

Title: Tell it to the Church  
Text: Matthew 18.15-20  
Theme: The “radical” grace of church discipline  
Series: Jesus said that?!  
Prop Stmnt Church discipline is a wonderful gift of grace given by the Lord of the church in order to protect the gospel so that present and future generations do not go to hell.

Much of our nation remains blissfully ignorant of the history of our constitution and the original intent of our founding fathers. It appears that most don't care, which allows those in power to do things without a great deal of concern of accountability. Right now, a Supreme Court appointment is working her way through the confirmation process. There are questions that I would really like to ask, particularly as it relates to some of the recent rulings of the Supreme Court. For example; just a few years ago, the high court ruled on a case involving the public display of the 10 commandments in a state government building in KY and determined that it was unconstitutional. Therefore, they had to be removed. Never mind that the Federal government just ran roughshod over state's rights, which is truly unconstitutional, but the same Supreme Court ruled that the public display of the 10 commandments at a state government building in Texas was constitutional. That display could stay put. Same court, same justices, same 4 for and 4 against, with Justice Breyer flip-flopping. Confused? You should be confused, because it is confusing. What happens when you are in leadership and you say one thing and then say another?

Now, we are a group of people who voluntarily associate together on an agreed upon set of beliefs. But do not underestimate the significance of our choosing to voluntarily associate ourselves together because, what we agree upon and what we commit ourselves to follow is serious. And we take it seriously, as we must, if we are going to claim to be a church. It doesn't matter what the culture says. It does not matter how radical this may appear. If we are going to claim to be followers of Christ, then we have to follow what Christ has said. Would you agree to that? Now, before you answer that question, you need to be informed of what Christ has said. If you are ignorant of what the Scriptures say, then the leadership of the church can lead the church in any direction it wants, and you won't know any better. You must know better. It is my primary responsibility to teach you the Word for the protection of the gospel. One of the critical, but often misunderstood and neglected responsibilities of the entire church family is church discipline. Here is my thesis: Church discipline is graciously given by the Lord of the church in order to protect the gospel so that the present and future generations do not go to hell.

Now, I am reading this text fully aware that this will sound so radical that some of you will recoil at this and think, “We wouldn't actually do this, would we?” If we hated Christ, and if we hated his gospel, and if we hated his church, then we wouldn't do this. But, if Christ is our Lord, then we must follow his words.

Read Text:

## Question #1 - Why does this sound so radical?

### 1) **We do not recognize the category of sin.**

Have you noticed that no one lies anymore? “You calling me a liar?” “No, of course not, I’m just saying that you misspoke.” “Oh-ok.” We exercise poor judgment. We exaggerate. We hear of nuanced truth, poetic truth, alternative reality, strategic misrepresentation or (my personal favorite) virtual truth. Winston Churchill called these “terminological inexactitudes.” I.e. –a lie! We breathe the air of a culture that no longer recognizes clear categories of truth and lies or right and wrong. But notice what happens. Ralph Keyes chronicles this path in his book, *The Post-Truth Era: Dishonest and Deception in Contemporary Life*, in which he points out the link between dishonesty and the loss of community. “When it comes to post-truthfulness, the fraying of human connections is both cause and effect. Not feeling connected to others makes it easier to lie, which in turn makes it harder to reconnect. Eroded communities foster dishonesty. Dishonesty contributes to the further erosion of communities. As communal bonds wither, unfettered self-interest is unleashed.”<sup>1</sup>

God, by means of his Word, clearly classifies certain actions as being sinful and names them as such. He draws distinct lines, identifies clear categories and communicates specific laws. We live in a culture that, just like Satan, constantly tries to draw into question what God has said. We live surrounded by a culture that attempts to confuse that which is clear in order to excuse disobedience. That confusion is called, moral relativism. In other words; what is wrong for you may not be wrong for me. Who am I to push my beliefs upon someone else? I expect this incoherent and false moral humility in the world. They have rejected God’s law and are left with the insanity of their non-judgmentalism. But, to the church, we have to say, “Man-up!” “Stand-up!” and “Speak-up!” Otherwise, sit-down, shut-up and go home. If God calls it sin, what are you going to call it?

### 2) **We do not recognize the true nature of sin.**

Sin is worse than radioactivity. Sin is worse than the swine flu or cancer. Sin is aggressive, relentless, blinding and damning. If you have aggressive cancer, and you do nothing about it, you will die. The worst thing that cancer can do is kill your temporal body. The worst thing that a disease can do, is destroy your decaying tent. That is all the farther that it can go. Sin is so much worse than cancer. Sin will destroy your soul and damn you forever. The worst thing that we can do is ignore it. If we ignore it, we are pretending. Its affect will spread.

Look at the beginning of Matthew 18. Christ taught on this issue because he knew that we lived in a sin-cursed world. He knew that sin was going to occur (v.7). He also said what many of us want to ignore and that is, sin is a serious matter (6-9). We love the story told in verses 12-14, don’t we? We are comforted by the fact that our Father is not

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<sup>1</sup> Keyes, *The Post Truth Era*, p. 41.

willing to just let his sheep wander away and not do anything about it. So, what has the Father done about it? He sends us to go get them. (5-18)

Recently I received an e-mail encouraging me (and the leadership of the church) to stay the course on this issue and relayed to me the story of a situation where a person in a church blatantly disobeyed the Scriptures and the church was silent. The children (one in particular) were so messed up by it, because the stated beliefs of the church were not supported by the actions of the church. I have seen that happen. When the church is silent, it may not split, it may look like it is continuing on, but something happens. Along the way, the conviction, clarity, authority, and passion all starts to leak out and a huge hole remains that people attempt to fill with programs, or stuff.

### **3) We do not understand the scope of the gospel.**

What is the gospel? Is it getting a “get out of hell free card?” Is the gospel having my sins forgiven, or having some generic relationship with God? NO! The gospel is the good news that Christ came to this earth in order to live a perfectly righteous life in your place, so that when he died on the cross, he offered up, in his death, in your place, a perfect sacrifice, by which he bore upon himself the righteous wrath of God, so that your sins could be forgiven and so that you could be credited with his righteousness. When you, by faith alone in Christ alone accept Him as Lord/Savior, you are saved FROM sin’s penalty and saved TO God’s family. By means of believing in the gospel we are placed into a new family whose very identity is determined by Christ, and whose laws come from Christ.

### **4) We do not understand the purpose and nature of the church.**

Isn’t the church supposed to make people feel good? I think that people should always leave the church feeling uplifted. But, what if you are a pedophile and you have no plans to change? I don’t want you being uplifted. I want you to understand the gravity of your sin! I want you to tremble at the horrors of hell! I want you to come face to face with the reality of your condition. Yes, I want you to understand the power of the gospel. But, you cannot understand the power of the good news unless you acknowledge the true nature of your sin. The purpose of the church is not to make people feel good, no matter what. In fact, did you know that the church is supposed to tell you how to live and get in your face and crawl all over your case if you don’t live right?

If you are going to be a citizen in the United States of America, you have to obey the laws that this society has constructed. So, even though our society may sing along with Bon Jovi and Frank Sinatra that’s it’s my life and your job is to affirm it or get over it, it really doesn’t work that way even in society. The church is comprised of people who have had said, “It’s not my life and I’m going to live it”, but rather, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live, I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Therefore, I am part of a family that cares enough about each other to live humbly and

holy. It's not my life – this is our life together that forms a collective testimony to what we really believe about Christ and the gospel.

Have all college students stand. We are stewards of the church, taking care of this ministry for them. What kind of a church will they inherit from us? Will we be a church that in the name of toleration excuses and ignores sin? Or, will we be a church that in the name of Christ, deals with sin in a manner that reflects the gospel?

### Question #2 – **How is a true church supposed to solve problems?**

The answer has two parts. A true church has to solve problems based on the gospel. The gospel has to be breathed in and through all that we do. That means that the steps that we take have to be done with humility and with the goal of reconciliation. Humility is driven by recognizing that I am a sinner, and that my involvement in helping resolve a problem is not based upon the fact that I am an expert who has all of the answers and who has no problems of his own. Oh no! Galatians 6.1 warns against that by saying to those who are attempting to restore someone that you have to watch yourself. Matthew 7.1-5 is also very helpful by admonishing us to consider our own sins and deal with them before we attempt to help others. And yet, we cannot hide behind our imperfections as an excuse to not obey the Scriptures. The gospel keeps me humble, but the gospel also keeps me hopeful. Therefore, we are to help people resolve problems with the goal of reconciliation. Because the gospel reconciles us to God, the gospel provides us with the means by which we are to live out this reconciliation with each other. This is the sticky part. We are imperfect people. We have problems and we need help addressing those problems. We need relationships with people who will be part of our lives and help us because we are blind to our own sins. We are people of Christ. We want to live in a manner that pleases him. If I am caught in a sin, or ignorant of a blindspot in my life that is not adorning the gospel, I want to know that! We should beg for that! If we do not want to grow in grace, and do not want help with our weaknesses, and do not want to become more like Christ, we cannot claim to be a follower of Christ. So, when Christ describes the steps that we are to follow when helping each other with problems, he is describing a process that in many ways looks like the regular, daily, and routine life of the church.

In this text there are four specific steps that we are to follow. The first two are more informal, and the third is more formal. So, what do you do if your brother sins against you?

#### 1. **Have a Private Meeting.**

“just between the two of you.”

Do not go to someone else, nor are you to allow someone else to come to you about someone else. Go to the person directly. Talk with the person in the spirit of meekness. Ask questions. Seek to gain information in case you misunderstood what the situation is. “If he listens to you.” This means, if he agrees, or shows a desire to move forward on

this matter, then you work with the person from that point on. If they acknowledge the sin, and repent of it, then you have won your brother over (meaning, the person has been rescued from that which eventually cause them great harm). However, if the person does not respond to your meeting, then you may want to reconsider what you said, how you said it and unless there was a serious breach on your part, then the person's refusal to repent has moved the process to the next level.

## **2. Have a Private Conference.**

The text states that we are then to take 2 or 3 witnesses. A witness does not mean that the person that you bring along has to be a witness to the sin. They are acting as witnesses to what you consider to be a sin and to how the person responds to the Word of God. The witnesses provide greater objectivity. They also provide greater accountability. They are not there to be mean or vindictive. In fact, they need to examine their own lives as commanded in Galatians 6. This private conference may at first seem to be threatening or intimidating, but that is not the intent nor should that be the spirit in which it takes place. The goal of the private conference is to make the sinning brother begin to understand the magnitude of his decision. Of course as one man put it, "Moving into the group process is scary, but it does improve the attention level." But what if he does not repent?

## **3. Tell it to the church.**

This means that the matter will go before the congregation in a meeting. This is one of the reasons why we emphasize church membership. Membership in the local church is a statement of commitment to follow the Scriptures. We cannot assume that people who attend are committed to the priority, principles and practices of the Bible unless there is a specific and personal time in which each person explains the gospel, is told what we believe and how we function and commits himself/herself to it. This is all explained to you in the membership process. We are responsible for each other. We know that problems arise that demand our involvement. So, what should the response of the church be when we are told that one of the sheep have strayed? We need to stop and look at our own lives. We need to examine ourselves, and then we should reach out to the brother and seek to win him back. We can do that with cards, letters, phone calls, e-mails, conversations etc. We are seeking to restore the person back to Christ. That is why when a situation is brought before the church, details are usually not given. The issue is not the sin, but the person's response it. This is where people tend to really get hung up.

Let me ask you something. What is worse? A person who commits adultery and repents or a person who gossips and does not repent? If the person who gossips does not repent and stop their gossiping, and someone goes to them and they don't listen to them and then 2 or 3 go and they still don't listen and then the matter is brought before the church, is it not natural for us to say – gossip? They are being brought before the church because of gossip? You gotta be kidding me? What's next – jaywalking? Chewing gum in class? Not wearing a tie? (that was a joke) The original issue was gossiping, but now

the issue is; failing to submit to the Word of God. Now, we as a body are called upon to go after a person, but if they do not respond to that, then...

**4. Treat him as an unbeliever.**

This means that we are to treat the person as one who needs to get saved. If they are saved, then either God will bring them back or God will take them home early. It could be that the person is not truly a believer. This is God's method of church growth. You can't grow a healthy garden that is full of weeds. So, if the person has obviously failed to respond to the Word of God, then it could be an indication that the Spirit of God does not reside in this person. Therefore you treat this person as someone who needs to get saved. Don't treat this person as a church member, but instead evangelize the person. Witness to the person. When you see the person, tell him that you are praying that he will get saved, because that may well be his greatest need.

Christ recognizes our hesitancy in doing this. So, we are given this encouragement and promise. (vs. 18-20) Jesus told us that we are acting with his authority when we declare the terms that he has set forth by which God will forgive or refuses to forgive sin.

Verses 19-20 describe how we pray through these matters and seek wisdom and Christ is promising that he will be present with us as we seek to pursue unity in making these difficult decisions. Finally,

**Question #3 – What are the benefits of church discipline?**

- 1. It is for the good of the person who needs to repent.**
- 2. It is for the good of the church.**
  - a. It causes us to examine our own hearts.
  - b. It raises the discernment level of the flock.
  - c. It helps people face their true beliefs.
  - d. It helps people learn how to solve problems.

I was talking with a young lady one day who told me that when she was growing up that no one in her family dared to talk about the problems the family was facing. Every thing was swept under the rug, and the result was everybody had pretend relationships. We can do the same thing. And we will have pretend church. Pretend Christians prefer to have pretend church.

**3. It puts the character of God on display.**

We need to see God's righteousness and God's mercy over and over. They met at the cross and they are embraced in the people of God.

Tonight: Objections to Church Discipline and some Q/A.