



Potomac Hills

Presbyterian Church, PCA

By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.
Matthew 18:15–20

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English Standard Version

“Restoration in the Kingdom”

The 63rd Sermon in a series on the Gospel of Matthew entitled
“The King and His Kingdom!”

Matthew 18:15-20

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

*Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us the Scriptures and making us Your people. You have brought us to this amazing Gospel to learn more about your Son, Jesus. We ask You this morning to give us the grace to understand Your hard teaching here. It's hard not simply because Jesus has the ability to say so much in so few words but it's hard because our wills aren't easily bent to obedience. We want to listen to our own hearts instead of Yours. We thank You for this Word, and we pray that You would, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, enable us to bow our hearts to its authority. We pray as well, O Lord, that we would willingly seek the best for others, even when they have **offended**, in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*

INTRODUCTION: “*Have You Ever Dropped Your Phone?*”¹

I recently read an article about another pastor who dropped his phone.

He says, “While heading out the door of a friend's house, I felt it slip out from under my arm. Then came the sickening sound. Splat as it landed flat, but underneath the splat sound was a definite clink. I didn't have to look. I knew when it hit that the screen on my iPhone was shattered.

"Oh no!" my friend cried out, "maybe it's okay?"

"Nope," I said, "I bet it's cracked in a jillion pieces."

Jillion was a slight overestimate, but it was definitely shattered. Thankfully the phone still worked and I found some clear packing tape to hold it together and protect my fingers. So what do you do when your phone looks like a mess of fractured glass? Well, there are several options: **First**, you can buy a new one no matter the cost, even if I am not in my upgrade window. But, have you really priced that option? Ouch! Ridiculously high, besides two newer versions of the iPhone are rumored to be coming out soon. Maybe I should wait!

Second, I could wait for the upgrade window, then get a new one. For me, that's just a little over two weeks away. But then there are those new phones coming out and it seems ridiculous to pay such a high price for something that is going to be more than two versions behind in a few months. Maybe I should wait!

Third, perhaps I can use another phone, maybe with not as many features, but that can still make calls and send text messages. But, I use my phone for so many other daily things — address book, email, flight schedules, weather, Bible software, Facebook, Skype, notes, camera, copying receipts, Calendar, Twitter, Evernote and alarm clock. (And yes, I use every single one of those almost every single day. Maybe I should wait!

Fourth, maybe I can go see another carrier, start a new contract with them, get the latest Android phone that appears to be better with more features, and then cancel my old service in two weeks. Great idea, but... I would have to learn a new phone ecosystem that I don't like as well, I would have to transfer tons of data, and not have some key apps. Maybe I should wait!

I made it less than a week. My eyes were watering from trying to read the screen. My text messages had all sorts of missed typos and the attendant weird autocorrect guesses for my typos automatically "fixed." I couldn't wait! Yet I didn't choose to do any of those four things listed above. I looked up a repair company. Turns out it was only two blocks from my office. I gave them 90 minutes and I had my iPhone looking as good as new — and working flawlessly. I was out about \$100 — ouch! — but after a week of eye strain and embarrassing typos, I was happy to have my old familiar digital brain in tow. Instead of rushing to get a newer model because the old one's screen was fractured, I chose a novel idea in today's world: **I paid the price to repair it!**

So what does this have to do with anything spiritual?

Simple. The problem of fractures happens in almost every kind of relationship. Our choices are very similar to the four choices about your phone. Bottom line, we are tempted in **relationship fractures** to get a newer version of a friend, a spouse, a church, a club, a business partner ... you name the relationship; you know what I mean. But wow! The cost is high and the ethics are questionable. Trading in the old version for a newer model is frequently practiced in relationships. What follows, however, is the floating debris of broken relationships we've left

¹ The Introduction is adapted from the article “*Shattered*” by Phil Ware, Southern Hills Church, Abilene, TX, found in the email newsletter, [Daily Heartlight](#), 6/2/13.

behind. The problem is, this debris washes back up on the shore of our daily lives, pulls at our hearts, and intrudes on our future relationships.

And none of this even deals with the spiritual issues involved in abandoning relationships in ways that displease and dishonor Jesus. So whether the fracture is with a spouse, a sibling, a parent, a business partner, a close friend, or church leaders, the choices are similar. While I can simply get a new _____ (Fill in the blank with the appropriate term!), will this really heal the fractures in my heart and help me (or the other person) get on with a new life? Or will I simply add another layer of debris that washes up on the shore of my life, limits my future, and dishonors my relationship with Jesus as one of his followers. This is not to minimize the hurt caused by these fractures in relationship. When relationships are shattered, deep wounds are left behind. Repair isn't easy. Relationships are never exactly the same and there's a wound that must heal. But, isn't this what God calls us to do? And, will our wound ever really heal if all we do is try to forget the pain and leave the person we believe has caused it?

Colossians 1 teaches us that God paid the price to reconcile us back to Himself at great cost! Now, our Father calls us to be agents of reconciliation in our individual lives. Whether it is in our relationship with brothers and sisters who have sinned against us, marriages caught in conflict or apathy, disagreements caused by prejudice and bigotry, or even with our enemies. For Jesus' healing to be redemptive, we have to make the mission personal.

We don't know when the ultimate time we get our relationship upgrade and all our relationships are perfected in the fully realized Kingdom of God at the Lord's coming. However, we do know that we're called to **fix what is shattered** rather than simply trading in what is broken for a newer model until the same fractures occur and we leave behind more relational debris in the water that we know will wash back up on the shore of our own lives.

So how do we fix what is shattered relationally? Well, that's the main point of our passage this morning, **Matthew 18:15–20**. The focus of Jesus' whole instruction throughout Matthew 18 is our relationship with one another in the Church. What are the proper relationships between members between citizens of the kingdom of heaven? So Jesus tells His disciples that if you're really going to be great in My kingdom, you need to look out for others, in the sense of not causing them to **stumble** in their walk of faith. You need to live your life in such a way, that it is not an **obstruction** to their living the Christian life. You need to make sure that you're not throwing up **obstacles** in front of other believers as they attempt to grow in grace. In other words, it's not good enough to just think about **what's good for you**, because you're now, by grace, part of the family of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now you must think about the needs of the whole family, not just your own needs, but what's in the best interest of the whole family. Now that sets us up for the discussion we see here in verses 15–20. So let's start by looking at ...

v. 15–17: THE NECESSITY OF DISCIPLINE ²

2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the book, *MacArthur's New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16-23*, by Dr. John MacArthur, page 131ff; **And the Sermons, "Forgiveness and Reconciliation" by Dr. Tim Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY, 5/18/08, sermons.redeemer.com; Logos Bible Software 4: *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*; "Disciplining the Brethren, parts 1 & 2" by Dr. J. Ligon Duncan, First Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MS, 12/6/98 and 12/13/98, www.fpcjackson.org; and "The Church as a Self-Disciplining Body" by Dr. Phil Newton, South Woods Baptist Church, Memphis, TN, 3/21/04, www.southwoodsbc.org.**

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Because church discipline is considered outmoded in our day, it seems that we have to be convinced that it is needed. Yet even a casual look at just the evangelical churches of America, much less the broader circle of Christian churches, demonstrates that **missing** church discipline, the so-called "Third Mark of the Church," has left much of the Christian community looking more like the world than the people of God. In light of this, it shouldn't take much to convince the church to restore church discipline to its position as one of the marks of a true church. Unfortunately, that's not the case. But consider these two reasons for it ... first of all ...

1. Christ Commands It

The imperatives in the words of Christ to His church leave no question of what the Lord of the Church desires, *“If your brother sins against you, **go and tell** him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, **take** one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, **tell** it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, **let him be** to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”* In a series of five imperatives or commands (noted by the bold words), Jesus directs the church to engage one another in discipline. These are active terms, *“**go, tell, take, tell,**”* and finally, *“**let him be.**”* And you will notice that He doesn't limit this to the pastors, elders, or deacons of the church. He begins with the singular, *“**you**”* and moves to the plural body of believers *“**the church,**”* so that ultimately, the church as a whole has responsibility to be involved in disciplining its members.

If this were the only occasion that church discipline was mentioned, it would be enough. But we also see Paul addressing a number of New Testament churches, giving instructions on discipline. He told the Roman Christians to watch out for those causing dissensions in the church, **Romans 16:17**, *“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.”* He rebuked the Corinthians for tolerating immorality among their members, and to immediately take action in disciplining the particular member, telling them, **1 Corinthians 5:6**, *“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”*

The Thessalonians were warned to deal with those that did not obey the apostolic instruction in Paul's epistle, **2 Thessalonians 3:14**, *“If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.”* Paul instructed Timothy in his pastoral charge in Ephesus to publicly rebuke spiritual leaders that refused to repent of sin, **1 Timothy 5:19-20**, *“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.²⁰ As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”* On the island of Crete, Titus received instructions about administering church discipline, **Titus 3:10-11**, *“As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.”* Five of the letters to the churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2-3 contain rebukes and upbraiding of the churches. Some of the churches had tolerated false teaching and immoral behavior — having failed in church discipline — so they received the rebuke of Christ Himself.

So first, Christ command Church discipline, but second, the nature of...

2. The Church Requires It

We cannot presume upon the spiritual condition of the church. You are part of the body of Christ and therefore have responsibility for the overall health of the church, just as much as the officers of the church. Persistent sin tolerated in one member can influence the same sin in any one of us. That's why one of the steps of discipline is ***“tell it to the church.”*** In other words, the church, though loving every member, recognizes the leavening effects of sin. Singling out one member is only done as a last resort, but it's done because of the damaging effects of unrepentant sin in the body. I believe that the low view of the church today is symptomatic of neglecting to discipline members caught up in persistent sin.

“But, we're all sinners,” you might say. That's true, and we **do** need the reminder! Yet what is spoken of in the text, ***“If your brother sins against you”*** seems to be something that causes a doctrinal breach in the body or mars the church's testimony, or creates disunity, divisions, and factions. The level of seriousness warrants our attention.

Yet having said that, we cannot deal with another's sins if we fail to deal with our own. Personal purity should precede engaging others to deal with their sins. As Dr. John MacArthur explained, “A believer who is not concerned about his own purity will have no willing obedience to help protect the purity of the church.” The lack of church discipline in our day can usually be traced back to neglecting one's own spiritual disciplines to grow in grace and holiness.

But, let's face it, Christ's command is a wake-up call for each of us to realize that as part of the body of Christ, we have an ongoing responsibility for guarding our own spiritual lives, and helping one another to reflect the image of Christ. We are called a holy people throughout the New Testament. We are indwelt by the Spirit — both personally and corporately. So we must not brush-off Christ's command as though it applies to other Christians but not to me. Most of the time, the need is not to bring an issue all the way to the church but it is the concern of one Christian for another — exhorting, admonishing, explaining from the Scriptures, and calling another brother or sister to repentance. So these verses introduce us to the necessity of church discipline, but these verses also give us ...

v. 15–17: **THE PROCESS OF DISCIPLINE** ³

we often say, “When all else fails, read the directions.” The words of Jesus here give us clear directions on the process of church discipline. And in that process, the first step is ...

1. ***“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.”***

This calls for the type of fellowship where people can honestly talk to one another about their differences, shortcomings, and sins. When I sense there's sin, to take action is a loving act. Every marriage counselor knows that where wrongs have taken place and no communication follows, that marriage is on the road to failure. But the reproof should be private. The person who feels offended may have misunderstood. This is the time to gather information and to learn.

When approached by a fellow member of the body of Christ about any matter, the Matthew passage says we have **a responsibility to listen** — ***“If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”*** When confronted, my first tendency is to think, *Here we go again!* This is quickly followed by raising my defense mechanisms. I immediately want to justify my actions. Learning to listen, however, stretches me. One way I try to listen is by summarizing to

³ Part of this section is adapted from the article *“The Spirit of Church Discipline”* by Dr. D. Donald Bubna, in *Leading Your Church Through Conflict And Reconciliation*, by Marshall Shelley, ed., pages 235–245.

the person what he or she has said. I ask the person to correct my summary; I want him or her to know I have really listened.

Once in a staff meeting I was upset about some things that happened, where I didn't think we did a good job. And I was pretty irritated! And wanting the other pastors to easily perceive my irritation, I responded strongly and firmly. Later that day, Dave Dorst came to me and said, "Doc, I'm not sure you understood how you handled that." He then explained how they perceived my words and actions. I immediately saw how I overreacted, and I had to go to each of the pastors and apologize. And they were all very gracious about it. His reproof brought direction to me, strengthened my relationship with him because he cared enough to confront me, and allowed me to mend fences with the other pastors. These kind of actions should be just be part of how we do business.

But honestly, that doesn't always work. Sometimes I can be pretty stubborn, and on those **extremely rare occasions**, you have to move to step 2, which is ...

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

If the first step doesn't bring the needed response, it is time to involve some more people. The new people aren't there to substantiate our complaint but to bring new objectivity as God gives them spiritual insights. Again, the emphasis is on **listening**. God wants us to make an effort to understand what is being communicated. The risk is greater now, and although moving into the group process is scary, it does improve the attention level. The winning of a brother or sister is not apt to be a simple, onetime contact; it will most likely be a series of contacts. Restoration takes a lot of nurture.

This is the hardest step, and often the most telling. If the person understands why you've involved others, then they'll take your concerns more seriously. But if they get angry that you've involved others, it's much harder to get them to hear your concerns. In fact, they'll often accuse you of sin in having involved other members of the church. You need to be careful here, don't just show up with others, let them know you're bringing others with you, and why they're coming along. If he or she still agrees to meet, then that's a good sign.

But to stay with our scenario, I might get angry and defensive and refuse to listen to you. And in that case, you would have to move to step 3, which is ...

3. "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church."

In Jesus' time, there was not yet a structured local church, so most of His instructions would be based on the synagogue. The church, first used here in Matthew 18, didn't yet have the form it would take in the book of Acts and in the Epistles. This aids us in understanding the importance of the **principle** of communicating a situation requiring discipline to the larger body. I'm not certain that there's only one way to **"tell it to the church."** Scripture seems ambiguous about this; when this happens, I lean towards flexibility in carrying out principles. Thus, in our church, we use our full Session (the Board of Elders). 1 or 2 cases reach this level each year.

In such instances, the elders work with the people involved, and it usually involves some sort of counseling, mentoring, teaching, and further engagement in the life of the church. We only reveal the names in those extreme cases involving excommunication. Regretfully — I sometimes have to tell you what **we all already know**: that our church is not untouched by tragedy, and that some of our families are in crucial struggles. You need to know that in these cases, your elders are concerned and were working with two hands extended: one of mercy and grace toward healing, and the other of the unchanging standard of God's Word. When you're

aware of these situation, then I would ask you to love these people, to pray for them, and to abstain from judgment; and to pray for the elders who were making difficult decisions. But sometimes we have to make those difficult decisions, and move to step 4, which is ...

4. “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

This is excommunication. When you join the church, you become a “Communicant Member.” Thus, excommunication is removing your communicant status. Essentially, we’re saying that the Profession of Faith we heard from you when you joined the church was a false profession. We treat the person as a unbeliever, because he or she is not walking as a believer. It means to keep loving him as Jesus loved sinners. It means to reach out to her in witness, but not to relate to her as a member of the body of Christ. It means that any further interactions with him is focused on talking to him about Jesus. Like all evangelistic outreach, the goal is to bring a soul to Christ and back into the functioning body. So that’s the process, but what’s the point. What’s ...

WCF 30:3: THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 30, Paragraph 3 gives us five purposes for church discipline. There it says, “*Church censures are necessary, for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren, for deterring of others from like offenses, for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump, for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the Gospel, and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer His covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.*”

1. Restoration to The Body of Christ through gaining the offending brother.
2. Deterring others in The Body of Christ from committing similar offenses.
3. Purging the leaven, which is an old-fashioned way of saying maintaining the purity of the church, precisely because it’s The Body of Christ.
4. Vindicating the honor of Christ, and the profession of the Gospel of Christ.
5. Preventing the wrath of God upon the church for not maintaining the purity of The Body of Christ.

Perhaps this list could be accurately reduced to two primary reasons: concern for the soul of the sinner and concern for the health of the church.

And finally ... and I really struggled with what word to choose, because there were three, and they all fit. Originally, I called it the **Authority** for Discipline, then I changed it to the **Assurance** for Discipline, and then I thought it was more accurate to call it the **Ratification** of Discipline. Any of those work, but for now, let’s stick with the first choice ...

v. 18–20: THE AUTHORITY FOR DISCIPLINE⁴

The reason why Jesus is so insistent on this process of church discipline is precisely because He has given such authority to His church, and delegated to it the power to bind and loose. That does not mean that church authority always follows the will of Jesus, or that Jesus always acts the way the church determines. But it does show the high regard that Jesus has for the church, because it is the company where Christ is present and the Father is at work.

⁴ Part of this section is adapted from *Opening Up Matthew* by Dr. Ian Campbell, pages 113–115 and the article “*Philosophy Versus Method: Big Idea Preaching’s Adaptability*” by Dr. Scott Gibson, in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People*, by Dr. Keith Willhite, ed., pages 167–168.

Now, this is a great example of our need to study and understand **context**. There are scores of sermons on prayer that have been based on the wording of Matthew 18:19–20, “*Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*”¹⁹ *Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.*”²⁰ *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*”

At first glance, Jesus endorses prayer offered in groups of two or three and promises that if Christians agree together about a prayer request somehow they bind the Father in heaven. Good sense, if nothing else, would drive us to scrutinize the **context** of those verses (After all, if two or three Redskin fans agree to ask God for victory in an upcoming game against the Cowboys and if a few Cowboy fans pray for a Redskins defeat, which group is God bound to answer?). Actually, Jesus’ Words here have **little to do with the subject of prayer** but instead with how sinning Christians should be restored. In the immediate context, the “*two or three*” does not refer to a small group prayer meeting but to the witnesses summoned in verse 16, “*take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*” All that Jesus says, therefore, applies to the church dealing with someone who has sinned. That said, there’s a great promise given in these verses, and that’s the **assurance** that Christ is spiritually present when His people are called upon to do hard things.

You know, facing conflict head-on is one of the hardest things that we ever do. In our families, many of you know what it is to have to deal with a prodigal child. You don’t want to have to be tough. You don’t want to have to enforce discipline, but you know that you have to for the sake of that child. You know you have to for the sake of the family. It would be easier to deny it, to pretend like it’s not there, but that person’s life will be destroyed, and the whole life of the family will be disrupted. Discipline is hard. It’s hard to discipline a disobedient child. But the consequences of not doing it are even greater.

It’s the same in the church. We’re a family. God wants us to be united, and He wants us to be pure. And He’s not willing to be satisfied with one out of two. And so He says, my friends, you are accountable to one another and especially to the elders of the church that the Lord has placed over you as spiritual shepherds who only want the good of your soul. So listen to them for they want to see you stand before the throne faultless with exceedingly great glory and to hear the words “*well done.*” And so when they speak to us, the quiet, passionate, prayerful, pleading word of rebuke and admonition, they do it only because they want us to be like Christ. May God help us to accept that. I know this is already a long sermon, but there’s one last point that needs to be made regarding church discipline, and that’s ...

APPLICATION: *The Context of Discipline*⁵

And the context of church discipline is **CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**. There are over thirty of you who attend regularly, but are not members yet. **I’m begging you. Please join.** I think you’re hurting both yourself and the church **by not committing to church membership**. And yes, there is no verse that says, “Thou shalt join the church.” But there’s a reason for that. Throughout the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, belonging to the covenant community of God’s people ... is **ASSUMED**. Let me give you some examples ...

⁵ The Application is adapted from the article, “*Is Church Membership Biblical?*” by Matt Chandler, Village Church, Dallas, TX, May/June 2011, www.9Marks.org. There are several more worthwhile articles about church membership and church discipline on the 9Marks site.

In **Hebrews 13:17** we read, *“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.”* Two questions immediately come up. First, if there is no biblical requirement to belong a local church, then which leaders should an individual Christian obey and submit to? Second, and more personally, who will I as a pastor give an account for? Regarding the first question, the Scriptures clearly command Christians to submit to and honor the elders, **1 Timothy 5:17**, *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”* If there is no understanding of local church membership, then who are we to submit to and obey? Is it anyone with the title “elder” from any church? Should you as a Christian obey and submit to those loons at Westboro Baptist? In order to obey Scripture, must you picket soldiers’ funerals, as the pastor of Westboro seems to imply?

Regarding the second question, the Scriptures clearly command an elder body to care for specific people (We see that in 1 Peter 5 and Acts 20). Will I as a pastor be held accountable for all the Christians in Northern Virginia? Loudoun County? Leesburg? There are many churches in this area that I have strong theological and philosophical differences with. Will I give account for what they teach in their Sunday Schools, how they spend their money, and what they do concerning missions?

After considering questions of authority and submission, the second issue that comes up is the biblical teaching on church discipline that we’ve been addressing all morning. You see it in several places, but none so clearly as **1 Corinthians 5:1-12**. In this text the Apostle Paul confronts the church in Corinth for approving of a man walking in blatant, unrepentant sexual immorality. The Corinthians are celebrating this as God’s grace, but Paul warns them that this type of wickedness shouldn’t make them boast, but rather mourn. He calls them arrogant and tells them to remove this man for the destruction of his flesh and the hopeful salvation of his soul. He pulls no punches, **1 Corinthians 5:11-12**, *“But now I am writing to you **not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother** if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler — not even to eat with such a one.”¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? **Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?**”* My question out of this text is simple: How can you kick someone “out” if there is no “in”? If there is no local commitment to a covenant community, then how do you remove someone from that community? Church discipline just doesn’t work if local church membership doesn’t exist.

We could go on and on here, asking questions about how we could be obedient to the commands of God in 1 Corinthians 12 or Romans 12 if we aren’t connected to a local covenant community. When you begin to look at these texts it becomes clear that God’s plan for His church is that we would belong to a local covenant community. If you view church as some sort of take it or leave it operation, then you severely limit the likelihood of your growing into spiritual maturity. Your growth in godliness can and will suffer.

For instance, as I interact with others in my own church, **right here**, my own laziness is exposed, as is my lack of patience, my prayerlessness, and my hesitancy to confront sinners. Yet this interaction also gives me the opportunity to be lovingly confronted by brothers and sisters who are in the trenches with me, as well as a safe place to confess and repent. But when church is just a place you attend without ever joining, you just might consider whether you’re always leaving whenever your heart begins to be exposed by the Spirit, and the real work is beginning to

happen. What's the bottom line? I strongly believe that local church membership is a question of **biblical obedience**, not personal preference. Please consider that ... carefully and prayerfully.

But this sermon is about church discipline, not church membership. So let me ask you ... Have you ...

CONCLUSION: *Blown it lately?*

As you know, we all fail in many ways. Moral failure. Marital failure. Parental failure. Business failure. The list could go on and on. The question is not whether we will fail, but what we do with the failure? This is such a huge question that Matt Chandler, teaching pastor at the Village Church in Dallas, TX, says, "***The litmus test of whether or not you understand the gospel is what you do when you fail.***" We need to believe and act upon the fact that in light of God's grace, failure is not final! The implications of this gospel bottom line will affect how we deal with problems in marriage, parenting issues, workplace conflict and every other area of our life where we tend to fall into sin.

Our passage this morning began by saying, "*If your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault.***" I find it very interesting that that phrase, "**go and tell,**" is used throughout the New Testament by both Jesus and the Apostles. And it always is referring to evangelism. Except here. But the desired outcome is the same. When you "**go and tell**" someone the gospel, the desired outcome is that they would, **Mark 1:15**, "*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.***" And when you "**go and tell**" your brother that he has sinned against you, the desired outcome is that he would, "**repent and believe in the gospel.**" ... And that's something we all need to do. Perhaps we should start now.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

Our Lord and our God, thank You that You have given us a King. In this passage, we see Your Son. Open our eyes that we might see our sin and then see our Savior. Help us to obey this hard teaching about church discipline. And when confronted, help us to repent and believe in the Gospel. For we so desperately need it. We need it to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

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2 Timothy 3:16-17

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."