures of cutting it off and gouging it out.

All sin from their life. Then he speaks of the father's pursuit of them when they wander off with the parable of the lost sheep that we looked at last week. And then his joy at their return, having wandered away.

Now, what's the question? What is Jesus answering? I thought maybe what we want to answer is what happens when someone sins against us? So, Jesus, you're saying that we're to become like children. And yet people are going to sin.

They're going to continue to sin. There's going to continue to be temptation. And he goes on to say that, well, those people who tempt you will be judged. Okay, but what happens when I'm sinned against?

[ 3 : 56 ] What does that look like? And how do you deal with that? What happens when I'm sinned against? And that's really, I think, what Jesus is answering for us here in this passage. And he's really addressing two perspectives.

First, he wants to explain that the ones who are sinned against, the little ones sinned against, will be protected. How does God protect them? What recourse is there for us when we, as God's little ones, as his children, are sinned against?

What recourse? What do we do when we're sinned against by others? If we're not to make ourselves great, if we're not to fight our own battles, what do we do when we're sinned against? How will we be protected if we're only children?

And then the second issue, the second perspective that's addressed is winning the sinning brother. What about this one who's in sin? What do we do with him? What is the relationship between what Jesus has been teaching and the parable of the lost sheep and everything that precedes it? How does this all fit together? And I want to look at that in this as well. So the perspective of the one sinned against and the perspective of the sinner. Those are the two perspectives we want to see. [ 5 : 06 ] The one sinned against and the sinner himself. If we're Christians long enough, we're going to be in both those perspectives at some point. You're going to be sinned against and you're going to be the one who sins against someone else.

So we're going to be in both these situations at some point. So how do we deal with others in this situation and how do others deal with us? And how does God look after his children?

And so I want to begin first by looking at the procedure that he lays out for us in Matthew 18. And then to look at those two perspectives and what it means for us in light of the procedure. So first let's look together at the procedure that's laid out for us.

First, this would be great if this is Sunday school, I'd ask you the question. As you look at this whole procedure, what is the goal of the procedure? What is the procedure supposed to accomplish? As you look at it, you should see that this procedure here is specifically to win a Christian. When they sin against you. As we look at this, it's specifically a situation in which someone has sinned against you.

[ 6 : 14 ] And so what we see is that first God judges those outside the church. 1 Corinthians 5, 12-13. For what have I to do with judging outsiders?

Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you. So in 1 Corinthians they have a man who's involved in sin that hasn't been dealt with.

And here Paul is addressing it. And God addressing it through Paul. Tells them, listen, God takes care of those outside the church. But you've got to deal with this situation within the church.

So again, the situation that's being spoken of here is what happens when a Christian sins against another Christian. We're not dealing with how the world treats you. The persecution you may face. But specifically within the life of the church.

Now you may recall that already in chapter 18 we've seen Jesus speak of those who would sin against Christians. Tempting them to sin. He says it would be better for you if you had a millstone tied around your neck and you were thrown into the ocean.

[ 7 : 16 ] And so we already have that perspective. It's bad news if you're going to sin against Christians or tempt them to sin. And then he declares a woe to the world for temptation to sin.

And maybe we want to ask the question, right? Because it says what happens when a brother sins against you? Does this passage apply to private sin? What I mean by private sin is sin that's not specifically done against another Christian.

So in other words, is Jesus saying here, this is what you do when someone directly sins against you and he's leaving out what happens if someone sins in private?

Let me quote for you Matthew Henry. He says, A gross sin against God is a trespass against his people who have a true concern for his honor.

Christ and believers have twisted interest, intertwined interest. What is done against them, Christ hates is done against himself. And what is done against him, they cannot but take is done against themselves.

[ 8 : 20 ] The reproaches of them that reproach thee are fallen upon me. Psalm 69 verse 9. I think Matthew Henry's point is correct. That Jesus isn't meaning to limit it to specifically if it's only a sin against you personally.

He's saying what happens when a Christian sins? What do we do about it? And how does that relate to the body? And I think he does bring in against us personally, partly because he's dealing with his protection of his children.

And so what does the procedure look like when a Christian sins? What do we do when it comes to our knowledge of the Christian sin? And it may be the situation where they've done it directly against you.

It may be some other situation in which you find out about a sin or a pattern of sin in their life that maybe others are not aware of. What do we do? Well, beginning in verse 15, we see the first step is that we go and we talk with them.

Now, I know this sounds like a crazy concept. But if we're just honest with ourselves for a moment, that's pretty hard. And we don't like doing that. Right? Maybe we'd rather say, I'll pray for them.

[ 9 : 26 ] And you should be praying for them. But specifically, we're called to go and talk with them. And it says what we do when we talk to them. The goal is that we tell him his fault. We want to show him his fault.

Maybe we want to say, we want to prove the case to him. We want to argue it with him. We want to help him to see that what he's doing is sin and that it's wrong. And that it has to be dealt with.

Because our assumption has to be that he's not seeing it as such. That as a Christian, he won't continue to live in patterns of sin. So right now, in some way or another, he's justifying his sin.

Which, as Christians, we're really good at. Right? We're really good at coming up with ways why it's okay for me to sin in this instant. It's okay for me to be angry because they said something mean to me. Right? It's okay for me to do this because my marriage is not a good marriage.

My husband or my wife is mean to me. Work is really hard for me. So it's okay for me to respond by getting drunk on the weekends. Right? We have all these ways of justifying our sin. And so the first thing you want to do is you want to go to them and you want to make the case.

[ 10 : 32 ] Here's what God's word says about this. Here's why this is sin. Here's why this must be dealt with in your life. And in particular, it says in verse 15 that you're to go to them and speak with them between you and him alone.

And so the first step that we understand this procedure is to go and speak with them alone. Maybe one way of putting this is that we want to keep issues of sin as private as possible.

And I want to be careful even as I say that. But let me just start with God's word and what it says here. That when we know someone's sin, our first thing isn't to go tell other people. If we want to ask for a prayer, we do it in very generic ways.

Look, there's a sin situation I need to deal with. Will you pray for me in this? We may not even want to mention their names. But between you and them alone, you go to them and you talk to them.

And you seek to win them. Now, I think inevitably I have to deal with other issues in our culture today. First, I think what Jesus is getting at is that our goal in dealing with other people's sin is not to shame them or dishonor them.

[ 11 : 41 ] But our goal is repentance. So when we go and talk to them, why are we not telling other people? Because we're not trying to embarrass them. We're not trying to bring shame upon them or dishonor them in some way. Our goal is to see them repent.

And so if I can go and talk with my brother and he repents because of that, there's no need for it to be told to other people. But as you're no doubt aware, there may be situations in which this isn't an option.

You may know, but in our culture, in our state, there are mandatory reporting laws. So for your elders in particular, and there are other people in different positions, but if we're aware of a situation in which there's sexual abuse or physical abuse of a minor, we're required by law to report that immediately.

We have 24 hours to report that. And so there may be situations in which it cannot be kept private.

We're obligated legally to report that. There may be situations in which both the situations I just mentioned are similar situations, but there may be situations in which we can't keep it private.

We have to share because there's a need to protect other people in the church or the family involved. And so just understand there may be situations in which that's not possible, but as much as possible, our goal is not to embarrass or shame people.

[ 13 : 01 ] Our goal is repentance. And so we're to keep it as private as possible. At the same time, that also means our goal as a church, as the elders of the church, our goal is never to protect an abuser.

If there's someone who's causing harm in a situation, it has to be dealt with, and we need to protect those who are being hurt. And so there's that fine line, there's that balance that we're trying to do where we want to not shame people, but at the same time we have an obligation to protect and guard others.

But as much as possible, we want to keep it as private as possible. And then what happens if they don't repent? You go, you talk to them, and they don't repent. Well, we see really the second step in verse 16.

Go again with one or two others. And so if you go and talk with them, and you make the case with them, and they don't repent, you give them some time, and there's no signs of repentance.

If talking with them privately does not seem to work, then we're to bring one or two other people with us. Not just anybody, other brothers or sisters in the Lord, other trustworthy people, we bring them with us.

[14:15] And specifically, we bring them with us as witnesses. That every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses, is what it says in verse 16.

Now that is almost a direct quote of the legal requirement that was presented in Deuteronomy 19.15. It says there, 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. And so we see already with this requirement that, in some ways, what you're doing is you're building a case if they will not repent.

You're strengthening also your plea for the repentance. So I want to be clear that both are happening. You're bringing other people with you, and what is your goal? Your goal is still their repentance. And maybe this person or that person, these two other people I brought with, maybe they'll say it in a different way.

Maybe God's Spirit will use what they say to bring them to repentance. Maybe their perspective will be different. Maybe they'll be able to incorporate the gospel and grace in a way that I wasn't able to.

[15:25] Maybe they'll be less harsh. They'll be less prone to lose their temper with the person. Whatever it may be, but your goal is to bring them to repentance. But it's also the realization that if they don't repent, that there are other people who are aware of the situation, who can share, who can testify, as it were, should this proceed or progress.

And so that really leads them to the next step. What happens then if you go with two or one or two other people, and they still won't repent?

Well, the next thing it says is that you bring it to the church in verse 17. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And so here the church, I think, is meant by the local body, the assembly, what we would define by the church membership.

In a situation in which this would happen in our church, that would be a closed meeting, unlike most of our business meetings that are open. It would only be for church members that we would share, here's what's going on in the situation of this person.

First Corinthians 6, 1 through 20, we see Paul rebukes those who went to the courts, to the unjust secular courts, and not to the church. And so we see here there's a time in which we bring it before the church and ask the church to help settle something.

[16:46] Again, it may be a situation where one brother sinned against another. It may be that you're aware of a sin, but you bring it to the church and ask them to step in and to help. Do they listen to the consensus and the pleas of the church?

This is what we're looking for. If they won't hear you, and if they won't hear two or three of their brothers, what about when the whole church hears this and they plead with them and say, brother or sister, what you're doing is sin.

It's wrong. Repent. You have to lead that. Will they heed that? And if they won't, the final step in this process is what we would classify as excommunication.

The second half of verse 17, if he refuses to listen, even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. And first let me say, this is always the last course of action and only if the other steps did not lead to repentance.

Again, the goal all along, we want repentance, we want repentance. But if it hasn't come to that, then the last step is, it's communication. If they will not listen to the church, it says, let him be to you as a Gentile or a tax collector.

[17:53] Now, broadly speaking, what I think is being said here is that you're to treat this person to understand them to be an unbeliever. What is true of a Christian is that we will sin until we reach heaven and we're glorified.

We're always, I mean, there will be sin in our life. But the pattern of the Christian life is one of continued repentance. When we see our sin, we repent, we leave it behind, we turn from it. And if this person has heard your rebuke and the rebuke of two or three others and even the rebuke of the church and they refuse to leave behind their sin, then that's every evidence to us that they're not regenerate.

They're not saved. That God hasn't worked in their heart. Now, our hope is that that's not the case. That they really are. But as far as we can see the evidence, then how can we treat them as a brother or sister in the Lord anymore?

They're behaving as an unbeliever, as a Gentile or a tax collector. The fact that he throws in tax collector here is, I think, I don't want to take this too far, but at the very least he's saying, we treat them as an unbeliever and one that's not very well thought of.

[ 19 : 02 ] Not just a Gentile, but even a tax collector who was disdained in that culture. And so it's not as though, again, we're putting undue shame on them, but the relationship is broken.

It's not what it used to be. We can't have the unmitigated friendship that we once had with them. We have to treat them now as an unbeliever and one in particular who is walking and living in great sin. Maybe another way of saying this is that the familial, the family affection cannot continue any longer. We can no longer treat them as a brother or sister in the Lord. We can't treat them as part of God's family anymore because of the sin and the patterns of sin in their life.

They have willfully rejected the counsel of the church. They have rejected God's word and they've embraced their sin and rebellion. And that's not the behavior of a believer.

That's what we're affirming. It's not the behavior of a believer. We must consider that we were deceived by their profession of faith and that it was false unless at some point in the future we see genuine signs of repentance.

[ 20 : 13 ] Now, let me point out to you something about this passage. Excommunication is not the act of Peter. Did you notice that? These are the same words that we saw Jesus say to Peter and I argued back then that Peter was speaking as a representative of the apostles and really more broadly as the church.

And so we see the same words repeated that were spoken to Peter in 1619. Look at verse 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.

So, did Jesus mean that just for Peter? Was it exclusive power of Peter? No. Who does he say it belongs to? That power. It's the church. So, let me be more clear.

It's not Peter. It's not the Pope. It's not your elders who have the power to bind and to loose on earth with eternal consequence.

Who has that power? It's the church. Now, that's exactly how we argued it back in chapter 16 but I want you to see it again clearly here.

[ 21 : 19 ] Especially knowing that we live in a Catholic community. It's not the Pope who binds and loose. It is the church. So, the church's judgment has eternal consequences.

And I think that's what he's pointing to here. Now, let me be real clear here. What happens if there's a Christian who falls into sin and is unrepentant and goes through excommunication? Well, the church doesn't remove their salvation.

He doesn't take away their salvation. Right? The church doesn't have the power to plot someone out of the hand of God the Father. If they're a Christian they will persevere to the end. But God and his purposes will use this communication as a process to draw them back to themselves.

We would hope it wouldn't come to that. But, again, this isn't in some way overpowering God's work. The church cannot take away someone's salvation. So, don't misunderstand that as what's going on here.

But, what is being said is that the church their proclamation in this situation does have eternal consequences. And that's further proven in verses 19-20. 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 for where two or three are gathered in my name there I am among you.

[ 22 : 36 ] I know how we typically interpret this but do you understand the flow of the argument what's being said here? Whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth is loose in heaven. Because God is there with his people and he hears their unified consensus.

So, again not the charge of the elders but as the church as a whole if the church hears the case and this person is unrepentant and they declare him to be like an unbeliever then that has eternal consequences.

What they have bound on earth is also bound in heaven. So, this passage isn't foremost about praying in general but about binding and loosing.

God validates their judgment and authority. I think that's what's being said here. God gives a nod. He agrees. I put my church on earth for this purpose and this is something they do and he agrees with that.

And I think it's important to contrast that then with the person who's in sin who believes they're right in their sin. Who's unwilling to repent. Because there may as we hear this I think don't think of someone else in our church being under discipline.

[ 23 : 47 ] I think we have to realize we all sin and this could be any one of us. And so what happens when you're in that situation where you're saying I'm not willing to leave this behind. I'm right in doing this.

In some way you're arguing that. Well the church has declared you're not right and God hears them and agrees with them. So as it were God's taking sides in this.

And when you're siding against the whole church you're not winning the argument. God has placed the church there in that sense to judge in this situation and they've declared the judgment.

And if we understand that rightly we have to say that this is really scary. The church has been given a very important responsibility in the life of Christians.

And God hears and God agrees with their judgment. But I also want to point you to the reality that this also applies to the loosing. Whatever they loose on earth.

[ 24 : 46 ] What does it mean to loose something on earth? Well if you bind them maybe I should say who's bound that needs loosing? It's the person who's been disciplined. Whatever they bind on earth is bound in heaven and whatever they loose on earth is loosed in heaven.

So we have to understand that the loosing if that's the right terminology at this point is done to those who have been bound by the process of excommunication. So it's not as though repentance isn't still possible.

In fact this whole idea of loosing holds forth the possibility that the person could still repent. And that's what we still pray for. Maybe I could ask you this how do you pray for an unbeliever?

That God would save them right? That God would work in their heart that he would change their heart. How do you pray for a member who's been excommunicated? You pray that God would work in their heart that he would change their heart that God would save them if they're not saved.

If they truly are saved that he would bring them to genuine repentance. Now I spent a great deal of time dealing with the procedure and I want to talk about how does this apply to our passage.

[ 25 : 50 ] Remember the two perspectives I presented first protecting the little ones. And so the question is if I entrust myself to God the Father as his child what will happen when people sin against me?

Am I just left to myself to protect myself? If I really approach God as a child I completely entrust myself to him will I be taken advantage of?

Will other people sin against me? And what Jesus has confirmed so far is yes people will sin against you. Well that puts me in a pretty vulnerable position doesn't it? Right?

Children at times maybe much of the time need their parents protection. So God as my Father how are you going to protect me? When I'm sinned against by my brother.

And I think what Jesus answered is that sin is never to be overlooked. Sin is always to be dealt with. He's not going to allow people just to sin against us and go overlooked.

[ 26 : 52 ] Rather when we're sinned against he encourages us personally to go first and speak to them. And so you understand that there's something that has to be happening in the life of the church that arguably may or may not be happening in the life of Grace Fellowship church today.

There has to be genuine community. There has to be relationships in which we can talk to each other about sin. So let me ask you today how many people in the church would you be comfortable with going and talking to them about their sin?

I think in some way that helps us understand how much have we allowed ourselves to enter into community in the life of the church. Do we have relationships that afford me the opportunity that when I've sinned against or when I become aware of sin in someone's life I can go and talk with

them.

I feel comfortable doing that. We have established at our church I'm not arguing we have we need to establish in our church a community a personality or whatever you want to say of the church where we're regularly talking to each other about issues of our spiritual lives and sin so that when times like this come it's natural.

my guess is with many of us it would feel very awkward to go and talk to someone about their sin and there may be people that you feel like you've got no relationship that if they said something really sinful about you against you you feel like you couldn't go and talk to them.

[ 28 : 14 ] Well before we ever get to this step let me encourage you now before that day happens go and talk to them now build relationship with them now know them now live in community with one another.

in some ways it's been very hard to for me knowing all my family is still probably within a 10 mile radius back home back in Georgia say I even said back home I got anywhere I don't really say that much anymore but you could draw a circle and mine and my wife's family are all within this one small circle and to leave them behind and move far enough away that it's not an easy day's drive we can't just go down for birthdays.

in some ways it's forced me and my family to kind of identify with you all you are my family and so in some ways that's been a blessing for us even though it's been hard at times but you're my family and I want to have relationship with you all but I think oftentimes when we really establish in a community maybe you grew up in Hazleton or the surrounding areas you've got friends outside the church you've got family outside the church that maybe you don't feel that same draw that same need but what I want to encourage you is what's presented to us in God's word is that we live in community with one another we're involved in each other's lives we practice hospitality we have each other in each other's homes we're asking spiritual questions what are you reading God's word how's family devotions going in your home what's your prayer life like what sin are you struggling with right now that I can be praying with you about we're asking those kind of questions we're having those kind of conversations and if that's not happening then I assure you when the moment comes when you're sinned against this is going to seem almost impossible to do and so we've got to live in relationship and in community long before this ever happens but what Jesus is encouraging us is that when you're sinned against we don't just ignore sin it's never right for us just to ignore sin I know it sounds really great for us to say well I want to be really forgiving of that person so I'm just not going to talk to him about it that sounds really spiritual doesn't it the truth is it's probably a reflection of our own fear because we don't want to have to confront sin we don't want to have to deal with the awkwardness of broken relationships but what I see presented here is that Jesus is saying that's never an option when you know of someone else living in sin when someone else sins against you there's an obligation to go and talk to them and so we're encouraged to go and speak with him now in some way that's also how God guards us how God protects us he doesn't allow sin just to go on and not be dealt with when sin happens it's to be dealt with and we can even draw the lines tightly even within the home right we think of this broadly in terms of the church but what happens when the husband sins against his wife or wife sins against her husband or a husband sins against their children and the wife sees it and knows about it then what happens with they're both believers that spouse needs to talk with the other spouse if they won't repent and they won't change it has to be carried beyond the family even into the church family but even in the smallest level there's not sin that should happen that isn't dealt with all sins should be repented of all sins should be dealt with in our lives and the life of the church and we also realize that speaking to them guards our hearts against anger and bitterness because the reality is again we make it sound really spiritual well I just forgive them

I'm not even going to talk to them about it and then what happens an hour later or a week later you're still angry with them you're bitter at them I'm not going to talk to them about it in fact I'm not going to talk to them at all my whole relationship is broken down now they have sinned against me and I'm angry about it but I'm trying to forgive them I'm just going to avoid them the whole life of the church is affected by that we're one body and just imagine what happens if body parts aren't coordinating with each other if you're trying to feed yourself and your hand and mouth aren't really coordinated you're poking food in your eye all right that just doesn't work this isn't good there's something psychologically going on brain damage going on right this isn't right in the life of the church when the body isn't working together as a body if we're not talking if we're not

communicating and so this helps us it preserves peace and purity in the church I think it's unfortunate that this isn't happening in many churches and I think the name of Christ is blasphemed because there are people within churches who are openly living in adulterous relationships and the world knows about it and it blasphemes the name of

Christ or this drunkenness and people all around know about it but the church is doing nothing about it or there's divisions within the life of the church because they were sinned against and they're angry about it and they're fighting and there's bickering but sin's not being dealt with and so this is a way that God guards us he purifies his church he protects his church and it's a witness of the gospel to the world because we haven't quite gotten there yet but assuming this whole process works we follow God's guidelines even if they seem like foolishness to us we follow God's guidelines and it works and it speaks to the gospel we're going to talk more about that in a minute so you have the spirit working in them to bring repentance and the church working to that end as well we're working along with the spirit to help bring repentance in them so our reliance is upon God and his church and not ourselves in our own greatness thinking back to the beginning of Matthew chapter 18 who's the greatest in the kingdom Romans 12 19 through 20 says beloved never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written vengeance is mine I will repay says the Lord to the contrary if your enemy is hungry feed him if he is thirsty give him something to drink for by so doing you will heat burning coals on his head and again we see the example of [ 34 : 31 ] Jesus in first Peter 2 23 when he was reviled he did not revile in return when he suffered he did not threaten but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly so in the life of the church what does it mean to entrust yourself to him who judges justly well here's the process that God uses to bring our brothers and sisters to repentance but when I'm sinning against I want to get them back no vengeance is God's your goal is not vengeance your goal is repentance your goal is restoration of your brother or sister and so then there's other perspective rescue the loss what if you are the sinner what if you're the one who's fallen into sin or sinned against your brother in some way well I've said this multiple times in our sermon but the goal of this whole process is always to win your brother to restore him look at verse 15 if your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him if he listens to you you have gained your brother now that's not repeated but that's the idea all throughout the process the goal is always you want to gain your brother that's interesting he uses the terminology gain your brother we understand it's for their restoration it's not done for their condemnation but you've gained your brother the picture's almost the same as one of salvation you have a brother he's headed towards sin you plucked him out of the fire you've gained him back for the kingdom this is what's going on and so we see this picture then of restoration going on this is God's redemptive purposes God has purpose from the creation and from the fall to redeem the people for himself he sent his son to die for their sins assuming that you're a

Christian Christ has specifically shed his blood for you is he going to let you wander off now here's the connection to what we just saw and what we looked at last week what happens when one of his sheep wander away God pursues him God will not let him wander off and ultimately we saw even perseverance in that passage it's not the will of God that any of them shall perish so what happens if you as a little child begin to wander off if you get lost if you get distracted if you sin and desire that more than your heavenly father God's not let you wander off he's going to pursue his sheep he's going to bring them back how's he going to do that here's the answer this is why it's here in this passage this is why church discipline exists because God will not let his children wander off he will pursue them and what does that pursuit look like it's through the life of the church it's through relationships it's through your brothers and sisters one at a time two or three at a time even the whole church pleading with you don't go there there's danger over there come back into the sheepfold but this is

God's restorative redemptive purposes and bringing you back we sing earlier the hymn there is a fountain filled with blood and in that song we sing redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die that's what this is this is redeeming love it is not love to see someone go into sin and say good luck with that have fun maybe again you could picture a sheep that's in danger you're wandering off you know the wolf lives over there it's okay good luck with that I'm not going over there it's dangerous it's hard that's not love love is pursuing someone and bringing them back it's not easy it's messy but that's what love is you don't want them to remain in their sin you want to see them brought back into the kingdom in James 5 we see a picture of this in 19 and 20 he says my brothers if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back let him know

that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sin so there's a picture of it you're saving his soul from death and so we ought to see this almost again as if we're saving someone who's an unbeliever who's never known the Lord we're drawing them back we're saving them from death like winning an unbeliever to Christ you've won a soul for your your master your heavenly father I think verse 19 also argues for praying for the sinner if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask I don't think we have to limit it strictly to the church discipline aspect all along this process ought to be saturated with prayer before we ever get to the point where we have to excommunicate someone we better have prayed with them I would even go so far as to say before the church cumulatively by votes declares their sin to be wrong everybody in the church should have spoken to them by now and called them back but we ought to pray for them and know that God hears and answers our prayer

James 5 16 so just before what I read earlier says therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working so confess our sins to one another is that happening first off but then when it does what do you do when someone confesses your sin to them well you can't wait till you get to your small group so you can tell the whole group to be praying for that person because there's a way in which we can ask for prayer for them there's also ways in which we can gossip just want to tell somebody about it no the first response is what confess your sins to one another and pray for them that's what we must be doing so let me make a few points in closing I've said already verse 20 applies not or verse 19 and 20 apply not only to discipline but also prayer and we can say as well to corporate worship Matthew 28 20 Jesus says I'm with you always to the end of the age God is with his people but we see specifically in verse 20 what I would say is even Jesus proclaiming his deity for where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them that Jesus speaking here in flesh how's he ever going to be among everyone who's gathered in his name and so we see the deity of Christ but we also encourage that as we gather together we can be assured of his presence as we hear the word preach as we sing hymns to God as we pray as we read the scripture and even as we take the Lord's Supper later even though it's mystical and we don't see it Jesus isn't actually the bread he's not actually the cup but he's spiritually present with us as we partake of the table secondly we see God is our father protecting his children who are sinned against and pursuing his children who wander away in sin and really what I wanted you to see all throughout this chapter is this beautiful picture of God our father and his love for us and so I think the world around us and probably a lot of churches today think of church discipline as something harsh or authoritarian if you understand that you haven't understood the gospel you haven't understood God's word I think you haven't understood the flow of

Matthew 18 which I've tried to help you to see the flow is God the father looking out for his children how does he do that he protects those who are sinned against and the children who are in sin he brings them back and this whole process that he's established by which God's people work to pursue God's children that they may not wander off it's like you may remember maybe if you've ever done this with your family or I remember church youth group we had the buddy system we had to stay in groups of three you know the youth leader he's taking all these kids to some theme park I said last week we talked about Disney and how that can be with a bunch of kids but you can imagine the youth leader I always thought what a scary prospect you know you're taking our youth group sometimes we had 30 kids going to six flights yeah good luck with that and he's only responsible for all of them if one of them comes up missing you think the parents gonna be like well we know you had 30 kids to one you were really outnumbered no he's responsible isn't he and so we always said the buddy system we just stay in groups of three or four we had to keep up with each other and that's how he maintained that and we almost see this going on here in the life of the church

[ 43 : 16 ] God looks out for his children sovereignly he sends his angels to protect them but one way that he's established to look out for them is the buddy system it's the church it's the body it's what God's made us for that we're to look out for one another and call each other back when we see each other in sin and this is all a statement of God's love for his children if he didn't love his children he wouldn't care if we wandered off in sin but he does care and so he sends all of us to look out for each of us thirdly I think we have to see that we we cannot miss the important role that we play in this all of us play in this we're to pray for the sinner we're to seat the sinner we're to discipline the sinner if they won't repent and again this points back to what I said earlier the idea of community are we living in such a way that these things are happening are you praying for the

Christians in this room are you seeking them when you see them wandering are you even in a position to know when they wander are you even asking enough you know enough about their life to know something's wrong right now are we willing to discipline them if it must be the case that it has to happen they won't repent are we living in that kind of community and then finally in closing I want you to see that our goal is always in love to win our brother church discipline exists because God loves his children and we have to share God's redemptive purposes God's purpose in redeeming us is to bring us finally and ultimately into his kingdom glorified that's our goal too we want to edify our brothers and sisters we want to see them sanctified we want to sharpen them as they sharpen us and this is part of the process but the goal is always to win the brother to see them restored to see them growing in their love and dependence upon God to see their understanding of the gospel grow and all along the way I'd say God uses this process that we see here to redeem those people but he also uses it in our lives as well there won't ever be a time that we have to deal with someone else's sin that

God doesn't deal with our sin I mean I've heard people argue that even with church discipline well how can we discipline them because I'm a sinner too well God's laid out a process for that but now's a great time for you to be thinking of your own sin to be dealing with that to be considering how do I apply the gospel to my life if I'm going to have to apply it to their life and so God uses this in love to redeem and restore his people we ought to count that a blessing of his fatherly love let's pray together dearly father we long and desire to be faithful to your word and what we've looked today is not something that's popular in our culture and if we're really honest it's not even popular in the church right now but Lord we believe we have to be faithful to your word and even when this looks like foolishness to many we pray that we would be faithful in this Lord we pray that it would never even come to the point that we have to as a church as communicate someone that we would be living out community in such a way that we're going after our brothers and sisters long before it gets there and that you by your spirit of working to bring them to repentance so help us to live as your body to love one another to share your goal of redeeming your people and bringing them glorified perfected in the image of Christ into your kingdom eternally may we share that desire Lord we pray that you'd break us of the selfishness that won't makes us want to look out just for ourselves maybe even to think we're the greatest in the kingdom that we're beyond the process maybe to shrink back in fear that we don't want to have our lives get messy or dirty but Lord we pray that by your spirit you would overcome that in us that we would live in community with one another seeking to establish your redemptive purposes in our brothers and sisters and we pray that Lord you would guard our own hearts that as we sin you would quickly bring us to repentance that we would be daily repenting of our sins that you would allow us to continue on in patterns of sin that could lead to destruction Lord deliver us and save us we pray in Christ's name  
Amen