

How to Handle Church Discipline - Sin in the Camp Part 4

by Shane Idleman

Shane Idleman discusses the importance of church discipline as a means of restoring individuals caught in sin, emphasizing love and accountability throughout the process.

Duration: 46:34

Scripture: Matthew 18:15

Topics: "Church Discipline", "Restoration"

Description

Shane Idleman addresses the critical issue of church discipline in his sermon 'How to Handle Church Discipline - Sin in the Camp Part 4.' He emphasizes the importance of restoring individuals caught in sin rather than merely condemning them, advocating for a balanced approach that involves loving confrontation and accountability. Idleman outlines the biblical process of addressing unrepentant sin within the church, highlighting the need for prayer, patience, and a focus on genuine repentance. He warns against the dangers of enabling sin through silence and encourages the church to lovingly confront sin while also caring for the victims affected by it. Ultimately, he stresses that true faith is evidenced by genuine fruit, including a forgiving heart.

Transcript

So, here we go, Matthew 18, if you have your Bibles, Matthew 18, verse 15. And for those of you who have not been here, we've been talking about sin in the camp. Sin in the camp and church discipline.

How do you handle sin in the camp? How do you handle sin that's going on in the church? And we looked at two different extremes. On one extreme is, you go get them, Shane. Let's get all those sinners.

Well, most of us would be in trouble, right? There's a process here. No, it's not go get them, it's how can we restore somebody, how can we help them. But then the other side is what we're actually seeing a lot more of, is don't say anything.

You see somebody caught in sin or doing different things and they're actually enjoying it, they're flaunting it. And the church says, well, I don't want to upset anybody. I don't want to upset them.

But we have to remember, we're responsible to what God says in His Word. My primary responsibility is to God and His Word, and that sometimes offends people, doesn't it? That will, people will not like that. So

we have to find the middle, the whole point of church discipline.

The whole point of this topic is, what have we been talking about? Restoration. Restoration, we lovingly confront sin in the hopes of restoring somebody. And we did part one, part two, part three, and this is the final part tonight, part four.

And this is more specific on church discipline. And what church discipline is, in a nutshell, is when a person has a consistent and persistent pattern of sin that is unrepentant. They could care less, they're not going to repent, and that person goes to them, we bring maybe a couple elders or leadership or people, two or three witnesses go, and we talk to them and say, listen, this is hurting your family, this is hurting the church.

There's people who care for you and love you. You've got to make some changes. This is serious now.

We're involving other people. And if they say, well, I don't care, doesn't matter, then you've got to up it a little bit and bring it to the church. And let the church lovingly confront that person.

Now, how does that look? Well, I'm glad you asked because we're going to talk about that. But this is a good point to remind you, or a good time to remind you that there's not a one-size-fits-all approach. We're not going to have a list of do this in this situation, do this in this situation.

That's why a lot of prayer goes into it, a lot of waiting on the Lord, a lot of looking at what does God's Word say, says we're often not in a hurry. If you're in a hurry to rebuke or in a hurry to administer church discipline, often the heart might not be right. However, there are exceptions to that, are there not? There are exceptions.

When there's sin in the camp that's blatant and obvious, I gave some illustrations in the past, and I don't have to give those again tonight, but there's times when you do need to move quickly. It's very obvious you need to move quickly. There's nothing to pray about when the wife is bringing her boyfriend to church while the husband's at home, right? I mean, that's going to be addressed pretty quick.

But there's other things that can take time as you wait on God. So where we left off was Matthew 18 verse 15. Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, then take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, then tell it to the church.

But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. And let me remind you that Jesus Christ is saying this. This is Jesus saying this.

A loving rebuke is definitely sometimes needed. And many of you who have been brought back to the Lord by a loving rebuke know exactly what I'm talking about. Because here's what happens in my life too, in all of our lives.

If we continue in a pattern that's not pleasing to the Lord, and we only have cheerleaders and no coaches, when are we ever going to turn back? If nobody says anything, finances are going good, God's not orchestrating difficult circumstances, hey, I'm all that and a bag of chips, and I'm not being confronted, and nobody says anything because they don't want to upset, that person often will continue. It's not until

somebody grabs and says, wait a minute, do you realize you're going in the wrong direction? That often plants a seed. And I'll tell you, nine times out of ten, they're not very receptive.

They're not very happy when they're being confronted. But you've planted the seed. That's all God calls us to do, is plant that seed.

So the second step we talked about last week, if he will not hear you, take with you two or three witnesses. Now that does not mean you go to somebody, you go get witnesses the next day. He does not hear you tells me there's a period of time there in which you wait and you watch.

What are you watching for? He will not hear you. There's no change. He will not hear you.

Hear means there's no change in his attitude and his actions. And that sometimes can take a little bit of time. And by bringing two or three witnesses, now the offender realizes the seriousness of their sin.

And if he refuses to hear them, then you tell it to the church. And Jesus goes on to say, let me read that again. But if he refuses to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loose in heaven. Now it begs the question, how do we handle this in light of Jesus' teaching on loving your enemies? Does it seem like he's saying one thing and doing another? Wait a minute, treat him like a heathen and tax collector. But then earlier we learned in Matthew that he says to love your enemies.

Well, always remember this, loving somebody does not mean enabling them. See, I can discontinue fellowship and I can discontinue my friendship and still love them. How many parents love their children and they say, but Johnny, you're not living under this roof anymore, unless that lifestyle changes.

You need to find somebody else, somewhere else to live. Dad, can you pay this? No, I'm not going to enable you anymore. I'm not enabling this addiction.

I'm not enabling that lifestyle. I'm done being enabling. I love you too much to watch you continue to destroy your life.

So to me the context is everything. An enemy is somebody who's our enemy. There's plenty out there.

And Jesus is saying, listen, treat them with respect. Treat them with dignity. Turn the other cheek.

If they take something, give something. And you love them. But the context of this is actually true love is saying, I love you enough to tell you I can't continue to allow you to be friends with me.

And this is not the time to take somebody to the movies, right? Go golfing with them as if nothing happened. This is a time where we lovingly confront, and that is genuine love. I don't know if it'll matter.

I didn't really have this in the sermon notes, but I just thought of this as I'm talking about this issue. On this big issue right now that you're seeing in the news, gay marriage, and what the nation calling good, what God calls not good. And everybody wants to remain silent.

We don't want to offend everybody. We don't want to upset those struggling. And I want to remind people that that's not genuine love.

If you genuinely love somebody, you want to lovingly warn and encourage them that Christ is the answer. And I talk to pastors all the time. Well, not all the time, not in our area.

But you'll read their blogs and different things like, well, I don't want to say anything about this issue. We don't want to offend. We just want to love them.

That's not loving them. That's a coward. You want to save face.

You want to build a ministry. And you don't want to upset anybody because you're worried about your reputation. That's not love.

That's being a coward. So we have to be clear on this issue of truly loving somebody in this context. If the church truly loves somebody, we would go to them and take time, right, out of our schedule, out of our busyness, and we would take time.

We would sit them down and say, listen, you're going in the wrong direction. We love you enough to tell you this. Somebody who really, if I really didn't care or the leadership didn't care, we'd say, well, turn them over to Satan.

I don't care less. I'm just here to do my thing. I don't want to be bothered by this.

That's not love. So I think it's important to define what love is. Because we have this concept of God as a doting grandfather or this cosmic ball of love, which I talk about often.

But if you ask most people, that's their definition of God. He's just some cosmic ball of love or a doting grandfather that winks at sin. But Jesus himself said you better confront it because it's cancer.

The more a church allows sin, blatant, unrepentant sin, to continue, the more that church will know not that the Spirit of the Lord has departed from them. Because God dwells with his people who are repentant and broken and humble before him and not allowing these things. So let's talk about that for a minute.

He said tell it to the church. Now there's a lot of confusion here. Tell it to the church.

And that word in the Greek language is ekklesia. If you look it up, there's a couple different meanings. But the main meaning is a gathering of like-minded believers.

So when Jesus said go tell it to the church, the ekklesia, we immediately think of, hear both services, all the people, go tell everybody. And I want to be careful in this area because there's freedom to have differing opinions. What I'm about to say I know not everybody will agree with.

And I don't know if there's an exact way to do this. But I've been to, 10 years ago, I'll never forget. I was at this big church, probably 1,000 people.

And they put some guy up on the PowerPoint screen. And I'm like I have no clue who this is. But now I do.

Now I know what he's, but I didn't even know him. So is that what Jesus had in mind here? And the church had good intentions. And maybe that's the way, the route to go.

I don't know. But looking at this text, ekklesia, it's a gathering of believers, in my opinion, who know the person. The person's influence in the church would determine who the church is.

Right? The person's influence in the church would determine who the church is. Pastor Shane you hear is leaving his wife. Well guess what, the whole church needs to know.

Because the influence. But if Bill on the second row, second service, who doesn't come very often, and nobody really knows except a certain group of us, is that the church? Is that who you go to and you let them know, hey, all of us, 12, 15, 20, 30 people, we need to lovingly confront this person. So in a nutshell, I think we have to be careful when we're taking something to the church.

You have to determine who even knows this person. Will it be productive? Is that the goal, is to let everybody know, even if they don't even know who this person is? Because in going to the church and confronting something, there should be also a side of us that wants to protect. Because we often forget about the victim, don't we? Go get the guy, but what about the wife and the children at home crying? Saying, Daddy's not coming home.

You think they want all their junk up there? So we have to be careful in this area and look at every situation and pray it through. So in my opinion, go and tell it to the church, means those within the person's sphere of influence need to know about what's going on. Because it's those people who can do the next step, which is to treat him like, how can I see this guy up on the PowerPoint? I have no idea who he is.

How can I treat him like even a tax collector? I can't. I don't even know who he is. But now I do.

Now I know he's walked out on his wife and traded her in for a younger model. And now I know that this and that, things I probably didn't need to know. So I think that's the context here.

Again though, there's gray area in regard to Jesus saying a gathering of believers. You tell it to the church, the believers. But we can glean some insight from 2 Thessalonians 3, 14-15.

And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, Paul's talking to the church in Thessalonica, you note that person. So here's the setting. The church in Thessalonica, they have a gathering of people, probably a house church.

We forget that the church started in homes. Did you know that? There wasn't a big thousand seat sanctuary in Jerusalem. They had temples and different things.

But they met in homes. So if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, so you have this imagery here of people going to the small group or going to the church, and this person just does not want to obey them. Just, you know, I don't care what you have to say, and they're kind of contentious, they're divisive, and Paul's like, enough of this.

How long? Because we're supposed to be like-minded believers. Now there's nothing wrong with a person coming, having questions, and sincerely seeking. But there are people there who were causing division.

Have you ever met those people? Yes. I have, and it's not fun. That's why Paul elsewhere would say, rebuke a divisive person.

Just like, you're going to point out everything? The color of the carpet? You know, this and this and this. They're just divisive. So Paul's saying, do not keep company with that person, that they may be ashamed.

But then he continues, do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. In other words, he's saying, listen, you are so divisive this month, the word of God says this, you're doing this, and we can't

continue to fellowship with you. You're not my enemy, you're my brother, and because you're my brother in Christ, I love you enough to tell you the truth.

And I like what John Wesley said, commenting on this passage. Have no company with him, no intimacy, no familiarity, no needless correspondence. Tell him lovingly of the reason why you shun him.

There's a shun, we don't use that word much anymore, but a shunning is, listen, I can't have needless correspondence, I can't have, let's go to lunch, let's play golf. The reason is because you're validating by your silence that their lifestyle is okay. You're well aware that saying nothing says something, right? If a person, for example, comes into church week in and week out, month in and month out, and they know that I know that there's something going on in their life, but I'm just not saying anything, I'm just avoiding it.

By my silence, I confirm or strengthen their position, strengthen them in their sin. Actually, it's funny, if you read a lot of the Old Testament, I like, one of the books I like is Jeremiah, specifically Jeremiah 23. It's talking about the false prophets of those days, and even false prophets, you could parallel that to today.

One of the characteristics of a trait, of a false prophet, is to tell people peace, peace, when there is no peace. In other words, to say, don't worry about it. Continue in that destructive pattern.

God doesn't care. God still loves you. You're actually not warning.

That's why, in Jeremiah, he said, is not my word like a hammer, like a fire that devours? But you have perverted the words of the living God by not warning and instructing and telling the people to come back to God. You're encouraging their sin by your silence. That's a false prophet.

That's a false prophet. They would encourage sin. So all these guys out there that just want to keep encouraging the church to keep sinning and not confront anything, I don't know if they're pleasing God.

Now, there comes a time for encouragement, right? We all know that. Please, please bring the encouragement. But when it comes to a consistent pattern of sin, there comes a time to confront that.

We can't rush this process, nor should we try to avoid it. That's a key right there. We can't rush this process.

Anybody that wants to rush church discipline often has the wrong heart. But we also can't avoid it. We can't avoid speaking the truth in love.

Now, here's a couple of important steps I want to share with you since we're talking about this. And the reason I wanted to fully exhaust this over the last four weeks now, four messages, is because if it ever comes up or when we're dealing with this issue in the future, we can just say, go watch these videos. We just covered everything.

If you want to know the church's position, here they are. So here's a couple of important steps. This is actually before the church gets involved or it's even after when the person says, I don't care what the church says, I'm going to continue.

Number one, we have to offer a solution to the person. It's very healthy, and I do this often, to say, I will walk through this with you. There's hope.

But if you just confront somebody, and you say, man, you're out of line, this and that. You're in trouble. I don't care what you have to say.

Don't call me anymore. They leave there going, uh-oh. But if you say, listen, this is a very destructive pattern.

I can walk through. The church can walk through this with you. Here's the steps you're going to need to take.

Here's the healing that's going to need to happen. We've got to get your spouse plugged in with some other women or other men, if it's on the other side, and walk through this with you. We're going to be here.

It's going to be hard. It's going to hurt, but we'll walk through this with you. On one hand, they get the right hook.

That'd be a left hook, actually. They get the left hook. Oh, this hurts.

I'm confronted. But the building back up. But we're going to walk through this with you.

How does that look? Let me talk to you about one thing that's an epidemic now with pornography. I've shared with you before on my phone, on all of our computers, everything. We've got accountability software to where you can't even access a porn site, and it also will send to my wife every week every website search I do, the searches on Google, every website I visit, who I search for on Facebook.

It's all sent to her in a nice little email. But that's part of accountability. That's part of like, devil, you can't touch this, because I know how you work, and I want to put up safeguards, and I want to have those.

So how that would look is I would tell the guy or the woman, well, probably my wife would counsel the women. That's one thing we don't do. I don't counsel the opposite sex.

We refer those out just using wisdom there too as well, because there's relationships there that can build that aren't healthy, and you're opening a door to the enemy, I believe. Now, back on track. Offering a solution, if it's everywhere, we're actually going to offer a class here at the church for those caught in this or needing help in the future.

But you would say instead of casting, instead of just making them feel degraded and humiliated and shameful, you'd say I'm going to walk through this with you, and here's what it's going to look like. You're going to hook up this software. It's going to be painful at times.

It's going to hurt. We're going to hook it up to one of the leadership at the church, and you need this accountability. You need this structure.

Here's what's going to happen. Your wife is going to, it's going to break her heart. She's probably going to talk about divorce.

I don't want you to open your mouth. I don't want you to say a word. I just want you to apologize and repent, and you shut your mouth.

You don't argue. You don't make excuses. You don't complain.

Here's what's going to happen. Let me walk through it with you. And you walk them down that road so when it does happen, they're prepared, and they know that the church is there for them, not against them.

So you see the difference? I can bring the sledgehammer and say this is wrong. You're destroying your family, but here's how we're going to help you. And I have to take care there because take heed lest I fall.

What we talked about last week. If we come in with the wrong attitude, the devil says, oh, this guy's prideful. Let me take him down.

So that's how it works. Offer a solution. Now, this is important, too, with the person.

You have to, number one rule, you have to define repentance so everybody is on the same page. Because when I just say repentance, he might go, yeah, that sounds good. I'll be sorry.

Or she'll say, I'm sorry, but that's not repentance. Repentance is a turning, a changing, and a repairing, and a restoring. You want to fix the damage that you did.

You want to restore. You're not about, if you start to blame shift and make excuses, your heart's not ready. And so you need to let the person know what genuine repentance looks like.

Listen, if you're really changing, I don't want to hear this. I want to see your feet and hands moving and doing the right things. Because everybody, I'm convinced, can talk the talk.

Say the right things at the right time. We got the lingo down. So we have to define what repentance looks like.

And accountability, which I just talked about, accountability starts the process of restoration. You have to let them know you have to have some form of accountability. You have to have some form of accountability.

Here's the funny thing with accountability. Accountability in and of itself is not the answer. I cannot ask a person to keep me accountable.

God's got to keep me accountable. And a person should not have to keep you accountable. But it's a very important part of the puzzle.

Because there's accountability there. There's transparency there. What I just talked about the website.

What I've talked about with our board that's over this church that looks over the financials. They look at the, where's this money going? How's it being spent? It's very healthy to have accountability because it keeps our sin nature in check. So that's what you have to tell, you have to let the person know that there has to be some form of accountability.

There has to be some form of change. And we've talked about people, let's say again an example. They're married.

But now they're separated. And now this person has a girlfriend or boyfriend. Well, one of the steps of accountability is you need to cut that.

Here's how this conversation goes. You need to cut that relationship off. Not next week.

Not next month. Today. If you want me to see that repentance is genuine, you tell them to lose your number, you cancel your cell phone, your new cell phone, you leave it on the counter for your spouse to see every text that comes in, every phone call you make.

That's what genuine repentance looks like. I'm not willing to do that. Then you're not willing to change.

You're just full of hot air. And then we have to approach it like that. Who in their right mind want to keep plan B on the backup, back burner? A person not yet fully repentant.

A person not yet fully repentant has plan A, plan B, and probably plan C in case this doesn't work out. You know what? I wrote this down. I hope it helps somebody.

And as you know, the people listening on the radio, on the internet in the weeks to come. But I want to speak on this issue since we're talking about it. I'm amazed at how many Christians seek somebody to date soon after their separation or divorce.

I mean, if anything shocks me in the church, it's this. I know people, not people that go here, don't get me wrong, but you'll see on Facebook that I know they're separated and now they met somebody. What are we missing here? Let me be crystal clear.

You do not go out and find somebody even if you're divorced. I think it should be at least a year or two of healing if it's a biblical divorce, which there's only a few things, and we're going to talk about that in the weeks to come. But that should be the last thing on your mind.

And I've talked to people. One lady used to come a couple years ago and she was in the separation process wanting to get a divorce. She goes, I can't wait until I can start dating again.

I don't know, laugh or cry. You want to know why? Because her heart's not right. You should be broken over what's happening.

So on that note, I just want to say that because I see so many people, okay, now we're separated, now I can start dating. No. That is clearly sin in God's eyes.

The release of that takes time, a lot of time. And this no-fault divorce that we've embraced in our country is destroying the families. See, here's the thing.

Well, not you guys, but people doing this kind of thing, and I know it's hard, don't get me wrong. Marriage is difficult. Talk to my wife and ask her about the first year of ours.

Wow. Remember what Ruth Graham told Billy Graham? I still love him, but I've thought about killing him. I might murder him.

So I know, when I talk about this subject, I never want to minimize the pain and the difficulty and the challenges. Sometimes marriage is a thorn in the flesh, is it not? But I don't think we realize the damage that it's done to children. Because here's the excuse we think, oh, they're resilient, they'll bounce back.

No, they won't. Let me just be up front. The majority of young adults that sometimes the church is counseling now, most of their pain can be traced back to the divorce.

Mommy meeting somebody new quickly, and this, it can be traced right back. This is an epidemic. But we're so selfish and so self-absorbed that we have to go get somebody.

Right? And the truth is, the reason people want to hurry up is they want to hurry up for sex. That's the majority. That's the truth.

And the majority, hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry. I've got to meet somebody. I've got to meet somebody.

No, that's not good. That's not godly. There should be a significant amount of time.

People are going, I can't believe you said the S word here. Well, it's healthy as God ordained it, but that's what drives many people. Selfishness.

Selfishness. You can listen to the conversation. You can listen.

And on this note, if a person is looking forward to meeting somebody else, now there's nothing wrong with, you're going through a difficult marriage, and you can't wait until this is over, and God restores hopefully, and things like that. But when we're planning, we're planning something when God might want us to pray for restoration. It makes no sense.

So you cannot immediately, in my opinion, there's no excuse for just immediately going out and finding somebody. Here's another point. Be clear on this with them.

That healing requires time. Healing requires time in the same way that the physical injuries, have you ever been hurt physically? Have you ever tore a rotator cuff, or your knee popped, and you've got to wear braces? In the same way, spiritual injury takes time to heal. If reinstatement to ministry or restoration occurs too quickly, more damage can result because of a weakened state that is not yet strong.

What I mean by that, as many churches, okay, somebody, there's church discipline, or there's sin in the camp, and it's pretty big. And the person's like, okay, can I go back and start helping again a month later? A month later? Talk to me in 12 months. One year? Yeah.

Oh, for sure. See, we've got to feel the pain of the sin that we caused. If you just reinstate somebody quickly, it does more damage than good.

Now there's forgiveness, then we can reinstate the relationship, but serving in ministry is a whole different capacity. Whole different capacity. So that area, we need to be careful as well.

Be clear. Tell them that healing takes time. And it's very good to say things like, I don't know how long.

I don't know how long. I remember there was one gentleman here three years ago now. He's actually back in jail.

A couple of you will know who this is, but most of you won't. But soon after something horrific happened, the church had to get involved. Within, it seemed like, a couple months, he was asking me when we can ordain him as a pastor.

It's like a deer caught in the headlight. Look, right? Am I reading this right? This email. What is wrong with me? Lord.

In a nutshell, I was cordial, nice, but don't even bring this kind of stuff up. Don't even talk to me about this. That's not even on the radar.

Well, Shane, what about offering hope? We offer hope in segments. And say, maybe someday, if a lot of things change, but you don't give a time frame on it. Because what happens is they'll do certain things until the time frame's up.

Right? If I tell my son, just be good for the next 30 minutes, and then you can do this, guess what he's going to do for the next 30 minutes? His heart hasn't changed, though. So we don't put time frames on things. Now, it's okay to say, yeah, we can revisit this in three months or six months, and here's what I'd like to see during that time period.

But you want to avoid putting a time frame on it, because then you've got to rush to that time frame. And here's why. Time is needed to revisit progress, talk to family members, and reassess the situation.

We encourage and believe the best in others, but we also wait and we verify. What was Ronald Reagan's famous saying? Trust, but verify. Trust, but verify.

I think he was dealing with Russia back then. Yes, we trust you, but we're going to verify. I think Obama should have said that to Iran as well, right? Don't get me started.

You guys, come on. Anyway, but if he refuses even to hear the church, but if he refuses even to hear the church, now think about this environment. People have told me before, that seems a little harsh.

Jesus seems harsh here, Shane. Help me understand this. Well, let's put this whole in context.

But if he refuses to hear the church, here's the context of this. A person goes to somebody and says, listen, here's the offense. They say, I don't care.

I don't want to hear it. They come weeks, maybe later, praying about it. They come with mature men or women, and they address the person again.

They say, I don't want to hear it. It's not my fault, right? Excuses. And then they bring more people or they tell the church.

So this guy now is in a point of arrogance and rebellion. There's nothing pleasant about this. This is arrogance and rebellion at its core, and Jesus says you better address it.

If a person doesn't want to hear the confrontation of one, okay, I got it. Then they don't want to hear a couple witnesses, leadership in the church, and then they don't want to listen to the whole church, and they still think they're right, that's rebellion. That's arrogance and rebellion, if I've ever seen arrogance or rebellion.

So that's why the next step has to occur. So always remember, the church doesn't create this environment, the person does. So when the person gets upset, you have to remind them, I think you created this environment, not me.

People get upset. Did you know that? They get upset at the church. This message right now will upset people, probably in the first and second service.

And you have to remind them that you created this environment, not me. We're just responding to the environment you created that's occurring here. Now what if the person doesn't listen? We talked about earlier, I don't have to explain this again, how the church handles it, is you go to the group of people who know this person, there's influence, you probably, I'm going to talk about a few things in a minute, but that's who the ecclesia is, that's who the church is.

Their area of influence determines who you tell, and you say, listen, here's this person, they're caught in transgression, they're caught in this sin, we need to pray for them, we need to fast and pray, and pray that God will work in their heart. Because whether they admit it or not, once you get to this process, it's pretty humiliating. Do you think the person would be humiliated? In a good way, right? They can't believe they're going through this, me, not me, I'm such and such, I'm Joe Bible.

Well often it's Joe Bible who needs a swift, you know what, without that brokenness and humility that I often talk about. Without that broken, gentle spirit, Joe Bible becomes a Bible-thumping husband that wants to tell his whole family off. So we have to be careful there too.

And usually it's after many weeks of pleading and praying and waiting on God that you finally have to come to that point and apply the church discipline. So here's what has to take place. Number one, the majority, if I'm reading the text right, not reading into it too much, the majority of the leadership has to agree.

I mean, if the leadership of the church is divided and saying, listen, I think we need to wait a little longer, I think we need to, I talked to him last week, he seemed, I don't think we should do this yet, I think there's caution there, there's wisdom in waiting. So the church, the majority of the church leadership should agree. Remember the verse, assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven.

And whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. You've got two or three people on the same page. What I believe this is, the reason God binds what we bind is because we're following the will of God.

We're confirming, listen, this is God's heart in this matter, we're just announcing it, that binds it up, that confirms it, God will honor that. What's bound, it's not like we have some super power that we can just bind and loose whatever we want. We're pronouncing things according to God's will and there's power in that.

That's why if there's two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them. When was the last time you grabbed somebody's hand and said let's pray for me, pray for my family, pray for my church, let's pray. And the two or three there, the mighty hand of God is moving because you're binding things together.

There's unity in that. So that's what's happening here. The leadership has to agree, there has to be unity.

The second point, I believe it has to be announced in a separate church gathering. I don't think I would use a sermon opportunity like this to go through the process of church discipline if there were somebody. I think there has to be an event outside the church or after the service, say listen, for those of you who know this person or if you're part of this body, we'd like you to be here.

And then we go to that. Number three, just pertinent information is given. This is not where you air the dirty laundry to everybody.

Just pertinent information because we're still in protection mode, right? What do people need to know? That's all we need to know or they need to know. Number four, lovingly challenge those attending that this is not the time to gossip. This is a biggie.

Because as soon as they walk out those doors, guess what starts ringing? Did you hear? Did you hear? I can't believe it. And that's a sure sign. Folks, let's just do a heart check real quick, mine included.

That's a sure sign that we're not protecting that person. That's a sure sign that our own heart, if we want to air somebody's dirty laundry, that's not a good sign. We should want to protect them.

Protect. Somebody should be able to go to you and know they're not going to gossip. And that will, you'll push a lot of people away when they know that you're not a gossip.

You're not going to get all the latest little news. Because here's the kicker, gossipers in this area will be confronted. If we're finding out that people are just gossiping and hurting this family even more, then that person will be confronted.

Trust me. Lovingly confronted, but that we can't allow the church, because that's still sin in the camp. Last time I checked, God didn't like gossips or back biters.

Or one who sows discord among the brethren. Yay, seven things I hate, they are abomination to the Lord. Lying tongue.

Hands that shed innocent blood. Feet that are swift to running to evil. A heart that devises wicked plan.

And one who sows discord among the brethren. A gossip. Discord.

That's very important. The fifth point. Do not forget about the victim.

See, we can get so caught up in the person who did the sin, but we've got a family bleeding or dying over here. A spouse. And I've heard of bad situations where it could be a husband or wife in either scenario.

Well, listen, the church isn't reaching out to me. I'm dying here. My kids.

Yes, you're talking to such and such. You're rebuking such and such. You're having meetings about such and such.

But what about us? The victim. We're hurting here. So that's when you get mills ministry involved.

You bring them mills. You have older women go into council, if it's a woman or men, go alongside, and you don't forget about the victim, because that can happen pretty easily. They're down here when you're wanting to address the big issue.

Number six. Don't forget about the lost sheep. The person.

Now, isn't this interesting? If you look at Matthew 18, the context of this is the lost sheep too. Jesus says, if there's a lost sheep, wouldn't you go out to look for the one and leave the 99? This person is a lost sheep. So we can't forget about them.

We can't get upset and mad and angry. We have to pray. We have to fast.

And we have to contend for them. Number seven. This is the final one on this point.

Don't overlook your own heart. Don't overlook your own heart. I'll keep reading.

Matthew 18, 21. Then Peter came to him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Peter thought he was being pretty special, right? He goes, up to seven times? And Jesus said, no. I do not say to you up to seven times, but 70 times seven.

And here's why. Partial forgiveness is not forgiveness. Because Peter's attitude would be like most of our attitudes.

Hey, how long do I have to keep forgiving this guy? Three times, four, five. I mean, I have to keep forgiving him. What's the deal here? I want to stop forgiving him.

Wasn't he looking for an out? So partial forgiveness is not. Now, if the person's genuinely repentant, right? We know all those people that can play games. He's talking here about a person who's genuinely repentant.

We're to forgive them. Seven times seven. But up to 70 times seven.

Verse 23. Therefore the king of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servant. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one of them was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents.

Now think about this. 10,000 talents is a huge sum of money. But he was not able to pay it.

So his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him saying, Master, have patience on me and I will pay you all. Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt.

Now remember Jesus said, Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like this. So it's a parallel to gaining access into the kingdom of heaven. He's paralleling.

This is what the kingdom of heaven is like. So the man saw the severity of his debt. The man saw the severity of his debt.

And this parallels our own need for forgiveness. See, if we could see the severity of my debt that Christ bore on the cross, my sin, he paid the biggest debt of all. He forgave me of my sin even while I was a sinner, even when I was living like hell.

Heaven was calling. And I look at the cross. I look at Calvary.

I look at what he did for me. How in the world can I not forgive somebody who did something much less? That's the context. And also we don't want to forget here how our sins affect the whole family.

This man's sins, this man's debt affect his whole family. His wife and children were being sold into slavery. So fathers, especially, your sins will affect your family.

Wake up. Wake up. This isn't just solo here.

How we act and how we live affects everything. It affects our family, mothers, moms. It affects your children.

How you treat your husband. How you treat God. How you look to his word.

It affects everything. There's a ripple effect. And I don't ever want to forget that because it'll make you think twice, won't it? Realizing that it affects those that we love the most.

But the servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, which is nothing. And he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me what you owe me. So his fellow servant fell down on his feet and begged him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay you all.

And he would not. But he went and threw him into the prison till he should pay the whole debt. So when his fellow servant saw what had been done, they were very grieved and came and told their master all that he had done.

Then his master, after he called to him, said to him, You wicked servant, I forgave you all the debt because you begged me. Should you not also have compassion on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the tortures until he should pay all that was due him. Now that right there is a whole sermon.

I mean, I could spend about an hour and a half right there. But let me just get down to the nutshell here. What happened? His heart didn't really change.

This person's heart had not changed. He was forgiven, but he was not willing to forgive. So my heavenly Father will also do to you if each of you from his heart does not forgive his brother his transgressions.

Now much debate has been going on with this scripture. I mean, how can God not forgive us if we're not forgiving somebody? Well, here's what I think is going on here. From his heart, when he says, if he doesn't forgive somebody from his heart, the heart is the gauge.

The heart is the gauge of true spirituality. The heart gauges our relationship with Christ. So he said, if you do not forgive.

What Jesus also said in another passage, if you do not sell all that you have, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. In another passage he said, if you do not repent. All of these things have to do with the heart.

He's showing the man he has an unforgiving, arrogant heart. He's going after the heart. Your heart's not changed.

God's not going to forgive you because you're not forgiving this person. The heart's not changed. And here is it, I'm going to wrap it up.

Genuine faith, genuine faith has genuine fruit. If you want to boil this down to something, here it is. Genuine faith has genuine fruit.

So if the guy was really repentant and got back on track and was in right relationship with God, he would have forgave the other person. So all this was was a fruit test. You failed.

Your heart's not right. So God can't forgive you because your heart's not right. You've never truly repented and been changed.

Because had you done that, you would have forgave your fellow person who owed you money. Because when a person is truly converted, there is true fruit. Always.

Always. Here's what the Bible says. There's sincere and real humility when somebody's genuinely converted.

They're not just talking. There's selfless love. There's true repentance.

And there's a love for God and His word and His ways. This is genuine fruit. So if a person doesn't have a forgiving heart, and I've talked to people before, they don't have a forgiving heart.

They're mean, they're arrogant, they're unforgiving, yet they're going to church. I'd say you might want to do what Paul says and examine yourself. Do you not know yourself? Is Jesus Christ in you? Now, we can all struggle with unforgiveness.

But as I said before, there's a big difference between a struggle and a lifestyle. Sometimes we struggle, and the reason we're struggling is because we're convicted. Why are we convicted? Because we're a child of God and we know what the right thing is.

That's why we're convicted. But a person who would just go out, he was forgiven a debt that you can never pay, ever. He was just forgiven that.

And for him to go out and not forgive a small minor debt shows that his heart has not changed, and God cannot forgive him because he never embraced God's forgiveness on his end. That's what this boils down to, the heart. Has the heart truly changed? I don't know everybody in this room necessarily, but has your heart really changed? Listen, owning a Bible doesn't make you a Christian.

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian. What makes you a Christian? Repenting of your sin. Repenting.

Saying, Lord, my heart, my heart needs to be reignited. My heart is not right. I'm confessing, I'm repenting.

Lord, would you change my heart? And then I can forgive others. So I would just encourage you, if you've never done that tonight, you need to do that. You need to do business with God and say, listen, I'm not going in the right direction.

My heart is not right. I repent to that Lord. Will you save me tonight? And that's a prayer he will answer.

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