

LAST CALL FOR DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

INTRODUCE

Alright, if you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to Matthew chapter 18. Matthew 18. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to Matthew 18. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, Matthew 18 will be on page **823**.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to week one of our two-week mini-series on Church Discipline.

- Last week was hell week,
- and this week we're two weeks
- on whether or not we should excommunicate
- unrepentant sinners from our church.
- So, good times!

And last week I apologized to all the college students back from summer,

- like, *"sorry for the chipper subjects*
 - *right as you're checking out Fathom."*
- But I had a couple students say to me this week,
 - *"bring it on! We're not looking for fluffy stuff..."*
 - *we want the real deal!"*

Well, you asked for it! So, here we go. Church Discipline.

EXPLAIN: CHURCH

Now, to cover this topic, we have to start with definitions. And there are two words to cover. The first word is “church.”

To understand church discipline, we have to understand church. Now, I actually think this is an extremely relevant topic for us to tackle.

Because in one survey, 81% of Americans answered ‘yes’ to this question:

“Do you believe you can be a very good Christian w/o attending a church?”

- 81% said yes! There is a decided move away from the church
- That does not bode well for my career choice, right?

ILLUSTRATION: BAD CHURCH EXPERIENCES

But some of that is fueled by bad church experiences!

One famous pastor posted on his Facebook a few years ago this question: *“Has anybody ever had a bad church experience?”* And he had over 3000 comments! Here are some of my favorites:

A guy named Ryan said,

- *“Our church leaders believed that wearing blue-jeans*
- *gave the impression of rebellion.”*

Cause nothing says rebellion like blue-jeans, right?

- Here was their mind-set:
 - *“In the 60s, hippies started wearing jeans...*
 - *now we have terrorism...*
 - *cause, effect.”*
- How do you argue with that logic?

At another church this guy brought his girlfriend, and an usher said,

- “Mam, women aren’t supposed to wear pants.”
 - To which she grabbed her belt loop and started...
- And he was like, “No, no, no, no!”

Another comment from a woman who said,

- “At my youth group you were not allowed to wear
- black polo shirts.
- Any other color was fine,
- but black meant that you loved the devil.”

That one doesn’t even make sense!

A gal named Rachel said,

- “I grew up in a church that wouldn’t let boys and girls
- swim together because the girls could get pregnant.”
 - That’s not how that works!
 - It could lead to it...
 - but that’s not how it works.

APPLICATION: SERIOUS CHURCH EXPERIENCES

So, many have had bad church experiences, some silly, like these, but others much more serious...

- Some of you were at a place where all-of-a-sudden the pastor was like a dictator...ok?
- Some of you were at places where there was war waged in back rooms and political strife.
- Some of you come from places where you were shunned, sinned against, abused...

So, we may have church wounds...

- but our reactionary tendency is to run,
- and to put up barriers,
- and to not commit to any church.

But that is not the right reaction!

APPLICATION: CHURCH COMMITMENT

It is the biblical understanding of the New Testament...

- that you belong to,
- are involved in,
- and are committed to a local congregation.

So, hear me: we can't talk church discipline without someone first committing relationally to a local church.

- This is done via church membership,
- and really, next week is when we'll dig more into
- what that formally looks like.

But for today...to start with...biblically,

- if you follow Christ, you are saved INTO a people.
- And those people are the local church.

We say it like this:

- **SLIDE CHURCH ISN'T A PLACE YOU GO TO...**

- **IT'S A PEOPLE YOU BELONG TO.**

- It's a committed relationship to others that says,
 - *"I'm not running from this relationship..."*
 - *for shallow or superfluous reasons!"*

EXPLAIN: DISCIPLINE

But then, let's talk "discipline." What is church discipline?

Well, really, everything the church does is discipline, ok?

The word "discipline" is connected to the word "disciple." And so,

- the job of a disciple...
- is to discipline themselves...
- or to be disciplined...

In the field of academics, you might ask, *"what is your discipline?"*

- And that's just asking, *"what's your field of study?"*

So, everything a church does is discipline...

It is meant to help people be disciplined in the discipline of Jesus Christ.

Now, historically the church has designated two forms of discipline:

- formative discipline
- and corrective, or reformative discipline.

SLIDE FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE is helping a disciple grow via instruction.

So, most of what we do in the church is formative discipline.

- This sermon is formative discipline.
- Bible studies...
- Discipleship Groups...
- Kid's Sunday School...
- Youth Group...
- these are all examples of formative discipline.

ILLUSTRATION: MATT TEACHER

So, picture a math class. Ok, part of the job of the teacher is

- to explain,
- instruct,
- model...
- basically, teach the student how to do
- Algebra or Trigonometry or Calculus.

The formative discipline comes in the lessons taught.

But that's not all a math teacher does.

There is also an aspect of correction. Right?

- A teacher gives assignments,
- and quizzes,
- and tests...
- all with the purpose of correcting errors,
- and thus, completely teaching a student math.

And that's what we call corrective, or **SLIDE REFORMATIVE DISCIPLINE**.

And that's what most people mean when they talk about the subject of church discipline.

- Reformative discipline helps to correct a disciple of Jesus through correcting sin.
- And this is practiced at an individual level...
- but it is also practiced at a corporate level.

In the context of a committed church relationship,

- it is one member,
- or a group of members,
- lovingly calling out another member for their sin.

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TRANSITION

Now, the most well-known text in the New Testament dealing with the practice of church discipline is Matthew 18:15-17, which was read over us this morning, and which I'd like for us to unpack a little.

MATTHEW 18:15

[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."

POINT 1: RELATIONSHIP

Now, this first point this morning will be a bit redundant...but I don't want you to miss this.

SLIDE CHURCH DISCIPLINE BEGINS IN RELATIONSHIP

- If your BROTHER sins.
- You have gained your BROTHER.
- These are relational/familial words. Ok?
- You are in relationship with this brother or sister.
- You love this person.
 - This isn't a person on the internet.
 - This isn't a person you've just heard of.
 - This isn't even really an acquaintance.
- This is a brother.
- This is a sister.

This is why church discipline is predicated on you being meaningfully connected to a church body.

You love this person!

The point here is the relationship between the two parties.

EXPLAIN: PARABLE OF LOST SHEEP

Now, look back at what Matthew puts right before this section:

It's the Parable of the Lost Sheep!

- There's a man with 100 sheep.
- 99 of them are cool.
- But one of them goes astray.
- And the man rejoices when the lost sheep returns.

And right on the heels of THAT...Jesus says:

- *“Here’s how to handle*
- *when someone you love...*
 - *a brother or sister...*
- *begins to wander...*
- *goes astray...*
- *gets lost.”*

See, it BEGINS IN RELATIONSHIP.

EXPLAIN: STEP ONE

And what’s the first step?

You go and talk to them!

- Yeah, you have a conversation. Ok?
- Why?
- Because you love this person!
- They’re your church family member.

This is how reformative church discipline should most often occur in church life.

- It should most often occur informally and privately,
- where one person and another person
- address the matter privately.

Now, what this is not?

Well, first: it's not IGNORING sin. Ok?

- In our conflict-averse culture,
- we will do anything possible not to engage...
 - we don't want to ruffle feathers...
 - we don't want to stir up the waters.
- But that is not loving!
 - It is NOT kind, merciful, and gracious
 - to let someone who is in sin
 - believe that everything's ok!
 - Cause everything's not ok!
- We lovingly want to help one another
- grow in Christlikeness
- by correcting sin.
- So, it's not ignoring sin.

Second, it's not GOSSIPING.

- Notice, this starts with a one-to-one,
- and only if that conversation doesn't move forward,
- do we consider bringing someone else in.

Anything else is gossip.

- And that's sin.
- And that is in need of discipline as well. Ok?

And thirdly, it's not JUDGING.

- Listen, this isn't supposed to be judgmentalism
- like in Matthew 7:3 where Jesus says,
 - *"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye,*
 - *but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"*

Church discipline requires a certain level of self-awareness.

- Remember the context...
 - this is a stray sheep...
 - this is a friend who has lost their way.
- You aren't out there sin hunting...
- just perched like a sin sniper ready to fire! No!

So, you,

- in a loving church relationship,
- confront a fault of a brother or sister.

And if they listen, you've gained them back!

- The sheep has returned! Let the rejoicing begin!

POINT 2: REDEMPTIVE

And it's my second point this morning:

SLIDE CHURCH DISCIPLINE'S PURPOSE IS REDEMPTIVE

- The goal isn't to cut someone down,
- or to judge someone,
- or to make yourself feel good,
- or like you've got it all together.

The goal is repentance!

ILLUSTRATION: LESLIE

So, I picked on Leslie last week...and sorry if your name is Leslie...

But, if Leslie says,

- *“I’m a believer in Christ,*
- *and I’m a member of Fathom.”*

But then she starts doing things

- that go against what the Bible says
- or what God commands.

You go to her one-on-one and you say,

- *“Leslie, I love you,*
- *but what you’re doing is out of step with the Gospel!”*

And that’s done in the hopes that she might repent!

It’s redemptive.

- It’s meant to bring her back into right relationship with God!

TRANSITION

Now, as I’ve already said, this should cover a majority of church discipline.

- It’s brother to brother.
- It’s sister to sister.
- It begins in relationship,
- and its purpose is redemptive!

But Matthew goes on in verse 16:

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MATTHEW 18:16

[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.

EXPLAIN: STEP TWO

Alright. If the private conversation is rejected, the next step is to bring in others from the community.

- Now, again, this is not:
 - You blast them on Facebook...
 - You start gossiping with your small group...
 - OR you go to friends outside of the church...

As in the private confrontation, the purpose of the second stage is primarily redemptive, to reconcile the sinner with the one they hurt and to bring them back to God.

Now, they take one or two others should be from the community...

- they should be involved in this individual's life as well...
- and they should also be loving
- and desirous for repentance and redemption.

Often this is the right time to bring a leader from the church into the equation.

- Maybe a d-group leader?
- Maybe a staff member,
- or an elder.

But this is upping the ante to include more members of the church.

And Matthew is drawing on language about “two or three witnesses”

- from Deuteronomy 19,
 - essentially making sure that church carefully weighs
 - the evidence of an individual’s sin.
- This isn’t a place for unbased accusations
- or “he said...she said” quarrels.
- Is this a valid issue?
- Has a sin really been committed?

There is more procedure going on here. And then verse 17:

MATTHEW 18:17

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

EXPLAIN: STEP THREE

So, this is the intensive climax of the process.

- They refuse to listen to their brother.
- They refuse to listen to the small group.
- So, it’s brought to the church...
 - and that means the local members of the church...
- those who have covenanted with one another at a local church.

And we’ll get into more specifics of this next week.

EXPLAIN: UNBELIEVER

But if he continues to refuse to listen,

- even to the pleading of the whole church family...
- **let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.**

Now, Matthew's not being literal here. Remember, Matthew himself was a former tax collector.

He's saying,

- treat such a person as an unbeliever.
- Treat them as someone outside the community.

ILLUSTRATION: LESLIE

So, Leslie says,

- *"I'm a believer in Christ,*
- *I'm a member of Fathom,*
- *but I'm going to do this,*
- *and I don't care what the Bible says*
- *or what God commands."*

To Leslie we say,

- *"Based on this, we don't think you are a Christian,*
 - *and therefore, we cannot treat you as such.*
- *We can't treat you like a member of the church*
 - *when what you are doing shows us the opposite."*

Now, finally, that's done in the hopes that she might repent, right?

Again, this is always meant to be redemptive!

- So, in most cases they are still welcome to attend church...
- In fact, there's no place we'd rather they be!
- Because here we preach the gospel to them
- and love them like we would someone who doesn't believe!

And if they come back to the truth,

- we welcome them with open arms
- and warm hearts rejoicing.

EXPLAIN: UNREPENTANCE

Now, let me clarify once more:

- this is NOT for those
 - who have sin in their life,
 - and who are really struggling with their sin,
 - but are repentant.

That's not what this is saying. Repentance is key.

So, if you're in here and you're like,

- *"Oh, I'm out because I'm sexually immoral,"*
- or *"I'm out because I'm greedy."*
 - *In fact, I just stole a twenty*
 - *from this lady's purse beside me."*

No! Verse 17 is talking about people who know the truth, but they're saying that they're beyond the truth.

- *“I’m the ultimate authority on right and wrong.*
- *I’m the ultimate authority on how life works.*
 - *I don’t care what the Bible says,*
 - *I don’t care what the elders say,*
 - *I don’t care what the church says;*
- *I’m going to do what I want.”*

So, it’s not about people

- who are struggling and fighting...
- and have sin that they hate in their lives,
- who want God to heal them,
- who want God to move in them.

That’s not what this is addressing.

TRANSITION

Now, next week we’ll get into the corporate side of this, and we’ll talk excommunication and the processes of formal church discipline at Fathom.

But for the remainder of our time today, I’d like to give focus in on one more point.

If you notice,

- after this section in Matthew 18,
- Jesus moves to another parable.
- The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant.

And that begins with Peter asking a question.

Look at Matthew 18:21-22:

MATTHEW 18:21-22

[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?” [22] Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

POINT THREE: RECONCILIATION

So, in context:

- the Parable of the Lost Sheep
 - deals with the love of the Father for one lost sheep.
- Is followed by
 - Jesus’ teaching
 - on how to gain your brother back
 - when he’s in sin.
- And that’s followed by...
 - a teaching that we should be prepared to forgive,
 - and forgive,
 - and forgive.

He’s saying:

- when a lost brother or sister repents,
 - and again, that’s the key...repentance!
- **But to a repentant brother, our response is to forgive.**

So, let me make this into my third point:

SLIDE CHURCH DISCIPLINE’S HOPE IS RECONCILIATION

- Reconciliation between the struggling sinner and God, yes!
- But also, reconciliation between church members!
- Between brothers and sisters!

We strive to forgive those who repent...even those who sinned against us.

APPLICATION: FORGIVENESS

Now, real quick...we gotta do a minute on Biblical forgiveness, because there's not much worse than bad theology on forgiveness.

- And this isn't all that's needed to be said on forgiveness...
- but in the context of a church member sinning against another,
- and coming with repentance...
- here's a few thoughts about forgiveness...

First, **SLIDE FORGIVENESS ISN'T FORGETTING** what happened nor is it pretending that it never happened.

See, when someone has sinned against you:

- not just done something you don't like...
- but really sinned against you...
- that's not something to just pretend didn't happen.

Again, this is the whole purpose of church discipline.

- It's not ignoring it.
- This isn't something to sweep under the rug.
- IT IS A BIG DEAL!

So, FORGIVING ISN'T FORGETTING.

Second,

SLIDE FORGIVENESS ISN'T REMOVAL OF CONSEQUENCES

This will sometimes happen where a hurt or betrayal has happened.

- And they're working through it...
- And sometimes the one who has "been forgiven"
- will say something like, *"Well, things aren't better!"*

And what they expect is for forgiveness to remove all the consequences.

But that doesn't work in our lives, and it doesn't work with God, either.

Listen, we can forgive, and the consequences continue.

- I can forgive you...and still call the police.
- I can forgive you...and still keep you at arm's length.
- I can forgive you...and you still can't work with the kids in Sunday School.
- I can forgive you...but I will never trust you with money again.

There are still consequences.

Third, **SLIDE FORGIVENESS IS NOT RESTORATION OF TRUST**

This is where the one forgiven wants things to go back to how they used to be. But here's the truth:

- forgiveness can let you start over,
- but it doesn't put you back to where you were.

Forgiveness can let you start over,

and redevelop trust,

but it is not an immediate restoration of trust.

So, what is forgiveness, then? Well, I'll put it like this:

SLIDE FORGIVENESS IS A DECISION THAT BECOMES A FEELING

Listen, you can't always control your feelings.

- They just are.
- And, frankly, you can't really trust your feelings.
- Because they are constantly in flux.

But you can control your actions.

- I can't control how what you did to me
- deeply, deeply affects me.
- But I can always control what I do.

And it's amazing,

- But overtime...
 - NOT OVERNIGHT!
- But overtime,
- if you make the choice to forgive...
- God will often,
 - NOT ALWAYS,
- but God will often change your feelings towards a person.

The feeling is a caboose. The engine is your obedience to forgive.

- That's the only thing you can control.
- But as you control your obedience,
- often the feelings will follow.

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APPLICATION: WHY FORGIVE?

Now why? Why can we say we hope for reconciliation?

- Because we have been reconciled!
- We have been forgiven!
- Because **FORGIVEN PEOPLE FORGIVE PEOPLE.**

If you've stood at the cross of Christ

- and experienced forgiveness,
- freely given to you,
- then you will STRIVE to forgive others.

Those who have experienced the freedom of being freely forgiven extend forgiveness.

CONCLUSION: MY STORY

Now, as many of you know, 3 years ago I found myself in a place where I sinned against the people of this church.

- There were many things that led to it all,
- but I found myself in a really dry and dark place...
 - and in an attempt to keep up appearances...
 - and keep things looking good...
 - and to keep the plates spinning...

I started plagiarizing portions of my sermons.

- I just wanted you to think I was ok.
- I just wanted you to think I had what it took.
- I just wanted you to think I could handle this.

But I couldn't!

- And I got called out on it.
- And it began a 10-month journey of discipline,
- and of repentance,
- and ultimately a lot of reconciliation.

Now, next week we'll go more in depth

- on the church side of things
- when it comes to church discipline,
- but I want to say a couple of things,
- that I've said from this stage before,
- but are worth saying again this morning.

ILLUSTRATION: GRACE

On the night that elders confronted me,

- I called Maryse on my way home,
- and I can vividly remember
- how much I didn't want to tell her what had happened.

I didn't want her to know...

As much as I care about what you think of me...

I care so much more about what she does!

- And I was ashamed...
- And I was afraid...
- And I wanted to hide...

But, on the phone, driving home from church, I confessed to her.

- And after I confessed,
 - I told her that I really didn't want to tell her any of it.
- And when she asked me why I didn't want to tell her, I said,
 - *"I am just so ashamed of myself.*
 - *For getting here.*
 - *For doing this.*
 - *I should know better.*
 - *I'm just so ashamed."*

And she said something that I'll never forget.

She said: **"Chris, you never have to be ashamed to tell me anything."**

ENDING

Why practice church discipline?

- Because we're in covenantal church relationships.
- Because we need redemption through repentance.
- Because we need reconciliation with God and each other!

Because whenever a disciple departs from the way of Christ by sinning...

whenever I depart from the way of Christ by sinning...

I need somewhere and someone to love me enough to help.

I need a place where I don't have to be ashamed to tell anything!

You see,

**SLIDE REFORMATIVE DISCIPLINE HAPPENS
WHEN GUILT COLLIDES WITH GRACE**

- The grace I experienced from Maryse that night...
- The grace that I experienced from you, my church,
 - in light of my guilt...
- the immeasurable grace I've found in my Lord Jesus Christ...

It's what the church needs to be about.

So, I'll say it to you, church:

- You don't have to be ashamed to tell us anything!
- IT'S OK NOT TO BE OK.
- IT'S JUST NOT OK TO STAY THERE.

You don't have to pretend to be alright. You hear me?

- Because nobody's going to know to encourage you...
- and you could be dying on the inside.

If you're not alright, the worst thing you can do is pretend that you are.

- This is church discipline.

May the Holy Spirit of God empower us to live this out, my friends.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Carson, D.A. Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary.
- Leeman, Jonathan. Church Discipline.
- Osborne, Grant R. Matthew: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.