

**THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH**  
**Taught by Bishop John Rodgers with an introduction by Bruce Bickel**  
**Session: February 24, 2012**

**Bruce Bickel:** Father, as we reflect upon the beauties of Christ and the magnificence and the glory of His works, we stand in awe of our need for mercy and grace. Father, we just pray that you would open our eyes once again that we might behold you in all of your glory for Jesus' sake. Amen.

We've come to a point in our study on the formation of the church, we're looking at the necessity and significance of church membership. We've talked about a lot of things so far, but we're to the point now talking about a healthy church and the church's understanding of membership. We touched on that last week. I gave you a handout of the 58 one another commands. The Greek word "allos," which means one another, is used over 100 times in the New Testament; 58 of those are commands to the believing body of church members who are to practice these things on each other so that we learn how to develop relationships so that we can take it into the world.

Now these are commands, brothers. These are not suggestions. When it says love one another, exhort one another, you have the list on the handout I gave you. I'm going to go through these in greater detail next week. But these are commands. These are not suggestions. It's not like saying, "If you'd like to do that, go ahead and do it." Can you imagine a young recruit at Parris Island Marine Base, where the drill sergeant says, "Right face," and the young recruit says, "Eh, check with me later." {LAUGHTER} These are not suggestions. These are commands. These are in the imperative tense in the Greek, and that means this, "Do it."

If you wanted to develop a good membership understanding, we need to take a look at these one another commands. They can be broken down into four major areas—our relation to one another, our reception of one another, our response to one another, and our restoration of one another. One of the four areas of these one another commands is sometimes relationships go a little bit south and we need some understanding about how do we resurrect and how do we restore that sinning person into the fellowship of the church.

I've asked Bishop John Rodgers to teach us today on that last fellowship aspect, which would be the restoration, under that heading of church discipline. So Bishop Rodgers, if you'd come up, we're looking forward to your teaching today. Let's ask the Lord just to be with him as the Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. John, thank you, sir.

**Bishop Rodgers:** Thank you, Bruce. I agreed to this because I thought he was going to be absent. {LAUGHTER} The Lord be with you.

**Audience Members:** *And also with you.*

Lord, as we address this subject, help us to keep in mind that we're your agents, that discipline ultimately is your discipline, for we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

You all got the sheet. If not, there are a bunch of them over there. I brought about 50 of them, so we ought to all have a sheet because we're going to go down the list. There are a lot of points, so I'm going to move relatively quickly. If I start to tell too many stories, wave at me or we'll never get through.

Before we get to the actual points here, I'd like to just read one passage that's sort of a key passage to keep in mind, I think. I'll make one comment about it; I won't exegete it. It's from Hebrews 12:5-11, "5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the

discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.’ <sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup>If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup>For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. <sup>11</sup>For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

My only comment about that is that it’s positive. Church discipline is fundamentally positive. It proceeds from the love of God and seeks the training and restoration of any who are in need of it. Just keep that in mind. That’s the context for what we have to say today.

Beginning with definitions. What is discipline? Surprisingly, the fundamental idea behind the word “discipline” is training. Training. If you look in the dictionary, you wouldn’t normally, that’s not what we normally think about, but that’s what it is. Discipline is training for excellence, training to achieve and maintain a standard. Webster’s dictionary lists several ways that the word “discipline” is used. First, he is a disciplined person. This is a disciplined group; that is, they have a clear focus, goals, standards, and they work at attaining and maintaining it. They’re serious about. They know what they’re doing and they’re doing it seriously, and they train to achieve it and maintain it.

Second, what is your discipline? That means what is it that you’re, in academic terms, what’s your expertise? What do you work hard at? And then thirdly, he disciplines his children or he disciplines his team. Trains them, corrects them, coaches them, punishes them if needed; even kicks them off the team if they are disruptive and unwilling to repent.

It’s this latter that we normally think of when we hear the word “discipline.” Correction and punishment; especially formal. If we are seeking to reach and maintain a standard in Christ, then we are seeking to help one another in that endeavor. See all these one another passages that Bruce is going to talk more about. This is part of the discipline of a congregation, it seems to me, that all these things are going on all the time. We would greatly minimize the need for corrective, formal corrective discipline, if we were all modeling and encouraging one another in the discipline of our daily life in the congregation. Rebuke one another, teach one another, all the one another passages are really, in effect, part of the discipline of a congregation.

What is church discipline? We can define church discipline as follows, in two senses—a broad sense and then a narrow sense. In the broadest sense, it’s the exercise of the members of the church to attain and maintain the declared standards of the church—by education, by training, by example, by coaching, and if necessary, by rebuke, calls for repentance, punishment and even if necessary, expulsion, always with the hope of repentance and return.

Let me read it again. We can define church discipline in the broadest sense as the exercise of the members of the church to attain and maintain the declared standards of the church—by education, training, example, coaching, and if necessary, by rebuke, calls for repentance, punishment, or if necessary, expulsion, with the hope of repentance and reconciliation.

In the narrower sense, church discipline or ecclesiastical discipline, is the formal correction of church members, leaders included, who are violating the standards of the church.

How significant is church discipline? The answer is it’s essential; not an option, but it’s essential. It’s

needed to maintain the clear purpose and standards of the church. It's needed to educate the whole church as to the nature and importance of the purpose and standards of the church. It's necessary for accountability to that purpose and standards, both for the leaders and the members.

It's obvious that to have church discipline in this narrower sense, you need two things. One, a clear statement of the purpose and standards of the church. You cannot hold people accountable to something that nobody knows what it is and it's vague. In the family, you know, you can't hold your teenager accountable to something the teenage hasn't heard you say.

Secondly, there needs to be a part of the body, or a portion of the body, or all the body—there needs to be somebody that's going to hold people accountable.

I grew up in the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church is now, as far as I can tell, no longer maintains the standards that would allow it to be called a visible church. It may be a religious organization, but it does not teach the Gospel according to the Holy Scripture, celebrate the ordinance or sacraments according to Christ's institution, and exercise discipline. The net result is slowly it became something else. So a number of us had to move out. Either that or...we tried for 40 years to correct it, it wasn't that quickie, but after a while, sooner or later, you get the picture, this is the outfit that's made a decision to go in another direction, and it's no longer a Christian visible institution according to classical Anglican teaching, according to the Bible.

No clear statement of faith, a vague statement about ethics, strange things got to be absolute, but not biblical things, and nobody holding anybody accountable. The only thing that you could get in trouble for, when I was a Presbyterian in the Episcopal Church, was crossing boundaries, as a Bishop, crossing physical boundaries into somebody else's bailiwick. That's why, when they consecrated me overseas, I was no longer under the canons and disciplines of the Episcopal Church; therefore, I could go around trying to gather those congregations that were leaving and they couldn't touch me because the only thing they could touch me for was crossing these boundaries, but I wasn't under their discipline, so they'd get mad at me and they'd write my boss in Singapore. He'd write back and say, "Well, if you were doing your job, I wouldn't have had to send him there." {LAUGHTER} And it ended there because they couldn't...I wasn't under their discipline. I was under the guy in Singapore's discipline, but no theirs.

You see, you have to have, you have to have a clear statement of the standards of the church. That's why you have creeds, confessions and catechisms. Read sometime Luther's shorter catechism. It's so pastoral, it makes me almost want to weep it's so good. So warm. So clear. Nobody has any doubt, it seems to me, if you're a serious Lutheran, about what it is that church stands for. Now the question is, do they have anybody that holds anybody accountable? Those both are essential.

This importance of ecclesiastical discipline, or church discipline, is reflected in the history of the church. At the Reformation, for example, we spoke of the church in several ways. First, biblical terms—the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the family of God, the people of God. We also spoke in creedal terms—the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic—and we can interpret all those, [UNCLEAR] would do so. By the way, Catholic meant universal; it didn't mean Roman. It's one of my pet peeves is that when somebody says he's Catholic, well, Catholic means to hold the faith of the Gospel for the whole world and invite the whole world in. It doesn't mean Roman Catholic. It's fine for Roman Catholic's to be Roman Catholic, but don't give them the word for cryin' out loud. {LAUGHTER}

The church also spoke of the church, the visible church, in three terms—faithfully preaching and teaching of the Gospel and the Word of God. That was one essential mark of the church. The second essential mark of the church was that the ordinances of God, or the sacraments, come from a more

sacramental side, be administered according to Christ's institution, baptism and the Lord's Supper. The third mark of the church was proper, Godly, ecclesiastical discipline. Where you don't see those three marks...suppose you're moving into town. Now here's a group in the corner. Are they occult or are they part of the visible church? What do you do ask? Well are they preaching the Gospel and the Word of God faithfully? Do they celebrate the sacraments according to Christ's institution? And are they exercising Godly discipline? Boy!

Now strangely enough, in the Anglican tradition, article 19 doesn't mention the third one. It says right preaching, right celebration, but it assumes somebody is seeing to that. However, part of the Anglican formularies, or the homilies, in the homilative [UNCLEAR] day, or Pentecost, it lists all three—boom, boom, boom. No ecclesiastical discipline, you're failing one of the essential marks of the church, so we have said down through history and down through from the Reformation on.

What does ecclesiastical discipline cover? What is it appropriate for you in the name of Christ to hold each other accountable to? Two things—doctrine, the proper teaching of the church; and behavior, holy living. Ethics. This is accountable. We're all accountable to this.

Luther, interestingly enough, said, "And the more fundamental of the two," if you're talking about correction, "the more fundamental of the two is that you must correct people's teaching, because if you lose the teaching, you lose the instrument that will correct the behavior." The first thing to go, historically, in a body, in a group, is not the ethics. The first thing to go is the teaching, and then it works itself out. People are more cautious to change basic ethical behavior, but they will eventually, if they're not held accountable to the standards of the Word of God.

*Audience Member:* [UNCLEAR]...

The essential marks? First, the proper teaching of the Word of God, centered in the Gospel. It must be Gospel centered, but you have the whole counsel of God is involved. You're not just rehearsing the very central evangelical message. You're talking about the whole. The whole of Scripture read in the light of Christ, in the light of the Gospel. Secondly, the proper administration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. And thirdly, proper ecclesiastical discipline.

*Audience Member:* I'm sorry, I mean the reasons to discipline?

Just really two. One was to fall short of the doctrine, to introduce heresy into the life of the church, and the second is to live contrary to the standards of the Scripture, as this church understands them and holds them.

*Don:* I just wanted to make a comment, John. I think that you're absolutely right about the fact that the first thing to go before ethics and behavior is doctrine. The PCUSA I think is a prime example that, and the Episcopal Church as well, where "Well, we don't really believe that there was a historical Adam and Eve," and everything like that and, "We don't really believe in the six days of creation," and then it just goes on and on, "we don't really believe biblical inerrancy, the miracles." You come down to women elders and you come down also then to we have denominations approving of the ordination of homosexuals.

And homosexual behavior and marriage and the whole bit.

*Don:* Bad doctrine produces bad behavior.

It does. It does. If you do not have clear teaching, what will happen is the culture will define you.

Instead of evangelizing the culture, it's the culture that will evangelize the church. I lived through it. We fought it for forty years. I did everything. Remember when the Russians came into Czechoslovakia with the tanks? The Czechs lay down in front of the tanks and they stopped. I laid down in front of this thing going on in the Episcopal Church and it didn't stop. {LAUGHTER} It just went right on. We didn't realize how hooked up we were to the culture.

Think of how the culture has changed since you and I were kids, I mean, it's light years. We have really, we have moved miles and miles down a relativistic path.

When Luther says that it's important to keep the doctrine as the tool for also affecting the behavior, he isn't saying that behavior doesn't matter. He's just saying the chief instrument is the biblical teaching.

What is the fifth point? What is the personal perennial necessity of ecclesiastical disciplines? It's very simple. It's the fall. We're all fallen. Every institution, every visible historical institution is vulnerable to corruption because of the fallenness of the culture in which they're set, and the fallenness of us who are within, including the church. We're fallible, constantly threatened by sinful distortion. Out of this, at the Reformation, came that slogan, "Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda." The church reformed and ever reforming. Why ever reforming? Because we keep slipping and we have to keep at it. This means that every church must have ways built in, and means built in, to address the need for formal discipline as well as the informal discipline that we should be exercising all the time. It will surely be needed.

I helped form a group called the Anglican Mission in America. Two of us. It was due to...well, that's a long story. {LAUGHTER} Anyway, we got started. I was consecrated in 2000, in January of 2000, Chuck and I. We came back, sent here to gather those congregations that were leaving the Episcopal Church because they could no longer, with any conscience, remain in their diocese. You go to a diocesan meeting and you would find yourself jeered at if you took a stand on anything biblical. We were asked to financially support that which the head of the church said was sin. So it became impossible, really.

I was sent back to gather these people with Chuck. Within two months, we got a word from one congregation writing to us saying, "We're getting some rather strange teaching going on in our church." We said, "Well, what is it?" They said, "This man is teaching, and our clergy seem to agree with it, even to they've had to sign on to the formularies that we had, the Anglican formularies, the articles and all that, they're teaching that when Jesus became incarnate, the whole world was reconciled. You don't need to repent and believe because it's already been done. And secondly, the cross was kind of beside the point."

We wrote back and said, "This is incompatible with your statement, your vows or ordination and your statement of faith as a congregation. Cease and desist this teaching. Come and see us. It must be something we don't understand that you're thinking. Or leave." Now since we had decided that each congregation would own its own property, they could make that decision. They left. That was within two months of trying to start an orthodox movement within the Anglican people. Within two months.

We had had no discipline. Where would that have gone? Well it would have affected everybody sooner or later because it would have said "Well it doesn't really matter."

Principles for how to exercise church discipline. It must be done for four positive reasons—the love of God, the protection of the congregation, the affirmation of the mission of the church, and the restoration of the person's disciplined.

Let me just say a word or two about those different...

*Ted: Bishop, could you say those again?*

Sure. First ecclesiastical discipline seeks to honor god—God’s word, God’s purpose and his love. He didn’t call all of us into being just to neglect us. He disciplines his children, right? We honor him when we exercise...the care for his Word, when we pay attention to what we’ve understood his Word to be and created and the confession and then catechisms. We’re concerned for the congregation. If you do not exercise discipline, by degrees, things happen within the congregation. Either both moral or straight doctrinal discipline.

First, if somebody’s doing something that’s clearly contrary, and nobody says anything, people say, “Well, it can’t be as bad as I thought. They really aren’t that serious about this.” That’s stage one. Stage two, “Well, if they don’t say anything about it, maybe I’ll join in on that.” Stage three—if it’s been permitted, people start joining in on it, then it’s actually seen as advisory.

Let’s just take the Episcopal Church right now. We struggle with the whole issue of the ordination of women. The first step was, “Well, some of us think it’s biblical. Just give us permission to do it.” Before I left, it was mandated that you must ordain women. Now it’s happening in terms of the homosexual community. We just had a Bishop issue a word in his diocese in Philadelphia that “If you refuse to conduct a wedding of two men or two women, you will be subject to ecclesiastical discipline” It’s gone from permission to formal statement of doctrine, now to mandated. Those are the stages. And it will happen.

*Audience Member: Bishop, [UNCLEAR] that goes directly against the grain of the church, I mean, that goes against the teachings of the Word of God.*

It certainly does. What you have to conclude is that well the Word of God is fallible in certain areas, the ones that you don’t like. That’s in part of the clear teaching, I mean, it’s very hard to...you can argue some things, but you can’t really argue about that. It’s so clearly stated in Scripture.

*Audience Member: It also concludes that they serve a different God.*

True.

*Audience Member: They serve of human imagination, not biblical revelation.*

Yeah, that’s true. I remember one lady was reported to have said to her pastor, “My God would never do such a thing. I just hold somebody accountable,” and he said, “Madam, your God would never do anything. He is a figment of your imagination.” There is a sense in which, if you neglect the Scripture, then you are subject to be shaped by “another god” and by the culture, primarily.

*Audience Member: I’m just curious. Do you believe any of the mainline churches [UNCLEAR] or are they all [UNCLEAR]?*

The culture wars have pretty much hit every part of, actually every of the, all the mainline churches and most of the parts of the church that are in Western culture where the enlightenment really took a huge, took the culture, it seems to me, in large measure.

There’s much good in the enlightenment about certain levels, but when you start making it that we can redefine God according to our reason, fallen reason, then we get into great, great difficulty. It was for a reason that God revealed himself in the historical beginning starting with Abraham and culminating in

Christ and in the inspiration of Holy Scripture. If we could do it on our own, why go through all that, including the crucifixion and resurrection. It doesn't make any sense, really. So it really is a repudiation of our faith, ultimately.

*Ted: I think what you often see, and I've seen this on the websites of those kinds of churches, you see the expression, "God is still speaking." So it's not so much, they don't so much say the Bible is wrong, they just say God is giving us new revelation insight, which in a sense amends what came before.*

Well actually, while we were fighting this, I just refer to the Episcopal Church because that's my background, the same can be said in the Presbyterian tradition, the Methodist tradition, the Lutheran tradition. I would assume there are Baptists that do the same thing if you depart from the Word of God. That's right. They'll just say, "Revelation is progressive and Jesus is redefined." Actually now, it seems to me, if I hear rightly, in the Episcopal Church, and the presiding Bishop, Christ is simply the embodiment of the millennial goals. The UN millennial goals, yeah. That's who Christ is. He kind of embodies that, you know, you can see it, it's an example.

*Audience Member: Didn't she also say that Christ is the only way to heaven puts God in an awfully small box?*

In a box, yes she did. You see, she hasn't got a clue. Has not got a clue.

First God, then second...

*Sig: Have the Methodists not ordained gay men and women in...?*

Methodists are split right down the middle. Those clergy that have been shaped at Asbury are solid evangelical clergy, except for Arminianism, but that's another whole question. {LAUGHTER} That's a battle we can have amongst ourselves about what the Scriptures really teach.

They're evangelically minded. If any of the other seminaries have had it, they're all way out there. And that's true of the Episcopal Church. That's why we had to start Trinity. Trinity is to Anglicanism in this country what Asbury is to the Methodist tradition.

*Tom: Going back to what you said about standards a while ago. I have one question and then one comment. You talked about a statement that Luther made.*

Yeah, Luther said that "It's more fundamental to maintain the doctrinal standards," including not only the teachings about Christ and all that, but also ethical teachings. What he would include, say, in his catechism, which was his attempt to instruct the whole church, is its more important to maintain that, not more important, more fundamental to maintain that than to correct behavior because it's by that that you correct behavior. If you lose that, if you corrupt the creeds and all of that and write your own, then what have you got left? Nothing. The culture, actually, you end up inculcating the wrong things. You actually discipline in the wrong direction.

*Tom: I was just going to suggest one of the great statements of [UNCLEAR] as I've seen in a long time is the Jerusalem...*

The Jerusalem Declaration is great. It's a great statement for Anglicans because it includes the articles.

*Tom: And the Creeds.*

Oh yeah. Sure. Creeds. First, in discipline you honor God. You're being faithful to the Lord because it's his discipline you're trying to exercise, in grace and in love. Secondly, you're concerned for the congregation, because if you don't do this, it will eventually spread like leaven, evil leaven.

Thirdly, you're worried about what the world sees in you. Remember Paul said to the Jews of his day, "You have made the name of the Lord blasphemed among the nations. The way you have lived, the way you have taught, has actually brought God into disrepute." Well what does the world look at and see in the mainline churches today? Is that really going to give them a challenge? No, it's going to encourage them in their wrong direction. Every congregation is meant to be a kind of beacon of holy living, a colony of heaven, imperfect as it may be. But if we are living a different message, totally...they all say we're hypocrites anyway, you know, outside, because we take a high standard and we don't live to it perfectly. So we need to explain that we can have a high standard, a biblical standard, that we call fall short because we know that God's forgiving and is working with us; he's not done with us yet. We can also say come join us and add one more hypocrite. {LAUGHTER} But we are to manifest a visible difference.

It's kind of embarrassing to me, actually, that the Mormons manifest a seriousness about their disciplines that puts most of our congregations to shame. Two years, of your life, every young person. Now, fortunately, I don't know that much about Mormonism. I know some of the strange teachings that they have, but fortunately their ethical behavior is somewhat in line with Scripture, so they're not representing kind of crazy stuff.

***Don:** Coming from the theoretical and the practical [UNCLEAR], have you experienced in your congregation, you don't have to go into specific names or anything, but have you experienced in your congregation or your time as a Bishop someone who has been disciplined and been restored, and without going into a whole lot of detail, how did that take place?*

Okay. I'll get to that if I don't tell you too many stories. It's coming up.

***Bruce:** I'll cover that next week also.*

Gong to cover it next week also. Alright. The last thing, the fourth positive purpose is the restoration, the correction and restoration of the person or persons being disciplined. Paul says he cast them out in order that they might know the Lord and repent.

I should add one other thing. Sorry. Go back to the thing about the congregation. Paul says "certain forms of this discipline should be public so that the church will fear." In other words people will realize in the congregation how important this is. I'll come back to that in a minute, when we talk about the different...

Now the principles of how church discipline is to be exercised. It must be done according to the four purposes that I've mentioned—the honoring of God, the protection and encouragement of the congregation in Godly living, the mission of the church, part of our outreach is that people see us and know that we're unified and we're living under the power of Christ, and then to lead people to repentance and reconciliation.

Secondly, it's to be done in stages. Suppose somebody is really doing something...Paul spots a man living with his father's wife, as he does in Corinthians. Here are the stages. In Matthew 18:15-20, it says first one goes to one. One of you rebuked me. I thought that was appropriate. When I was a little flip when somebody said, "What do you do if a congregation is not doing all these things," and I said, "Move," that's an easy thing to say. We didn't move for 40 years; we tried to change things. It had to get



to a stage where the evil of the Philistines was such that it was time to move. It may be that you're called to say in a tough congregation, for a time, but that should be...it seems to me at least, a very special call. It could even be an Isaiah call—they will not listen to you. I don't know. But you'd better hear that from the Lord, otherwise, it seems to me, we all need to be in congregations where the Word is being properly preached and taught and the ordinance, the sacraments, celebrated and ecclesiastical discipline is taken seriously. I apologized for being so flippant. Thank you for calling me to halt.

First you go one on one. If your brother has ought against, you have ought against your brother, you go. If he will not listen to you, you take several with you. If he will not listen to them, you take them to the church.

Now, the church can be the representative body that's dealing with this discipline. If the discipline is in its most extreme form, which is expulsion, then that has to become public because the whole body has to treat this person a certain way and also they need to hear. As Paul says, they need to be aware of this. They need to know how serious this is. This is all very foreign to our American *laissez faire*. We're talking about tough stuff here, and it must be done with great prayer...at least as I understand it. When the Lord says, "Whatsoever you decide, I will decide," he's talking about you having gotten his mind and will, carefully and in prayer, before you act. So it should be done in stages and in prayer.

There are levels of discipline. First, you can remove people from leadership. Simply speak to them personally and say, "I would like you to step down from leadership at the present time. You're not living in accordance, or you're not teaching...cease and desist certain behavior and certain teaching. I'd like to see you out of leadership for the time being."

A more serious one—not more serious, but another stage can be, "You may not receive Holy Communion at the present time. You are excommunicated in the sense that you need to show us," show whoever is responsible, maybe the pastor or the elders, "you need to show us that you are in a right relationship to the Lord, lest you blaspheme the sacrament." The sacraments of the Gospel are effective only in faith. They don't sort of carry, they don't function apart from faith, except that you then bring discredit and blaspheme the sacraments. As Paul says, "Some of you are sick and some have died from blasphemous treatment of the sacraments or the ordinances."

Thirdly, there's public excommunication; you're kicked out of the congregation. The congregation then is told that they may not welcome you into the congregation. Paul says in another place, "I would not have you even eat a meal with these people, much less Holy Communion with them." I mean, just not go down to Burger King with them. Why? So that they'll sense what it's like to live outside the fellowship of the body of Christ and repent.

Suppose you're told that you can't go the church. Think of that. What would that mean to you? It would be devastating to me. Yeah, I could do my quiet time. That's good. But I'd be outside the fellowship of the body of Christ. That would be an awful thing. Our article says, "You must treat them as a publican and a sinner." That doesn't mean you can't greet them in a...bump into each other in the grocery store or something. But you cannot go on as if normal relationships are possible. Otherwise the person says, "Well, it really doesn't matter very much." Excommunication. Always with the hope.

Now the intent is to be restored. Now we have a problem on restoration. There is the story of the prodigal son. Which son is further away from the father? Both of them are pretty far anyway. One came back. It's easy for a congregation to fall into the elder brother syndrome and not receive a person who has convinced those who are responsible for discipline that they have indeed, this person has indeed repented. In the early church, they had time, which was Holy Week, Holy Saturday, they would restore people that had been excommunicated. They would come back and be part...they'd have baptisms and

restoration of those who had been kicked out. And everybody could say, “We are now tied back together.” It’s hard for a congregation, sometimes, to say, “We welcome you back, brother, because you’ve hurt our feelings, you’ve hurt our friends. You’ve done something that’s really wrong.”

***Audience Member:** Bishop, can you give some examples of some of the kinds of behaviors that would come under the classification of going to a brother or getting to the point of being expelled because there could be a whole list? Who determines what that list is and the steps that would be taken?*

Well I would say...

***Audience Member:** [UNCLEAR]...sins and so we’re all sinners. What’s that classification of...*

I’m with Bruce. I can’t be your Holy Spirit on this, but I’ll give you some examples. Of course, you’ve got the Ten Commandments. They’re pretty obvious.

Here are two brothers. In the same congregation. Have not spoken to each other in 20 years. You’re the pastor. Would you give them Holy Communion? I wouldn’t. I’d sit down with them first, one-on-one. I’d say, “You guys have got to work this out. Biblically, you need to be reconciled. If you’re not recognized with each other, then you’re disobeying the Lord, and you must not receive communion until you are reconciled. What can I do to help you?” They’ll probably leave and go to another congregation. I can’t be responsible for that.

We had a member in our congregation who was calling up the women and propositioning them on the telephone. We thought that was a little extreme. {LAUGHTER} I don’t know if you’ve ever had anybody talk to you. One time a homosexual person, I guess, called me and was saying dirty things to me on the phone. I just felt dirty listening to this stuff. So what are these women thinking and feeling as this guy’s doing this? He wouldn’t stop, so he was kicked out, in the hopes that he’d repent and return.

It’s up, finally, to the life of the congregation, I think, to hit these things early. Then if it gets to the point where it’s becoming disruptive to the whole community, then it has to go before whatever body is set apart to deal with this, and then they have to pray their way through it, it seems to me. It has to be pretty serious before you’re going to do a public...that’s the ultimate level is to kick them out. That’s serious.

***Audience Member:** Bishop, how do you respond to those who say Scripture [UNCLEAR] is not to judge?*

I suppose it’s not to judge in the sense that we’re trying to do this for reconciliation. It’s done only carefully with prayer and by people set apart to do this. Now on the personal level, one another, you have to do that in prayer as well. But the intent is always to set things right, to correct a brother or a sister. My own model is say a few nice things first. You have to be in some kind of relationship with the person before you can really do this with any effectiveness.

That’s why a congregation cannot just be the gathering on Sunday. Sit next to a relative stranger and try to rebuke him in the middle of the service and he’d think you’re nuts. This is for life where we know each other and care for each other and we trust each other to some extent. Then when it gets very serious, then we’ve got the elders or whoever has been set apart to deal with this, who presumably there’s some relationship with.

***Audience Member:** Would it be appropriate to say that we’re not to judge those outside the church, but those inside the church, based on Paul...?*

You must make discriminating, I mean, you have to know what people are saying and doing. I think it's really more that we're seeking to lead them to Christ, we're seeking to restore them, whether outside or inside. But we do have the special responsibility to those within.

***Audience Member:** Are there sins that have been repented that would preclude one from being in church leadership?*

There might be. It takes, also it would, I'm just thinking of one case. I won't go into it. If that person were restored to the congregation where he had done what he had done, it would take some time, maybe several years, while they're learning to trust this guy again. It's one thing to welcome; it's another thing to kind of embrace, to have confidence this is not phony, it's real, it's deep.

***Audience Member:** What do you mean restore yourself to the congregation? I'm thinking of, is there a process is there specific things they should do?*

Yes, if you have excommunicated somebody, publicly, then you have to welcome them back publicly, with a statement. Have the person stand. Have the congregation officially welcome the person back. Then it has to get lived out.

***Audience Member:** So if the congregation doesn't even do that, like happens in a lot of churches, all of a sudden the guy's gone, it's like, "Whoa, what happened?" Nobody announces anything, no one says anything, and then a few years later, he shows up again. I mean, I don't know, so they're starting out wrong, I think, the congregation or the church leadership, but then bringing them back should be a public thing?*

I think... certainly, if you've excommunicated them publicly, you should bring them back publicly. And the congregation needs to be taught their responsibility, which is to welcome this repentant brother back into the life of the congregation, and not necessarily immediately in positions of leadership. Deep feelings are involved in this thing, as you well know.

All of which is... this is so counterintuitive to our culture. That's another problem. Most people haven't been raised in any kind of accountability like this. So it's easy for me to list this. It's another thing to sort of live it out.

***Audience Member:** When you're talking about discipline [UNCLEAR] judgment, I think there's a subtle difference between holding someone accountable to what they've professed and judging [UNCLEAR].*

I'd have to look at the text more carefully about judgment. Bruce, you got a word on this?

***Bruce:** Well, as we've been saying for years, Scripture has already pre-judged everything, so there's nothing to judge. If you believe in the sufficiency of Scripture, then Scripture has already pre-judged that, so there's nothing for us to judge. What we do is we hold people accountable to that standard that has already been judged. That's the role of the one another commands, which we'll get into next week. The reason I wanted you to hear this portion of the restoration [UNCLEAR], is so you understand the importance of the other three. Really, John's absolutely right. This occurs in stages. One of the great disciplines of the first three stages of our relationship to one another, our reception of one another and our response to one another. That's part of the whole process. That's why I wanted him to go first so you understand the significance of what we're going to talk about next week.*

***Audience Member:** Bishop, I'm always thankful to be here. This morning, when I was coming here, and thinking of the church, on my way here, I was on the road and I believe the speed limit was 25. I got to*

*the construction signs and it said 40 miles an hour. A little further along the construction signs said 35. At the end there was a white sign that said 25. Looking for anyone outside [UNCLEAR] church certainly you want to have all the things [UNCLEAR] to travel this road, where you're going, where you're going [UNCLEAR], and I myself I often think about myself, well, who's [UNCLEAR]. It's a very...gosh. I'm just grateful to be here knowing who I am, and then my goodness...*

Join the crowd, brother. We're all in by grace alone. I don't want to come across to suggest that there's a kind of perfection that we...I've just...you know the old story about nobody's perfect and the guy gets up in the back of the room and he says, "Sir, are you teaching that you're perfect?" He says, "No, I'm standing up for my wife's first husband." {LAUGHTER} We're all very, very far short of what we would like to be and know what we need to be, and times the Lord makes that very clear to us. I find myself occasionally weeping before the Lord's Supper because I am not worthy, and I know that.

Every day in my quiet time, I quote Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." That's what I've earned. You earn your wages. But the free gift of God in Christ Jesus is eternal life. And I say thank you, Lord. So that has to be the ground on which all this is...on the other hand, everything we've said is I think biblical. We're called to seek to maintain a standard. Bruce can talk about who does it and patterns.

**Bruce:** *We'll pick some of this next week. The reason I wanted you to hear John this morning is because I wanted you to hear from someone who was battling the issue of the sufficiency of Scripture for over 40 years; a man who's got the injuries, the impact of the that fight, that battle, as a model for us as the younger men, what we need to do. So John, we're grateful that you could bring the historical perspective of one who's been in the battle of that, helping us understand the real battle ground is the sufficiency of Scripture. Remember that. I'm going to have Tom Smith come up here. Tom is one of our men who have been with us for several years. He's now leaving this week to go and begin a ministry in Croatia. He's going to be in a church planting role. We, as the Brave Men of Friday Morning want to send him off with our blessing and with God's grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. We'll just come up and have Bishop Rogers just pray for him on behalf of all the men. Come up and we'll just put our hands on Tom and send him off with the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Are you to be Islamic territory or in...?

**Tom:** *Roman Catholic.*

Roman Catholic Church.

Lord, we give you praise and thanks for the call that rests upon Tom and whom you call, you will equip. Fill him with your Holy Spirit. Open his heart constantly to your Word. Bless his endeavors. May many come to know you and come to faith because of his witness. The whole family is going is it, Tom?

**Tom:** *Yes.*

Be with his family, his wife and children. Oh my, Lord, this is a major, major move, Lord, into another country, another culture. Comfort him. Give him friends in the Gospel. Help us to keep in touch that he not feel isolated and alone. In tough moments, be close to him. Guide him and direct him, Lord. Reach through his ministry and through the ministry of that congregation as it takes shape to the culture around him, that people might know the comfort of the Gospel and the challenge of holy living. We ask this, Lord, in your strong name; in the name of Jesus, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. In his name we pray. Amen.