

## 6. Christian Restoration (Church Discipline)

**Introduction:** As you well know, one of the tasks Jesus gave the church is to make disciples:

ESV **Matthew 28:19-20a** ... make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

To make disciples of Jesus involves teaching people to observe (obey) all that Jesus commanded.

It can plainly be seen that the words *disciple* and *discipline* are related. If you are a disciple of Jesus, you will experience God's discipline to help you obey Jesus.

ESV **Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This is a good thing. It is blessing.

ESV **Proverbs 12:1** Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge ...

ESV **Revelation 3:19** Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

ESV **Proverbs 3:12** ... the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

### 1. According to Hebrews 12:7b-10, what is an integral part of God's love for us?

ESV **Hebrews 12:67b-10** God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

**Aridan Rogers:** "If you are living in immorality, you're either headed for the woodshed or headed for hell."<sup>1</sup>

### How does God discipline us?

1) One way involves the conviction of the Holy Spirit when we are disobedient. The lost man leaps into sin and loves it; the saved man lapses into sin and loathes it. The most miserable man in the world is not a lost man; it is a saved man who is in sin.

ESV **Galatians 5:17** ... the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

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<sup>1</sup>Adrian Rogers, *Adrianisms* (Collierville, TN: Innovo Publishing, 2015), 230.

2) In addition to the Holy Spirit's conviction, God has also tasked each of us to help the other to be a disciple of Jesus. He has done this through the church discipline process, or what I like to think of as the Christian restoration process, whereby the church helps to restore a brother to obedience.<sup>2</sup> This is what I want us to consider today.

### 1. The Seriousness of Sin

\*\*\*\*What did Jesus say to show how serious sin is (Matthew 18:8-9)?

ESV **Matthew 18:8-9** ... if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.

Jesus illustrated the seriousness of sin with the hyperbole of cutting off one's hand or foot or gouging out his eye if they cause you to sin.

2. What effect were the various hyperbolic sin statements of Matthew 18:8-9 designed to have on Jesus' disciples? See 1 Corinthians 5:6b-8. The lesson is that sin is to be taken seriously; it is nothing to play around with.

ESV **1 Corinthians 5:6b-8** Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

### 2. The Importance of Getting Involved

\*\*\*\*Based on Matthew 18:10-14, how does God the Father feel toward Christians in slavery to sin?

ESV **Matthew 18:10-14** See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

The Father is greatly concerned about the spiritual welfare of His children.

3. Based on Matthew 18:10-14, what attitude should we have toward Christians who are caught up in sin? See 2 Thessalonians 3:15. Like God the Father, ours should be an attitude of great love and concern, not disgust, not anger nor revenge.

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<sup>2</sup> Someone once said that church discipline is God's way of putting teeth into holiness.

ESV **Matthew 18:10** See that you do not despise one of these little ones ...

**2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 concerns a brother in sin. How might 2 Thessalonians 3:15 help us to have the right attitude toward the sinning brother?**

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15** If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

**4. To what extent should we be willing to go to rescue a wayward Christian from sin (Matthew 18:12-14)?** We must be willing to roll up our sleeves and get involved. We can't stay aloof or be apathetic. We leave the ninety-nine to rescue the one. This really is a case where the squeaky wheel is to get the grease.

**3. How to Help a Brother Caught in Sin**

God has designed the church in such a way that we are help each other obey all that Jesus commanded. If one of us is in sin, is doing wrong, here is what the rest of us are to do:

**Step One: Talk in Private**

**\*\*\*\*What is the first step in helping someone do what is right (Mt 18:15)?**

ESV **Matthew 18:15** If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.<sup>3</sup>

*Step 1: TALK, in private, to the sinning brother.*

**5. What is the goal (purpose) in going to tell him his sin (18:15)?** The goal is to help him recognize his sin and repent of it. In a sense, it is better to call this process Christian restoration, rather than church discipline.

ESV **Luke 17:3b** If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him ...

**Success:** In my opinion, most church discipline will start and end here (with success). It should happen often, a regular occurrence.

**6. Is this the first step (Mt 18:15) to be taken by the church leadership or someone else? How so?** The text states that "you" are to do it; no prior consultation with the leadership of the church is required. We are all deputized!<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Matthew 18:15, Jesus said, "sins against you". In Luke 17:3, Jesus said more broadly, "If your brother sins".

<sup>4</sup> The teachings of Jesus are in seminal form. That elders are not mentioned does not mean they are not to be involved. However, it is the duty of the whole church is to lovingly confront the sinful brother and urge his repentance (not just the elders).

**7. What in this passage indicates whether we are dealing with believers or unbelievers? Compare 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.** The word “brother” (18:15) signals that this is a process to be followed between professing believers only. 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 specifically states that this is to be the case:

ESV 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 ... what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside.

**8. How public should the first step be (Mt 18:15)?** If he listens, it is to be between you and him “alone.” No one else in the church should ever hear about it!

**Dwight Eisenhower:** The eight years of the Eisenhower presidency were a time of prosperity and peace (1950s). Looking back on it, Eisenhower said: “The United States never lost a soldier or a foot of ground in my administration. We kept the peace. People asked how it happened—by God, it didn’t just happen, I’ll tell you that.”<sup>5</sup> Eisenhower worked quietly behind the scenes, and so should we.

**9. What would it mean if the brother “listens” (Mt 18:15-17) to you?** It means that he agrees with you that he is in sin, and he agrees to take appropriate action to end it.

**What should happen next if he admits that you are right and agrees to sin no more (Mt 18:15b)?** Jesus said you have “gained” your brother. This is the goal of Christian restoration. The case is closed. As with the shepherd in Matthew 18:13, there should be great happiness.

### Step 2: Take a Posse

\*\*\*\***What should you do next if the brother does *not* listen to you (Mt 18:16)?**

ESV Matthew 18:16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

*Step 2 is to TAKE one or two others along to talk to the sinning brother.*<sup>6</sup>

**10. According to Jesus, what is the purpose of taking along a witness or two (Mt 18:16)?** He is to be taken along as a witness to the fact what this brother is doing wrong.

**Exactly what “charge” is to be “established” by the witnesses (Mt 18:16)?** They bear witness to confrontation process and to the accused that what he is doing really is sin and that he should repent, and that he had been talked to in private about it.

**11. Based on Galatians 6:1, what type of Christian should be brought along as a witness?**

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<sup>5</sup> “Talk: Dwight D. Eisenhower”, en.wikiquote.org. Accessed February 21, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Why would it not gossip to tell these witnesses about the sin? It is not gossip because this is how Jesus told us to proceed in such cases and because the witnesses are an essential part of the solution.

ESV **Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

We must seek out spiritually-minded people, those who walk in the Spirit.

ESV **2 Timothy 2:24-26** ... the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

ESV **James 2:13** ... judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

**Perspective:** Jesus' teachings assume there is no doubt about the brother's sinfulness. The issue is not whether he is in sin or not. That is a given. When following **Matthew 18**, only deal with actions that are universally accepted as sinful: lying, stealing, immorality, drunkenness, divisiveness, physical abuse, etc.<sup>7</sup>

**12. What happens if the sinning brother listens in this second step and changes his ways (Mt 18:16)?** Case closed; mission accomplished! This would be as public as the matter ever needs to be (four people maximum).

### **Step 3: Tell in Public Matthew 18:17a**

**If the sinning brother refuses listen to the three of you, what does Jesus say should happen next (Mt 18:17a)?**

ESV **Matthew 18:17a** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.

*Step 3: TELL it in Public (the church).*

**What is the purpose of telling the church about it (18:17a)?** It is so that the whole church can speak to the man about his sin. This amps up the pressure on the man.

**13. What impact on the man is telling the whole church designed have?** The desired impact is that it will cause the man to listen and repent. Some people are so hard headed they need the corporate witness of the whole church to persuade them.

In fact, simply realizing that his sin will go before the whole church may be a big incentive for the accused sinner to repent back in step 2 before it ever gets to step 3.

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<sup>7</sup> Less mature Christians can sometimes confuse areas of freedom (or gray areas) with certain sin and are too quick to begin the discipline process. They have zeal, but are lacking in both knowledge and discernment. Examples of disputable issues that could easily be abused: Sabbath observance, drinking wine, hair length, spending habits, financial debt, musical styles, disputable doctrines, child training, finances, or the observance of holy days (Christmas, Easter).

**Note:** Jesus' teaching assumes there is no doubt about the sinfulness of the situation.

#### **Step 4: Treat as Publican**

**What happens if the sinful brother refuses to listen “even” to the church (Mt 18:17b)?**  
See also 1 Corinthians 5:9-13.

ESV **Matthew 18:17b** ... if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

*Step 4 is to TREAT him as a Pagan and a Publican (Gentile or tax collector).*

**14. How did Jewish people of the first century relate to Gentiles (Mt 18:17b)?** To first-century Jews, Gentiles were seen as ceremonially unclean, profane outsiders. Thus, Jews would not do anything to do with Gentiles socially. Orthodox Jews would not enter into a Gentile's home, would not eat the kind of food he ate, would not dine with him.

**15. How did Jewish people of the first century relate to tax collectors (Mt 18:17b)?** Tax collectors were Jewish men who worked for the hated Roman oppressors. In Southern parlance, they were scallywags. Not only seen as traitors, they were notoriously dishonest. Thus, the Jews kept aloof from Jewish tax-collectors. (Jesus scandalized the Jews when he associated with tax collectors).

**Overall Point:** Jesus' point is that the church is to remain aloof from those brothers who refuse to repent.<sup>8</sup> The church is to withdraw fellowship from them.

ESV **1 Corinthians 5:11b** I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler- not even to eat with such a one.

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#### **4. Our Authority**

**16. What is the point of Matthew 18:18-20 as it relates to church discipline? Compare 1 Corinthians 5:4-5.**

ESV **Matthew 18:18-20** 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 three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527, the Anabaptists declared that baptized believers who fall into sin and refuse correction are to be banned from fellowship. This was declared in contrast to the state churches that often used the government's sword to execute church members under discipline (*The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought*, p. 140).

The overall point is that the church has divine authority to put someone out of fellowship or to restore him to fellowship. We have the Father's ear when we pray concerning church discipline. Jesus is with us!

An example of this can be seen in what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 5:4-5** When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

**The First London Baptist Confession (1644):** "Christ has likewise given power to His whole church to receive in and cast out, by way of Excommunication, any member; and this power is given to every particular congregation, and not one particular person, either member or officer, but the whole."<sup>9</sup>

**17. What is the meaning of binding and loosing (Mt 18:18)?** Binding and loosing were rabbinical terms, meaning to forbid or to permit. The church has the authority put unrepentant believers out of fellowship.

**Note:** The Greek behind the verb "will be" actually carries the idea of "will have been" (see marginal translation of most versions). It is not so much that heaven is responding to what we do on earth, but rather that God had already decided from heaven concerning what the church needs to do in relation to issues of discipline, and when the church finally acts, that same decision already "will have been" made in heaven already.

**Based on Matthew 18:19-20, what should always go along with church discipline?**

Discipline must always be in the context of prayer and prior agreement.

**18. From the context, for what purpose will the two or three be gathered together (Mt 18:20)?** Usually neglected in claiming this promise is a consideration of its context: *Church discipline!* It has nothing to do with prayer meetings, Bible studies or evangelistic visitation.

**19. What literary function does Matthew 18:18-20 serve in relation to the whole of Matthew 18:15-17?** Matthew 18:18-20 are verses of encouragement and support designed to help believers carry through with the tough assignment of 18:15-17.

## 5. The Importance of Forgiveness

**\*\*\*\*According to Matthew 18:21, how willing should you be to forgive a brother when he sins against you?**

**ESV Matthew 18:21** Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

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<sup>9</sup> Article XLII, "London Baptist Confession of 1644", ReformedReader.org. Accessed February 21, 2019.



**ESV Luke 17:3-5** Jesus said, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." In reply, the apostles said, "Increase our faith!"

Jesus then put all this in perspective for us:

**ESV Matthew 18:22-35** Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

We should err on the side of forgiveness, repeatedly forgiving him if necessary.

**What in Matthew 18:35 shows the critical importance of forgiveness?**

**ESV Matthew 18:35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.

**20. Jesus felt the need to caution us about a lack of forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35). Forgiving someone who has sinned against you and then repented can be difficult. Why can it be so hard to forgive a person who has asked for forgiveness?** Sometimes when someone is in sin and does not want to repent, he will behave irrationally. You may even begin to wonder if this is the same person you knew before. He may lie, lash out at you, be stubborn, argue with you, rationalize away his sin, be mean and hateful, or even pretend to be interested in repentance only to the result of wasting your time. Especially if in his sinning he hurt others, the temptation is strong to be resentful and not to forgive him when he finally repents.

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**21. Based on 2 Corinthians 2:5-11, what course of action should be taken when the church withdraws fellowship from a convicted sinner who later repents?**



**ESV 2 Corinthians 2:6-9** Now if anyone has caused pain ... this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.

He should be accepted back into fellowship.<sup>10</sup>

### Conclusion

- God's loving discipline is a good thing.
- God has given us the privilege of lovingly working with him in the discipline process.
- We must love our brothers and sisters enough to get involved.

**NAS Proverbs 27:6** Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

- The escalating steps of the Christian restoration process are:
  - Step 1 ~ **Talk Privately** with him alone, 18:15.
  - Step 2 ~ **Take Possession** along—one or two others to talk with him, 18:16.
  - Step 3 ~ **Tell it Publically** to the church, so the church can talk with him, 18:17a.
  - Step 4 ~ **Treat as Pagan**, 18:17b
- Jesus promised be with us in this process!
- The outcome is usually restoration, not withdrawing fellowship.

**ESV James 5:19-20** 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 sins.

**Extra Preparation:** Go to [NTRF.org](http://NTRF.org) and listen to the audio (MP3) on Christian Restoration. A good book on the subject is *Handbook of Church Discipline*, Jay Adams (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986).

\*\*\*\* = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud.

**Next Lesson:** E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask everyone to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

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<sup>10</sup> There is question whether 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 even has reference to a person who had repented after having been put out of fellowship (1Co 5). It may refer to a different situation entirely.

## Extra Material

**What do you think: What is the eternal state of someone who is put out of fellowship and who never repents? Consider Matthew 7:22-23, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 John 3:7-10.**

Further, Jesus said, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Mt 7:22-23, ESV).

**1 Corinthians 5:5** indicates that he may indeed be saved: "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

On the other hand, **1 John 3:7-10** (read) clearly indicates that those who practice unrighteousness do not belong to Jesus.

ESV **1 John 3:7-10** Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

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**Why is it that most churches today utterly ignore Matthew 18:15ff? See 1 Corinthians 5.**

They are too big and impersonal, they fear litigation, there is often a lack of commitment to Scripture, there is a lack of love for one another, they mistakenly think they are being loving by tolerating the sin, pragmatism leads them to avoid controversy, love of lucrative offerings leads them to not rock the boat, they think if they are nice enough the world will believe in Jesus, the church is full of unregenerate people who mistakenly think they are believers, the church has so much sin in it that to single out a single sinner would be laughable.

**What criticism did Paul have of the Corinthian church for failing to discipline a wayward member (1Co 5:1-8)?**

**What should you do if you find yourself in a church that refuses to obey Matthew 18?**  
See 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

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**Why is church discipline not a direct contradiction of the command in Matthew 7:1-5 to "judge not"? See John 7:24, 1 Corinthians 5:12, 6:1-5.**

ESV **John 7:24** Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.

**How is church discipline consistent with the Bible's command to "love one another"?**

*Proverbs 13:24, 27:6, Hebrews 12:4-16, Matthew 18:1-9, 18:10-14.*

ESV **Proverbs 13:24** Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

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**What caution or word of balance can be gleaned from Proverbs 19:11?**

ESV **Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

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**What If:** A woman is brought before the church for consistently failing to even try to submit to her husband. Many people had already been involved over much time in counseling her and her husband. Yet in the end, she still said, "I do not care what the Bible says. He is an idiot. The men who wrote the Bible did not know the situation I'm in. And anyway, you all have perfect marriages and don't understand." After much discussion and prayer, the whole church agrees to put her out of fellowship. All, that is, except one hold out. This one woman is herself in a bad marriage and just cannot bring herself to agree to put the sinning woman out. **What should the church do?** This is precisely where **Hebrews 13:17** is applicable. After much persuasion and dialogue, the few holdouts are called upon to yield to the leadership of the elders.

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**In your opinion:**

- If a Christian husband consistently fails to love his wife as Christ loves the church, is that basis for church discipline?*
  - If a wife refuses to in principle submit to her husband, is that basis for church discipline?*
  - If parents are habitually lax in properly training up their children, is this basis for church discipline?*
  - If a perfectly healthy husband is a stay-at-home dad while his wife is out in the work force earning a living, is that basis for church discipline?*
  - If a professing teenager is in rebellion to his parents, is that basis for church discipline?*
  - Is sending one's children to public school (rather than home schooling them) basis for church discipline?*
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ESV **Proverbs 15:10** There is severe discipline for him who forsakes the way; whoever hates reproof will die.

ESV **1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

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**What if you can't find a witness who agrees with you that the accused brother is in sin?**

If no witness can be found who agrees with the charges being made, then that is the end of the case. Perhaps it will serve as a learning experience to the misguided accuser.

**Examples:**

- One over-zealous Arminian tried to do church discipline against anyone who was a Calvinist, declaring the Calvinist worshipped a false god. Happily, he could not get anyone to agree to be his second witness.
- A narrow-minded Calvinist tried to do church discipline against a fellow church member who, while out of town on a trip, attended an Arminian Baptist church and participated in their Lord's Supper. He accused the brother of fellowshiping with demons by partaking of the Lord's Supper in an Arminian church. He could not get anyone else to agree with that it was sin.
- One brother sincerely believed that remarriage after divorce—for any reason— was adultery. He determined that the proper course of action was for any remarried couple to divorce and for each to remarry the first spouse. He confronted each divorced couple in his church. When none agreed with his suggested course of action, and when no one could be found as his second witness, the brother left the church in protest (rather than submit to the wisdom of the entire body).
- One fellow decided a pastor was an overbearing, dictatorial, iron-fisted ruler who was abusing his ministry as elder. He spoke to the elder, who disagreed. Not being able to find a second person who agreed with his assessment of the pastor, he violated Matthew 18 by writing letters of accusation against the pastor to everyone in the church.

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**Test Case:**

A single woman comes to the pastor with the information that she has become pregnant.

She is repentant, admits it was wrong, is committed to future holiness and she absolutely believes that abortion is murder. She will carry the baby to term and raise the child as a single mother. **What should the pastor do?**

Suppose that upon hearing of it, and despite her repentance, one church member cried, "Make an example out of her. Kick her out anyway!" **What is the right action for the church to take?**

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**What if, during this second step, the witnesses hear the accused brother's side of the story and decide that you are in error for finding fault? See Proverbs 18:17.** The sword cuts both ways! The witnesses serve as a sort of safety valve. It may well be that the one bringing the charges is himself in error about what constitutes a sin.

**ESV Proverbs 18:17** The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.

However, Jesus' teaching assumes there is no doubt about the sinfulness of the situation.

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**What is the proper setting for bringing such a matter before the whole church (i.e., the Sunday meeting, a special Wednesday night meeting, etc.)?** Jesus did not specify. It may be wise to discuss it first with the church leadership to determine the best setting. One consideration is the presence of children and any visitors. Another option might be to call together a special meeting specifically to discuss the matter.

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**Test:** A brother suddenly erupts in a church meeting, hurling accusations against someone. When asked who his witnesses were (the 2nd step of the process), it becomes evident that he had skipped that step. In fact, it is not even clear that he had ever spoken to the accused before in private (the 1st step). **What should the church do?** This is where leadership is necessary. First, had the accuser spoken to the elders about the best time to bring an accusation, they may have been able to determine beforehand that the accuser had bypassed all the required steps, and thus saved the man embarrassment. Second, since the man had skipped the steps that Jesus said to take, the man's accusations are not to be considered (there has been no due process).

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**How does the Matthew 18 process illustrate the norm for churches to be smaller rather than larger?** This process, especially the last step, becomes very awkward the bigger the church is.

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**Test: Where/how does the example of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 fit into the process described in Matthew 18?** In 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, the final step of the Matthew 18 process (treating him like a Jew would treat a pagan or a tax collector) seems to have been reached. This seems to be a situation where his name has been brought before the whole church and the whole church is in the process of shunning him because of his sin. There is definitely an estranged relationship between the church and the idle man. He is not to be associated with. Note that the brothers under discipline are not to be treated as enemies, but rather as brothers with whom you have nothing to do!

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A biblical example of Matthew 18 carried out can be found 1 Corinthians 5.

**\*\*\*\*In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, what did Paul want the church to do?** They were to expel the immoral brother.

**In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, why did Paul not just simply put the man out himself?** Paul was not there in person, and anyway only the church can expel someone (not its leaders alone).

**Based on 1 Corinthians 5:9-12, what are the practical aspects of putting someone out of fellowship?**

**Which immoral people is it perfectly permissible to associate with (5:10)?**

**Why did Paul not worry about judging lost people (5:12-13)?** It was none of his business; God will judge them.

**Who are we perfectly authorized to judge (5:12)?**

**Based on 1 Corinthians 6:1-5, what did Paul write to convince the church that it is capable of making such judgments?**

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**Why do you suppose that God was so harsh with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)?**

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**In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32, the sin was that of division within the church (11:18).** The rich believers so loathed eating with the poorer believers that the rich arranged to get to church early so as to be able to eat the Lord's Supper apart from the poor. The rich failed to recognize the poor as part of the Lord's body (11:29). As a result, by time the poor arrived, all the food was eaten and some of the rich were drunk (11:20-21). The poor went home shamed and hungry (11:22). The sin was eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner due to a failure to discern the body of the Lord in the poor brethren.

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**What is the difference between the first step in the Matthew 18 process and taking an immature believer aside to disciple him?** Matthew 18 involves unmistakable sin that is not repented of. To disciple someone involves areas of growth and maturity (such as personal finances, husband/wife relationships, child training, a good work ethic, etc.). Sometimes great wisdom is needed. It is important to give people time to grow.

**Test:** A brand new Christian comes to church, fresh out of the world. He has long hair, smokes cigarettes, curses, has his fingernails painted black and he is living with his girl-friend (it has not occurred to him that it might be wrong). **What do you do?** You do not jump on him about everything at once. Love him, get to know him, build a relationship with him. Then, in the timing and wisdom of the Spirit, you might begin to bring up areas that need attention, but more as a process of discipleship rather than church discipline.

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**Beware the Coming Storm.** As Western society grows increasingly secular, persecution of the church is likely to increase. For example, it came to the attention of a church in Woodstock, Georgia, that one of its members had divorced her husband and publicly embraced a lesbian lifestyle. After repeated attempts to show her that such conduct contradicted the clear teaching of Scripture, the church finally removed her from membership. The woman revealed this to a local media, which decided to run a story on it. Consider how biased the title is: “Metro Atlanta mother banned from local church.” That fact that she was a mother had nothing to do with it. Reporter Adam Murphy wrote: “coworkers and clients love her, but she hasn’t received the same treatment lately from her church family.” Reflecting an anti-Christian sentiment more and more common in society, a man who saw the broadcast wrote in, “This practice of active hatred is traumatic, and the opposite of what the bible preaches about God’s love.” Jesus said that we must be as wise as serpents, but as harmless as doves.

Church discipline is not opposite of what the Bible teaches:

**ESV Hebrews 12:6** ... the Lord disciplines the one he loves ...

In a televised interview, the disciplined woman cried and said, “I **feel** like it’s not wrong. I look at my relationship and how much love I have with her and think, how can people think this is so wrong?” Sin can be compared a mind-altering drug to those who are enslaved by it. She continued, “It **feels** terrible that they won’t let anyone come and worship.” Church discipline is supposed to feel terrible. It is designed to put teeth into holiness. The goal is the restoration of the person. She also said, “The fact that they’re going to point it out and release my personal business to the entire congregation of the church and tell them that I can no longer come there I just don’t **feel** like that’s right.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus Himself said to tell it to the church in a worst-case scenario. She is basing her life on feeling (3x), rather than Scripture.

Another problem with sin is that it is contagious, and to keep the church healthy, those caught in it must be removed from fellowship:

**ESV 1 Corinthians 5:6** Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

She also objected, “Why am I getting picked on and getting called out when everyone has sin?” It is true that everyone struggles with sin. The difference is how we deal with it. In this case, the woman came to the point that she openly declared what she was not doing wrong (she defied clear teaching of Scripture, she defied 2,000 years of Christian consensus, she was committed to continue on in it, and she refused to talk about it). The church has not choice.

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<sup>11</sup> Adam Murphy “Exclusive: Metro Atlanta mother banned from local church.” cbs46.com. Accessed 04/24/2021.



**The Applications:**

- 1) Prepare for the coming storm. Sexual freedom trumps religious liberty.
- 2) We are called by Jesus to help each other walk in the light, as He is in the light. The Christian restoration process is part of God's design.

ESV **Hebrews 12:14** Strive ... for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

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What is church discipline?

Why is Church discipline necessary?

How do you explain CD to your congregation? New members?