

**Restoration  
Luke 15:11-24**

Let me begin by saying that this is a very special morning and a very special service. And why is this? Today, very much like the prodigal son of **Luke 15:11-24**, a dear and beloved sister in Christ has returned, and there is very much to be thankful for. And without doubt none of this would have been possible apart from the outpouring of God's grace that I will be seeking to highlight for you this morning.

So what is the question? How has God's grace been manifested in the matter of this restoration? This is the question. And why is this question so important? It is important so that God alone will get the praise for all that has been accomplished.

So how has God's grace been manifested in the matter of this restoration? First of all, God's grace has been manifested through the obedience of this congregation in initiating the process of church discipline. So how do we know this? Church discipline on many different levels is counterintuitive to the thinking of man. In other words, church discipline, as it is described in the Scriptures, is typically very unnatural and therefore certainly would not be carried out apart from the outpouring of God's grace upon those who, in dependence upon Him, initiate it and who are committed to carrying it through. And if there is any doubt about what I have just said all we have to do is to once again look at the topic of church discipline as spelled out for us in the Scriptures.

So once again, what is church discipline? Church discipline refers to the process that is spelled out for us in Matthew 18:15-17 that is to be initiated by the church when they believe a brother or sister in Christ is choosing to live in sin.

So now let me read this passage for you. **"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. (16) But 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. (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."**

The process spelled out in these verses by Christ is the process that has come to be known, within Christian circles as church discipline. And what did Christ indicate to His disciples should trigger this process according to **verse 15?**

The trigger for initiating this process of church discipline is contained in the words, **“If your brother sins.”** These words provide the ignition point for launching the process of discipline that Christ detailed for us in **verses 15-17.** So, what does Christ mean by these words, **“If your brother sins?”**

Does this mean that at any time when we might see a sin committed by a professing brother or sister in Christ that we immediately launch into the steps of church discipline described for us by Christ in **Matthew 18:15-17?** The answer should be obvious. This clearly is not what Christ meant.

If this were the case then everyone in this fellowship would be continuously initiating or having initiated against them this process since every member in this fellowship is continuously sinning in various ways whether they know it or not and that includes you and that includes me. And why is this? It is because we are sinners.

So if this is true then when should we initiate this series of steps given to us by Christ in **Matthew 18:15-17** in light of what I have just said?

This series of steps should only be initiated when a member or members of a congregation believe that a professing brother or sister in Christ has not simply sinned at a point in time knowingly or unknowingly, which we all do, but rather when a member or members of a congregation believe that a professing brother or sister in Christ has willfully chosen to live in sin, or perhaps better said to live in a way that is more consistent with the unsaved world than with the community of the redeemed and this is very consistent with the teachings of **1 and 2 Corinthians.**

Therefore if we as a member of this congregation see or have reason to believe that a professing brother or sister in Christ is presently choosing to live as an idolater, fornicator, adulterer, thief, liar, drunkard, drug addict, wife-beater etc., and that is in fact the lifestyle that we believe they have chosen to live and they are not striving by God’s grace to put that lifestyle away from them, even in spite of the fact that they are professing to be a

Christian or a follower of Christ, then we must move forward with this process of church discipline as it is spelled out for us in **Matthew 18:15-17**. We have no other option.

So, what is the first step? The first step in the process of church discipline is to go to the sinning brother or sister in Christ in private (Matthew 18:15). Isn't this exactly what we see in **18:15**? Let me read this verse for you and see if this is not so. **“If your brother sins** [if your brother willfully chooses to embrace a sinful lifestyle that is more consistent with the world rather than the lifestyle the redeemed then], **go and show him his fault in private.”**

So let me ask you this question. Is going to a sinning brother or sister in Christ in private to show them their fault their sin easy? No! It is hard. What would be easy would be to simply ignore their sin and to bury our head in the sand. That would be the easy thing to do.

But if we believe that Christ knows better than us, how love should be expressed when dealing with a willfully sinning brother or sister in Christ, then we need by the grace of God to do exactly what Christ has commanded us to do and that is to go to them privately to confront them with their sin in the hope that they might be restored.

But what happens if this initial attempt fails to bring about the desired end, in other words there is no repentance and no restoration? We go to the second step.

The second step in the process of church discipline is to go to the sinning brother or sister with one or two others (Matthew 18:16). Let me read for you **Matthew 18:16**. **“But 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.”**

So, what is happening here? The circle of those seeking to restore the sinning brother or sister who has refused to repent in **verse 15** has been enlarged to include others. These individuals are being added obviously to make it that much more difficult for the sinning brother or sister in Christ to continue in his or her sin.

But this is not the only reason. It is also for the purpose of confirming every fact. Isn't that exactly what the verse says? **“But 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.”**

Church discipline should not be conducted recklessly. It must be based in fact. In other words, church discipline cannot proceed forward unless the sin, the willfulness of the sin, and the unrepentant state of the sinner has in fact been verified as spelled out in step two of the discipline process.

So is this second step of church discipline any easier than the first? No! How could it be any easier? It involves more people. In other words, more people have to be willing to ignore their natural impulse, which is to simply bury their head in the sand. And why would they do this? They do so that they, in obedience to Christ and by the grace the God supplies, might confront the sinning brother or sister in Christ with the hope that they might be restored.

So, what happens if this second step fails? We need to move on to the third step of church discipline. And what is this third step?

The third step of church discipline is telling it to the church (Matthew 18:17). Let me now read for you **Matthew 18:17** and see if this is not so. **“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”** Obviously this step is pretty extreme and care certainly needs to be exercised so that when it is done we do not go beyond what Christ intended by His words or fall short of what Christ intended by His words.

So who among us would be responsible for determining how this particular step of discipline would be carried out? It would be the elders who have been entrusted with the spiritual oversight of this congregation who must figure this out.

And what do we believe? We believe that the phrase, **“tell it to the church,”** does not necessitate that every member of the church be told about of the unrepentant sinful state of a particular brother or sister in Christ but rather only the members that personally know the person that we are seeking to restore.

In other words, if someone has been extensively involved in this fellowship and is therefore well known by this fellowship we will make their sin known

to the entire fellowship as we did a number of weeks ago, but if it only a few people know the person that we are seeking to restore then we will only make their sin known to the few people within our church that personally have known them. We believe that this approach fulfills the intent of Christ's words and is consistent with all other New Testament passages related to church discipline.

So let me ask you this question. Is this an easy step for a church to take? Absolutely not! It is a very difficult step. Who wants to do this in their flesh? Nobody would! But if we trust Christ and the words of Christ then what option does a church have? A church that loves Christ and the words of Christ must act **“tell it to the church”** if they truly love the sinning brother and sister and is seeking their restoration.

And what happens if these efforts fail? We then go to the fourth step and final step of church discipline. So, what is that?

The fourth and final step of church discipline is to break off all social contact (Matthew 18:17). Let me read **Matthew 18:17** and see if this is not so. **“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it even to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”**

When Christ said, **“Let them be to you as Gentile and a tax collector,”** this would have meant in the Jewish context that all those within the church who knew this unrepentant sinner and had some kind of relationship with him would in obedience to Christ's command cut off all social inter-action with this so-called brother or sister in Christ who stubbornly was refusing to repent. This is what Christ meant when he said, **“Let them be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”**

So, what would this accomplish? Hopefully when the church, the body of Christ, cuts off all social contact with an unrepentant sinner, the sanctifying influence of the church that has served as a buffer between them and the spiritual forces of darkness will have been removed, which will allow the unrepentant sinner to suffer all the ill effects of his fleshly choices thus hopefully leading him to godly sorrow and true repentance.

This is what Paul meant when he talked about turning the incestuous man in Corinth over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh in **1 Corinthians 5:5**. Paul was not primarily talking about the destruction of his physical body but rather the destruction of his or her sinful and fleshly orientation.

Would such an action on the part of the church be easy? No, it would be extremely difficult especially for those believing family members and those believing friends whose very lives over the years have been defined on so many different levels by this sinning brother or sister. For them the choice to separate in obedience to Christ and as an expression of love would be excruciatingly painful thus requiring the ongoing outpouring of God's grace to ensure their success. In fact, apart from God's grace they would most certainly fail. But they did not fail.

God's grace has been abundantly poured out upon this church over the last several months as we have sought to faithfully in obedience to follow through on the commands that He has provided us in **Matthew 18:15-17**. It has not been easy but His grace has been more than sufficient.

But this has not been the only place where the grace of God has been manifested in restoration process. So where else has God's grace been manifested?

God's grace has been manifested through the restoration of our sister in Christ (Hebrews 4:14-15).

She has gone through difficult times. She has been tempted by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life just as we have been tempted. She has struggled against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of the darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness just as we have struggled.

We know what it is to be tempted. We know what it to struggle. We know how easily it is for sin to beset us.

So who is going to care for us? The Lord our shepherd and great high priest will care for us, in the midst of our temptations, in the midst of our struggles and in the midst of our defeats. Let me read for you **Hebrews 4:14-16**. **“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through**

**the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of our need.”**

And this is exactly what our sister in Christ did and in the time of her need God poured His grace upon her. And this morning I have joy of announcing to you that our sister in Christ by the grace of God and by the grace of God alone has returned back to the Lord, to her family and to our church.

And on behalf of our church family I would like to officially welcome you home. It is good to have you back.

May all the praise, the honor, and the glory go to God for His good work.