

THE FORMATION AND FUNCTION OF THE CHURCH

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Father, there's only one reason that it is well with our soul, and that is because of your marvelous grace. Father, you give us what we do not deserve. The wages of sin is death. The soul that sins shall die, yet you intervene in the course of human history because of your love for your Son, your love for your chosen, and your love for the church, the body of Christ. Father, help us to never take grace lightly, and may we always be motivated by a deep sense of gratitude for your mercy to us. Father, we realize that depravity affects very human being, and the one thing we have in common with each other is our total depravity, and we thank you that your grace is sufficient for all things, and we thank you for the redemptive work that we have in the person and work of Christ, and may our minds be focused upon Him this day, as your Holy Spirit teaches us about how we relate to one another within the body of Christ. And to that end, we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

If you pull out less number 13, we're talking about the Formation and Function of the Church. We're looking at the responsibilities of church membership. We've been on this for a couple of weeks. A couple of weeks ago, Bishop Rogers took us through a wonderful, historical understanding of the big picture of church discipline, all the things that are involved in that.

Last week, I took you through a quick introductory work of the 58 one another commands, the commands in the Scripture that teach us how to get along with each other. It is the Greek word "alleon," which means one another. It is used over 100 times in the New Testament. These are commands that are really given to us so that we will practice our relationship building within the context of the body of Christ, practice that on each other, and then take it into the world, and be part of God's redemptive work for the Kingdom glory.

The critical issue about the church is really how do we get along in our relationship. I gave you a handout today about when it is necessary to be involved in Matthew 18 church discipline. That is absolutely the last step. You don't start with that. It's the last thing.

The reason I wanted to go through the 58 one another commands just very briefly is to help you realize those are the things that prevent us from having to exercise Matthew 18. All those other one another commands are really preventative. In other words if we work on those things, we're less likely to have to exercise Matthew 18 church discipline in its fullest extent. Remember, church discipline is not something that we do to a person; it's something that God works in a person, through the process known as church discipline.

We've talked about the things that prevent church discipline. Let me call your attention to your handout, if you have that—lesson 13. If we're doing these other things, then it is most likely that we will not have to ever exercise Matthew 18, but there might be the times when we do, so we need to be prepared to know how to do it.

There are many things that prevent us from ever having to exercise it. Let me give you a couple. Just look at our outline. First of all, if we're engaged in a church body with expository preaching, we're less likely to have to deal with church discipline because the Holy Spirit will be more likely to convict people of their own sin, and they'll deal with it. How are they going to be exposed to it? They want to be exposed to it through preaching. It's the content that comes out of the pulpit that is critical for the prevention of church discipline. In other words, you've got to start with what do you hear in the pulpit.

If the pastor is preaching expositively, that is what we are taught from the Scripture, how we are taught,

when we're learning that, the Holy Spirit whose job description is to guide us into all truth is more likely to be able to convict, convince and convert somebody of their sin, rather than if you're hearing a sermon out of latest movie review or Reader's Digest.

You see, one of the great preventatives of ever exercising Matthew 18 church discipline is expository preaching. It's a preventative because it will teach people to deal with their sin independently, individually, and not have it be disruptive in the church.

The second thing is biblical theology. If we're teaching biblical theology, the Holy Spirit, that's his greatest asset, because his function is to call attention to the person and work of Christ and to guide us into all truth. You see, it's when we're hearing biblical theology through expository preaching, the Holy Spirit works. We don't know how the Holy Spirit works, but it may work preventatively in having people deal with their own sin and go before God and deal with it so that it does not pollute the body. The church, Christ is not polluted because of people not dealing with their sin. So those are preventative measures.

Then the third thing is a biblical gospel. The people understand the difference between salvation by grace and salvation by works. Understanding that, you see, that's when the Holy Spirit in his most powerful position of guiding us into all truth when people are hearing the truth. It is the truth that sets us free.

Before we ever get to Matthew 18, we ought to be asking ourselves, "What are we doing in those situations that will most likely prevent us from ever having to do it? But if we have to do it, we need to be prepared to do it correctly."

That's where the one another commands come in. In other words, the way that you and I relate to one another is based upon the fact that we have the same Heavenly Father. Then we receive one another because of that unique relationship of having the same Heavenly Father. Then we respond to one another because of our unique reception, the way that we respond to one another is based upon our reception based upon our relationship. You'll see how those 58 one another commands just flow toward the very last one, which is church discipline.

There's one other thing that I want to help us understand before we get into Matthew 18, and that would be this. Turn to Matthew 5. When there comes a situation in the church and the relationship is strained and one has to exercise church discipline, there's plenty of guidance in the Scripture to teach us how to deal with that so that it does not pollute the body. All of these things are designed not to pollute or to infect the body of Christ, the total church membership, with an insidious cancer known as pride or ego. The real issue is this. The issue is never who's right or wrong in disrupted relationships in the church. The issue is this—if you know, you go. In other words, if you know you've been offended or if you know you are offending, you go to that person and vice versa. That's all designed to deal with this so that it does not become a pollution or an infestation to the body of Christ.

Go to Matthew 5 and we see this, beginning at verse 23, ²³"Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you," in other words, you know, ²⁴"leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." In other words, I know that in some relationship in the body of Christ that somebody has something against me. I know that. What's my responsibility? To go. I need to go to that person and to be reconciled; to do whatever I can to reconcile that relationship before I come back and make my offering at the altar. In other words, I know that. That's one side of the coin.

Let's go to Matthew 18 and look at the other side. Matthew 18:15, ¹⁵"If your brother sins, go and show

him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” Now there’s the other side of the coin. If somebody has sinned against you, and you know that, what do you do? You go. If I know I’m the offending brother, I go. If I know I am the offended brother, I go. Regardless of your position, your responsibility is to go and be what? Be reconciled. You see, that’s preventative so that you don’t have to do the rest of the step of Matthew 18.

The whole issue here is designed so that people will deal with those unreconciled relationships so that the whole body of Christ will not be polluted or impacted. There’s responsibility of these one another commands.

Take a look at your list of the one another commands that I gave you last week. We studied this some time in depth several years ago. I’m just going to review it for you. Just look at the things that we’re supposed to do. These are things that you and I practice on each other. These are what I would call the responsibilities of fellowship. Fellowship is not number two red punch and cookies on Sunday afternoon at 5:00. That’s not fellowship. Fellowship is engaging in relationships to the glory of God and the edification of the body. That’s what it’s for. That’s what fellowship is about.

We get together so that the body of Christ is glorified and we edify one another and help us become more mature and Christ like. That’s what whole fellowship is about. These are the commands that say this is how you exercise your personal responsibilities of fellowship as the member of your local church. The tragedy is members of the local church don’t know this because no one’s ever taught them that. That’s where you come back to the pulpit. What do you hear from your pulpit? Are you hearing expository preaching? Are you hearing biblical theology? Are you hearing a biblical gospel? You see, the critical issue is what are the people hearing? If people are not hearing how they are supposed to get along with each other, the expectation is, “Oh they’re wrong, and I’m right.” So you begin to say, “I’m right. I’m the offended one. It’s her problem,” or his problem. When in reality, you see, we need to recognize these are the real responsibilities that you and I have within the context of fellowship of the local church, and we practice these on each other.

You’ll notice, if you know, you go, that means if somebody makes a mistake and there’s an error in the relationship, what do you do? You go be reconciled. The idea is this—if I know that I’m the offending brother, I need to go. If I know I’m the offended brother, I need to go. Ideally, in an ideal world, you’ve got two people running to each other. That’s preventative because you’re dealing with the issue and being reconciled. You see, the whole thing is we want to prevent every to do Matthew 18, but when you do it, you’ve got to do it right.

As Bishop Rogers taught us a couple of weeks ago, I came out of my seat and wanted to say, “Hallelujah!” when he said, “There are three keys to the kingdom.” God’s given us the keys to the kingdom. What are they? It’s the presentation of the Gospel. It’s the administration of the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper and baptism, and church discipline. The third one is church discipline. Most churches have two out of those, and sometimes they don’t even turn the two keys well. They’ll preach the Gospel and have the administration of the ordinances of the sacraments, but they eliminate church discipline.

Years ago, when I was candidating for a church who was looking at me as possible candidate, I was talking with the elders. One of them said this, “I’ll never be involved in a church that exercises church discipline because it’s unloving.” I’ll never be involved. Now his role was he was a mediator. He was a union mediator. I understood why he was saying what he did because his whole profession was I’ve got to mediate situations and never deal with any discipline.

I knew right away that that was not an environment for me because I basically, when said no, then they said, “We really wanted you. We thought you were the guy. How come you’re not coming?” I said,

“Because you only exercise two out of three keys, and you’re hindering the kingdom development because you’re only using two out of the three keys.” “Well, we’ll never exercise that. We’ll never do that.” You see, most people have a warped understanding of church discipline. They think it’s something you do to a person. It’s really something that God works in the body of Christ. It’s something that the Holy Spirit is working in to the perfection and the glory of Christ and the edification of the believer and the maturity of the individual person.

There’s a situation where we need to help each other realize this—if you know, you go, and you be reconciled to one another, and you do the best you can and trust Christ with the rest. But the real preventative comes in those first three essentials of a healthy church, and that is expository preaching, biblical theology and a clear understanding of the Gospel. Those are the three things that are critical. It’s in that context that we would understand the responsibilities of fellowship.

Look at the 58 one another commands. First of all, our relation to one another. We belong to one another. Do we really believe that in the church? You can read these verses on your own. But do you really believe that you belong to somebody else? I belong to you. You belong to me. That’s going to radically change how we relate to each other, if we think that way. You see, you’ve got to think right before you act right. If you don’t act right, you’re not going to feel right. This whole thing is designed to get us to think differently about each other.

The next verses are be like minded to one another. That doesn’t mean that we agree upon everything, every jot and tittle. It means this—that we’re committed to the same mission. I have the same commitment to the body of Christ and the glory of God that you do. That’s going to help us. We’re going to work these things out. We have a like-mindedness. We agree upon the same. We’re focusing upon the same things that mean that my focus for the glory of God and the edification of the body is the same as yours. That’s what helps us belong to one another.

Based upon that understanding, of belonging, that we have the same Heavenly Father, it takes us to how we receive one another. How is that I receive you? How do you receive me? Well we do that with non-judgmental attitudes. In other words, we don’t judge one another because the Scripture has already prejudged everything. There’s nothing left for us to judge. We receive each other. We work through those things. And if you know, you go. If you know, you go. You see, that’s where this you know you go principle comes into play in all of these relationships, in our responsibility. So there’s nothing for us to judge. Judgment has been something only the Holy Spirit does. We do not have the ministry of judging somebody else’s motive. That’s not our responsibility.

Next we greet one another. This is bestowing the sense of respect and dignity and hospitality. We bestow respect and honor on them. We take the initiative to go greet people. One of the things that I appreciate about what Sig does is he always has you new guys introduce yourselves because we want to get to know you. You see, we’re just not trying to keep an increased number of people who come to our attendance. We want to know who you are because we want to show you our respect for you in the fact that you’re here. I hope somebody will take you to lunch today. {LAUGHTER}

Audience Member: Or breakfast.

Or breakfast. Whatever. We show hospitality. We receive each other with great sense of hospitality. That’s sharing our food and our lives with the people with whom we come in contact and how we receive each other. There’s this emphasis of being hospitable to each other. We’re more than just acquaintances, you see, in the body of Christ. We belong to one another. We don’t judge one another. We have the same focus with one another. We show respect to one another. We’re hospitable to one another. We look for ways to get together to develop our friendships for the glory of God and the

edification of the believer.

Then next we go into our response to one another. How is it that we respond to one another based upon our reception of one another, based upon our relation to one another? First of all, we love one another. There are 13 commands where we're told to love one another, so look at the understanding of biblical theology. Repetition is the way of stressing a point that's very important. You'll notice that the command that is the most often repeated is love one another. In John 13:34-35, "Love one another as I have loved you and the whole world will know that you're a follower of me. You'll know that the world will know that you're a disciple."

You see, what he's saying is this. When people come inside the church from outside in the world and come into the church and they see how people love one another, they're going to see this—they are followers of Christ. That's the consequence. Is that happening in our church? When people come in? When a stranger comes into our church, are they going to walk away and say, "I was in the presence of disciples and followers of Christ because I saw the way they related to each other"? You see, you're not going to get that at your job. The only place you're going to get that is understanding these commands of the responsibilities of fellowship, which is involved in church membership.

When the world comes in, in my judgment, in my opinion, I think a stranger who comes into the church should have two feelings. First of all, they ought to feel uncomfortable. They ought to feel uncomfortable. If they're coming into an environment that matches their work environment, then we're really off the mark. They've got to come into an environment and say, "I've never been in an environment like that. I heard stuff I've never heard before. I saw people who related to each other like I've never seen it happen before." There's a degree of what's going on here. They feel uncomfortable because they've been exposed to something they've never seen before. Where are they going to see that? They're only going to see that inside the worship service of the church, the body of Christ. That's by design, guys. It's by design. That's what these commands are to set us apart from everything else, so that we're not like the world.

If our worship service is like MTV, then there's going to be no change in their thought at all. "I can get that on TV. Why do I need to go to church? I can flip the tube and get that." You see, there's got to be a degree when they come into a worship service, they realize that the service is not about the people. The worship service is about giving glory to God. It's blessing him. It's kissing toward, it's showing our due reverence, sense and respect and awe for God. Is your worship service awe inspiring?

One of the great sermons that I read when did my doctoral work in England, I think I read 3,000 Puritan sermons over the course of those years, one of the most intriguing ones was this. The title of it was "God Is Awe-ful." God is awe-ful. Now in our terminology, awful would mean bad. What he meant was it's full of awe. When you go to worship, is your worship service awe inspiring? Does it inspire within you a sense of awe and reverence and dignity and worship? You see, that's what people need to see when they come from the world into the worship service. It's an awe inspiring centered worship based upon the glory and beauties of Christ.

Jonathon Edwards is most known for his wonderful sermon, "Sinners on the Hands of an Angry God." But you know the single most topic that he preached about in his career, his illustrious career, one single thing. That was this—the beauties of Christ. He taught more about the beauties of Christ than he did anything else. He's remembered for one sermon, but read the rest of his work. He talks about the awe inspiring beauty of the person and work of Christ.

You see, when somebody comes into a worship service, if that's not what they're exposed to, that ought to make them feel uncomfortable because they realize the worship service is not about me. It's about an

awe-inspiring God.

Brian: *I listen to a lot of sermons on the radio on the drive home. It seems as though people are missing the mark and it's so subtle that preachers, instead of focusing on God and what he is and how they relate to him, it's me and how I can feel better. It's backed up biblically, but they miss the mark instead of looking at the holiness of God, it's how can I feel better about myself. And it's so very subtle, you can't [UNCLEAR] we can point out [UNCLEAR] really focusing on. I'm not seeing the holiness of God. I'm just seeing you need to feel better.*

Well you're absolutely right. There are many reasons for that. One of those is that our culture today in the Christian world does not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture. We really don't believe that Scripture is sufficient to make you feel better. What I need to do is have you have ten techniques that's going to make you feel better. So I'm going to come up with ten steps to making you feel better. Really, the contrast, if you want a very simplistic response to that, Brian, is the difference is marketing versus messaging. We are to be involved in communicating a message as opposed to trying to market something that gets people to come.

There are all sorts of reasons why that occurs. You have to back to the first three tenants of what we're saying about a healthy church is what? Expository preaching, biblical theology and a biblical gospel. When you have that as your focus, you're going to be less likely to do what you just said. But we're so worried, as Jeremiah Burrows said in 1646, when numbers become important, when finance become important, numbers become critical and doctrine is watered down. When finances are important, numbers become important and doctrine is watered down. You see, so often times, we have our ministry dictated by the finances, and that changes the message.

I was in one church who said, "We can't preach the Gospel because it will bring in the wrong kind of people who can't sustain the church, because you're going to bring in hurting people. We need people who've got wallets." Now that was a church that actually said that, "We need people that have wallets, not hurting hearts, because they can't sustain the church."

There are all sorts of things. The bottom line for me is basically we don't really believe in the sufficiency of Scripture.

"Love one another as I have loved you and the whole world will know that you're my disciples." The other thing that I believe that somebody ought to experience when they come into a worship service in a healthy church is they ought to feel absolutely welcome. Feel uncomfortable because they've never seen an environment like this before. Never heard the message like I've heard before. Never see people get along the way I've seen this before. At the same time, we ought to be absolutely welcoming them and they go out and say, "I felt uncomfortable but welcomed." You see, that is, in my mind, the perfect balance between what the world offers and what we offer. So we love one another as an expression of our devotion to the person and work of Christ.

Then we're humble with one another. People need to see our humility. Humility is seeing the contrast between that which is perfect and realized I can't do it myself. It's the contrast of seeing that which is perfect—sinless perfection and perfect obedience of Christ—and realizing I can't achieve it. That's humility. People need to see humble relationships between members of the body of Christ. It's not about me. It's not about my ministry. It's about the glory of God and the edification of the church. Equipping the saints to do the work of the ministry. It's really not about me.

How many times do you hear people say, "Well my ministry"? It's not your ministry. It never was. Never will be. It's his ministry which he permits you to be a part of. We think it's ownership. It's mine.

I remember years ago when I was with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, there was a gentleman who was involved in athletic ministry. We were at an athletic conference in Washington, DC. We each had time to present various things of what was going on. This gentleman stood up. He was a very gracious man, but the only thing I ever heard him say was, “This is who I converted in my ministry. I converted him in my ministry, and I converted him in my ministry, and I converted him in my ministry.” It was all “I” and “my.” “I” and “my.” “I” and “my.” You see, guys, the spirit of humility says this—it’s not me.

2 Corinthians 4:1, “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart.” The NIV says, “Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry.” “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy.” Notice the consequence of that. What? You don’t give up. You don’t give up. You don’t lose heart. It means you’re strong of heart. Do you realize that that verse is telling us this, that ministry is not the result of human achievement, it’s a consequence of divine mercy. It’s not the result of human achievement. It’s the consequence of divine mercy.

You see, the ministry is God’s ministry. He permits us to be involved in that. If I’m involved in anything, it’s a function of God’s absolute mercy to me as a sinner. You see, it’s not mine. That’s where humility comes in, and realize I see what perfect and I realize I can’t do that. I see the contrast between who I am and that which is perfect. I see the perfection in the glories of Christ, the beauties of Christ, his sinless perfection and perfect obedience, and I realize that’s not me. If God has permitted me to be involved or you to be involved in something, it’s a function of his mercy.

You see, that’s why we are mercy motivated members of a movement. That’s where I get that phrase. Mercy motivated members of a movement, because it is God’s mercy that permits us to be involved in mystery, and so we understand that, and that’s what creates within us a sense of humility. Ministry is not the function of human achievement; it’s the consequence of divine mercy.

Then we care for one another. When you’re humble and understand the contrast between yourself and that which is perfect, you have a greater desire to care for people. When you care for someone, you’re going to have a greater orientation to serve one another. Serving one another is essentially this. Doing something for someone and expecting nothing in return. Doing something for someone and expecting nothing in return. Now guys, you can’t do that, first of all, unless there’s a sense of humility. That humility manifests itself with a sense of caring. When you care for somebody like that, you’re going to have a desire to serve them and expect nothing back because you know this. I’m just involved in God’s ministry of taking care of this person who’s in the body of Christ for your glory and their well-being.

***Audience Member:** Bruce, 5:18, it says, “All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”*

Amen. 2 Corinthians 5:18. Remember what he’s given us? He’s given us the message of reconciliation. That’s what we are...that’s what these one another commands do. They help us reconcile in the body of Christ so that we’re different than any other institution or organization or group. When somebody comes from the outside, they come in and they see how different organization known as the local church, the body of Christ, that functions radically different in their relationships because of these one another commands.

Then we move into church discipline. The last thing, our restoration of one another. Sometimes the first three don’t work as well as we would like because of our depravity and our sinfulness. So sometimes we need to restore one another. Galatians 6:1 says basically, before you go to another brother, what are you to do? Examine yourself. Go to Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you

too will not be tempted.” In other words, you know you go. Yes, you know you go. What do you do before you go? Examine yourself. Say Lord, “Where is sin in me that I need to have that rooted out before I go to my brother to be reconciled?” If you know, you go. Yes. But you examine yourself before you go. You do that with a spirit of gentleness, not with vengeance or anger or retribution or pride.

Now notice, the whole thing is go restore. The first thing is the motivation of these one another commands is restoration. The first time that I dislocated my shoulder playing football at Navy, the trainer took me on the sidelines, he and the surgeon popped my shoulder back in. I’m sure glad that their first response was restoration, not cutting it off. You see, the first motivation is restoration, rather than amputation. Church discipline is not about amputation. Church discipline is about restoration. That’s works and it’s going to be painful. Yes it is. Restoration is painful. But the whole issue is we need to restore the brother, and so we do that. That’s part of our restoration ministry of reconciliation.

Then we need to admonish one another. Sometimes we just warn. The word “admonish” means to warn one another. Sometimes we have to warn each other, “You just need to stop doing that.” You can do that graciously and kindly. You do it out of love, but you go warn somebody. That’s preventative.

Then we edify one another. Sometimes you need to come along side somebody in a situation like that and just be an encouragement to them to help them through their situation. Sometimes we need to forgive one another. That means I don’t hold your offenses against me and keep a record. 1 Corinthians 13 says one of the descriptions of love is you don’t keep a record. Remember what you did back in 1945? Or 1982? Or 2011? I remember last week what you did. You see, love says you don’t keep a record because you do not hold their offenses against one another. That’s radically different than you’re going to see in any other environment except the membership of the church.

Then we speak to one another graciously. We need to realize that when we restore one another, we need to be very, very selective with the words that we use and the phrases that we emit. “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks,” Jesus says. Probably one of the greatest barometers of a person’s spiritual maturity is their language because it’s a reflection of what? The heart. You listen to my words and you’re going to see where my heart is. When we go to restore a brother, they need to understand, they need to see our heart just as much as hear our words. That means you’ve got to be very, very cautious and trusting the Holy Spirit to give you the right words to say at the right time because you want to be a reflection not only of your heart but of his heart also.

Then lastly, we come to a point we need to be at peace with one another. The whole issue is restoration. Look at your handout today, just very briefly. I’ve outlined for you the stages that if we have to go do that (Matthew 18) and all the other things we’ve done in the one another commands have not been successful, here’s how the Scripture says that you apply Matthew 18. Let’s go to Matthew 18. Bishop Rogers touched on this a couple of weeks ago, so I’m just going to quickly review this.

Matthew 18:15-20, ¹⁵“If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.” Notice “facts may be confirmed,” not guesses established; “facts may be confirmed.” “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church,” that’s the church body, “let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Now notice this verse. Probably if there’s any verse in the Scripture that’s ever taken out of context, it’s this one, ¹⁹“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three have gathered together

in My name, I am there in their midst.” I’m going to go play golf today. Where two or three of us are gathered together, God’s going to be there. Of course he’s going to be there because he’s omnipresent. You don’t get away from him. This verse has to do with church discipline. It’s saying this, “Look, when you’re exercising church discipline in the loving manner that you’re instructed to do, I’m going to be with you. When the two of you agree upon this, that you’re going to function in the church, I’m going to be there with you.” You see, the real power of this whole ministry of restoration is this—Christ is going to be there with us while we do it. It has nothing to do with fellowship. It has to do with restoration and ministry. We take this verse out of context because we always say, “Well wherever two or three are together, God’s going but with us.” Well no kidding. If you understand the nature and character of God, you know he’s omnipresent. Of course he’s going to be there. Be careful not to take these verses out of context. This has to do with church discipline.

The two times that I as a pastor had to exercise this in my church, the greatest confidence I had was this—that I’m doing it alone. I’m not doing it alone. Christ is there with me doing it, and I’m going to trust him and I’m going to do the best that I can and trust him with the rest because I know this. He said that, “When you do this, Bruce, as a pastor exercising one of the keys to the kingdom, you’re not going to be alone. I’ll be there with you. It’s not you. It us. Just follow the script because I’m never going to leave you by yourself to do this. This is beyond you. It’s beyond your leadership. It’s beyond the elders. It’s something that only I can do. And I’m going to allow you to be there with me because where two or three of us agree upon this, I’m going to be there. I’m going to be there.”

You see, the great confidence is this, that Jesus is in the midst of the exercising of that key to the kingdom. That’s why it’s a key. Because Christ is there doing it with you. You see, that’s gives you the confidence and the grace to be able to do it correctly.

Look at your little chart. I just tried to outline this for you. You’ll notice you have firsthand knowledge of sin in the body. Now you go deal with it. You reprove him quietly. You’ll see Matthew 18:15. Then you’ll notice if he listens, you’ve saved your brother. Now if you let it go, on the other side, if you don’t deal with it, he may not be saved because he may continue in his sin and it may reveal his unrighteousness. You don’t know that.

The second stage is you reprove him privately and he listens. You’ve saved the brother. Then if he continues, then you go to the next box, you reprove him with two or three witness. If he listens, you’ve saved the brother. You notice the consequence is always the same. You saved the brother. You’ve restored him. It’s the ministry of restoration. There are different degrees of pressure you put on him, through the Holy Spirit, that maybe it’ll just return him back into the fellowship.

Then if he continues in sin, you’ll notice 1 John 1:6. And then if he continues, in the next box down, you reprove him before the whole church. If he listens, what have you done? You’ve restored the brother. You saved the brother.

If it continues, you put him out of the fellowship, as Pastor Rogers taught us a couple of weeks ago, and what that means and how we handle that. You do that for the sake of the glory of God. If he listens, and he restores back, you’ve saved the brother. Then if he continues, you have fulfilled your obligation. You see, there’s a point where our job is not manipulation. It’s restoration. We just do the best we can. He may continue on. We just have to realize that’s what we’ve done. The whole issue here is, the goal is what? Restoration not punishment. You’re not trying to punish somebody; you’re trying to restore someone.

***Audience Member:** Someone said, and it’s really running true to me, that the gift of discernment where God’s showing you sin in the body of Christ, it’s first through intercession. You should never bypass the*

opportunity to pray for that person.

Absolute. That's Galatians 6:1. You examine yourself. Pray for the person.

Audience Member: *Yeah. [UNCLEAR] situation is that. That isn't revealed to you immediately, so you can confront.*

That's right.

Audience Member: *We're not called to ministry of confrontation. They're called a ministry of prayer first. God can open a door for confrontation, but the first response should be [UNCLEAR]...*

Absolutely. When you go to step on, the first thing you do is examine yourself and pray for the person. You start that. That's why when we had to do this in my second church, it took us, the church body of 400 people, six weeks before we could go do it. We needed to pray of ourselves, cleanse ourselves, purify ourselves, pray for the situation, get his wisdom, get his discernment. It took us six weeks before we were ready to do it, because the wonderful thing happened, 399 people were purified to some degree or another, before we ever did it, and exercised the restoration ministry to our brother. You're absolutely right. You pray for yourself, examine yourself.

Audience Member: *I think that's absolutely key [UNCLEAR] go back to the point earlier about the mediator. [UNCLEAR]...as soon as we started talking about this, I was thinking about [UNCLEAR]...examination is, it's like people think about a negotiation [UNCLEAR]...no, no, no, it's [UNCLEAR]. I think it is so important what you said [UNCLEAR]...uh huh, I got sit down and examine myself. I've got to make sure, absolutely, I'm in the right place before I do this. [UNCLEAR] too much me and there's too much of I feel [UNCLEAR]...I'll feel better about myself, and that's absolutely wrong.*

Absolutely. You've got to examine yourself.

Audience Member: *Bruce you did touch on general will and specific will and [UNCLEAR]...it's tough when you go out in general, this is the way, who do things go, it's specifically there's stuff that you really have to be in on to be there, you know, that is ahead of time. [UNCLEAR] not always be able to [UNCLEAR] friendship.*

It takes great discernment. You've got to be very discerning before you ever do this. That's why Galatians 6 is so critical.

Audience Member: *On your handout of church discipline, question number seven says, "Who is to exercise church discipline?"*

It is done by the leadership of the church.

Audience Member: *Does that mean we always have to have a preacher involved, or should we start with ourselves?*

You start with yourself, but you're going to have to get the whole body involved later on, perhaps. You start with yourself, and then if he doesn't, then you take a couple, then you certainly need to get your leadership involved. The ones who exercise church leadership in its fullest sense and supervise and superintend and manage the whole thing are your leaders. It's the elders and the pastor of the church who exercise and shepherd that. It's part of the shepherding ministry of the leadership of the church.

That's why you've got to have the right leaders in the right spot to do the right thing. If you don't have right biblically qualified leaders, they'll abuse this. This is so easily abused. My point is you don't abuse this. You use it. You don't abuse it.

Audience Member: So one thing, fellowship, us, with each other, gets it early? Gets it when it's simple?

Right.

Audience Member: And if it continues, there needs...?

Then you get involved.

Audience Member: Then they get involved.

You see, if we are exercising the one another commands, hopefully, in an ideal world, we won't have to get to this. Hopefully. Because we'll be doing all the other things that deal with us individually resolving those reconciled relationships that need to be strengthened and reconciled. Hopefully, if we're exercising the one another commands, this won't be necessary. But if it does, all I'm saying is we need to do it correctly and realize the Scripture is sufficient to guide us through it, because of this, "When two or three of you agree upon doing this, I'm going to be with you. I'm going to be with you. And you will not be doing it alone." There's a great confidence.

Audience Member: God is the only one in the whole group that has no sin because you have two or three who agree, but they're still sinners.

That's correct. That's correct. That's why...

Audience Member: Maybe another sinner, but you have three who are of like minds. God is still the only one who's without sin.

Yes. No question about that. That's what breeds humility. We realize that we are not perfect.

Brothers, my whole point of all of this, I wanted to go through Matthew 18 with you just very quickly, but I wanted to stress more, look at the things that will put us in a position not to have to do Matthew 18. That's what we want to do. We want to talk about the things that are preventative. That's what we've been talking about all morning. It's the things that prevent this. But when it occurs, you have to be prepared to do it and do it biblically correct and do it with great grace, great truth, and great sensitivity and compassion. It's something that's a responsibility of church leadership, and that's why you have to have the right leaders in the right position to be able to do this correctly for the glory of God.

Let's pray. Father, you've given us so much today about the responsibilities of fellowship, about our relationships, and the great duty of leadership is to look after the welfare of relationships. Father, we all have a duty, we all have a leadership responsibility within the context of the body of the church, and that is to look after the welfare of our relationships to the glory of God, and may it be so, Father, that you'll give us a discerning spirit, not a critical spirit, but a discerning, gracious, compassionate spirit realizing that you have given us these commands to teach us how to get along with one another for the glory of God, so that the world will see that we are truly followers of Jesus Christ, and may it be so for your glory. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!!!