



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Matthew 18:15-20; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16

“The Local Church: Its Discipline”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed thankful to Thee for this privilege again of studying matters that pertain to the local church. Give us direction. Enable us, Lord, to understand the teaching concerning discipline. And give us, Lord, the mind first of all to remain in the relationship with Thee that is proper for a believing Christian and also give us the mind to carry out the discipline that is required by our great God and the saints of God. We do need the discipline, Lord. We know that we are like little children spiritually and we need a heavenly father who will discipline us and prepare us for the future service that we shall enjoy in Thy presence. Give direction in this hour. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Now, our subject tonight is “The Local Church: Its Discipline.” I know that if you have reflected at all upon the subject of church discipline you have no doubt come to the conclusion that one of the reasons for the apostasy that exists in a number of our large denominations and one of the reasons for the weakness that exists in others of our Christian groups is this very failure to exercise discipline that is characteristic of our day. I know in the denomination in which I grew up the reason that that denomination began to depart from the principles to which it had held for many generations was the failure to exercise discipline when heresy, both moral and doctrinal, began to appear.

Now, when that happens in the local church the same requirement rests upon us. If doctrinal apostasy begins to make its place felt – incidently we’re talking about apostasy, we’re not talking about different opinions concerning individual texts that we all might have within the Christian faith. We’re talking about apostasy over the great fundamentals of the faith, the person and work of Christ. We’re not talking about whether the church will go through the tribulation or not. That is not of the same importance as the doctrines of the person and work of Christ. But in a local church, when departures from the faith begin to appear, whether doctrinal or moral, it is the duty of the church to exercise discipline. It is not a very pleasant task. And, no doubt, this has contributed to the fact that we often overlook the necessity of doing it. But if we do not do it, the apostle tells us “a little leaven leavens the lump.” It’s not a little lump that lumps the leaven. It’s a little leaven that leavens the lump. So that if we do not deal with error, whether moral or doctrinal, at the point of its appearance, we shall find that it will spread in the assembly of God. So it is a neglected truth, but a most important truth.

I think it is a good practice for the elders to make very plain as an individual comes to faith in Christ and is baptized and begins his life in the local body to make plain the responsibility for discipline, discipline in the individual life, discipline in the family of the congregation, that is in the congregational life carried out in the latter case by the elders. “If we would judge ourselves, we should not have need to be judged,” the apostle states, because we all fail constantly. And it is important for us to exercise personal judgment of our sins as we are acquainted with them in our lives.

You would be amazed I think at how much in the Bible there is on the subject of discipline. Let me just give you some texts. I left some blank places there for you to put down the texts. These are the ones that I have in my notes: 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 – I don’t think I

gave you anymore spaces, but I'll give you a few more texts – Titus chapters 1 and 3, Hebrews chapter 13 specifically verse 17, 2 John, 3 John, and others.

Now, these are just some of the passages in the New Testament that have to do with discipline. You can see that discipline is a topic that appears frequently in the New Testament.

Now, we're going to use Matthew chapter 18 as our text for our study tonight because this is the first important passage on discipline in the New Testament and it's a good place to begin. But we will also look at 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and some of the things that are stated in that chapter. So let's turn now to Matthew chapter 18 and verse 15 through verse 17, in which we have the procedure of the offended. Listen to our Lord.

“And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 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 (That is literally every word, but) EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. And 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 gatherer.”

In the preceding fourteen verses before this passage begins in chapter 18, Matthew writes against inflicting wrongs and particularly regarding the little children.

Now, he tells us how to act when wronged. Now, you'll remember too that when we were talking about the doctrine of the church this is the second occurrence of the word church in the New Testament. That is, the New Testament as we have it. The first occurrence was Matthew 16:18, “On this rock I will build my church.”

Now, our Lord will use the term church twice in verse 17. So, we are no doubt to think of this term church here as meaning the same thing that it means in chapter 16 and verse 18. That is, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ which we know as that group of

people who were bound together in unity on the day of Pentecost. 1 Matthew or our Lord speaks about the private rebuke. “If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private.”

Now, that is I think the beginning of the proper way to exercise discipline. If you see a brother sin, don't go to your best friend and say, “So and so has done such and such. What shall I do?” Or, “So and so has done such and such. What do you think of that?” Don't even come to the elders. But the text of Scripture says, “If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.” It would be much better that when you see a person sin you give that brother an opportunity to face his sin privately and respond to it and the whole assembly knows nothing about it, much better, much better for the life of the assembly.

Now, Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1 speaks I think to this point too. The Apostle Paul, remember, writes, “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness; looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted.” Considering yourself, the Authorized Version puts it. So the private rebuke then is the first step after a sin is observed. As the Germans put it, this rebuke should be “unter vier augen.” That is, under four eyes. Only four eyes should look at it, the eyes of the person who committed the sin and the eyes of the person who has seen the sin or has reason to think that the person has sinned. By the way, this rebuke is because of sin.

Now, in the Authorized Version – how does that read? Does someone have an authorized version? Yes, verse 15. “If Thy brother shall trespass against Thee.” It is the word sin. And furthermore, it is in an emphatic position in that clause. So it is if your brother sins, so the rebuke is because of sin. It is not a rebuke because of some suffering, it may have occasioned us. In other words, the reason that we talk to our brother about his sin is not because it has hurt us. But the reason that we talk to the brother who has sinned is because he has sinned. That is, it's the relationship between

him and the Lord that is the important thing. Not what effects it may have had upon you. So, that is the prominent thing.

Now, of course, we don't have any assurance that you will gain the brother. But it is possible that you will. He says, “If he listens to you, you have won your brother.” So it is possible for you then to gain a prize. That is, you've gained your brother. You've been the instrumentality by which his relationship with the Lord has been restored. James says in chapter 5 and verse 20, “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.”

Now, it is possible that that is a reference to a sinner in the sense of one who has never believed in Christ. But since James has this habit of calling believers sinners – in the rest of the epistle, you know, he calls the believers there, clearly believer sinners. It's very possible that this is a reference to a believer who has sinned and the death that is referred to is physical death. That is, the judgment that ultimately comes if we persist in sin. “Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” The text is questionable and we should not, of course, be too anxious to make the application. But the Lord's words make the point very well. “Reprove the brother privately.” It must be a private rebuke. It may be the means of the restoration of the brother.

But now what happens when the person does not respond? Verse 16 continues with the plural rebuke. “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, in other words, the next step is, again not to tell the elders necessarily, but to take another person with you in order that the fact may be established before witnesses so that “By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.” You'll notice our Lord takes an Old Testament principle. That's a quotation from Deuteronomy 19:15 and applies it. It's a general principle that – well it pertains even through the whole of the New Testament. And remember later on in the Epistle to

Timothy, Paul says, “Receive not an accusation against an elder except in the presence of two or three witnesses.” An elder has a little bit of the benefit of the doubt. One person is not qualified to accuse an elder. Don’t receive an accusation except with two or three witnesses. But two witnesses are sufficient or three witnesses are sufficient to raise a question about an elder’s faithfulness.

So, the next step then is to take someone with you and talk with the brother. How many times have you done this? Or, probably most of you, if I were to ask you this question you’d say, “Very rarely have I ever done this.” Well, that shows you, you see, we have not been really applying discipline probably as we should have. The chances are we’re not any different from the people about whom our Lord was speaking. Our assemblies are characterized by human beings and they do sin. And so, this should not be totally strange to us. But we get the feeling, most of us do don’t we, that it is totally strange to us. That was one of the evidences we’re not applying it probably.

Now, the next is the public rebuke. You know this would make a great difference to me. I wouldn’t want to be rebuked publicly. Would you? How would you like to be rebuked before the whole of the assembly? I wouldn’t like that. That would be a deterrent to sin. Listen to what he says in verse 17. “And 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 gatherer.”

Now, probably when he says, “tell it to the church,” he means the local church. Now, he has referred back in chapter 16, verse 18 to “I will build my church.” But you cannot tell it to the universal church. You tell it to the local church. So, the chances are this is a reference to the local manifestation of the universal church. This, I think, is the official recognition that a brother has sinned and is therefore under discipline. “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”

In ancient times, that is, last century, they used to carry this out in local churches. I think I’ve referred to this before when we were studying through this in Matthew. But

do you know even in the state of Texas the Baptist churches used to have discipline meetings once a month, usually on Saturday afternoon. Some interesting things happened in those meetings. But it was the time that they reviewed the membership of the church. And those that had accusations brought against them, those things were considered in that Saturday afternoon meeting. And occasionally fights developed because it's characteristic of the Christian church which has been in existence for a good time to kind of intermarry among itself, you know, because of the biblical injunctions to marry believers. And so frequently families got entangled in the sins. They have an old expression in Texas, so I am told by an old deacon of a southern Baptist church who used to attend these meetings when he was young told me about this. He said just as happens in any human gathering, occasionally they really never settled the questions, but those meetings were an extension of the difficulty. And so they would have an expression which they used “answer him in prayer,” which means to get up and pray in the meeting. But when you're praying in the meeting, argue some more. But argue as if you're praying to the Lord.

Now, we know exactly what that means. Answer him in prayer. That's was the exact way he pronounced it, answer him in prayer. So, if you weren't convinced that the person for whom you stood was guilty, but the other side was really wrong you would punch somebody and say, “Get up and answer him in prayer.” So he'd pray to the Lord and bring up some new points about the brother over there [laughter] that hadn't been mentioned perhaps. I know too in my church in Charleston, South Carolina, the First Presbyterian Church, they used to have tokens that they passed out for sitting at the Lord's table.

Now, they observed the Lord's table behind long tables in this church. It's one of the oldest, if not the oldest, in the United States of America. It started in 1731, this Presbyterian church. They used to meet at the Lord's table with a lengthy table that went down the whole of the auditorium. And they had little tokens which they passed out to those who were in right relationship to the church. And you could not sit down to

observe the Lord's Supper on the day in which they observed the Lord's Supper without presenting one of these tokens. The tokens were given to those who were in fellowship. And they exercised discipline. That's not bad, that's good. And in that sense, a closed communion is not bad. There are certain things about closed communion that are good if it is properly carried out.

Now, I'm not for the kind of closed communion that is called closed communion today. But I also feel that in our meetings we should make it very plain that we should not partake of the Lord's Supper if there is reason to believe that there is something amiss in our relationship with the Lord.

Now, what happens then when they refuse to listen to those who come to them? It should be announced in the church. “Brother S.L. Johnson is, by the elders, recognized as being out of relationship, being guilty of (Whatever you may want to say. You don't have to necessarily spell out precisely what it is). And the elders want to announce to the congregation that the elements should be kept from him as they are passed in the observance of the Lord's Supper.” There is nothing incidently in the Bible that says that a person should be excommunicated from the church unless he is not a believer. But a believer should never be excommunicated from the church. What does that say? Well, that says that you were never really a member of Christ. It says you can lose your salvation. Discipline pertains to observing the Lord's Supper. Discipline pertains to the right to sit at the Lord's Supper and partake of the elements. That is the sign of relationship to believers and the sign of the right relationship to the Lord.

Excommunication is ex-communication. That is, you are prevented from observing the communion, but not from attending the meetings. That's the thing that might be good for you, to hear the word of God. So, the person out of fellowship should be invited to the meetings or should be welcome at the meetings, but should be kept from partaking of the elements. So, tell it to the church. Expulsion from assembly privileges then is what is in mind. Not expulsion from the church.

I think I've told you before. My wife was a Presbyterian also and when we came to Dallas I had my membership transferred to the First Presbyterian Church here in the city because that was all I knew. And then later on, we, due to the force of certain circumstances, we left that particular church and I was involved in an independent church. And my wife was also desirous of joining this church. So we went back to Birmingham, Alabama for a visit and she called the church office and asked to have her name taken off of the roles. The church secretary said, "Well, do you want us to transfer, to give you a letter to another church, to transfer your membership to another church?" She said, "No." At the moment she had not made up her mind what she was going to do. "No, I just would like my name eliminated from the roles of this church." That's the church she had grown up in and her grandfather had been an elder in. It was the church in which we were married too. And the church secretary had never had any request like that. She said, "Wait. Let me talk to the pastor." And so, Mary said there was a long silence. And afterwards the secretary came back and said, "It can't be done." And that made Mary a little mad. [Laughter] And so, that was when I guess I should have reproved her. Because she said, "What do you mean you cannot take my name off the role? It's very simple. Just erase it or run you a line through it (or something like that)." And she said, "No, it cannot be done. The only thing that we can do is, you either must join another church or you must die. [Laughter] Those are the only two conditions on which we can take a name off the church roles." Well, Mary had not had any experience in that before. But strictly speaking, what they were saying was true to their doctrine.

You see, there is no way for you really to remove your name from the church role if you believe in the doctrine of eternal security or the perseverance of the saints. And it is death or transfer of membership. These are the only alternatives. Because if you eliminate a name from the role without any assurance that they were not a believer, then you are saying in effect that you don't believe in the doctrine or the perseverance of the

saints or the doctrine of eternal security. So, they were right and we learned a lesson, although I don't think the church secretary understood what it was all about.

Now, the next thing that I want you to notice is the public refusal of privileges. And what I would like for you to do is to turn over to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 6 and verse 14 for the apostle's parallel passages. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 we have some rather important statements concerning church discipline too.

Now, notice verse 6.

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from (or withdraw from or the verb *stellesthai* here means something like to avoid) keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”

Then verse 14, “And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.” What does it mean to keep aloof from? Or, what does it mean to withdraw from, as the Authorized Version renders it? Well, I think in verse 14 we have a kind of exposition of it. He says, “If anyone does not obey our instructions in this letter, take special note of that man.”

Now, what does that mean? Well, I think that means that you are to publicly note that man as one who is out of relationship, the proper relationship, with the assembly. In other words, it is the equivalent of “Tell it to the church.” You are to note that man. Make special note of him. Whether you put his name in the bulletin as out of fellowship with the Lord or you announce it from the pulpit or announce it in the – I think it would be better in our case – announce it on the Sunday night meeting when the church gathers together to observe the ordinances. Note that man. Publicly name him. Then the second

thing is to have no company with him. The Greek means literally to mix up along with. Don't mingle with him.

Now, I do not think that this means that we are to totally ignore the person. But it's to refuse to have a free intercourse with him. In other words, there should be a recognition on the part of the saints who are in fellowship that the brother is out of fellowship with the assembly. In other words, you shouldn't treat him as if everything is alright. It would be wise for you not to invite him to your house to have dinner with him as if there is no problem whatsoever. The apostle means, I think, precisely what he says. Do not associate with him in the sense that you limit your relationship to him in order that he may be put to shame. If you do not treat him as he truly is, a brother under discipline, then you do not allow the discipline to have its proper effect in his life. You cover it over. You actually hinder the work of God. You, in effect, say to him everything's alright. But everything is not alright in that case.

Now, we read also in verse 15 “And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” In other words, you are to treat him as he is, a member of the same family of God, and you should engage in exhortation with the aim that the brother may be restored to the proper relationship to the assembly. Restoration is always the end of discipline. Discipline is never designed to put a person out of an assembly. It is always a means to restoration. Restoration is the important thing. Let us never forget that. And consequently, when a true brother has sinned and is under discipline it should be the desire of the saints that he be restored. That's the reason God has set up what he has set up in the Bible, this method of discipline. It is designed to restore him to the relationship that God desires for him to have.

Now, some of these statements in the Bible are rather difficult to harmonize one with another. And I confess that I've had a little bit of a problem through the years with that statement back in chapter 18 and verse 17 in which our Lord says, “And 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 gatherer.”

Now that seems to be a very strong statement. And I must confess I'm not absolutely certain that Paul's statements in 2 Thessalonians 3 are perfectly harmonious with it. That is that they speak of precisely the same thing. I am expounding it, these passages, as if Paul does mean the same thing when he says, “Don't associate with him. Treat them as a Gentile and a tax gatherer.” But I confess I'm a little puzzled by that. If you would like to share further light with me, I would be happy to receive it.

Now, let's secondly notice the power of discipline in the church. And we'll turn back to Matthew chapter 18 and look at verses 18 and 19. “Truly I say to you (the Lord says), whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

Now, this is the Godward side of the power of discipline. Now, he has just said here, you see, in verse 17, “Tell it to the church.” So, discipline has been exercised. The man has been noted. Announcement has been made. And the brother is under discipline.

Now, he says, “Whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.” These are technical terms, as I have put in your notes. To bind is to forbid. And to loose is to permit. So, we should read this “Truly I say to you, whatsoever you shall forbid on earth shall have been forbidden in heaven; and whatever you permit on earth shall have been permitted in heaven.”

Later on in chapter 23, verse 4 he speaks about the scribes and Pharisees as being those that bind heavy burdens. That is, they in their pronouncements forbid the doing of certain things that are very difficult to keep as commandments. But our Lord is saying here, you see, that the local church does have a power that comes from God when it exercises discipline biblically. In effect, he's saying that God stands behind the

disciplinary decisions of the local church when they're carried out scripturally. So when the elders of a local church, under the Lord carrying out the word of God, note a brother and put him under discipline they have the promise of God that God himself stands behind that discipline.

Let's turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 5 where we have an illustration and where the apostle uses terms that are very reminiscent of our Lord's words here in Matthew chapter 18. You know the story. It's the story of the person who has committed immorality in the Corinthian church. It actually was a vile case of incest. “It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not even exist among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.” And incidently that is in the present tense. So, this is a relationship. “And you have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done the deed might be removed from your midst.”

Now, that means, in the light of what we've been saying, to be removed from the privileges of assembly fellowship. “For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus.”

Now, I want you to notice the way the word the apostle is – what he's saying here. He says, “I'm not with you. But I have acted in the disciplinary fashion in spirit as you should have acted in actuality. You should have met. And you should have carried out discipline and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ would have stood behind that discipline.” That's what he means here when he says, “Absent in body, present in spirit. I've already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.” Notice the expression “In the name of the Lord Jesus.” And we'll read in verse 20 “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in their midst.” That's a disciplinary meeting. “In the name of the Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, I with you in spirit,

with the power of the Lord Jesus.” So, notice these things. He said, “Here is a disciplinary case. You should have met in discipline. You have not.”

Now, the way to meet is to meet in the name of the Lord Jesus. And further, you have the assurance when you carry out the word of God that the power of God stands behind it. Paul says, “You didn’t do what you were supposed to do. You should have met, but I’ve met in spirit,” because he could not stand aloof from this even though he was not present. And so in the presence of God, in the name of the Lord Jesus, he, acting as an apostle, sought to see that the judgment of God upon the offending brother was carried out. He said, “I met in the presence of the Lord in spirit, in the name of the Lord Jesus, with the power of the Lord Jesus. And I have determined as judgment to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” So, there is the name of the Lord. Everybody’s assembled. And the power of the Lord is present to back up the decisions that are made. It’s a beautiful illustration of the proper way to carry out discipline.

Now, the manward side is in verse 19 of chapter 18. “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father in heaven.”

Now, of course, there are people who look at this text and take it out of its context. And what it means to them is if you can get somebody else to get together with you and agree that a certain thing ought to be done and you get down on your knees and you ask God about this general thing, that it will have to be done. But that is another illustration of taking a text out of its context. What this has to do with is with church discipline. And he’s saying that the church, no matter how large, may have the assurance that when they get together to carry out discipline that it shall be done of the Father in heaven. In other words, he stands behind the decision of the eldership in matters of discipline when those elders are in harmony with the word of God. Verse 20, “For where

two or three have gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst.” He is there in the meeting carrying out by his power the results of the disciplinary action.

Now, there may be a general application of this principle that “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst.” But that’s not the primary force. It has to do with church discipline. Roman 3. “The presence of the Lord, the source of power,” verse 20.

Of course, this is the proper attitude that the church should have in all of its meetings “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” Later, the Lord Jesus describes himself as the one who walks in the midst of the candlesticks. In other words, in all the meetings of the churches the Lord Jesus is present. It’s good to remember that.

By the way, we don’t meet in Believers Chapel in the name of Dr. Johnson or in the name of Mr. Storms or in the name of Mr. Prier. We meet in the name of our Lord. We carry out the worship of the local church in the name of the Lord Jesus. I think also in this text it’s fair to say that “when two or three have gathered together in his name, there he is in their midst,” even though their attitudes might not be too good. But if they have truly met in the name of the Lord as believers, and even if their attitude is not so good, the Lord Jesus is still there. That is his promise.

Well, let me close by just making a few comments concerning the applicability of this teaching today. There is no assembly in my opinion that shall not sooner or later have to be faced with the question of discipline. And therefore we should know how we are to respond. I think, of course, it is exceedingly important for the elders to have compassion and concern. Discipline should never be carried out harshly. It should be carried out as if our Lord were carrying it out, tenderly, but nevertheless firmly. And discipline is to be applied to all kinds of sins, not simply the sin of adultery, the out-breaking form of sin, but even against gossip, walking disorderly in the church, causing

disturbances, upsetting the saints, seeking often to gather a little clique about yourself because you're unhappy with something. All of these are occasions for discipline.

I can remember many years ago in Believers Chapel the elders visited a couple that had become rather unhappy with the assembly. And we went by to see them because we knew they were unhappy. And we sat down with them to talk over the thing that was bothering them because they not only were unhappy themselves, but they were disturbing some others. And as we sat down and discussed it with them, one of them spoke up and said, “We want to know what is going on in the church.” And so because they did not know what was going on in the church, they thought they had been causing things to go on in the church. It was a strange situation. We said to them, “You know everything that's going on in the church.” “But we want to know what is really going on,” they said. We said, “You know everything.” We only had about forty people attending then. If you attended about twice, you knew everything that was going on in Believers Chapel. [Laughter] They knew everything. But they were convinced that there were some things that were going on that they were unacquainted with. And as a result of it they were unhappy and were making others unhappy.

About the same time, we had another couple that was attending the church. And they had attended three or four other evangelical churches in this city. They had been in three other churches that I knew of and in each of these churches they had been unhappy or had caused difficulty. They were evangelical churches. If I were to name them, we would all recognize them as fine churches. And they came to Believers Chapel and they were very happy for awhile until the same pattern began to develop. And some of us again went by to see them and it was impossible to reconcile the differences or the difficulties and finally they left Believers Chapel and went to another church.

That's one of the sad things in evangelicalism. As you know, I am not a denominational man. I do not believe the Bible teaches denominationalism. I think the Bible teaches the body of Christ is one and all believers are a member of that body. And

if we say that we are Presbyterians, we in effect divide the body of Christ. And so, I could never myself be a member of a denomination again. But there is a relationship in the family of God. That should be so close that when a person leaves one meeting of the saints for another, we ought to be close enough to be able to say to the other meeting, “So and so has been out of proper relationship in our church. And they are under discipline.” And it should not be possible for them to escape the discipline and escape to another church and start over again without dealing with the real problem. In this case, the problem persisted from church to church to church. And it was never settled because it was never dealt with.

That’s the reason we have discipline in the Bible. It’s to help us to deal with the problems that we ourselves have. And consequently, it would be much better in the evangelical community if there was such a relationship that we could pick up the telephone – I have done this incidently and I think it has been good – to call some friends in another church when a person with a real problem has gone to that church to try to deal with the question. But it’s a very important teaching of the word of God. I said that I don’t myself, I’m not a denominational man, but there is an advantage, a true biblical advantage in having such a relationship that when you pass from one church to another in the same denomination there has to be a delivery of a letter to the effect that you are in good standing in that congregation.

Now, in the bodies of the saints it’s not a bad idea to have a letter passed about. The Apostle Paul speaks about letters of commendation. They had them in the early churches so that a person could not pass from one assembly to another and enter it as if he were in fellowship with the Lord if he really were under discipline in some place. So, a letter of commendation is not bad. I used to carry one around myself when I went to another church and would pass it to them. “This is to signify that brother S.L. Johnson is in good standing in our fellowship,” signed by the elders. That’s not a bad idea; that’s a

good idea. If you want one of those, if you're traveling somewhere, we'll think about giving you one. [Laughter]

But now don't forget that the aim of discipline is not judgment, it's restoration, maintenance of the purity of the church and the maintenance of testimony. So, those last three lines are restoration, Galatians 6:1, maintenance of the purity of the church, 1 Corinthians 5:6 through 8, maintenance of testimony, Acts chapter 5, verse 11, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 9 through verse 12.

Well, I have taken you over a few minutes. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so thankful to Thee for the subject of discipline. And enable us, Lord, to know how to practice discipline, first...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]