

November 30, 2016

The Importance Of Church Discipline (Part 8)

Matthew 18:18-20, “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. 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. For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.”

We have had the blessing over the last few weeks to study Christ’s clear teaching in Matthew 18:15-20 regarding the practice of church discipline. We cannot emphasize enough that church discipline is always to be motivated by the hope of restoring a straying brother or sister. It is never supposed to be out of derision or contempt for the sinner. Love for Christ, love for His church, and love for each other requires us to treat sin with extreme prejudice, but we are to treat the sinning brother or sister with extreme love and compassion.

Loving a person who is in sin, who professes Christ as their Lord and Savior means that we refuse to allow the cancer of sin to spread in their own life and around their life as well. We are through a series of loving and grace-filled confrontations to make every attempt to rescue them from the self-deception and the snare of the devil that they are caught up in. This begins with a one-on-one confrontation that is to be done in private. If he or she refuses to repent, then you are to bring along with you one or two witnesses and confront them again. If they continue in their rebellion, then the matter is to be brought before the entire congregation. If the man or woman continues in sin and unrepentance then the next step is excommunication. If, however, at any point in the process the sinner turns from their sin, the process is to stop and he or she is to be forgiven and restored. These are the four steps that Christ has described for us here in Matthew 18.

The Lord’s instructions for protecting His church and the purity of His church did not end with verse 17. These verses are often taken out of context and they are applied to prayer requests of any kind. But these verses and the phrases used here are specifically applied to the subject of church discipline. Christ was teaching how God is at work in the process of church discipline

.Verse 18 says, **“whatever you bind”** and **“whatever you loose”** refers to the church’s decision and verdict in a discipline case. The terms **“binding”** and **“loosing”** were common terms used by Rabbis and would have been very familiar to the disciples. These two terms referred to the bondage of sin and to liberation from the guilt of that sin. What Christ is saying here then is that heaven is in agreement with the church’s verdict in a properly handled discipline case.

The idea in this passage is not that heaven follows the lead of the church, but rather then when discipline is properly implemented, whatever is done on earth has then already been done in heaven. Matthew 6:10 in the Lord’s prayer says, **“Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”** This then is one of the requests in the Disciples Prayer. If the Lord’s

will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven, the church then must practice correct church discipline in regards to sinning members.

This promise that is given here is given both as a comfort and as an encouragement. Far too many people think it is unloving for a church to confront sin. The truth however is that when a church correctly practices discipline as our Lord instructs us to do, in fact how He commands us to do, that church is simply doing the work of the Lord and the work of heaven. They are loving the Savior and the sinner at the same time.

The next verse, verse 19 is often very misunderstood as well. In verse 19 the word **“agree”** is the Greek word from which we get our English word “symphony.” It literally translates “to produce a sound together.” What this means then is that when the verdict and decision of the church involves **“binding”** or **“loosing,”** and when the church is in harmony – and especially when the **“two or three witnesses”** are involved and they establish the fact that the sinning man or woman who is unrepentant – the Father in heaven is in absolute agreement.

Verse 19 does not mean that anytime you can get two people to agree on something that God has to honor that request. The word **“two”** in verse 19 refers to the two witnesses whose testimony is in agreement. If the two witnesses are also in agreement with God’s will when they implement discipline on a sinning man or woman in the church, they can then be certain that God Himself is working in their midst and on their behalf.

Verse 20 then just reiterates a very similar promise from Christ. **“For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them.”** Verse 20 is often used to invoke Christ’s presence at prayer meetings and that is a misinterpretation of the intent. Understand that God is omnipresent, so that means that He is present whether or not one person is present or two or three or ten thousand are present. The context then of **“two or three”** refers back to the **“two or three witnesses”** of verse 16. This verse then speaks not merely of Christ’s presence, but of Christ’s participation in the process of church discipline. Christ joins in the discipline that is carried out by the church – this is a very fearsome reality for the individual who refuses to repent, but also a rich comfort to those who must administer the discipline.

As we have seen throughout the church discipline process, the primary goal and function of church discipline is the repentance and restoration of the sinning brother or sister. That goal should never be abandoned, even after the individual has been excommunicated. If at any time he or she repents, they are to be restored and they are to be welcomed back with love and compassion. Let us never forget the great love and the great compassion that Christ extended to us in redemption.

While the process of church discipline can be very painful and heart rending, Christ-followers must remember that the purity of the church is a God-given priority, and that by following the pattern He gave us, we can then have confidence that He is working in us and through us to accomplish His will.

My prayer is that this series has been a blessing to all of you. If you have any questions about this topic please do not hesitate to contact me.

