



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Local Church

“Its Discipline”

[Audio Begins] The local church, its Priesthood, The Local Church, its Ordinances, last time, The Local Church it's meetings. And you remember that we've been trying to make these points, that the New Testament church order is just as plain as the New Testament plan of Salvation, and that the supreme principles are these: government in the local church is by a plurality of elders, ministry of the word is by gifted men, that the priesthood which every believer possesses may be exercised by the men freely under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the meeting of the church. And we have been stressing the fact that in order for us to have an effective practice of these principles, ministry by gifted men, plurality if there is plurality of gifts, and the exercise of individual priesthood in a corporate meeting, we must have a meeting in which there is freedom for the men to participate, And that if we violate these principles, we are not measuring up to the New Testament principles for the local church.

Now we have also stated that in matters not specifically commanded in the New Testament, the principle apostolic practice is ordinarily to be regarded as apostolic precept is a good guide. Now of course there may be some occasion in which we have to modify that, but in general, what the apostles practiced is to be regarded as what they taught which I think surely seems a reasonable thing. And particularly in the light of the

fact that the Apostle Paul seems to teach that as a special principle, for he states in chapter 4 of 1 Corinthians when he is writing about Timothy, that verse 16 of 1 Corinthians 4, “Wherefore I beseech you, be you followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.” In other words, his practices were in accord with what he taught. And so in matters in which he does not specifically give us instruction we are justified from the specific teaching of Scripture to follow the apostle’s practices. So when he speaks about his ways as he teaches in every church and that we are to be followers of him in them, he states apostolic practice is ordinarily apostolic precept.

Now last time we were looking at the subject of the church meeting, and I tried to point out that probably the origin of the church meeting as it exists in the New Testament was the synagogue meeting. That is that some of the principles that were set forth in that meeting apparently were carried over into the New Testament meeting. The freedom of utterance for men who had gifts of ministry, that apparently was definitely carried over from the synagogue practices into the early church. We talked also about the organization of the meeting, its time, its place, the people involved, the supervision of specific meetings, the primary purpose of the meetings, the ultimate aim and the atmosphere of the meeting. And then we were talking about characteristics of the meeting as our meeting closed. That is there was freedom for exercise of spiritual gifts, there was freedom for the exercise of priesthood, there was the necessity of edification that is one of the controls upon a meeting which is freely carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and that it an important control on a meeting which is free. If the utterances and participation are not edifying, then obviously we have something not in accord with God’s word. The necessity of tranquility in the meeting, in other words, the fact that we have freedom of ministry and freedom of priesthood in our church meeting does not mean that we have a meeting in which there is no control what so ever but men

may do the wildest types of things. And I mentioned specifically speaking in tongues just as an illustration that the spirits of the prophets are to be under the control of the prophets and that that is a principle that applies to all of our meetings. That is that they should be meetings in which there is peace and not confusion.

Now I didn't have time to talk about this, but let me just mention them, I think these facts are rather self-evident and I want to go on to discipline this morning. I think it is obvious to us that there should be decorum and there should be order in our meetings. And the apostle states in 1 Corinthians 14 in the last verse of that chapter which describes the freedom that existed in the early church meeting, he states that all things are to be done, “decently and in order.” So if we ever have a meeting in which there is disorder, even though it might be called sanctified disorder by some, you can be sure it is not biblical order. There should be beauty and harmony in the meeting of the church. And finally, there should be divine guidance -- that is obvious a meeting like this should be under the control of the Spirit. And I do want to point you to one thing before we go on to discipline. In 1 Corinthians 14, these meetings which were free, were in accord with the will of God and had divine authority behind them. Will you read with me beginning at verse 31 of 1 Corinthians 14? 1 Corinthians 14 and verse 31, Now this is in the description of the early church meeting given in 1 Corinthians and let me read a few verses and I want to ask you to notice particularly the statement in verse 37. But beginning in verse 31,

“For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (In other words when we meet together and we have freedom of utterance, there should not be confusion, the Holy Spirit as he guides those who participate will not guide them in such a way that there is disorder verse 34) Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted

unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”

Now he means of course in the church meeting. Now this I think by the way, this verse is commentary on the condition of evangelicalism today, which is full of strong women and weak men. I hope in Believers Chapel, and I speak as one of you, that we never have a church in which we have strong women and weak men. I don't hope that we have strong men and weak women either, but it seems to me that in the early church it is obvious that the strong members of the early church were the men and the very fact that the women were asked if they want to know anything to ask their husbands at home is an evidence of the spiritual maturity of the men. Now today, in many of our churches you could never say that, but rather if you don't understand what I'm saying, ask your wives at home would be the ordinary thing today, because the wives frequently are much more adept in the word of God than the men. So the fact that the apostle says for the women if you want to learn anything ask your husband at home was an evidence of the fact that God expected the men to be the spiritual head of the house.

And I think that is biblical and I hope in Believers Chapel we always have it that way, that the men are the spiritual heads of the houses. Now that doesn't mean men that you are to go in and to dominate the kitchen, let you wife have the mastership of your kitchen. Paul tells us in one of his epistles that the women are to be masters of the house, oikodespotes that means a despot of the house. Now I gather that that means that the wife is to do the dishes and you're not to bother her when she's doing things like that, because that is her job. [Laughter] Seriously, she is to be the despot of the house, the master of the house. But when it comes to the spiritual headship, it is the man who is the spiritual head; it is he who gives direction to the home and to the family. And her place is set forth in the word of God as a very definite and important place, and we could not

express its importance too much, but nevertheless, it is the men who are to know the spiritual truth.

Now verse 36, “What? Came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?” In other words, do you Corinthians have special rules which apply only to the Corinthian Church? There are some who say that the things that Paul says in Corinthians pertain only to the Corinthians, he has a special verse for that interpretation. “What? came the word of God out from you? Or came it unto you only?” The early part of the epistle, he says he writes this epistle to the Corinthians and he writes it to Christians who every where in every place call upon the name of the Lord. In the 11th chapter when he talks about matters pertaining to the local church he says, “If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom neither the churches of God.” In other words, the things that we’re telling you in the Letter to the Corinthians are true of the churches everywhere generally taught.

Now verse 37, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” In other words, the test of spirituality is your agreement with what I’m saying in the 14th chapter of 1 Corinthians. Isn’t that interesting? If any man says that he’s a prophet or spiritual, here’s the test, acknowledge that what I’m saying is of divine authority. Now I think that is especially appropriate to that chapter which is of course has occasioned quite a bit of discussion.

Verse 38, “But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.” So the meetings of churches free, under the direction of the Holy Spirit that the whole church may be edified by them.

Now today, discipline. Discipline of course is another one of these neglected truths, and the absence of discipline in our churches has resulted in lower standards in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is my own personal opinion that the reason that

many of our large denominations have departed from the faith and the reason that they have not been able to recover themselves from error is related directly to the practice of church discipline. You know today when you talk to believers, you frequently hear them say, “Well in my church they used to preach the gospel, but today you get nothing.” And this is true of many many large denominational groups. And it is the practice of Christians to decry the fact that they do not get the word of God anymore in their denomination. And I have many friends who are still in the denomination many of them are preachers, and they speak about the difficulty within their own denomination because there is no longer the teaching of the word of God in them.

Now it seems to me that the reason for this has not been that error came in the denomination. Paul told us in his word to the Ephesian Church, in Acts chapter 20, that we could expect that in every Christian church error should enter. In other words, if we should find error in the local church, that should not surprise us, we expect that Satan will be able to gain an entrance into every assembly or church. Paul warned us about it, he said, “From your own selves there shall arise men speaking perverse things. They are grievous wolves who enter in among the flock.” I dare say in this auditorium there may be a wolf, very possible. Might even be one of the seminary fellows. I just happened to look at you two in the front row here and it gave me that idea, but these two are alright, I vouch for them. As a matter of fact, it more likely is that kind of person than a simple minded person who doesn't know anything. It's the person who has some acquaintance with spiritual truth who is the most dangerous person.

Now you see there's nothing wrong with error entering, but where the church of Jesus Christ has failed is in not dealing with the error when it did enter. And so the result is error spreads like leaven Paul says. And it spreads and finally, the whole is permeated. And then when the few who belong to the Lord discover that they are in the minority, then they can do nothing about it. So as long as they were the majority, that was the time to act. But when you wait until there is a minority who are true to the word, hope is

largely gone. Now the trouble then with the church is not that error has entered, the trouble has been that they have not dealt with it when it did enter. And we should expect in the local church that there should be constant need to deal with error and apostasy both of a moral and doctrinal character. In fact I think in Believers Chapel if we never have any problems, if it seems that we are coasting along and we do not have moral apostasy, or doctrinal apostasy, then you can be sure that Satan is lulling us to sleep, because he is very anxious to disturb us always.

So discipline is a very very important part of the word of God. In fact I think it's a good practice to ask everyone who comes into a fellowship like this, “Do you as you meet with us acknowledge your responsibility to be under the discipline of the elders of the church?” Suppose I were to ask you that question. You've come to fellowship with us in Believers Chapel, we're certainly happy to have you, we hope we can contribute something to you and you to us are you willing to be under the discipline of the elders of this church as long as they are in accord with the word of God? I've asked that question of people and they've said, they've looked at me rather peculiarly and nodded their heads and we've gone on to other matters and then later they'll come back and say, “What was that you said about discipline? What did you mean by that?” I dare say it was the first time they had ever heard of it or ever thought of that.

Now the Bible has surprisingly large sections that deal with discipline. Let me mention 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, 2 John, 3 John. Now all of these passages have either small or large sections dealing with discipline. You would be startled how much of the New Testament deals with this topic.

Now this morning for our time I want you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 18 and we're going to take a look at one of the firsts of the passages. And while it's one of

the firsts, it still is one of the key passages. So Matthew chapter 18 and let's read verses 15 through 20, discipline in the local church, Matthew 18 verse 15 through verse 20. Now remember, as we approach Matthew 18, remember this fact, the word church occurs three times in the gospels, all three times occur in the Book of Matthew. The first occurrence of the word church in the New Testament is Matthew chapter 16 and verse 18, the second and third occurrences of the word church occur in Matthew chapter 18 verse 17. These two occurrences plus the one in Matthew 16:18 are the only three places where the word church occurs in Matthew Mark Luke or John. Now since the Lord Jesus had just announced in chapter 16 and verse 18, “Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.” and since that has just preceded this, it's very unlikely that he means anything other than that same group when in chapter 18 he speaks about the church. So just as he spoke about the church as being a future entity, in Matthew 16:18, so here he is talking about things that are to be true of the church as a future entity that is when it comes into existence. And so verse 15,

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and himself alone: (or 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 thee, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. 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. 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 which is in heaven. (Oh how misunderstood that text has been, you see it has to do with discipline in the local church, now verse 20) For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

Now the first fourteen verses of this chapter Matthew has written against inflicting wrong. Now here he tells us how we are to act when we are wronged or when someone is seen to have wronged someone else. Now the first thing he states is and this is the first principle in the exercise of discipline is that there is to be private rebuke, first principle. What's first principle today? First principle today is get on the telephone; call your friends, “Have you heard about so and so? Now were not supposed to talk about this, we're not supposed to know this, but” And we proceed to talk about our friend who has fallen. First principle, verse 15, “if thy brother shall trespass” those words “against thee” by the way are not in the Greek text, I think however the thought is there. “If thy brother shall trespass” sin it is literally, “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” In other words, the first step in biblical discipline is to administer a private rebuke if you know that this action is contrary to the word of God.

Now will you turn with me just for a moment to Galatians chapter 6 and verse 1 for the expression of the same thing in a parallel passage. Paul says verse 1, of Galatians 6, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” In other words, the first step then is for those who are spiritual those who are in right relationships in the Lord, they are to go to the brother or the sister who has wronged someone who has sinned as our text says, and bring to their attention their failure. And it is to be between the two. Don't go to the third party; go to them first of all. And as a matter of fact if you know something that is wrong about a certain person, and you're sure that it is contrary to the word of God, clearly against the word of God, if you have not spoken to them face to face about it, you should never speak to them about it to someone else. “Considering thyself lest thou also be tempted,” be very careful too, that it is not you that deserves the

rebuke rather than they. So that's the first principle, go to them only. That would eliminate a lot of problems, wouldn't it?

Now let's look at the second step. Verse 16, of Matthew chapter 18, by the way, you'll notice that this rebuke while private, has a reward attached to it, “if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” He'll be thankful. If you've called something to his attention that is wrong, and he has a chance to correct it privately, he'll be thankful to you for it. The brother who can take a rebuke is the brother who begins to mature. The person who can never take a rebuke that is evidence they are not very mature. I'm so grateful for men who were older than I in the Lord, who particularly when I was a young Christian, came to me and called my hand a number of times. It helped me greatly. Sometimes I must confess I rebelled against it, but then after I had a chance to reflect, saw that they were right, I appreciated them because they had called that to my attention.

Verse 16, “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 shall be established.” The second principle is if the brother refuses the rebuke then take witnesses. For the biblical principle is always a thing is established before witnesses. The fact that one person has seen or know of specific disobedience is insufficient to establish it as a matter for dealing within the church; we need witnesses, two or three. Now the reason for this is very good, it's to protect a person against the one who wants to see something in someone else, or also the one who does not have the ability to see clearly because his own eyes have a beam in them. And so witnesses are necessary. You know the word of God is imminently suitable to life. It's very reasonable and logical; it's not something that is just a command and categorical. But there is good sense behind it. So the second step, the plural rebuke, two or three.

Third, verse 17, the public rebuke, “If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.” Third step, if the brother has sinned, he has been admonished by the spiritual brother, he has refused to hear that, he is now admonished by several witnesses and he

refuses to hear that, then it is the responsibility to bring it to the attention of the church. Now I would gather from the reading of the word of God that this is the public rebuke. So at the meeting of the assembly, if a brother is out of fellowship with God and it is known and there are witnesses, there should be something said about it. Now that means it should be publicly announced in the church meeting, such and such a brother has sinned, has been admonished, has refused admonishment until finally it is necessary for us to publicly announce this fact.

Now that is done in order that there may be a recognition of the fact that the fellowship of the local church with the Lord has been marred. How often does this occur in our churches? You see we pride ourselves in evangelicalism on believing the word of God don't we? We think we practice the word of God. There are great sections of Scripture which we do not practice at all. What happens when one of the elders begins to be seen in places with the soloist in the choir? What's usually done? Well there's a whispering campaign. And finally they're driven out of the church by that perhaps. But very rarely is there the application of the principles of church discipline. Some brother who is spiritual and has a heart for the work of God privately administering the rebuke, then with witnesses, then the public rebuke. You know I think that if we had one local church in one city, I'm not advocating that, but if we did have as in the early churches, just a few who met together, there was no other possibility of fellowship, it might be a deterrent, quite a bit of deterrent to evil, if we knew that these principles would be carried out and there was no other place to fellowship with the Lord's people. But today what happens? In Dallas, if for example a person comes into Believers Chapel and after a little while somebody steps on their toes in some way, well there are eight or ten or fifteen other evangelical churches in the city they can go. And so they go with their hurt feelings to that church, and disturb them until finally someone steps on their toes there, then they move to another church. And so around the city they go to the evangelical

churches, but the problem goes with them, the problem that should have been dealt with originally.

May I tell you one illustration of our experience? A few years back when we began Believer's Chapel we had a couple come in from out of the city, they had moved to this place. And they began immediately to be very active in our church. As a matter of fact I think in some ways they made a contribution to us particularly the husband. And then their feelings were hurt and so they didn't show up and Mr. Prier and I thought that we should go and see them. And so we went to see them and we sat down with them and we said, “We would like to talk with you about your relationship to the church, we noticed you haven't been attending recently.” “No.” “Why?” Well the wife spoke up and she said, “We don't feel that we know what's going on in the church.” We were a little startled by that objection, but Mr. Prier said, “What do you mean?” She said, “Well we just don't feel like we know what's going on in the church.”

Mr. Prier said, “There's nothing going on in the church, there's nothing going on but what you see and what you hear.” “But we don't feel like we know what's going on in the church,” she kept saying. “Well there's no secrets, is there anything you want to know? You can look, look at the financial records if you wish, look at the books, anything. There's nothing going on.” And so we talked with them and urged them to if they felt the guidance of the Holy Spirit to resume fellowship with us. I believe that if we did this more consistently with the word of God before us that a lot of our difficulties would be solved. Now frankly, I felt a little sorry for the church to which they went. Because you see, the same problem existed there and it had not been solved. If they had faced up to that problem which was a problem with them, they would have been much more useful to the Lord even if they didn't come back to Believers Chapel. So the biblical principles are imminently suitable for the Lord's work, third.

Now it doesn't stop at this. I think frankly, that when we read here in verse 17, “And if he shall neglect to hear thee, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the

church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” That what this means is that there is to be official not expulsion from the local fellowship, but official exclusion from the Lord’s Supper. In other words, the Lord’s Supper in the local church was designed, remember when we talked about the ordinances, the Lord’s Supper was designed to represent visibly the communion that the saints in a particular locality have with the Lord. Baptism represents our salvation, so we are baptized once for we are only saved once, but the communion is something that continues, because it represents our maintenance of relationship with the Lord, our maintenance of communion with him. Baptism says you have been united to the Lord, every time we partake of the Lord’s table we are saying we together are in fellowship with him. And so when a brother has sinned and come under discipline of the local assembly, he is excluded from partaking of the elements at the communion service. It is in other words an official public acknowledgment that he is not in fellowship with the Lord. Now this does not mean you expunge his name from the roles, you excise him from the local assembly that can not be done. If he believes in Jesus Christ, he belongs to the church forever. But he’s a member of the church out of fellowship with the head of the church, Jesus Christ. And you should never of course when a person is under discipline, you should never say he can not come to the church, now really, that’s what he needs to do, he needs to come and hear the word and be stirred up, and confess his sin and be restored to fellowship. So discipline after the private rebuke, the plural rebuke, and the public rebuke has to do with partaking of the elements at the Lord’s table.

Now what do we do then? Well the New Testament has some things to say about what we do then. Will you turn with me now to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. That’s the New Testament, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and let’s read verse 6. 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 us.” What does it mean to withdraw from the

brother? Does it mean to have nothing to do with him? Does it mean to pull up your skirt like the Pharisees and no contact whatsoever? I doubt that. And the reason I doubt it is because in the same passage we seem to have further explanation of what it means to withdraw oneself. Will you notice verse 14? “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man,” By the way that frequently was used of a noting in writing I am not insisting that’s the meaning here, but it is a public noting of a man. George Finley, one of our great commentators on the Greek text of this epistle states that it was a public naming of the man. So, “Note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.” Do not mix up along with him the Greek says, do not mix up along with him. Now Lightfoot, perhaps the greatest commentator on some of our epistles in the New Testament says, “This word does not mean to ignore a person, but it means to refuse to have free intercourse with that person.” So we’re to note that man, and we are to have no company with him that he may be ashamed.

Now verse 15, yet in order to keep you from saying you’re to have nothing to do with him whatsoever he adds, “count him not as an enemy but admonish him as a brother.” And those are present tense. In other words, when you meet the brother who is out of fellowship with the Lord and out of fellowship with the local church, you’re not to draw up your skirts and pass by and say nothing to him, you’re not to fellowship with him, you’re not to invite him over to your house to have dinner with him, that seems to say you are having fellowship with him. You’re not to bring him into the Lord’s table and allow him to partake of the elements, but when you see him, count him as a brother and admonish him. Go on admonishing him. In other words, urge him to settle the matter and to come back into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. So then the steps are, private rebuke, plural rebuke, two or three witnesses, public rebuke in which there is official notation of the man and then the public refusal of privileges to partake at the Lord’s table, but nevertheless, the personal appeals. In fact I think these are really about the five points of church discipline. Number one, admonish him privately, number two

admonish with witnesses, number three, the church, public censure, number four refusal of the right to partake of the Lord's table, and number five, constant appeal. Because you see the aim is always to bring the man back into fellowship. The aim of discipline is not excommunication; the aim of discipline is restoration. Restoration always, because he belongs to the Lord, because Christ loves him, he's just as much a member of the body of Christ as you, but he's out of fellowship with the lord, a sick brother.

I know in the twentieth century these are very difficult things, but I can still remember in my church in Charleston, First Presbyterian Church, it's an old church, in fact I think it's the oldest Presbyterian church in the United States, and in that church there are still in their archives, little tokens. And you can take a look at them, and they were tokens which were issued to everybody in the local church that was in fellowship with the Lord, officially. And in order to partake of the Lord's table you had to bring a token and if you didn't have the token, you couldn't partake. You were under the church discipline for some reason and they issued them before the Lord's Supper. So when you came in you had to present your token. Now that wasn't a bad practice, that was a scriptural practice, it wouldn't be bad to have it right here. When we sit down at the Lord's table, let's see the token, that's the evidence that so far as the elders are concerned, you're in fellowship with the Lord. Nothing wrong with that, I think it would make us much more careful in our daily life wouldn't it? And if there was no place else to go if we got our feelings hurt, it would be very important very healthy for the local church. And frankly I would love to see the day in Believers Chapel when we had strict discipline, biblical discipline. You pray that the elders will have the courage, because that's what it takes, as well as spirituality to carry out what the New Testament has to say.

Now I want to say just a word or two about one other point or two here. It's not necessary, you've seen really what the discipline is, but let's read verses 18, 19 and 20 and I just want to say a word about them and then we will open it up for a question perhaps. Verse 18, now here we have our Lord's statement regarding the power of discipline in the

church, I commend to you the study of 1 Corinthians chapter 5 which states essentially the same thing as here, “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.”

In other words, what our Lord is saying is if you carry out discipline as I have set forth here you can be sure that what you permit on earth is permitted in Heaven and what you forbid on earth is forbidden in Heaven in other words, Heaven will follow your actions with Heaven’s approval and power if you carry out the word in accordance with the teaching which I am giving. And that’s what our Lord means. When by the way he says binds, he means to forbid. And when he says to loose, he means to allow, these words were rabbinic terms. The rabbis had a statement, to them to take a hot bath on the Sabbath day, they that is the authorities, they bind washing that means they forbid washing. And they loose perspiring. So yesterday, if you took a hot bath, and you washed yourself when you took it, you broke the Sabbath, according to the rabbis. But if you just took a hot bath and perspired, you didn’t break the Sabbath according to the rabbis. So bind and loose are terms which mean to forbid and to allow. So, our Lord says, whatsoever you shall forbid on earth in your discipline that shall be forbidden in Heaven. Heaven stands behind actions which are in accordance with the word of God.

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 which is in heaven.” In other words, if the church comes together and action is taken and it’s in accord with Scripture, and discipline should be exercised, and if on earth there is an agreement with regard to this thing, “it shall be done for them of my Father in Heaven.” When the church acts in discipline, it’s carried out by God. And discipline begins to work out its processes in the disciplined when it is carried out in accordance with Scripture.

Now verse 20, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” What that means is simply this, when we meet in the name of the Lord Jesus and carry out the principles of the word of God, we can expect the power

of God to be present in that meeting. That has nothing to do by the way with the inauguration of a church if two people come together. It has to do with church discipline, and where two or three are met in the name of the Lord to carry out church discipline, the power of God rests upon that decision. So discipline then is extremely important.

Now just a question or two, are there any problems that have come to your mind as I have been speaking? [Name redacted]

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Would you speak a little louder Paul, I'm sorry I cannot hear you.

[Question from same audience member]

[Johnson] Yes, I think that we can do thins from the word of God too. For example in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 we have a good illustration. There was a case in which there was moral sin, remember the brother who was engaged in illicit intercourse with his step mother apparently, and the church did nothing about it in Corinth, and Paul was very disturbed over it. And he said, “You have done nothing about this, you’ve become proud and puffed up rather and you’re all implicated in it.” But he said, “I acted in spirit even though not in presence of you, I came together, the power of the lord being with us (just as in Matthew) and I have determined that to commit such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” That was a case of moral decline and the apostle quickly acted. In fact he told them in the chapter just before that about difficulties that he might have to come with a rod, he meant with discipline. They were to straighten those things out.

Then of course we have the case of Hymenaeus and Colletus in 1 Timothy in which there was doctrinal apostasy apparently, made shipwrecked concerning the faith. We have in 2 Timothy chapter 2, the same thing, a person who is saying that the resurrection has already occurred you know. And so in the case of moral apostasy or moral evil there was discipline and in the case of doctrinal evil. So in the local church, these are matters which can produce discipline.

I think also in Romans chapter 16, the passage I mentioned, we have brothers who are walking disorderly, who are causing strife in the local church, that's one case. In fact I can give you an illustration from my own experience right here in the city of Dallas. In one church in which I fellowshiped, we had a group of people who were it turned out later on, who were

[Comment from audience member]

[Johnson] Thank you, let the women keep silence in the churches, but we'll forgive you this time. [Laughter] Since this is question time we'll forgive her. That's right, British Israel and we finally, they were carrying on a telephone campaign, for their particular doctrine upsetting the faith. We had admonished them several times, and finally the elders met and we determined that we were going to issue them a very strong plural rebuke. And certain elders were designated to speak to them. And we did not know at the time, but one of the elders was involved, and so out of this, discipline took place. Now unfortunately, here you see was a case in which I think is one of the failures of our church today. What they did was to leave the church, when rather there should have been response to discipline, and restoration and perhaps fruitfulness in the Lord's service later. But I think that's an illustration, I could give you a lot more, personal ones that I've had. Any other, yes?

[Question from audience member]

[Johnson] The fellowship is restored by confession, if it reached stage of that, no, I would think that in a case like this, this of course is only my opinion, Turner. I would think that if there is confession made to the elders' satisfaction, then they would announce, because you see it might be something that involves not the whole church as a sin against the whole church, but a sin of a more private character. Sin should be confessed only to those against whom they were directed. In other words, we should never have a confession meeting of the church in which people get up and say I've done this bad and I've done that bad, and so on. Others are not concerned about those matters, but if you have wronged a certain brother, then it seems to me that that confession should be made to that brother, to the satisfaction of the elders. And they would announce, such a brother has been restored. And this by the way occurred at 2nd Corinthians chapter 2 in which the apostle announces and says, "You've had this brother under discipline long enough and he's properly repented, now restore him," 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 5 through verse 11. Any other questions? Time's up really anyway.

Next week will be our last study on church order. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we commit our time of study to Thee. We pray that as a result of our study

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]

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