

The Discipline of the Local Church

Selected Scriptures

May 31, 2015

This morning you can open your Bibles to Matthew 18. Can open your Bibles there. You know we ended the time last time there in Matthew 18. We looked at Matthew 16 and Matthew 18, talking about Jesus' uses of the word church. Two times, two specific times, he addressed the issue of the church, and, recognized and acknowledged both the universal aspects of the church and the local realities of the church of Christ. Basically, we're talking about the church invisible, and the church visible. The church invisible, and the church visible.

The contrast is between the church catholic and I, wh, by that I mean the church catholic, small C, not big C, church catholic and the church local, the church visible. We said the church catholic, that is the universal, the invisible reality of Christ's bride, that incorporates all Christians throughout all

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of Church history, all the way from the birth of the Church in Acts Chapter 2, all the way to the time when the Church will be raptured by Christ in, it's referred to in Thirst, 1 Thessalonians 4. That universal, catholic church is made visible today in flesh and blood through local churches.

We said last time we possess membership in the church universal. We practice that membership in the church local. So in local churches all over the world, real flesh-and-blood Christians worshiping, ministering in local congregations, they demonstrate the transforming power of the Gospel to the watching world. So the church, the local church, is what puts the Gospel on display. And really, apart from local church assemblies, without that reality, the universal church would be just a nebulous idea. Be hard to pin down. No real form to it, no influence, no concrete reality or actual authority. Christians without local assemblies, local expressions of the Body of Christ, they'd be adrift. They just be floating from church like thing to church like thing, para-church to para-church, from deaver to mission, feeling no sense of responsibility, no sense of accountability to anyone. No sense of accountability to any authority.

Or on the other hand, rather than just a, maybe a permissive idea about the universal church and local church, perhaps a universal authority would step in to fill a power vacuum, and try to bring all those drifting Christians together under one head. Historically, that's what we witnessed in the authority of the Roman Catholic system. The Roman Catholic Church believes the Magisterium, that is, its Popes, its councils, that Magisterium provides structure and discipline for the universal church of Christ. They believe that they are able to make visible the universal church through universal authority.

So that Magisterium, Pope and councils, sits above all local churches in the Catholic Communion. All monastic orders, missions, charities, hospitals, the many and the varied outreaches and activities of individual Catholics. They believe that the Pope and the Councils, they hold the keys of Peter, exercising authority and discipline, exercising excommunication, being able to determine who is and who is not a Christian. They believe they hold that authority over the entire universal church.

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And that's why, when Pope Leo the 10th excommunicated that troublesome Augustinian monk named Martin Luther, remember, the Pope was in Rome, Martin Luther was in Germany about 900 miles away, Pope Leo felt no compulsion to explain himself for excommunicating Luther. He believed he was just doing his job. He was simply using the keys of church authority to protect and maintain stability in the catholic church, the church universal.

Now, as Protestants, we look back on that history, and we judge that Papal excommunication of Luther as beyond the Pope's authority. It's beyond the scope of his authority, and rightly we judge it that way. But why? On what basis do we say he was wrong? Well, number of things to say on that, but really, if we could just boil it down to the basis of the two points that we have used to draw a distinction between the universal and the local church. We all possess membership in the church universal, but we practice that membership in the church local. It's the local churches, not some remote universal church hierarchy; it's the local churches that hold the keys of authority and discipline over its members.

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You know, Roman Catholics, they look at the state of evangelicalism today, everyone doing what's right in his own eyes, every local church doing what's right in its own eyes; people declaring themselves pastors with no ordination, starting churches, planting churches, conducting Christian ministry however they want to; they see all kinds of organizations doing whatever they want, no accountability, no one to answer to; now, they don't see the details of that. They don't care to see the details maybe, but they see all that, and they see this as what they would call a predictable failure. They could have told you that this would happen. Leave mother Rome and everything's gonna fall apart. Everything's gonna fracture and disintegrate. They knew this would happen.

But they also see this fracturing and this chaos as a very significant opportunity that they have to win back disillusioned evangelicals into the fold of mother Rome. Come back to Rome, they say to evangelicals. Come home, and find the order, the discipline, the unity, the history that you've left behind. Catholic apologist Scott Hahn, he wrote a book with his wife, reaching out to Protestants like us. The book's called, *Rome*,

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Sweet Rome: Our Journey to Catholicism. They were Presbyterians, militant anti-Catholics, but they reversed course, became Catholics, and they're encouraging other evangelicals to do the very same thing.

One of the most high profile evangelicals to return to Rome recently was Francis Beckwith. Francis Beckwith or Frank Beckwith, an evangelical philosopher, he taught at Baylor University. He was president of the Evangelical Theological Society. Brilliant mind. Highly respected. In 2007, he returned to the church he was raised in up 'til the age of 14. He resigned his presidency of the Evangelical Theological Society the very next week, and in 2008 he wrote a book about the experience called, *Return to Rome, Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic.*

Just to be clear, the fundamental issue dividing Catholics and Protestants is justification by faith. Roman Catholics blend justification with sanctification, which introduces human works into the process of conversion, into the process of maintaining acceptance before God. Protestants rightly, biblically affirm

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that salvation is wholly by the grace of God. You don't maintain salvation by your works. You don't get your salvation by works, you don't maintain it by works. God saves you. It's wholly by his grace.

But Roman Catholics also believe that the authority of the church universal, which is administered by popes and councils of bishops, the authority of the universal church, that they hold the keys to, is binding on the consciences of individual Christians at the local church level. And in this way, Roman Catholics have blended the biblical distinction between the church universal and the church local. They've put them together. In fact, they would say that the authority of the universal church is above the authority of the local church.

Roman Catholics, today are not the only ones to make that error. Many evangelicals are guilty today of the very same thing. Just the other day I had a man tell me, professing evangelical, not a Catholic, by the way, he told me he didn't need to submit to the authority of the local church. He claims to be a member of the church universal. And he says Jesus Christ

is his authority, not the leadership of some local church. So he has no interest in becoming a member of a local church, submitting to its authority.

That man, and many other evangelicals like him, have made the same error. So many who've been influenced by para-church organizations hold the same opinion. They're trying to accomplish the ministry that Christ assigned to the local church in Matthew 28:18-20. They want to try to accomplish that, but they want to operate completely outside of local church authority.

Because so many of those organizations were started to conduct youth outreach, a lot of that youth culture dominates evangelicalism today. Number of books have been wri, written recently studying the effects of this, like Thomas Bergler's book, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*. Many other titles like that.

So now we have a situation in Evangelicalism that, instead of one old man calling himself, The Vicar of Christ, and ruling

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from Rome, instead of that, we have a situation where thousands of teenaged popes have become accustomed to getting their way. Through our missions organizations, many of which are also operating outside of local church authority, that error is being exported around the world. I've seen it.

We're not here to solve all those issues. We can't. But you need to understand that that same attitude prevails among, among so many evangelicals today. We're now dealing with an attitude which is pervasive in evangelical churches, where people have this, you're not the boss of me, attitude. Having been told all their lives, all their evangelical lives, that they are in charge, church membership means to them voting rights. And church leaders exist to serve them, to please them. Many evangelicals have become accustomed to personal autonomy. They kinda become accustomed to self-rule, become accustomed to favoring the young over the old. Can't even recognize biblical church membership and involvement anymore.

Armed with this sense of entitlement and individual liberty, many come into the church feeling no obligation, no

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sense of responsibility, no sense of humble submission. They judge what they don't understand. They criticize what doesn't suit them. They feel no sense of reverence, no need to submit humbly, to serve sacrificially.

The church is there to serve them. And maybe, just maybe, if everything meets with their approval, perhaps they'll volunteer a little bit. Perhaps they'll lend a hand every now and again. Perhaps they'll write a check or two to support what's going on. But cross them, step out of line, they're outta here.

However, I just want to say that there are younger Christians coming to the faith who recognize that attitude for what it is. They're very familiar with it. They call it worldly. In fact, many older Christians see it that way, too. Many older Christians were raised to sacrifice. Even culturally, they were raised to sacrifi, they were raised to sacrifice, to give of themselves, to live in submission to authority. That's a godly attitude that we need to recover, beloved. We need to reassert

the biblical pattern of submitting to the discipline of the local church.

Thankfully, we are not left with a choice between two bad, unbiblical options: Roman Catholic hierarchy on the one hand, and individual autonomy on the other. We don't need to choose between Catholic tyranny and evangelical anarchy. There's a biblical option. So we need to get back to the Scripture to understand what the Bible teaches about the distinction between the universal and the local church, and to reassert the proper use of authority. Notice I said the proper use of authority in the local church. There are many improper uses of authority in the local church. It's called spiritual abuse. You stay away from that too. But does the local church have authority? Do local church leaders have any right to insist upon anything with its members? The Bible answers that question with the definitive yes.

So just quickly, let's look at the first point in our outline for this morning. You can find, I think, the outline in your bulletin. First outline point this morning is: Live under

the authority of the local church. Live under the authority of the local church. Now I'm gonna have you turn to a few passages this morning, just to set a foundation. This series of a, messages we're doing on local church membership and involvement, it's not really expositional per se, but it is faithful to the Scripture, I think. But it's more of a topical treatment. It's not typically what we do in the pulpit here, but whuh, is a topical treatment. We just want to lay some groundwork to help you understand why we insist on the priority of the local church. So vital to the health, the growth of all of us. So again, ask the question, does the local church have authority?

I want you to turn first to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. First Thessalonians chapter 5. And I want you to see there in 1 Thessalonians, this is one of Paul's earliest epistles. It's preceded only, by his, letter to the Galatians. In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, notice there that Paul encourages the church with these words, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, he says, "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you, and who are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves."

You see here, in this passage, that Paul acknowledges the existence of local church authority. There are those “who are over you in the Lord.” He doesn't defend the concept, he doesn't really explain it there, unpack it. He just simply assumes it, just acknowledges it. The fact of submission to leadership was plain to those early Christians. Paul says, “Look around. The ones you see laboring, doing the difficult and uncomfortable work of admonishing; respect them, esteem them very highly in love because of their work.”

That pattern of eldership had been established very early on, when Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary journey, having planted churches in Pisidian, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derby. Says in Acts 14:23, Acts 14:23, it says, “They appointed elders for them in every church.” “Appointed elders in every church [...]and they committed them to the Lord.” So they ordained and installed elders, leadership, authority. From the earliest days of the Christian Church, there were elders in authority over the church, those who were “over them in the Lord.”

And notice that Paul says "Respect those who labor," what does this say? "among you." Among you. He's not calling them to submit to church leaders in Jerusalem, to authorities who are remote, governing the entire church universal. Paul's commanding submission to local church authority. What governs every Christian, local churches, and individual Christians universally? The Word of God, right? The Word of God. So any individual Christian or local church that drifts from the Word of God is drifting from the church universal. But Paul doesn't command submission to elders in Jerusalem. He commands submission to the church leaders, "respect for them who labor among you."

You say, Well, look, I'm reading 1 Thessalonians 5 there. Paul doesn't command the church to submit to them, he just asks them to. Just asks it. It's a request. You can pay attention to if you want to. You can neglect it if you want to. Is that true? Is this more like a suggestion? Just a good idea, one among many equally good ideas, and structure how we want to? You know the answer, but turn anyway to, just a few pages to your right, to Hebrews 13:17. Lest you make the mistake of seeing the

gentleness of the apostle Paul for a permissive attitude about this, let's consider the writer to the Hebrews.

This verse, Hebrews 13:17, is on our membership application, so the people entering membership can see how they benefit from what this verse teaches. Take a look at it. Hebrews 13:17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." Did you get that? It's of no advantage to you to make your leaders groan. It's not to your benefit to make their lives difficult as they, get this, as they serve you. As they provide loving oversight to your souls.

Don't miss the imperatives there, though; the commands, obey, submit. The writer here is calling for obedience and submission. And again, it's obedience and submission to your leaders. Your leaders. They're in the local church. You're to submit to them, not some remote authority thousands of miles away. They are the ones who know you. They know your family. They know your context. They watch over your souls. It's a local

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church authority, not some hierarchal authority of a Catholic or universal church.

You say, Okay, I see that. Am I to submit myself, am I to submit my family to the dictatorial authoritarian ambitions of some megalomaniac megachurch pastor? No way I'm gonna subject myself to that. No way I'm gonna put myself or my family underneath that and be subject to spiritual abuse. Look, I tell you, I don't blame you. I don't blame you in the slightest. We have seen some recent high-profile examples of spiritual abuse. You can see it all over the Internet, stories posted about it.

One in particular destroyed a network of churches he worked to build. Hurt a lot of people, hurt a lot of families, brought dishonor to the name of Christ. The guy's making his comeback, by the way, and he's being supported, aided and abetted by pastors. Conference speakers are trying to lift him up again. Other stories as well, current and ongoing stories that describe abuse by megachurches, church networks, para-church ministries. All of these silencing the victim in the interest of protecting the organization and protecting the brand. I know that goes on.

I know it goes on, it seems a tad bit bold for me to call for this, but it's biblical, beloved. It's biblical. You're absolutely right to stay far away from abuse of authority, because subjecting yourself to abusive spiritual authority, that's not biblical either. You're responsible for the leadership you put yourself under. You're responsible for the leadership that you put your family under. However, just because some people abuse authority, that does not mean there is no authority in the local church. There are more passages we could turn to, to, illustrate this, but we need to keep moving. I think you get the point.

The Bible does command obedience to local church authority, point one, but it also puts boundaries around the exercise of church authority. And that's why, point two, you're responsible to, point two, to look after the leadership of the local church. Look after the leadership of the local church. Let me tell you what I mean by that. It's your responsibility as a Christian, as a local church member, to look after your leadership.

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Every local church is an autonomous body. It's a self-governing group of believers. It's a local expression of the universal church, the Body of Christ. And as such, every local church needs to qualify its leadership. Qualify its leadership. Once you've established a biblically-qualified leadership, you're not only duty-bound to submit to that leadership, but also to continue looking after your leadership. You need to make sure your leadership remains faithful to the boundaries of biblical authority. That's your job.

Does that mean the congregation has its hands in every decision, micromanaging, hovering? Does it mean the, the membership is watching over the leadership like a hawk, just waiting for a single slip-up, ready to pounce, ready to dive in? Aha, gotcha! You're outta here, fella. No. Church is not a democracy, it's not governed by the people but by Christ, through the mediation of the eldership. And church members need to trust the leadership Christ has put in place, and trust the processes that Christ has put in place, put in place for getting rid of bad leadership. But, at the same time, Christians need to make sure leadership is staying faithful to its biblical mandate.

I like how Mark Dever put it one time, he said, "The congregation makes a terrible steering wheel for the church, but it's very useful as an emergency brake." The elders steer the church according to Scripture. Can you imagine driving your car and letting all the kids get a hand on the steering wheel? It's, car'd be turning all over the place. You need to have one driver. That's safe, depending on the driver.

But to illustrate my point right, make sure you got a qualified, licensed driver in the driver's seat. The elders steer the church according to the Scripture, according to principles of love and truth found in the Scripture. Congregation submits to that direction, but it sounds the alarm when leadership is veering from its biblical course.

The problem is, in so many churches we have so many uninformed congregations. They're biblically ignorant church members, and they have no idea what the biblical mandate for leadership is. And they make one of two mistakes: Congregation either sounds the alarm falsely, through uninformed criticism,

like hyperactive poodles, watch dogs that are barking at every passerby, most of them not dangerous at all or on the other hand, the congregation becomes passive. They're like passengers on the bus, not noticing that the church is driving off of a cliff.

Again, that is why Bible teaching in the church is so crucial, beloved. So crucial. You need to know what it says so you can hold yourselves and your leadership accountable to the biblical mandate. That is your job. So with that in mind, let me get you started. Take a look at 1 Peter chapter 5, 1 Peter chapter 5. We've actually been going through these kinds of issues as elders because we wanna make sure, we fear the Lord and we wanna make sure that we're using our authority in a biblical way.

Peter tells all pastors and elders, those who are in positions of spiritual leadership in the church and authority, 1 Peter 5:1-3, he says this, "So I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:

Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly. Not, "dominating, uh, "domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." Stop there for a second.

Shepherding involves oversight. And that means there is a heavy administrative aspect to shepherding. It's not all Bible study, not all preaching and teaching. It also involves exercising administrative oversight. And this administrative aspect of sep, shepherding is something that shepherds embrace cheerfully. It's part of the job. We exercise that oversight that we have in a, in a certain way.

Notice Peter says here, nobody forces leaders, church leaders to serve. Nobody compels them, twists their arms into shepherding the church. Shepherding is a privilege granted by a gracious God, so shepherds are to embrace that role willingly. Willingly. There's nothing shepherds should stand to gain out of overseeing the church here on this earth.

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Working for the orderly organization and management of the church is hard work. It's often thankless work. It's sometimes inglorious work. Difficult. But because it serves Christ and others, you know what? As Peter says, we embrace it eagerly, eagerly. If someone seeks personal gain, whether it's pride of place, money, personal ambition, they got some kind of a Na, Napoleon complex, listen, that's a man who's not qualified for leadership.

Shepherding is not about dominating others. It's not about domineering over the flock, and that's why the metaphor used to illustrate the church leadership, it's not a cowboy, Coloradans. It's not a cowboy. It's a shepherd. Cowboys drive the herd, shepherds, Middle Eastern shepherds, anyway, shepherds lead their flocks. Shepherds don't drive people. They don't command obedience to themselves, they don't Lord it over people's consciences with their own preferences. Shepherds get out in front. They teach the Word, doing first in their own lives what they ask others to do. And they lead by example.

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Where'd Peter get all this? From our Lord. In John 21:15-17, when Jesus restored Peter back into ministry, he commanded Peter, "Feed my lambs," "Shepherd my sheep," "Feed my sheep." Feed, shepherd, feed, that's shepherding language there. It's tender. It's sacrificial. It's compassionate. Listen, that's why qualification for church leadership, for leadership in the local church, absolutely imperative. Men must be qualified. As a church, it's your responsibility to look after the qualification of local church authority.

Take a look at 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Timothy 3:1-7. I could also point you to Titus 1:5-9, but it's kind, of a parallel to this, so let's just read this passage. As a local church congregation, you have to insist that your leadership submits itself to the qualifications listed in this passage. That's your responsibility. You neglect it at your own peril, and it's not just at your own peril, but it's also the spiritual peril of many others, along with your church's testimony of Christ before the entire community. So notice what Paul commands Timothy, 1 Timothy 3, "This saying is trustworthy. If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach."

Above reproach is the, is the overarching concern here in the text. Can anyone bring a charge against this guy in his character? Well, with regard to what? Well, here it says, "The husband of one wife," or ih, ih, tha, that is, is he a one-woman man? Or is he known to be a philanderer, someone who's flirtatious? "The husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard. Not violent, but gentle. Not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

"He must manage his own household well, with all dignity, keeping his children submissive. For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and into a snare of the devil."

Notice the emphasis, not a new convert, not a young person. In this juvenization of American Christianity, we're violating

that all over the place. Again, all of this here that Paul is commanding Timothy is practiced at the local church level. There's no practical way to look after the qualification of universal church authority. You may suspect some of the people on the national, uh, church stage, but you really don't know for sure. Not until the scandal breaks, right?

Even if there is no scandal, you're not close enough to this man's life and ministry, his family, his community, to know whether the guy's biblically qualified or not. All we're, all we can do is read what's in the media like everyone else. The current evangelical moment is so out-of-hand, some think it's time for another reformation. But you go back into church history, read about the character of some of those medieval Popes. Absolutely horrendous. Unbelievable.

Get a copy of William Manchester's little book called, *A World Lit Only by Fire*. You can read it yourself. But the Evangelical Church has laid its own bad eggs. I mean, we're not, we're not without blame. Veritable litany of big-name celebrities have fallen morally, bringing shame to the name of

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Christ. So many that don't make the front pages, you find that too. So much heartache and disgrace would be avoided if we paid stricter attention to these character qualifications. They're here for our good, beloved. They're here for the church's good.

We need to insist also upon the one skill required of pastors and elders, that they truly can handle the Word of God. That they can teach from it, and exhort the flock from it toward love and good works. You gotta insist upon it, folks, that's your duty. One of my favorite texts on the mindset of a shepherd is in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2. Turn over there just quickly. I want to show you this.

Such a wonderful passage, because Paul certainly understood the pattern set by our Lord Jesus Christ, the one that Peter called the, Chief Shepherd, 1 Peter 5:4. And here in 1 Thessalonians 2:1 and following, you see Paul describing exactly what church leadership ought to look like. He says this, starting in verse 1, 1 Thessalonians 2, "You yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as

you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the Gospel of God in the midst of much conflict.

“For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak; not to please men, but to please God who tests our hearts. For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor the pretext for greed. God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others.

“Though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ, but we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves, because you’d become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil.

“We worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the Gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and

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blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how like a father with his own children, we exhorted each one of you, and encouraged you, and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own Kingdom and glory.”

Boy, just love to camp there for another few days, wouldn't you? Notice how many times Paul appeals to what the Thessalonians knew about him. What they saw in his conduct, what they were able to observe about his life. Verse 1, “You yourselves know, brothers.” Verse 2, “We had already suffered and been shamefully treated in Philippi, as you know.” Verse 5, “We never came with words of flattery, as you know.”

Verse 9, “You remember, brothers, our labor and toil.” “You remember it.” Verse 10, “You're witnesses, God also, how we acted.” Verse 11, “You know like a father with his own children, we exhorted each one of you, encouraged, charged you.” What is that, six times there? Paul is appealing to personal familiarity with him. The whole passage presupposes their knowledge and observation of Paul's conduct in the ministry. They knew him. They saw his life.

Listen, the Bible commands your obedience to local church authority. But it also commands you to look after your local church authority. The men that God places in authority over you, these are men you know, whose lives you can see, whose families are part of your church. You've been in their homes. You've watched them parent their children. You've seen how they interact with their wives. You, you see how they react to trials, to difficult situations, to difficult people.

Are they perfect people? No. But their behavior is exemplary. It's worthy of emulation, as Paul said several times throughout his epistles. Just a few, 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 3:7, "You yourselves know how you ought to imitate us." And in verse 9, he's, Paul said he wanted to give them "an example for you to imitate." He told the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 11:1, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." And I love this, in Hebrews 3, 13:7, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." Those are the people you need to put before you as examples, so you can follow in their steps.

The men in authority over you are not two-dimensional images on a projection screen. They aren't bios you read on a website. They're not highly polished promo pieces that are written by clever marketers who know exactly what to say to get you to trust. These men are flesh-and-blood people whose lives and character you know. They're men you can see. Men you can observe. Men you can imitate. And if they aren't qualified, then they shouldn't be in leadership, right?

But if they are qualified, then you're responsible before God to obey and submit to their loving leadership. You need to recognize; you didn't put them there. God did. Christ did. Christ gave them as gifts to the church. And they're, they're Christ's gifts to you for your spiritual good. If you don't submit to your leadership, or their leadership, then you're not submitting to Christ.

So the Bible commands you to live under the authority of the local church. Commands you to look after those in authority as well. Point number three, point number three: Submit to the

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discipline of the local church. Submit to the discipline of the local church, church. Authority doesn't mean much without teeth. For authority to be effective, for authority to mean anything, there has to be a consequence for violating that authority. Just as law enforcement has various means of enforcing its authority, the rule of law, so the church has a means of enforcing its authority and the rule of Christ in the church.

We call it church discipline. And we introduced that last time in Matthew 18. Church discipline involves the authority of the local church, not the universal church, mind you. This isn't Catholic hierarchy. Church discipline provides the authority for each local church to care for its membership.

You say, discipline, that doesn't sound very caring to me. Listen, I understand that sentiment. I've been raised, as many of you have, in an American culture that's been training us to think like Americans breaking from England, right? We're rebellious. We're independent. We've been taught to loathe discipline for a long, long time here in this country. And when youth culture dominates in the church, it's understandable that

so many have an aversion to discipline, to correction. We call it judging, which mm, one must never, never do. That's the one thing our tolerant culture simply cannot tolerate, it's to be told it's wrong.

But you need to notice that the word discipline is very closely related to the word disciple. Think of discipline, then, just as you think of discipleship, in terms of training, discipline is training, and you'll be on the right track. We're to discipline our members, because that's the mandate from Christ in Matthew 28:19, "Make disciples of all the nations." Basically, discipline Christians, train them. Disciples are those who are disciplined followers devoted to Christ teaching.

And remember, beloved, uh, what the writer to the Hebrews said about discipline. Don't turn there, but just listen, Hebrews 12:5 to 5 and following says this, "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons," children, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when you're reprov'd by him, for," listen to this, "the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastises every son whom he

receives." You know how the Lord disciplines those he loves? He does it through the teaching, discipling, disciplining miss, ministry of the local church.

Church discipline is where Jesus showed the apostles how to use the keys of authority, right? Jesus gave the local church authority to declare Heaven's judgment about who is and who is not a Christian. And at the local level, the local church makes judgments about those who speak for Christ, those who represent Christ. It guards the entrance into membership, and it guards access to the Lord's table. And all of that protects the purity of Christ's testimony through the church to the world.

That was certainly Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 5. 1 Corinthians 5, go ahead and turn to 1 Corinthians 5. I wanna read this passage to you. Just, not comment much, but just read it. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, it's actually the entire chapter. But 1 Corinthians 5 is so important, because chr, Paul was concerned, just as I said, for the purity of the church.

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Look what he says here. "It's actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife." You know, wherever the line is drawn, culturally, with sexual issues or whatever, there is a line. There is a point at which the culture says, you can go no further.

Here this culture found it intolerant that a man had his father's wife, and it says in verse 2, "You're arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn?" Basically, they were flaunting their liberty in Christ, saying, look, we're free to do whatever we want. There's, we're covered in Christ. All things, all people are equal. There's a radical egalitarianism in the church. We could just share and share alike and, no. You ought to have mourned.

Listen to what Paul says, "Let him who has done this be removed from among you." Well, he jumps all the way to fourth step, excommunication. Verse 3, "For," abs, "though absent in the body, I'm present in spirit, and as if present, I've already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you're

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assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you're 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." Okay, so there's love toward this man. Excommunication seems harsh, at the moment, but it's actually the most loving thing you can do, to put him outside of the membership, so that Satan will torment and, and hopefully drive him back into the fellowship.

So Paul addresses the church now in verse 6, he says, "Your boasting is not good. Don't you 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.

"I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But I am, now I am writing to

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you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother, if he's guilty of sexual immorality, or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler; not even to eat with such a one. 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."

Wow. Beloved, we are to judge ourselves. We're to clean out the leaven out of the church, so we're a pure body. So that our testimony to the watching world is about the purity of Jesus Christ, about the power of Jesus Christ and his Gospel to transform us. Shacking up with your father's wife is not evidence of transformation.

But that said, church discipline is not just about protecting the church's testimony about Christ, even though it is. And there's so much more we could say. We'll come back to it another time, maybe, but, it's also for the sake of the precious people that Jesus has bought and paid for. Jesus is very concerned about those, so turn, with that in mind, to Matthew

18. This is where I told you to turn at the very beginning. Now we're getting to it.

Matthew 18, thanks for your patience. I appreciate that so much. I, I find it int, fascinating here, just fascinating, that of all that Jesus could have said about the church's role in the world, he talked about its duty here to exercise church discipline. As a repository of God's truth, the role of the church in the world, that we learn from the rest of the New Testament, is to bring glory to God. The church lifts up the Gospel of Jesus Christ, proclaiming his name, pointing to his ministry, his work on the Cross. The church lives out the Gospel in increasing conformity to Jesus Christ.

By doing that, the church is shining like a light in a dark world, both to expose sin and unrighteousness in the culture, you can see that in Ephesians 5:8-14, but the church is also shining like a light in the dark cul, culture to point people to salvation in Jesus Christ. Matthew 5, "Let your light shine before men," right? Titus 2:11-15. That's why it's imperative that the church edify, and equip, and train its membership well.

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That's part of the church's role. But I want you to see the role of church discipline, and the role that it plays in the context of what Christ was teaching in Matthew 18. Because it's fascinating. It's not talking about the culture; he's not talking about the world. He's talking about Christians.

Let me start by reading verses 1-4, "At that time the disciples came to Jesus saying, 'Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?' Calling to him a child, he put them in the midst of them and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you turn,'" that's the co, concept of repentance there, "'unless you turn," or repent, "and become like children, you'll never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.'" Now Jesus here is not stirring some Disney like sentimentality about some supposed innocence of children, okay? It's not this Pelagian idea that children have innocence, and as they grow and became corrupt, corrupted by the world, they become dark and bad and evil, and that's why we all hate old people, or something like that. That's not what's going on here.

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He's very clear about the metaphor in verse 4. He says, "Whoever humbles himself like this child." Humbles himself. That's the connection. In Matthew 5:3-5, Jesus describes the humility that's required to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. You enter by acknowledging your poverty of spirit. You enter by mourning over your sin. That's where your poverty of spirit leads, is to mourning.

And that leads to a meekness, and a humility, and a lowness before God. It's one that others can see. That's the kind of person who enters the Kingdom. That's the kind of person who's saved; one who humbly accepts Heaven's judgment of his spiritual condition, and he's driven to repentance, to beg God for salvation. No demands, no expectations, no sense of entitlement, only a sense that his condemnation is, was, was well-deserved.

God's judgment is completely righteous, and the only hope he has is the gracious character of the one who will not only judge, sentence, and execute judgment on him; his only hope is in that one will show mercy. Those are the people who are precious to Christ. Those are the people who are like little

children. They belong to Christ. They are those for whom Christ died. They are his precious possession, bought and paid for by his death on the cross.

And that's why, verses 5-8, look at it there, such a severe warning against offending any of those precious children. Take a look. "Whoever receives," one child, "one such child in my name receives me. But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck, and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Wow. I've done some diving. I've gone to depth actually with an ear infection. OW! Couldn't clear. And the pressure on my eardrum was crushing. The pain was excruciating. And that's what Christ wanted to convey to those who would harm his little children. Take a millstone, big heavy stone used for grinding grain, pulled by an, by oxen or a team of oxen. Huge stone. Fasten it to your neck, throw you into the ocean. It would be better for that to happen, to be cast into the sea, hurling your way to the bottom of the sea. No time to drown. You don't die by

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drowning; you die by being crushed from the atmospheric pressure of the water above you. Your ears bursting, your body being crushed by the water and the weight. Painful imagery.

So listen, we gotta deal quickly, like he says here, verses 7-9, we gotta deal quickly and decisively with sin. Take a look at it there. "Woe to the world for temptations to sin. It's necessary that temptations come to a, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes. So if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. Throw it away. It's 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's better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes and be thrown into the hell of fire." Wow.

For those of us who know and love Christ, for those of us who love his people, are fellow children of humility, this mandate to work out repentance makes perfect sense. We don't want to cause anyone to stumble. As Jesus said in verse 10, in fact, look at verses 10-14, "See that you do not despise any of

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these little ones." Not one of them. "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, one of them's gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than 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."

Every single one of those little ones, those sheep, those children of Christ, every last one of them is precious to God. So precious, in fact, that he assigns an angel as a guardian over them. Did you know that? Here's textual evidence for a guardian angel. Not in the cultural sense. Biblical sense. It's not a Precious Moments angel, either. It's a big, bad, tough, strong, fiery angel that'll kill people.

But notice it's only for believers, only for believers. The devil watches over unbelievers. Angels watch over us. That context, God's care and concern for these little ones, he don't

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want one of them to go, go astray, and he will make sure it doesn't happen. In that context, Jesus commands the process of church discipline, and he gives the church authority to excommunicate the unrepentant.

That in mind, look at verses 15-20 and this should start making sense. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother. 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. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church," it's like an unthinkable thing for a believer, unthinkable that he would not listen 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. Whatever you loose on Earth shall be loosed in Heaven. And again I say to you, if any two of you agree on Earth about anything they ask, it'll be done for them by my Father in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them."

This section is all about winning over your brother. Because if you win your brother, well then you've shown the love and concern and care for one of Christ's little ones, and that pleases Christ greatly. That pleases the Father. So listen to the rest of that passage in Hebrews with this in mind, Hebrews 12:7-11, I'll continue reading, "It's for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you're 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 seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who've been trained by it."

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That's what God wants. God wants to produce the peaceful fruit of righteousness in the church. Jesus loves these little ones, and he wants them to be disciplined, disciplined, to grow in conformity to him. That's for our good, beloved. I hope you see that. He loves us. He wants us to grow. And local church discipline is the means by which we grow. In fact, that first step there of church discipline, that should be happening all the time in a healthy church. All the time. As Paul says in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," get this, "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." You know what that is? That admonishment is the first step of church discipline happening as a routine aspect of local church life.

A Word-infused church cares for one another, teaches and admonishes. And you know what? It stays at the first step most of the time. You know why? Because the offender repents in humility. He's a little child. He's humble. He's meek. He gets it. He's entered into fellowship like that, like a little child, so responding to correction in humility, that's in his nature, right? Because of his humble response to correction, no one else

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ever finds out about it. No one ever, el, else finds out about his offense. It stays private, stays covered over in love.

It's only when that offender refuses to repent of his sin, bristles a bit, stiffens himself, others have to be brought in as a witness against him. And if he refuses the small group admonition, then the elders are brought in to provide wise counsel, to adjudicate the, the matter through eyes of seasoned maturity, bring the matter before the whole church. Where there's a continued refusal to repent, that's when excommunication needs to happen. Why? Because we can't allow that leavening influence to harm any of the other little ones who belong to Christ. We can't let that happen.

The Bible commands us to live under the authority of the local church. And because of that, it commands us to look after the authority of the local church. And then it commands us to submit to the loving discipline of the local church. We're all under it. Elders, congregation alike, we're all under that discipline. All under that biblical authority. That's the kind of accountability that's healthy, beloved. It's healthy for our

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growth. It's loving. It's not loving to let sin continue in the church. We need to confront it, help people grow in greater conformity to Jesus Christ. And that's what it means to live under the discipline of the local church. Let's pray.

Father, we're so thankful for the instruction of your Word, and what you've given for our good and our growth. We look forward to the next few weeks, where we're gonna talk more about life in the local church What it looks like, what we do together, what we get to enjoy as church members. But it's so important that we set the context of the discipline so that we understand that you want us to grow, you want us to change, we wanna, you want us to share in your holiness. We're so grateful you've saved us to share in the very, one of the very attributes of the triune God, the Holiness of God. So please help us to be faithful, courageous, obedient to your Word for the sake of Jesus Christ and the glory of his Gospel.