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Great Truths by Ben S.

Matt 18:15-20

The plan for the next two weeks is to finish off the 'Great Truths' statements of faith series. After that I plan to start a series on 1 Peter and Ben Midgely will start a new series in the Old Testament.

The last paragraph of our statement of faith is all about the future. Ben M has already taught us extensively on that from the book of Revelation. We've discussed the ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) so, we need to finish off this section about the church. Today we are thinking about church discipline and next week we will think about evangelism. These two topics are very closely connected. To be salt and light we need to be reflecting the character of Jesus Christ which is the goal of church discipline. We need to grow in church discipline in order to have a healthy church and reflect a little bit of heaven in this fallen world.

Three questions: What is Church discipline?

How do we do it wisely so that it leads to healthy growth?

Where does our help come from?

**What is Church discipline?** We sometimes think of discipline as a negative word but it isn't. A sports person disciplines him/herself to grow and perform better. An academic person disciplines himself to study, musicians are disciplined in their practice. A child who has no boundaries, (speaking as an ex-primary-school teacher) is a frustrated child, because he is struggling to reach his/her full potential. But a child who is consistently disciplined, loved and affirmed, is a child who grows and flourishes in maturity. In the book of Proverbs discipline is an extremely positive family word. We are called to exercise discipline in our physical families and also in our church family. In Hebrews 12:5-11, *"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son ...but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."* God disciplines us because he wants us to enjoy growing in holiness and righteousness as well as in our relationships with other people. When discipline in a family is done in a very harsh and overbearing way, it's a horrible and abusive thing, but when there is no discipline in a family, the family becomes dysfunctional. There is a lack of healthy growth. The same is true within the church family.

Church discipline involves two things: instruction and correction; historically described as 'formative and corrective church discipline'. Formative church discipline involves proactive, positive instruction. It happens all the time in church life as we listen and think, engage our minds and hearts in prayer about God's word. It happens during communion as we examine our hearts about our relationships with God and each other. It happens in home-groups, in one-to-one relationships as we speak the truth to each other in love. It's not easy being committed to and submissive to God's word. It takes effort to come to church, to engage your mind in worship, to pray and apply the Bible to your life in dependence on the Spirit. When

you get the whole body of the church doing this, the church grows health and flourishes.

The second part of Church discipline is correction. What do you do if you discover that a member of your church is physically aggressive to his wife or that a member of your church is committing adultery? What do you do if a young person in your church has been arrested for being drunk and disorderly? Or maybe the sin isn't so outwardly large but it keeps happening: writing malicious gossip, regular fits of rage, falling out with people, leaving a path of destruction behind them in church life? It's continual without remorse or repentance.

**How do we do church discipline wisely?** The first stage of church discipline is you go and speak to the person one-to-one. Let's Reread Matt 18:15-20. Verses 1-5 are all about the importance of humility. In verses 6-9 Jesus talks about cutting sin out of your life. Verses 10-14 is the parable of the lost sheep; about Jesus pursuing sinners to bring them back to life in the fold. Then we have this passage about dealing with sin and repeatedly forgiving each other. Humility and concern is the context of church discipline. 1 Peter 4:8 says, "above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

The last thing we need in a church is the fundamentalist attitude of self-righteously judging and policing one another. We cover over one another's sin just as Christ covers over our sin. But in verse 15 it says if your brother or sister sins talk about it just between the two of you. If they listen you have won them over. However, there must never be any covering over of abuse or trampling on others. When a person's sin is repeatedly causing damage and pain, ruining the reputation of the church then something needs to be done. If you find you cannot approach someone in this way then of course take an elder with you so you don't put yourself in a vulnerable situation. If there is no repentance the second phase in verse 16. says take two people with you to protect the other person from false accusation. If that person still refuses to listen take them to the church elders who will listen and offer support and help. If there is no remorse or repentance then you should treat that person like a non-believer outside the community of faith. Keep pointing them to Jesus. Exclusion is actually aiming for restoration.

1 Cor 5. talks about formal corrective discipline. Paul tells the Corinthian church they should be in mourning for the reputation of Christ and this man's salvation. Paul is saying this man should be treated as an outsider because he is destroying the witness of the church. We are called to help one another and not to judge ("handed over to Satan") until the day he reaches out for salvation. The aim is victory over sinful desires; that he will come to his senses and wake up to his need. Have you been in a church and experienced rough unwise unloving impersonal discipline? Sometimes the best thing to do is to remove them from membership. This is not the end of the process. Wait hopefully for God to bring them back.

**Where does our help come from?** Matt 18 19-20 "If two of you agree it will be done for you." The context is church discipline. When you are doing this together 'I am with you in it.' The Holy Spirit works for repentance and restoration in the unity of the Spirit. He is not indifferent to our sin. He seeks and saves the lost with us as we work out church discipline with the Holy Spirit. He restores broken fellowship, an essential

part of our growth in church. Ultimately a little taste of heaven in this fallen world.