

Title: Jesus is worth a beautiful bride.  
Text: Matthew 18.15-20  
Theme: The grace of church discipline  
Series: Matthew #91  
Prop Stmtnt: God cares so much about people that he gives us careful instructions to follow so that we can be a happy, holy and unified body of believers.

If you have been a follower of Christ for any length of time, you realize how critical a local church is to your spiritual health. Often when people move to another community, they just assume that they can find a good church, but it is not always an easy thing to find and is certainly not automatic. That is why, before you make the decision on where to move, look at more than the property values, school system, and commute times, etc., look for a healthy church. Otherwise, no matter how much you may like your new house, you will never be at home without a church family. No church family is perfect, not by a long shot. But, if you have been in some unhealthy churches, and then become part of a healthy one, you realize what a gift a good church is. Vice versa, if you have been in a healthy church and then become part of an unhealthy congregation, you realize how important a good church is. The older you get the more concerned you are that your church is vibrant and healthy for the next generation. Also, the older that you get the more you realize that it does not take much for a church to lose its way and become a heartache to its members instead of a blessing.

So, what can you do to help our church right now be healthy? What can you do to help ensure that this region of Detroit will have an enduring, endearing, and vibrant gospel witness for years to come? You can reaffirm your commitment to helping your church protect the name of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> In this text, Jesus tells us how to do this. It is so pleasing to sing together on Sundays about Christ. It is moving. It is compelling. It is thrilling. It is particular exciting to hear our children sing, isn't it? We are moved by this because we witness a public declaration of their hope and trust in Christ. But the truth is, singing the songs is not difficult. What is difficult and what reveals whether or not we really believe what we are singing is how we live. The crowds of Palm Sunday were excited. But they were fickle. The excitement of following Christ turned to resentment and hatred when they realized the cost. What about us? If we really want to Crown Christ as King, if we really believe that he is the Majestic One deserving of all glory, laud and honor, then shouldn't we be ready to do what he commands? Shouldn't we be desirous to do what will advance the glory of his fame and protect the honor of his name? Absolutely! But the text I am about to read is sadly neglected by many believers. But when it is ignored or abused the church and the reputation of the gospel has always suffered. But we believe that Jesus is worth a beautiful bride, let's seek to listen with our hearts.

Read Text:

I. **What is Obvious from this text?**

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Leeman subtitled his book on Church Discipline, "how the church protects the name of Jesus."

**A. Jesus is giving his followers a directive for living out His purposes for redemption.**

1) God's plan is create one new people through Christ. – Eph. 2 (Purpose)

This is what God is doing. Through Christ he is creating a new nation from all of the nations. Through Christ he is creating a new people from all of the peoples. These people who form this one people are not perfect, yet. They will be glorified one day. That is, one day with Christ, they will (we will) be like Christ, but we are not there yet. How can we now live in a way that reflects our identity when because we are not yet made perfect we still sin against one another? How do we deal with problems that arise and will arise between sanctifying, but not fully sanctified believers? Jesus gives us the plan that is designed to help us live out what it means to be one new people through Christ.

2) The directive is not optional. (Directive)

The language that Christ uses is full of commands. “Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.” “Take one or two others along” “tell it to the church” “let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector”. On what basis can we claim to be a church and say to the head of the church that we really don't do this? This doesn't work in our context. If we did this, people would get the wrong idea about the church. What are you talking about?! If we don't do this, then we have the wrong idea about the church. In fact, whatever we have may not in fact be a legitimate church. This is what the head of the church says that the church is supposed to do.

Let's say that you have a car. The owner's manual says that you must put unleaded gasoline in the car in order for the car to operate properly. But going to a gas station and getting out and paying for gas and putting it into your car is not convenient. So, you decide that you are going to put water in it because you have a spigot on the side of your house and a hose and that is a whole lot easier and way less money. How does that work out for you? It doesn't! Beloved, this is not optional. This is a serious charge for the church. And you should never, ever join a church that fails to practice this because this is one of the critical means that Christ has established for the church to protect the integrity of the gospel, the unity of the church and the reputation of Jesus.

3) The plan involves the church.

This is only the second time that Jesus has talked about the church. He is getting his disciples ready for the church. He already told them (chapter 16) that he is going to build the church that the gates of hell will not prevail against it and that he will give the keys of the kingdom to the church. Jesus said that he will give authority to the church so that “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” (16.19b) Now, compare those words in chapter 16 to these words of Christ in 18.18 “whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” They are exactly the same, aren't they? Do you see the connection? Christ has given authority to the church to act on his

behalf. He does not give this authority to any individual Christian, but only to the church. Therefore, you cannot obey this command unless you are part of a local church. And a group of people who call themselves a church are only a legitimate church to the degree that they fulfill the definition of a church that is established by Christ.

## B. The plan is pretty straightforward.

I will speak more about this process in another message, but let's at least review the steps that Christ has established whenever a conflict arises between two believers.

- 1) Go only to the person who has sinned against you.
  - a. Tell him his fault
  - b. If he listens (confesses, forgiveness is implied – v.21) the matter is over.
  - c. If he does not listen go to the next step

This is obviously a very important and often neglected step. Do not go to other trusted individuals to get counsel when you already have counsel. Do not make this gossip disguised as a prayer request. Do not post on your social media accounts how hurt you are, how upset you are, how disappointed you are, etc. so that you invite all sorts of inquiries that tempt you to tell other people what has happened and therefore sin. If someone has actually sinned against you, it is grievous and it indeed hurts. If you sin against them because you fail to follow Christ's commands then you are making a bad situation so much worse. Jesus is obviously concerned with keeping the circle of knowledge as small as possible. ***People who want to tell others about how they have been sinned against in order to punish the person, shame the person, or elicit pity, know very, very little of Calvary's love.***

- 2) Go back to the person and bring 2 or 3 witnesses
  - a. Review the issue
  - b. If he listens (confession and repentance implied) the matter is over.
  - c. If he does not listen go to the next step.

The language that Christ uses ("charge" "evidence") makes it clear that the church is now participating in a process that sounds judicial. It sounds that way because it is. There is a verdict that these witnesses are expected to render. They may say to the person who was sinned against, that you are misunderstanding the entire matter. This person did not sin against you. Or they may say, to the person who is being confronted that what this person is saying is true. You need to take this seriously and confess this and repent.

- 3) Bring the matter before the church.
  - a. The local body of believers is engaged to helping restore this brother.
  - b. If he listens to the church (implied) the matter is over.
  - c. If he does not listen, go to the next step

People may say, “You cannot do this these days because people will bring a lawsuit.” That is a possibility. But, this is what the head of the church says to do. We must do carry this out. We have a responsibility to inform people of this when they join the church, which we do. We have responsibility to have this process written out in our constitution, which we do. We have a responsibility to teach on this and preach on this, which we do. So, while we seek to do the right thing and inform everyone up front of how we function as a church, this does not guarantee that we will not face legal action. We haven’t yet. But we certainly could. People like to say that the church has no business telling you how to live. That is patently false. The church (all of us - members) has been entrusted with the reputation of Jesus. We are given clear directives by Christ to protect the reputation of his name by helping one another and going after one another when we wander away. A church that does not call you to live right and that does not pursue you when you wander away does not love you like it should.

4) Treat the person as an unbeliever. (one who needs the gospel)

A Gentile was a pagan and a tax collector was one who betrayed the covenant community by aligning himself with the enemy. Christ has given the church the authority to mark an unrepentant person as “one who is living as an unbeliever.” The truth is, we do not know a person’s heart. This person may be a believer who has wandered away and God is using the action of the church as a wake-up call to bring this person back to fellowship. It could also be that this person is an unbeliever and has either been deceiving others or has been deceived himself. To treat this one as an unbeliever means that we witness to this person and plead with them to trust Christ. We would warn them not to participate in communion because communion is only for believers. And we would not treat them as a member of the church, because they have, by virtue of their unrepentant sin forced the church to remove them as a member. After all, membership is the means that God has given to the church to identify who is on the team and who isn’t.

II. What is often overlooked in the text?

These instructions by Christ are not a separate lecture. These instructions are part of his explanation to his disciples about the critical issue of humility, the importance of not causing a follower of Christ to stumble and sin, and the importance of going after a “little one” who has wandered away. When a brother (or sister) sins, they are “wandering away.” Jesus is explaining how we are to go after a “little one.”

A. **This process is a detailed plan of how to go after a “little one.”**

Imagine that you have a large vat of caramel. Imagine that this caramel symbolizes humility and love (vs.1-14). The steps outlined in verses 15-20 need to be completely immersed in this vat of humility and love so that they drip with it. If someone sins against you, it is so easy to react in anger. These steps are never given to the church to be used as a club to beat someone or intimidate them.

I know a man who was repeatedly frustrated with his boys and on several occasions he used this text in anger and threatened to take them before the church so that they would be shamed because of how they were treating him. Now, the truth was, the dad was living as a hypocrite and his boys had lost all respect for him. And they said things to him that were wrong all in the midst of arguments and fights where he was saying things to them that were just as wrong. But then he would pull out this text on them and threatened them with it. And when they blew him off, he would accuse them of being disrespectful to God's Word, when he was the biggest offender. Of course he wanted the church to follow through, but note this; he wanted the church to follow through with his interpretation of what to do. The obvious problem was, he was ripping these steps out from the context of what Jesus was saying. So, listen to me carefully. If a church ignores this text, it will create a context of disunity and factions. If, however a church follows these steps without humility and love, it will be absolutely disastrous. It is better not to do this, than to do this in the wrong spirit and with the wrong goal. Jesus wants us to go after little ones and we need to be ready to rejoice when they come home. We do not go after little ones in order to shame them or embarrass them, no matter how much we may have been hurt by their sin. The truth is, no matter how much we are sinned against, it really does not compare to how much we have sinned against Christ; a point he spends the rest of the chapter on. But, let's talk a bit about love and what love really is because...

**B. This process is to be driven by a willingness to sacrifice because of love.**

Culture: If you love your child, you will give your child everything that he or she wants. If you hate your child you will not let your child have everything that every other child seems to have. Indulge your children because you will look awesome and cool! And that is really all that matters in life, right?

God: If you love your child, you will train your child to work for and earn the things they need and want. If you hate your child, you will give your child everything that they want so they do not learn how be disciplined, thankful, humble or dependent on God. If you give your kid everything he wants, he won't need God, when he has you. That works if you can pay for everything including his sins by dying, rising again and living forever.

Culture: I have seen discipline done so poorly that I am not going to do it at all.

God: Discipline that is done wrong is a grievous sin and wreaks havoc on people's life. But, discipline that is done wrong is not a reason not to discipline. In fact, if you love your child, you will discipline your child. God disciplines his children. (Heb. 12.6) If God is love and God disciplines his children, who are we to think that we can love better than God and not discipline our children? If you love your child, you will discipline your child. If your church loves its members it will go after them when they wander away and it will use the process that Christ has given. Love is not easy. It is a sacrifice. (John 3.16)

**C. You cannot do this apart from the local church.**

This directive is not given simply to the leaders but to the entire congregation. Here is one of the reasons why. Is it possible for the leadership of a church to become corrupt? Yes. Is it possible for the leadership of a church to abuse this process as a means of silencing critics or intimidating people who want to expose the corruptness? It is not only possible it happens. It is one of the worst things that can happen to a church, but it happens. Is Christ aware of this? Yes. So, look at step 3 (v.17). “Tell it to the church.” What does this mean? It means that unresolved matters are to be brought before the entire church. Do you see what this does? The elders are not the final court of appeals. The congregation is. The elders cannot just say to the congregation, “*hey just trust us, this guy was a bad apple.*” The elders are accountable to the congregation. This means several things: 1) we have to know exactly who the congregation is. When a situation like this is being told to the church, who exactly is the church? Is it every professing believer in the world, nation, state, county, or city? It is every member of that particular congregation, a point that Paul makes and illustrates with the local church in Corinth that was dealing with a church discipline matter. If we are going to obey Jesus and tell it to the church, we have to have a means by which we can identify who is actually part of the church. Being a member is not an automatic process that happens because you attend for so long of time. Because 2) if a church is going to follow this process well, there has to be a means by which we not only know who the church is, but we have to be able to instruct these people on how we function. Yes, the congregation has to have trust in the elders of the church if the church is going to be healthy, but that trust is not blind trust. The elders are therefore; constantly involved with communicating to the congregation and training the congregation so that the congregation knows how we are supposed to respond to matters when they are brought before us.

Look at Ephesians 4.11-16 (chart). I want you to ask 3 questions of this text: 1) why does God give leaders (v.11) to the church? The answer is in verse 12. “To equip the saints for the work of ministry.” 2) Why does God want the saints (the members of the church) to be equipped for the work of ministry? It is the means that God has designed for the unity, maturity, protection and joy of his people. 3) What is therefore necessary for a church to be growing in unity, maturity, protection and joy? It demands leaders who are committed to equipping their people and people who are willing to be taught and engaged in the work of ministry.

Leaders do not exist to lord over the flock nor do they exist to do your job for you. You are called to be part of this process. That is why it is right for me and the leaders to challenge you and encourage you to be a member of a local church. A healthy church protects the gospel and the name of Jesus. Please note the relationship between what Jesus says about the church in chapter 16 and what he says here in chapter 18. This process is one of the means by which he will build his church and ensure that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Therefore,

**D. We will encourage the demise of the church if we fail to follow the commands of Christ.**

Every church has to figure out what it really stands for and what it really is hoping to accomplish. Many of us just want the world to like us. We want people to think that we

are nice. We do good things. We house and feed the homeless. We fix up homes in the neighborhood. We take care of elderly people. We provide clothes and food to people who are in need. We go on trips to do some humanitarian things in other parts of the world. We are nice and likeable and we want you to like us and say nice, respectable and impressive things about us. Now, there is nothing wrong with people liking us, per se. However, if we make that our ultimate goal then that goal becomes our filter. And we will end up preaching a gospel that tells people to believe in Jesus because he will be good for them, but we won't preach a gospel that tells them to repent. We will emphasize all of the humanitarian things that we do, but we will not carry out these steps of church discipline because we would be afraid that people would not like us if we did. We would tell people about heaven and forgiveness and how to have a happy life now, but we would never say anything about homosexuality, materialism, hell or anything that would make someone uncomfortable. After all, they may not like us. It is not easy being a church. Never has, never will until Christ returns. But, we would rather people be upset with us now for believing and speaking the truth than being able to accuse us when they stand before God of hiding it. And what is worse, what could we say to Christ? What excuse could we offer to him for not doing what he said?

But, what is the church? It is not a building. The church is the sum total of its members. Therefore, every member has to figure out what they really stand for. None of what I have said this morning is of any surprise to our members since we explain this in every Discovering God's People class. But, what may surprise you is that we really follow through on this. But in order to do that, we have to have leaders who are careful, loving, humble and consistent. And we have to have a congregation that is careful, learning, serving, humble, loving, and consistent. Beloved, Jesus is worth a beautiful bride.

Conclusion:

One of our members – (family tragedy)

She needs the church

What if the church was so full of division and disease that we could not help? How do we protect the health of the church?

We recognize that we are all part of the immune system designed by Christ to ward off the infection and disease that we are all susceptible to.