

Lighthouse Bible Church

October 26th, 2014

Matthew 18: 15 - 20 *Scripture Reading: Matthew 18: 1 - 14*

Purity, Discipline and Restoration in the Church

Stand – Read – Pray

We are going to take a break from the book of John, this week only, to look at an important passage of scripture that has great bearing on what I will be sharing at the end of this service.

And it has to do with one very important aspect of the church and that is in the area of the purity and holiness of the church and its people and how to maintain that purity and virtue and holiness in the church.

One way that that can be done is through what is called church discipline or the restoration of a sinning brother or sister. It is a biblical principle set down by our Lord on how to maintain the purity and integrity and testimony of the local church while at the same time desiring to restore a sinning brother or sister.

Because the local church, our church, is made up of redeemed people who still have a sin nature that wars against the Spirit as **Galatians 5: 17** says **the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh and these are contrary to one another so that you do not do the things that you wish.**

Because this is a sensitive area and one of those that you may not be familiar with or don't know or understand how the process works or why it is needed, or you have never heard of anything like this ever being done, I want us to see what the Word of God has to say about this.

Let me start by saying this; The purity of the church, the holiness of the church and its people is of utmost importance to God. Jesus **purchased the church of God with His own blood**, Acts 20: 28 tells us. He is the **head of it** Colossians 1: 18 says and it is **His body** Ephesians 1: 22 – 23 says. He puts a high value and priority on the church and on maintaining the purity and holiness of it because it is a reflection of Him, and we must to.

And it starts with our own personal purity and holiness as we live before God, right? We are called to be a pure, holy, righteous people.

1st Peter 1: 14 – 16 says we are to be **obedient children**. We are to **not conform ourselves to our former lusts** and we are to **be holy in all our conduct**. 1st Peter 2: 5 calls us a **Holy priesthood**.

Remember what Romans 12: 1 said? That we are to **present our bodies a living sacrifice HOLY acceptable to God ...**

There is a standard of holiness and righteousness that every believer is called to live, and apart from the Holy Spirit of God, we couldn't do it. In Romans 6: 11 – 22 it says **we are to present our members as instruments of righteousness, we are slaves of righteousness .. for holiness and we have fruit to holiness now.**

2nd Corinthians 7: 1 ... let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the **flesh and spirit, perfecting Holiness in the fear of God.**

We are told in Ephesians 4: 24 to **put on the new man which was created according to God, in true Righteousness and Holiness.**

1st Thessalonians 4: 7 says that **God did not call us to uncleanness, but to Holiness.**

Think about this! In Ephesians Chapter 5, Paul has been talking about the relationship between a married man and woman and their responsibilities to one another. Then he says in **Ephesians 5: 27 ...that He might present her to Himself**, as the man does to the woman, **a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she should be holy and without blemish.**

A husband must love his wife enough to set her apart from worldly sinful influences in a purifying kind of love that keeps her holy and pure and without blemish, just as Christ does with the church. And He finishes all of that, in **Ephesians 5: 32** by saying **this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.** See also *Hebrews 12: 10,14, 1st Corinthians 3: 17, Ephesians 1: 4, 5: 24-27*

And the visible representation of Jesus Christ, the church, of which He is the head, is called to be pure and holy and obedient to the Word of God in order to be a testimony to the holiness and purity and righteousness of God. Where a church has no desire for purity or holiness, anything will be tolerated. That is why in **Revelation 1 – 3** you see Christ admonishing several churches.

We, individually, are called to holiness, righteousness and purity and collectively, as a church, we are called to that same standard (not perfection, but set apart to holiness). And when someone deviates from that standard by their continual or unrepentant sin, what happens to their testimony and what happens to the testimony of the church.

So the question becomes what do people see today when they look at the church? Do they see a church that winks at sin, tolerates sin, refuses to talk about sin and judgment, or caters to unbelievers to the point they call good evil and evil good? Or do they see a church that upholds the Word of God and loves people enough to deal with sin and restore them to holiness.

Think about this: Our lives are called to a certain sense of conformity to some kind of standard that has been set. For instance; if you are at **work** there is a certain standard that you must comply with or you will suffer some type of discipline or consequence as a result of disobeying the standard that they hope will help you to not do it again:

- if you are late
- if you don't do a certain amount of work
- if you talk back to the boss or whatever

There is a certain standard in place that you are held to when you drive on the roads that you are called to obey and if you don't there are consequences and discipline as a result in the form of a citation or accident.

Think about your **own children**. Your desire is for them to live holy, righteous, godly, pure lives. When they do or say something that deviates from that, you, as a loving parent, want to discipline them in love, to correct that behavior. It is because of the deep love that you have for your child that you take such action in their lives.

Well, it is no different in the **church**. We can preach and teach all about sin but if we do nothing about it then we undermine the scriptures and bring a reproach on the name of Christ and what He is the head of.

The only way we will know that we are serious about sin and holiness is not only through the preaching and teaching of them but by encouraging and admonishing everyone to the biblical standard of holiness and righteousness that conforms to what the scriptures say.

If we don't hold everyone to the biblical standard of holiness, purity and righteousness, then why have the standard. But the bible does have a standard and we are all called to live by it.

If we choose to disobey that standard or change it or ignore it or whatever, built within that standard must be some correction or discipline that causes us to desire the standard once again.

It is kind of like **Hebrews 12: 5 – 11** Read

That is why we can see examples all throughout the New Testament of churches taking some kind of action against sin within the congregation. You see it in:

1st Corinthians 5: 1 – 13: Read 4 – 7, 13 to **2nd Corinthians 2: 6 - 8**

*Romans 16: 17 **And avoid them ...***

2nd Thessalonians 3: 6, 14 – 15 We are to **admonish** them

Galatians 6: 1 if anyone is overtaken in ANY sin, you (*pl*) who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness ...

1st Timothy 1: 18 – 20

1st Timothy 5: 19 – 20 those who are sinning rebuke in presence of all..

Titus 1: 10 – 11

Titus 3: 10 – 11

Well, the question becomes; how do we deal with sin in the church and who is supposed to do that how is that supposed to be done and when is it supposed to be done? Is there a process, a way in which to deal with unrepentant sin in the church body? Yes!

There is one passage that stands out among the rest that speak specifically to the issue of church discipline and restoration of a sinning brother or sister and it is found in our passage in **Matthew 18: 15 – 17**.

I want you to notice something first. The very first word in Verse 15 is **moreover**. That calls us to a continuation of thought about what our Lord was just previously talking about and what has He been talking about?

He has been talking about believers likened to little children or to one of these little ones. Then in **Verse 12 – 14** he talks about the man who has one of his sheep go astray and the love that man has for that sheep that he would leave the 99 and go find that one and then rejoices when he finds it.

The whole idea there is of the preciousness of a believer and what another person, another believer, would do to restore that little one to where he was before.

Now He is going to make application for the people to hear. Then Jesus says, moreover, *or and or but*; **if your brother sins against you**. What does that have to do with loosing a sheep? This is the application, this is how one brother, how one church, as we shall see, loves another brother enough to do whatever it takes to bring them back just like the shepherd would go after the one, leaving the 99.

If your brother. This is talking about someone who is a professing Christian, a born again believer, who is sinning in some way.

If your brother **sins against you**. The kind of offenses that require confrontation and biblical discipline toward restoration are not unintentional transgressions, petty annoyances, or matters of simple preference. They are serious violations of clear biblical principles—sins that hurt other believers, destroy the unity of the flock, cause the name of Christ and the Word to be blasphemed and bring a reproach on the church. In such cases, sin must be dealt with and not be covered up or ignored. They are like leaven, and left alone their evil effects will eventually permeate the whole church. **1st Corinthians 5: 6** says **do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump therefore purge out the old leaven..**

It says ‘if your brother sins against YOU’. But the implication is that we can all be sinned against and influenced by someone else’s sin, in some cases, so by implication we could all become the you. It’s like **Galatians 6: 1** says **if Anyone is overtaken in ANY sin, you (pl) who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness.** And just to be clear, we are talking about unrepentant or unconfessed (continual) sin.

So, when someone does sin against you, what do you do? This is really where church discipline and restoration starts and we would love to see it end here as well. If your brother sins against you **go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.** Or some versions may so ‘go and reprove him in private’. **Go** means you take the initiative, don’t not do anything.

“**tell him his fault**’ is one word in the original Greek language *el-eng-kho* and it means to reprove, admonish, convict or convince. That is how the word is used and translated different places in scripture. It has the idea in mind of telling the person in such a way that he cannot help but recognize their sin for what it is or their fault.

And notice, you are to do this **between you and him alone, in private.** It is between you and him alone. When you know that your brother or sister in Christ is involved in some kind of sin then it is up to YOU to reprove them, admonish them, convict them and convince them of their sin.

And by the way, this is always to be done from a heart of love and self examination and not in a condescending, judgmental, holier than thou attitude. You are trying to win your brother back to holy living, not beat him down.

One writer said “A Christian who is not deeply concerned about bringing a fellow Christian back from sin needs spiritual help themselves. Smug indifference, not to mention self-righteous contempt, has no part in the life of a spiritual Christian, nor do sentimentality or cowardice that hide behind false humility. The spiritual Christian neither condemns nor justifies a sinning brother. His concern is for the holiness and blessing of the offending brother, the purity and integrity of the church, and the honor and glory of God.” *MacArthur Commentary on Matthew page 128.*

That is why in **Galatians 6: 1** says **if anyone is overtaken in any sin you who are spiritual RESTORE such a one in a (what) spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.**

That is why Jesus said in **Matthew 7: 3 – 5** **why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye but do not consider the plank in your own eye ...**

This is the first step in church discipline and it is to be done privately, one on one with another person whom you know is sinning or has sinned against you or against the holiness and purity of the church or has brought a reproach against Christ and His church. This is one way that we safeguard the holiness and purity of the church.

You don't go around saying 'hey did you hear about so and so what he did' 'what he said' 'what she did'. That is the tendency of some Christians today that I might add is in itself is disobedience and sin to what the scriptures say. *My lips are sealed to people but my mouth is opened wide to God in prayer.*

You go to the person privately and you tell them their fault, you tell them their sin, just between the two of you, no one else. Why? The rest of Verse 15 tells us. **If he hears you, you have gained your brother.**

If he hears you; has the idea that he has heard what you said about him and his sin and his need to repent and turn away from it and seek God's forgiveness and seek forgiveness from the one he offended. He admits to it and he responds in humility and contriteness of heart and repents.

If he does hear you and responds with a godly sorrow then the end of Verse 15 says **you have gained your brother.** That is the whole purpose behind confronting someone and reproofing them of sin is to win them back to holiness. It is to restore that relationship between brothers and between the sinning brother and God and the sinning brother and his church family.

And by the way, when you gain or win him back, it is a gaining and winning for everyone, for you, for them and for the church.

Listen very carefully, church discipline is not to **keep** or **kick** people out of the church. It is for the restoration of a fallen member back to holiness which in turn strengthens and purifies the entire church. It is to keep the person in the church.

2nd Thessalonians 3: 14 – 15 says if anyone does not obey the word note that person and do not keep company with him that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Like Galatians 6 said earlierrestore such a one ... or what James said in James 5: 19 – 20: if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

As a matter of fact, we ought to be ready and eager to forgive someone who sins against us, right? Isn't that what Jesus tells Peter starting in Verse 21 of **Matthew 18: 21 – 22: how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to 7 times. No 70 X 7.**

What you are doing by confronting a brother or sister in their sin is you are saying to them and to the church that that sinning brother or sister has great value and worth; just like the 1 out of a 100 sheep Jesus just talked about.

When you gain your brother or sister back, you have gained something very valuable back. But often times we don't look at it that way. We say 'well, who am I to judge that person' or 'that is between them and God, not me'. No! the most loving thing you can do is **tell him his fault between you and him alone in hopes that he hears you so that you can gain your valuable brother back.**

If your brother who has sinned against you doesn't hear you and you have not gained him or made him realize the seriousness of his sin, then what. Look at verse 16.

Verse 16: but, if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

The next step (#2) in the process of church discipline/restoration is to go back to that person with two or three more people and, again, in private. The witnesses have a two fold purpose as they did in **Deuteronomy 19: 15**.

One is to reprove, admonish, convict or convince him as the other person has tried to do. Verse 17 says **if he refuses to hear them**. So the assumption is that they were also telling this person to repent of their sin and explaining very clearly what needs to be done.

The second purpose was to **establish every word** that was said. To verify the words of both the person who is sinning and the person who is admonishing him. To make sure there even is a sin issue that needs to be dealt with and to make sure the single person has done their part in admonishing him.

Again, all of them approach this person in love and humility and graciousness and gentleness only after examining themselves and praying for the outcome of repentance and restoration.

The desire, as before, is to see the person realize after hearing it, from several different sources that are presenting the truth, that he would repent and turn away from his sin and be restored in his relationship with the other person, God and the church.

If he still doesn't hear them, then what? Well, the next step (#3) in the discipline/restoration process begins. By the way **if you gain your brother** after the 1st or 2nd or 3rd attempt then the issue is done and not to be discussed any more.

Verse 17: and if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

If one person tries and does not gain his brother and if several try and do not gain their brother and he still lives in unrepentant and continual sin, then you get the whole church after them.

Verse 17 says **if he refuses even to hear the church**. So the idea is that now everyone is going to this person in love and humility and graciousness and gentleness to reprove and admonish and convince and convict this person in order to win them back. That means that we all love this person enough that we are willing to do whatever it takes to win them back.

By the way, it says **tell it to the church**. How would you tell it to the church. The only way that is possible is in a public meeting where the church is gathered together. Which means that the Pastor or Elder would bring this before the congregation openly and ask everyone to pursue that person in love.

Why tell it to the church? It is not to embarrass or humiliate anyone, it is to have everyone come alongside this person to call them to repentance and restoration so that they can be won back. And the 4th and final step is not to be done until everyone in the church has had an opportunity to restore the sinning brother or sister.

Let me say this; we are a family, a household, a physical body as the Bible says of us as a church. Would you be indifferent to someone in your own family that was sinning? You would want to do all that you can to restore them because you love them so deeply. You would gather all the resources at your disposal and all the people at your disposal to bring that child or family member back into the family. So why not with the church family and its people whom we say we love or should love. What happens if he doesn't hear the church?

The fourth and final step in the church discipline process is at the end of Verse 17. **But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.**

The heathen or Gentile and Tax collector were outsiders. They were not a part of the family of God. The person who continues in unrepentant sin and or hard heartedness is to be treated like an unbeliever who is living in continual sin. You have an example of that in **1st Corinthians 5: 1 – 13** *explain briefly* where the person caught in sin and is unrepentant is **delivered to Satan** and is likened to **leaven** that can **leaven the whole lump** so the church is to **purge out the old leaven** and he ends in Verse 13 by saying **put away from yourselves the evil person.**

The church at Corinth turned that sexually immoral man over to Satan. He was to be purged out and put out because of his pervasive influence on the church. To be turned over to Satan does not mean a believer living in sin loses their salvation, it means they are no longer under the protection of the church and its resources and influence, but to Satan's realm of influence.

Paul told Timothy in **1st Timothy 1: 20** that he **delivered Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.**

Even after that is done, we never stop pursuing that person to bring them back to repentance and restoration. It is just that they can no longer enjoy the benefits of Christian fellowship, the Lord's Table, serving, or involvement because of their unrepentant sinful lifestyle.

If you think this is too harsh, remember it is Jesus who is instructing us in this process and the Bible gives us several examples of doing this according to God's will. Remember God lovingly disciplines those He loves **Hebrews 12: 7 – 11** discipline so that it will **yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness**

Let me hasten to say this. As far as the treatment extended to someone by church members is concerned, this is no license for hostility or contempt or beratement or I'm better than you. As a matter of fact, both Matthew and Luke record that Christ's treatment of heathens and tax collectors was one of reaching out to them in love, right.

A similar kind of compassionate evangelistic pursuit should characterize our treatment of those who have been disciplined, with one significant difference: As long as the person remains unrepentant *and continues to identify with Christ*, believers must not carry on a relationship with that person as if nothing were wrong.

In other words, because of the mixed messages sent by someone who *professes* faith in Christ and yet lives a disobedient life, the lines must be drawn as clearly as possible on what we will say and do with that person. Again, the point is not to be antagonistic or hurtful or hateful toward them, but to make clear that willful sin is incompatible with Christian fellowship.

So how do we know if we are doing the right thing when it comes to the discipline and restoration of a sinning brother or sister? Well, verses 18 – 20 gives us the answer.

Matthew 18: 18 – 20: Read

First of all, as you can see, these verses, especially verse 20, are in the context of church discipline and restoration. But many times people use verse 20 'where two or three are gathered in My name I am there in the midst of them' in a prayer meeting thinking Jesus will be there if two or more are gathered. That is not what this teaches. He is there when you pray alone.

What we see here is God's affirmation of the church discipline and restoration process. When church discipline is correctly administered then heaven, God, binds there what was bound here or looses there what was loosed here.

The idea, as we saw last week, is God already affirming what the church has done in regarding to binding or loosing someone from their sin based on the promises of the word of God in the discipline and restoration process.

One writer said this "This promise is meant as a comfort and encouragement. Too many people think it is unloving for the church to confront sin. But the truth is, when a church practices discipline as Christ commanded, that church is simply doing heaven's work on earth. They are loving the Savior and the sinner simultaneously."

Verse 19 says **if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask** (related to the discipline and restoration of a professing believer) **it will be done for them by whom My Father in heaven.** That word 'agree' is *su-fo-neoh* in the Greek and it is where we get our English word symphony from. This doesn't mean that when two people get together and agree on something that God must answer that prayer or act on their behalf.

It means that God is in symphony, harmony, agreement with what the 2 or 3 witnesses have brought before the church and the church agrees to by way of binding or loosing one's sin in the discipline process. The Father agrees with the churches decision when it has been prayerfully, carefully, lovingly and restoratively pursued in the discipline and restoration process.

Closing prayer

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Matthew 18: 15 – 20

‘Purity, Discipline & Restoration in the Church’

The importance of the church:

Galatians 5: 17, Acts 20: 28, Colossians 1: 18
Ephesians 1: 22 – 23

The standard of purity in the church and in our lives:

1st Peter 1: 14 – 16, 2: 5, Romans 12: 1, 6: 11 – 22
2nd Corinthians 7: 1, Ephesians 4: 24, 5: 27, 32
1st Thessalonians 4: 7, *Hebrews 12: 10, 14, 5 - 11*
1st Corinthians 3: 17, Ephesians 1: 4, 5: 24 – 27

The mandate for the church to discipline & restoration:

1st Corinthians 5: 1 – 13, 2nd Corinthians 2: 6 – 8
Romans 16: 17, 2nd Thessalonians 3: 6, 14 – 15
Galatians 6: 1, 1st Timothy 1: 18 – 20, 5: 19 – 20
Titus 1: 10 – 11, 3: 10 – 11

Matthew 18: 15 – 20:

1st Corinthians 5: 1 – 13, Galatians 6: 1
2nd Thessalonians 3: 14 – 15, James 5: 19 – 20
Matthew 18: 21–22, 7: 3 – 5, Deuteronomy 19: 15
1st Timothy 1: 20, Hebrews 12: 7 – 11

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