



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Basic Bible Doctrine, Matthew 18:5-17

"Church Discipline"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Tonight we are looking at the oversight of the local church, and if I may broaden it just a little bit, the oversight and the discipline of the local church. This is the last in our very short series of three studies on the church in our basic Bible doctrine. Many of us, in thinking about the local church, tend to overlook the contribution that the New Testament gives to the doctrine of the church, and the many passages that have to do with church discipline. So, it is something of a neglected truth. One of the reasons for the lower standard of life in the church is, I think, related to the fact that there has been a neglect of the application of church discipline. One of the reasons that the problem of apostasy exists in some of our large denominations is, I think, related to the neglect of church discipline.

Just this last weekend I was in one of the cities of the south, one of the nicer cities, I think, in which there was a very large church that the gospel was being preached in, though the denomination now has become largely liberal. And as a result of the fact that it has become largely liberal, a large number had finally been forced to leave the local church there, and twelve hundred people were meeting in a high school building in the city, in the process of forming a new church. One of the reasons for the existence of a situation like this is that in the history of that particular denomination, and I am

acquainted with it a little bit, there was not the application of church discipline when ministers and elders and others who were prominent in the local church were allowed to move away from the historic facts of the Christian faith.

The failure to exercise discipline allowed unbelief to enter, and to prosper until finally, unbelief attained the ascendancy, and now it is impossible for anyone to bring charge of apostasy against the leadership of the church, for the simple reason that the vast majority of those in the church would support the apostates. And so, to bring charge is, in effect, to bring about your own removal from that church. If discipline had been applied in the beginning, if when the first individual, whose departure was known to the rest of the denomination, had been brought up for church discipline, well it is possible that that church would be a relatively sound church today.

It's a good practice in the local church on the part of the elders to be concerned about every member, with reference to their own spiritual living, because discipline is set forth in the Bible in a great number of passages. I think it might surprise you to realize how many passages of the Bible have to do with church discipline. Let me just name some of the chapters, Matthew chapter 18; Romans chapter 16, 1 Corinthians chapter 5; 2 Corinthians chapter 2 Galatians chapter 6; 1 Thessalonians chapter 5; 2 Thessalonians chapter 3; 1 Timothy chapter 5; Titus chapters 1 and 3; Hebrews chapter 13, verse 17 in that chapter; 2 John; 3 John; and these are just some of the chapters that have some significant material in them on the doctrine of church discipline. So, I think that you can see that it is widely taught in the New Testament. Not all of these chapters are chapters completely devoted to the subject, but they contain material concerning church discipline.

Now, last week we were looking at the organization of the church and its ministry, and we were talking about the congregation or the body. And then we talked about the elders, and we talked about their titles, their identity. That is, that the bishops and the elders were the same. We tried to make the point that in the local church there existed a plurality of elders, and not simply one. Some have sought to teach that there is just one

elder in the local church, and that he's only one who is an elder, and that individual is usually said to be the minister of the church. That, however, is not scriptural, so far as I can tell, for in several passages of the New Testament it is made very plain that in the local church there is to exist a plurality of elders.

The functions of the elder are set forth in the Scripture as the leading of the flock, the shepherding of the flock, in the government of the flock, including control or guidance and direction over financial matters. That is set forth in Acts chapter 11, in verse 30, where the gifts from others for the church in Jerusalem were brought to the elders of the church for their disposition. They are to lead, in the sense that they are to shepherd the flock. They are to lead, in the sense that they are to teach the flock. Sheep feed themselves, but it is the responsibility of the elders to provide pasturage for them. So, one of the principle duties of the elder is to lead the flock, in the sense of, to shepherd them.

Another of the chief duties of the elder is to guard the flock from false teaching. Titus makes that very plain. In the 1st chapter of Titus, verse 9 through verse 13, the Apostle Paul writes these words, and I think they are important for this aspect of the elders' ministry. He says with reference to them that they are to hold "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to confute the opposers, for there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake." Then he continues, "One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, the Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons. This testimony is true, wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith." So, one of the duties of the elder is to guard the flock from false teaching.

And then finally, one of the duties of the elder is to discipline, and we have passage devoted to that. We want to take a look now at one of the principle passages

that has to do with church discipline, and it's found in Matthew chapter 18, verse 15 through verse 20, so if you have your New Testament with you, turn with me to Matthew chapter 18, and we'll look at verse 15 through verse 17 first. Now, in the preceding verses of this chapter, the first 14 verses, Matthew writes against inflicting wrong on others. For example, we read in verse 7, "Woe unto the world because of offences!" And then in verse 10, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." But now, in this section, they are told by our Lord how to act when they are wrong. And so, we read in verse 15 now, "Moreover," the Lord Jesus says, "if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector."

There should not be any question about the fact that the Lord, here is speaking about the church of Jesus Christ. Of course, in the 17th verse we have the term church twice. You remember in the reading of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that the term church only occurs three times. Now, that's some evidence for the fact that the church was not in existence, because in chapter 16, in verse 18, the Lord Jesus had said, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." And so, he speaks of the church as a future entity. In chapter 18, we are probably to interpret this passage in the light of that previous mention of the term church. These are the only references to the term church during our Lord's ministry, and it's not until the time of Acts chapter 5, that we have mention of the church as being in existence. So, what we are given here is some instruction with reference to the church, that is future from the standpoint of our Lord's ministry. And it has to do with discipline.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." So, the first thing the Lord says is that when you see a

brother sinning a sin, and if that sin should be a sin against you, in particular, the first thing you do is not go and tell someone else, but you tell him his fault between thee and him alone. Now, you'll remember that the Apostle Paul says something very similar to this in Galatians chapter 6, in verse 1 of his letter. Listen to what he says, it's almost as if he is giving what he learned from reading Matthew chapter 18, he says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." It is a temptation for us, when we see a brother or a sister commit a sin, do something that is contrary to holy Scripture, to go to our best friend and talk to them about it. In fact, occasionally you will find people that will go to the elders or to one of the deacons, and say that they have seen such and such do something, which to them is a sin. Even that's wrong. You shouldn't go to the elders if you see, as Paul says, if you see a brother "overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore them." It is between you and that person only, because it is to you that that knowledge has come.

In the case that the brother has trespassed against you, you are to go to him and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. In other words, first of all, when there is sin against an individual, the first response is the private rebuke. It is private. The Germans put it, *unter vier Augen* or "under four eyes." That is, it is only to be known by those that are involved, the person who has done the wrong and the person who has been wronged. Now, this particular thing, the way the Lord Jesus has written it is interesting in another respect, too. That we are to be concerned, because of the sin, not because of the wrong done to us, primarily, because the emphasis on this verse, in the original text, rests upon the word trespass, or the word sin.

Moreover, if thy brother shall sin against thee, the Greek text uses the word commonly translated sin. So, it is the sin that is the thing that concerns the fellow believer, not the fact that he has been wronged. In other words, it is not so much the fact that we have suffered, it's the fact that the brother will suffer, because of the sin that he's

committed. That should be our concern. So, the first step then, when one sees a brother fall into a sin, be overtaken by a fault, or if the brother sins against us, is to settle it between the two of you, unter vier Augen, under four eyes. I think the Germans have it right, it's to be something that is to be seen and known, only by those who are involved.

Now, that is something, I think, that is rarely practiced in our midst, and I'm using the "our" in the broadest sense of the church. It's rarely practiced. Almost always, when something is done, we get hurt, and then we go and talk to others about it, rather than settling the matter between the two. How much better, if when something happens, when we have someone sin against us, or we see a brother overtaken in a fault, if it were settled right there. Then there would be no reason for the elders to have to exercise discipline. Furthermore, the Lord says, "Tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." In other words, you will gain a prize, you will gain a brother.

I think that the meaning of that is that the brother will be restored to fellowship as a result of your faithful discipline, or disciplinary conversation with him. It's James who in the 5th chapter of his epistle says something I think that's rather similar to that. The last two verses of the Epistle of James read this way, "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." So, if someone errs from the truth, and someone else is used of God to turn them back, he will save that soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. So, the first step, then in biblical discipline, when a sin takes place that comes to your knowledge, the first thing is for you to talk to that individual. If it is some fault in which he's overtaken, you talk to him. If it's a case of him wronging you, you should talk to him. That's the first step.

But now, of course, what happens when there is no response, and often that is the case. Well, the 16th verse, after the private rebuke, gives us a plural rebuke, "But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three

witnesses every word may be established." Now, the Lord Jesus is building upon a principle of the Old Testament, and that principle is that nothing should be established except in the presence of proper witnesses. In Deuteronomy chapter 19, and verse 15, is the text to which he refers. There we read, "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established. So, in the case of an individual who has been overtaken in a fault and you've sought to exhort them, if they do not respond then you should take two or three witnesses, and then the brother is to be confronted by the rebuke of more than one. If the person sins against you, and he does not respond to your rebuke, then you should take some witnesses.

In other words, it is necessary that it be established properly that he has truly sinned, because we can make false judgment. We can see a person do something, and we say, "Ah, he has sinned." But when we know all of the facts we discover, well it wasn't a sin after all. Or when someone sins against us, we think that we have been wronged, but after a while, upon mature reflection we realize that it wasn't really they who wronged us, but we who were in the wrong in the beginning. So, in the light of the Old Testament that things should have proper witnesses before they were established, the Lord Jesus says, "Take two or three, or one or two more, with you, so there'll be two or three, that every word may be established.

But suppose the person does not respond to the personal exhortation, and he doesn't respond when a couple of others go with the individual to him, well then it's necessary for a public rebuke to be given, but not until then. We read, "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector." I couldn't help but laugh at that, "Let him be unto thee as a tax collector." Evidently, they weren't too popular in those days either. "Let him be unto thee as an heathen and as unto the IRS." [Laughter] But notice now, it says, "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church."

Now, the church here is, in the light of the mention in chapter 16, verse 18, the church that would come into existence on the Day of Pentecost. This, in the light of the fact that it's to be told to the church, this is a reference to the local church, not the universal church. There is no way for us to tell it to the universal church, to shout it on the housetops would not make it known to the universal church. He's talking about the local church. This is an official rebuke. So, when he tells it to the church, in the light of other things that are told in the New Testament, it is to be told unto the elders of the church, for the elders are they who represent the church. So, I would take it that the steps of discipline as set forth are these, if a brother is sinned against, it should be settled first of all, between the two, if that works fine. You've gained your brother. If not, then you should take witnesses, one or two witnesses in order that the matter may be established. If there is a response then, that ends that matter. But if there is no response then, then it should be told to the elders. And the elders should, if there is no response to the elders then, it should be made public in the church. And the brother guilty of the sin should be expelled from assembly privileges.

Now, it is my own personal feeling that what is meant is not that he should be kicked out of the church, but rather that he should be prevented from exercising the privileges of membership in the local church. I know that there are many who say that one should be excommunicated at this point. But excommunication implies that the individual and we of course have here a brother mind you, excommunication implies when you kick them out of the church; that implies that they are not really a member of our Lord Jesus Christ's body. Well, if they're not a member of our Lord Jesus Christ's body, the implication is that they are not believers at all. So, it would seem to me that the idea that a person, who has sinned and does not respond to discipline, should be ousted from the church is really a denial of the eternal security of the believer.

I think that biblical discipline is not excommunication from the entire body, but rather it is excommunication. That is expulsion from the privileges of the local church.



He should be encouraged to come to the meetings. The ministry of the word might be the occasion of bringing him back into a right relationship to the Lord, but he should be refused the right to partake of the bread and wine in the communion service. In other words, it should be publicly announced in the local assembly that brother so and so, or sister so and so, stands under the discipline of the church, and therefore they are not to partake of the bread and the wine in the meetings, because the partaking of the bread and the wine signifies that you are in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, and also that you are in fellowship with the others who are there partaking of the bread and wine. So that excommunication is really excommunication, it is excommunion. That is a person is not allowed to partake of the communion.

Back in the earlier days of the denominations in this country, this is what was practiced. I have often mentioned this, and some of you have heard me say this before. But when I was living in Charleston, South Carolina I was attending the Old Scots Presbyterian or the First Presbyterian Church. It's called the Old Scots Church, because it was chartered from the Church of Scotland, one of the two churches in this country that was chartered from the Church of Scotland, the other being in Savannah, Georgia. And that church was also called the Old Scots Church, because almost all of its first members were Scotsmen who had come over into this country, and even today, on the membership rolls of that church, there are many of the names of those original settlers who came to that part of the country. It's one of the oldest of the Presbyterian churches in this country, over two hundred and fifty years old. Well, when I first was there as a young teenager, I can still remember the long communication tables that they used when the time came for the observance of the communion.

And furthermore, you were given a little token, and if you didn't have the token you were not eligible to sit at the Lord's Table, and that token was given to those who were in good standing or in fellowship in the local church. So, you had to have a token to observe the Lord's Supper. It would be as if we in Believers Chapel were, say we were

going to observe the communion supper on Sunday night, and on about Monday or Tuesday we'd mail out from the church office tokens to everybody who was in communion or in fellowship, so far as we knew. And then at the door the deacons would take your token before you were allowed to come in and observe the Lord's Supper. In this way, the elders were able to keep track of the spiritual condition of the assembly.

In Scotland, and even to the present day, in some places in Scotland, they have discipline meetings on the Saturday afternoon before the observance of the Lord's Supper on Sunday. And these special meetings now are largely meetings of preparation for the observance of the Lord's Supper the next day. It's a time of prayer. It's a time of examination of one's spiritual condition. It's a time of singing of hymns and of other things that go into the meeting. But it is a preparation for the observance of the Lord's Supper. If an individual is not in fellowship, well then of course, he would be denied the privilege of sitting at the Lord's Table.

Some years ago when I was in Nacogdoches, Texas, there was an elderly man there in one of the churches I was preaching in, the Grace Bible Church in the city. And this man was a judge, a former judge, and he lived in Lufkin, but he was a very sound Christian man, and he felt that there was no church in Lufkin that was sound in the word, and so he would drive from Lufkin over to Nacogdoches. He was a very godly man about seventy-five or eighty years of age, and he was very vigorous. And he took a liking to me, and I took a liking to him, and I was often with him. He used to tell me of some of the experiences that they had in the Baptist church in the early days in Texas. He said that on Saturday before the observance of the Lord's Supper, they had also meetings which were disciplinary meetings.

And at that disciplinary meeting, the deacons would go over the membership and bring up matters for church discipline. And in the meetings, often some very funny things happened. He said that in some of the churches the people were related to one another

rather closely, and so some of those disciplinary matters were rather touchy. And so, there was often disagreement over whether individuals ought to be disciplined or not. Those in the family thinking no, they shouldn't be disciplined. And some outside the family thinking they should be disciplined. And so, sometimes arguments broke out in the midst of this meeting, and they would have well, some kind of knock down drag out fights, in a nice way, over whether a certain person should be disciplined or not.

He said there was an expression that came to be common that after they discussed a certain person, and they came to a certain conviction, which was contrary to the feeling of some in the audience, and they didn't have any way of responding, the only way they could respond was to respond in their prayers. And so he said, "We had an expression that if a person said something that was contrary to another person's spiritual testimony we thought was wrong, we would punch each other and say," and he used the slang that they used, "answer him in prayer." And so, the person would stand up, and in the course of the prayer he would let the other side know how he felt, invoking God's support on his side. But these meetings were important meetings in which the spiritual condition of the assembly was taken up by the officials.

Well, it must have been something like that anyway. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." I take it that means the elders. "But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector." That is, he should be expelled from the assembly privileges. He should not be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper. Of course, the spirit of rebuke is to be in the spirit of love. "Lord, speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone." That, of course is the attitude that any one should have when we are dealing with causes of discipline.

Now, if there is public refusal of the privileges of communion, then of course, there is proper response on the part of the people. And we read, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Well, that's a rather interesting thing, because you know we live in the day when everybody is rather soft-hearted. We're soft-hearted in our

national policy, that's one of the reasons Ronald Reagan is President of the United States right now, whether he's going to be a good president or not, well, no one knows. But one of the reasons he is president is because there are a lot of people in this country who have decided they do not like what has happened to the United States of America over the past five, or ten, or fifteen, or twenty years. They don't like it that the United States has lost the respect of the nations of this earth. And one of the reasons for that is that there is, abroad, the idea that if we are nice and sweet, then everybody else is going to be nice and sweet to us. I know, when I was living in Britain twenty years ago, that was the attitude that they had. And some of us Americans at the time said, "Great Britain will never win another war as long as the mood of the populous is as it is." They were very, very happy to avoid any kind of confrontation with anyone, no matter how much they may be wronged by them.

Now, in the Bible we are told that there is a certain way in which we are to respond to people who are under discipline. I've often seen this happen in the Christian church, somebody is under discipline. Instead of responding in the biblical way, they take them in, and try to be nice and sweet to them, and try to act as if they're not under discipline. That's very much of a wrong, according to the teaching of the Bible. "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector."

Now, Paul says something about this in more detail. So, I'm going to ask you, if you will, to turn with me to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 6 and verse 14; 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 6, verse 14. The apostle writes, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, page twelve hundred and ninety-five in the approved edition of the King James Version, [Laughter] or if you have a New American Standard Bible, well, that's permissible too, twelve ninety-five. Verse 6, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, "Now we command you," Paul says, "Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of me." Will you read verse 14? "And if any man obey not our word

by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." Paul says that we are to withdraw from the individual who is walking disorderly, who is under discipline. I think that that withdrawal is Paul's way of expressing what is meant by our Lord when he says, "Let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a tax collector."

Now, notice the two things that he says are to be done, verse 14, you are to note that man. That means that you are to publicly name him. That doesn't mean that you are just to notice him over there as we walks along the streets, it means no, you are to point him out in the local assembly. You are to note that man. Many years ago, Mr. Prier will remember this; we were in a local church together, let's see how many years ago, thirty. Over thirty years ago, I know you didn't think Mr. Prier is that old, but [Laughter] over thirty years ago, and in this church, discipline was exercised with reference to two young seminary students. And they needed it, and some others of us who were seminary students probably needed some counsel, too, but they needed it. They were walking disorderly in the church, and they were causing trouble. And so, the result was that finally the elders dealt with them, and there was no response, and so I can remember one of the elders standing up in the meeting, and the name of the church was Believers Chapel. That's right, it was a different church, but it was named Believers Chapel. And one of the elders stood up, and made the public announcement that, named the two names, were regarded as being under discipline.

Now, of course in these days in which we are living, there are so many churches that one person under discipline in one assembly, well all that he will do is walk down the street and enter another church. That's unfortunate. It would be much better if all of the churches that were Christian kept in touch with each other, so that anyone under discipline in one assembly would be known by all of the other assemblies. That's one of the advantages of a denomination, because ideally that is what would normally take place. But anyway, that man was noted. He was marked out. Everybody in the

assembly present that morning knew that those two individuals were under discipline, that's the first thing.

Now, the second thing that Paul says is, "have no company with him." The tendency of many soft-hearted Christians, at this point, is to well, "if a brother is under discipline, maybe if I invite him home to have dinner with me, I can get next to him, and I can reach him." That is not the thing to do, the apostle says here. That's the soft-hearted thing to do, but the wrong-hearted thing to do. "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed." And so, you are not to go put your arm around the brother who is under discipline and treat him as though he were not. What he needs is to be treated as if he were under discipline, because Paul says he might be ashamed. So, have no company with him. That Greek word means "to mix up along with"; so don't mix up with him.

Whiteford points out that that doesn't mean to completely ignore him. That is, if you walk down the street and see him, you don't just pass by without speaking to him, but it means you refuse to have free intercourse with him. You refuse to invite him into your house. And of course, this too is inclusive of the Lord's Supper. He is not to be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. Now, the apostle does say that it's perfectly all right to make personal appeals to that individual to repent. For in verse 15 we read, "Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." So, what you should do is not put your arm around him and treat him as if he were a brother in good standing, but you should speak to him, and you should admonish him. In other words, you should try to deal with him as one who is out of fellowship with the Lord, and out of fellowship with the assembly, and seek to bring them back by appeals for repentance and conversion in the sense of repentance.

You'll notice that the apostle says here, "Admonish him as a brother." And the aim of this is that he might be restored. For all discipline has as its end, not the chastisement of the brother only, but chastisement or punishment, it's questionable whether you ought

to use the word punishment, but chastisement, discipline with a view to restoration. The aim of all discipline is restoration to fellowship, to the time when the brother is free to come back into the meeting in order to enjoy fellowship with the saints and with the Lord together again.

Now, the remainder of the passage has to do with the power of discipline in the church. Matthew chapter 18, verse 18 and verse 19, the Lord Jesus says, "Verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." These are technical terms, bind and loosed, used with reference to the teaching of the rabbis. To bind something means to forbid something; to loose something means to permit something. For example, the rabbis said to them that take a hot bath on the Sabbath day, they bind washing. That is, washing is forbidden when you take a hot bath on the Sabbath day and they loose perspiring. In other words, it all right on the Sabbath day if you take a bath to perspire. That's all right. You're not considered to be breaking the law. That was called in rabbinic literature "Texas toleration." [Laughter]

Now, the Lord Jesus continues by saying in verse 19, "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven." Now, this too has to do with the power of discipline in the church. When the elders exercise discipline, they can count upon heaven standing behind that discipline. And on the man-ward side, he says, "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven." That has to do primarily with church discipline. When the assembly agrees concerning a particular form of discipline, well then, as he says, "It shall be done for them by my Father who is in heaven."

Now, it is possible that there is a general principal here that goes beyond church discipline, and does have to do with our prayer life, but you can see in the context this has primary reference to church discipline. It means that when the elders act in

accordance with the principles of Scripture, and they act in disciplinary matters, they can count on the Lord God standing behind them. And that means that if we are the object of their discipline, well we are the object of heaven's opposition. It's a very serious matter then.

And finally, he concludes in verse 20 by pointing out that the presence of the Lord is the source of the power of discipline, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Here's the proper attitude for the church when it meets on Sunday morning, it's to meet in his name, but primarily this text has to do with church discipline. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." In other words, I will be there in your disciplinary activities and decisions, and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ rests behind the actions that you take.

I'm going to ask you now, our time is up, but I want just to read three verses for you, because the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 gives us an illustration of the application of this. There were difficulties in the church in Corinth, but Paul was not there. He says, "You should have exercised discipline, but you did not exercise discipline." And in speaking to them, he speaks to them by telling them what he would have done had he been there, and in fact he says, "Even though I was not there, I did act in discipline, as if I were there." Verse 3 of 1 Corinthians 5, "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Notice, he acted even though he wasn't there, because that was the right thing for them to have done. He mentions the name of the Lord. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," the Lord Jesus said. He mentioned the assembly of them all. He said, "We had a little spiritual meeting, and I in the name of the Lord, you gathered together in spirit, we have acted, and the power of the Lord was present, and



the result is," he says in verse 5, "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ." So, Paul carried out discipline, even though he was not there, in spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Counting upon the power of God to work in the case of this Corinthian brother who had sinned against the Lord, and he was delivered over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, for discipline to effect his physical life, that is spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

The oversight of the assembly is in the hands of the elders, and ultimately disciplinary power is in their hands. May God help us to recognize that that is an important function for the health of the local church. Let's close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for these passages that have to do with the oversight of the local church. And we praise thee that we are part of that church by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. for Jesus sake, amen.

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**