

The Lord's Supper

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Date: 30 April 2023

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[0:00] We have a pretty narrow picture of what discipline is, whether through a misunderstanding of that word or because of childhood hurts. The word discipline can be distasteful.

! The word discipline, however, has the same root as our word disciple and can be synonymous with the word train. It's not nearly as harsh as one might think.

So when someone is disciplined, they are being trained. In a broad sense, discipline is everything the church does to help its members pursue holiness and fight sin.

Preaching, teaching, prayer, counseling, our corporate gatherings together, accountability in relationship, godly oversight by elders are all forms of discipling or discipline.

Some have called this formative discipline. It's a term that I particularly like. The narrower sense of the term church discipline has been called corrective discipline.

[1:05] This process that we see outlined for us here in Matthew chapter 18. So church discipline is taught in the scriptures. It's grossly neglected in our day.

Very few churches that practice much discipling at all, much less this corrective discipline process. And it is extremely important for the holiness of God's people to the praise of his glory.

So if you're new to the idea altogether, and I praise God that many of you are not, I just want to lay out for you what the aims of church discipline are.

What are we trying to accomplish as we do this? Because it is not fun. I get looped into these processes most regularly when they're happening. And to be frank, I don't enjoy them.

So why? Why do I make myself available for discomfort in the life of our church? Wouldn't it be easier just to brush it all under the rug and act like it's not going on?

[2:10] In some sense, yes. In an eternal sense, certainly not. So five aims of church discipline. Let me run through these quickly for you.

Number one, church discipline is aimed at the good of the person disciplined.

Discipline warns a person of the danger of sin and calls him or her to repentance. I've said this already, right? To let people go on in their sin, acting as if those who are changed in kind by Christ will not pursue holiness is a great danger for them.

There are many people in our day that are deluded, thinking that they're Christians and they have a life that gives no evidence to that at all. And they're not part of churches that are helping them to realize this.

What a great tragedy that you would leave me alone in my sin and I might find myself not in the faith. Please, please bring me correction for my good.

We need to do this for the good of others as well. Secondly, church discipline is aimed at the good of other Christians. As the church speaks and acts against sin, the whole congregation sees the serious nature of sin and its consequences.

[3:25] We want to have positive witness to the glory of the gospel and obedience to it. It's good at times to show people the derailment of a life, right?

To say this person has gone astray and it's not good, right? We take this seriously and so should you. Thirdly, church discipline is aimed at the good of the church as a whole.

Church discipline keeps the local body pure by protecting it from moral decay. It also addresses sin that could potentially lead to strife and conflict in the church.

So we are part of an association of churches called the Chattahoochee Baptist Association. I am part of some of the leadership of that association. I volunteer as a moderator for our meetings. And so I'm in the middle of some ugly church situations, hearing about them, praying for them, hoping to see some change in them. And when you hear about the strife going on in some of these churches, my first thought is, had they practiced discipline, these unregenerate people would not be causing all these problems in the church.

[4:36] Just un-Christian action. Just incredibly wicked the way they're working with each other. And I would suggest that they're probably not Christians at all and probably should have been put out of the church some decades ago.

Or, one would hope, repent and believe and walk righteously in the church. So, it's good for the church to be holy and avoid those kinds of conflicts and strife that would be caused by people who are not in the faith at all.

Fourthly, church discipline is aimed at the good of non-Christians. It powerfully protects our corporate witness and evangelism because people notice when there is a whole community of believers whose lives are different from the world.

We're marked off. We're different in the way that we live. It helps to produce a community of changed people. A community that gives hope to non-Christians that they really can change. It's possible that change can happen. And fifthly, most importantly, church discipline is aimed at the glory of God. Christians are called to be holy, not for our own reputation, but for God's.

[5:50] Our lives are meant to display God's character in the world and we want him to look magnificent. He is that. We want to display that as secondary means.

One important part of that is the responsibility to address sin in the church that would bring dishonor. To his name. People claiming to be Christians and doing things in contradiction to that claim.

So, important. I hope you're seeing. What does all of this have to do with the ordinance of the Lord's Supper? Let me go back to my previous question.

What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven that do the binding and loosing work that's talked about in Matthew chapter 16 and chapter 18? Those keys are the authority of the church expressed in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

However, God has given us two visible signs for this weighty work of binding and loosing. Declaring who is and who isn't church.

[7:00] So, the binding and the loosing is this marking off of who is part of the church and who isn't part of the church. Beloved, this is an absolutely serious matter.

To say that somebody is a member of a church, they belong to the people of God, is to say to them that Christ's work has been effectual for them. They have repented and believed in the gospel.

It's a serious authority that has been given to the church. And it is to be handled under the great authority of our great God who gave us a book to govern us.

And we are to do this with care and love, great caution for the good of people and the purity of the church to the glory of Christ. We live in an age, I'm just going to say it again, that this is grossly neglected.

You have likely come from a background where this idea was not even talked about in the life of your church. And it is an important thing, a primary thing that the church should be doing.

[8:06] The most commonly held and historically agreed upon definition of a local church goes something like this. A local church is a gathering of professing Christians who meet regularly to do things.

Rightly preach the gospel. And I assume this means both in their meeting and in their going. Rightly preach the gospel. And secondly, rightly administer the ordinances.

Some of you might think, what? Like, get people wet and serve them little cups of grape juice? Like, why is that included in that definition? It's because it's the way that the church marks off who is in Christ and who is not.

With the kind of confidence we can have under the authority of the scripture. Right? It's really sad in our day if you take that definition and apply it to most churches.

It's difficult to call them churches. We'd be gracious to just say irregular churches. Not quite fitting the standards.

[9:12] I don't care where you meet. I don't really care exactly how you meet. I don't care on which day you meet. But if you're not preaching the gospel and rightly administering the ordinances, it's difficult to call you a biblical church.

Rightly administering the ordinances is a primary work of the church. And as congregationalists, which means we all think that we should be involved in this discipling project.

We're all to be doing it. Then we better make sure that we get it right. It's not just the thing that your elders do. It's a thing that we do together. So last week as we considered the ordinance of baptism, which was kind of a setup to be honest for today.

We did so with an outline from the 1689 London Baptist Confession article on baptism. The 1689 Confession, also known as the Second London Baptist Confession, is possibly the finest of all Baptist confessions.

And while we cry sola scriptura, as the reformers did, historical precedents can support our understanding of the scripture. So it's helpful to go, OK, we're seeing this in the Bible and someone else also saw it as well.

[10:28] So we looked at Article 29. It had four sections. That was our outline last week. Today we're going to look at Article 30 of the 1689 on the Lord's Supper, which has eight sections, but we're not going to look at all of them.

So breathe a big sigh of relief. We're only going to consider five this morning and three of them I'm lumping together. So there's three points for this morning and we'll cover them fairly quickly.

All right. Firstly, first point, Section one. Just listen carefully to this statement on the Lord's Supper from the 1689 Confession.

The Supper of the Lord Jesus was instituted by him the same night he was betrayed. It is to be observed in his churches to the end of the age as a perpetual remembrance and display of the sacrifice of himself in his death.

It is given for the confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits of Christ's death, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him and their further engagement in and to all the duties they owe him.

[11:33] The Supper is to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Christ and each other. The Lord's Supper is to serve as a reminder to us.

We are slow learners and we are quick to forget. I appreciate that God knows us much better than we know ourselves. And so in great loving kindness, God gave us instructions for our meeting together so that we would be taught and reminded of his graciousness toward us.

We do so well if we want to be encouraged to take up the word and say, how would God have us meet together? It's his design that we would come together and be reminded of his goodness in Christ.

One of the things we have been instructed to do is to take the Lord's Supper. Gathering together to take the Lord's Supper serves as a sort of pageant.

It marks the high point of human history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event that none of us were present for. And it makes it more visible to us.

[12:40] As we take the bread and the fruit of the vine together, we are meant to remember all that God accomplished for us in the personal work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It's meant for us to come together and look at each other and go, yeah, that thing that we say we believe is still true. It's still effectual for you and for me.

If you have participated in our taking of the Lord's Supper at our members gathering, you have heard me say, we remember together, I say this all the time, that what our God has done for us in Christ.

This is an ordinance given to the church. It's a thing that the church does when it gathers together. It's not a thing that you should do on your own. It's not a thing that should be done online in a Zoom meeting.

It's not a thing that should be done at a wedding. When the church gathers, this is when the Lord's Supper can be taken. We remember together what God has done for us in Christ.

[13:47] We proclaim his death until he comes. This comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We're going to be in 1 Corinthians a bunch if you'd like to turn there. I think you'll appreciate the flipping that you could do.

1 Corinthians 11, I'll begin reading in verse 23. Again, another familiar passage. Every Lord's Day that I'm here, I cite from this passage.

Paul here says, In the same way also, we took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We remember what has been accomplished. The finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. And, because we're slow learners and quick to forget, we think it's good to do it often.

[14:58] We have been doing it every Lord's Day since the founding of this church some 14 years ago. We are proposing a change that's going to have us doing it once a month.

And, at least for a time, doing it in that way. It's not my favorite. But, if you want to read the text and say, Look, I think the church did this every single time they gathered.

I'd go, Yeah, it's possible. But also, they all gathered way after dark, after all the slaves got off of work. So, would you also like to meet at that time? Would that be the regulative thing for us to do? We're all going to meet at 8 p.m. on Sunday evenings?

Probably not. I think we have some latitude in our regularity. But, we should do it because we need to be reminded. We need to be reminded of God's goodness to us in Christ. In the taking of the Lord's Supper.

We remember together what God has done for us in Christ. We remember together also how that work is effectual today. What he is even now doing for us. Having given to us the Spirit.

[15:58] Helping us to walk in obedience. Romans 8.1 says, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We need to come together and remind one another that if we are in Christ.

If we have placed saving faith in him. There is no condemnation for us. A whole group of fellow Christians have said, As far as we can tell, you still walk faithfully with our Lord.

There is no condemnation for you. Come, welcome to the table. And, thirdly, we remember together what God has promised to do.

So, it looks backward. It looks to the present. And, it looks forward as well. Matthew chapter 26. In the instituting of the Lord's Supper, Jesus goes on to say this in verse 29.

I tell you, I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. He is talking about the marriage supper of the Lamb.

[17:02] A thing that every Christian should long for. So, when we take the Lord's Supper together, we are getting some glimpse of that future glorious feast. Some paltry, small shadow of a glimpse.

But, it is meant to point our thinking to that great day. So, we remember together what he has done, is doing, and has promised to do.

Now, in that confession, the 1689, it says, It is given for the confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits of Christ's death.

I think for too long, probably most of us grew up in churches where the Lord's Supper was this highly individualized thing. And, there is an aspect of that, right?

Thinking about my past week or month. Or, in the case of many churches, six months to a year. Reflecting upon it. Thinking about my faithfulness.

[18:00] But, this is an ordinance of the church given in confirmation of the faith of believers. As I said it before, right? Welcoming people to the table.

I need this. I need to be welcomed to the table. I have bad weeks. This last week was just a tough week. Circumstantially, it was tough. Emotionally, it was tough.

It was a hard, hard week. It was good for me to come and gather with you. And, have you, in the taking of the Lord's Supper, say to me. I'm not saying it with your mouth. But, in the action of taking it, you're saying, Nathan, you still belong at the table. It's okay that this last week was rough. Because, Christ's work is completed and effectual for you. He has given you his righteousness, however poor yours was this past week. So, it's why we say, again, if you've been to one of our members' gatherings, the Lord's Supper is for members of our church.

[19:01] People who we have given the confidence to. We believe you're in Christ. And, for guests who have been baptized and are members in good standing of a gospel-preaching church.

A church that rightly preaches the gospel and rightly administers the ordinances. Right? Another group of Christians who have said, yes, yes, we believe that this person is in Christ. And, then, of course, I always say, with some providential exceptions.

Like, you may have just moved and you've moved your membership from one place to another. I'll give you a couple more supporting texts. 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16 and 17.

Paul says, The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body.

For we all partake of the one bread. Right? I'm picturing that likely at their meals, and I think it's fine that we do it differently, but there was a single loaf of bread and it was broken.

[20:04] This congregation gathered together, shares in this bread as a church together. On, back up a little bit, 1 Corinthians 5, verse 11 and 12.

This would be to the negative, right? To the positive, you're welcome at the table. To the negative, you're no longer welcome at the table. 1 Corinthians 5, verse 11 and 12.

Paul there says, But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother, if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler. Now, we need to understand, Paul's not saying that we should walk around going, No, you screwed up this week. Can't have anything to do with you. We need to apply the teaching of Matthew chapter 18 on top of this, and see that what Paul's talking about here is a person who is habitually and unrepentant participating in these things.

He's given them the actual title of these activities. And then he says, Not even to eat with such a one. Now, in this day, to eat with somebody was very familial, right?

[21:17] I don't think he is necessarily specifically referring to the Lord's Supper here, but I definitely think that it includes that in his teaching. Now, you can meet somebody and sign insurance paperwork over a meal, right?

Somebody you've never met before, you might sit down and have chips and salsa with. A little less so. So, what he's saying is, you don't have that kind of close familial relationship that you would have with somebody who's in the church and walking faithfully, right?

So, this certainly applies to the Lord's Supper. And then in verse 12, he says, For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Rhetorically, he's saying, nothing to do with judging outsiders.

He says, is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge, right? Pick up that authority of bearing those keys to the kingdom. And so, we say often that baptism is the welcoming ordinance. It's the way that we put our confirmation on, even as an individual proclaims their faith in Christ. It's the welcoming ordinance. In fact, I think in much simpler Christian context, perhaps a place where people are being terribly persecuted for their faith, if somebody claimed to be a Christ follower, you would just baptize them, and that would be the membership process.

[22:38] You would just say, well, then come on. We have a secret meeting, and we'll baptize you at that meeting and welcome you into our fellowship. In our setting, we go through a bit of a process, don't we?

All of you who are members, we want to make sure that you understand what we believe to be true in the scripture. We want to get to know you. When you say you're a Christ follower, we want to be sure it's the Christ of the Bible that you're talking about.

But then baptism still serves as that welcoming ordinance. The Lord's Supper is the remaining ordinance. It does the same work as the baptism does, but it continues on.

It's like reaffirmation. We affirmed we believe you're in Christ. Now we're going to reaffirm that you're in Christ as we gather at the table together. It's the remaining ordinance, or in some sad cases, it's the dismissing ordinance.

So I hope I'm wrapping that around to the whole thing about church discipline for you. It's the ordinance that must be used in that way. So there have been three positions for who the Lord's Supper should be offered to.

[23:45] One of them, to my shame, we used to do, and it was open. We had the Lord's Supper every time we met in this setting. It was kind of offered as an invitation after the preaching.

And to our credit, we offered some strong warnings about who should and who shouldn't be taking the Lord's Supper. But there were many, many Sundays that some college student said, I'm so excited.

My parents are here, and they're not Christ followers, and just so glad they're going to get to hear the gospel. And we would preach the gospel, and we would give these very clear warnings, and then we would see them take the Lord's Supper. And my hope was always, maybe they repented and believed.

Like, oh, this would be wonderful news. And you'd find out from that student later that that wasn't the case at all. And the concern was that we were issuing false assurance to these people.

Now, they probably misunderstood it so much that that's not really what we were accomplishing.

But it was a fear that it was possible that we were. And so we changed the way we did it, didn't we?

[24:47] Some of you were here through that. Gathering before this time together. Something we call our members' gathering. To practice what has been historically called close communion.

Which means we welcome members and guests who are baptized and members in good standing of a gospel preaching church. Right? Which allows for somebody to travel from another town for us to be in this kind of fellowship with them.

Previous members of our church to come back to Dahlonga, which happens quite regularly, and to enjoy the Lord's Supper with us. But it still places on there this desire that people would understand that it's about the affirmation of their faith as we take this meal together.

And then the last one is called closed communion, which is for members only. It's much more strictly done in that sense. This is the more historical position of interest to you.

You might appreciate knowing that Charles Spurgeon, his church once a year, an elder would interview members of their church. And would give them tickets to their monthly Lord's Supper meetings.

[25:56] And say, as far as we can tell, these people are still in the faith. And would give them tickets for that. And if they were disciplined out of the church, they would ask for them back. It was such a large fellowship of people that they numbered the tickets.

And they would actually track who was and wasn't coming and participating in the Lord's Supper. Seems like a little much to me. But I'm just saying that to say. Jonathan Edwards was fired from his church.

This is pre-Great Awakening because he fenced the table. He would actually stand at it and tell people, oh, no, no. Not today. And he offended a particular man who had enough influence to get him fired.

And that church, some like a year later, repented and rehired him. Brought him back and said, you were much more right than we understood on this. So opened, close, closed.

But these things are thinking in that direction, right? We have to think carefully about how do we rightly administer the ordinances. Okay. Super fast. I'm going to fly through these next two.

[27:01] Second point, sections 2, 5, and 6. Actually, I'm just going to give them to you in summary to make it even better for you. The point of these is to say that there's not any real sacrifice being made for the remission of sin.

It's not Catholicism. It's not a penitent thing that you must do in order to gain God's grace. It's a remembering thing of what Christ has accomplished once for all.

So section 2 makes this extremely clear. So Hebrews chapter 9, verse 25 and following. The author of Hebrews is making this case that Jesus is a different kind of priest from the Levitical priests.

And he writes, Nor was it to offer himself, being Christ repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own. For then he, Christ, would have to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. So Jesus is not like those priests who had to make sacrifice constantly with somebody else's blood, the blood of animals.

[28:17] But Jesus made the sacrifice of himself once for all. So we have no need to make continuing sacrifice in the way that they did in the Old Testament or that some people do in our day.

This is not what the ordinance of the Lord's Supper accomplishes. The next two sections are about the actual nature of those elements. That they do not become the actual body and blood of Christ.

Right? They speak against a doctrine commonly called transubstantiation. The authors of the 1699 say, This doctrine is hostile not only to scripture but also to common sense and reason.

It destroys the nature of the ordinance and has been and is the cause of many kinds of superstitions and of gross idolatries. For the sake of time, we won't look at any scripture for that.

But these last two sections in summary, we take the elements which are symbols of the completed sacrifice of Christ on our behalf and remember God's mercy and grace toward us.

[29:24] And then lastly, section 7 says this. The body and blood of Christ are not present bodily or physically in the ordinance but spiritually to the faith of believers.

just as the elements themselves are present to their outward senses. So 1 Corinthians 10, 16, I read to you already. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?

The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? We experience his sacrifice on our behalf by faith inwardly as we take the Lord's Supper, but not outwardly in reality.

The Lord's Supper serves the strong at heart, and it serves the faint at heart. When we come together, welcome one another at the table, and feast, whether figuratively or literally, we remind each other of our belonging in Christ.

Thomas Watson, Puritan pastor, wrote a book called The Lord's Supper, which I don't agree with in its entirety, but for the most part, it's a very good read. And this is the quotation on your bulletin this morning.

[31:02] I'll just add, In the supper, a weak faith can lay hold on a strong Christ. It's a time for us to forget ourselves that we might remember what Jesus has done.

And again, we do it together for one another as we come together. So there's so much more that can be said of the Lord's Supper. I skipped a page and a half of my notes for the sake of time, but I hope that I've sufficiently shown you that this is why we take the supper regularly, why the way we take it is for members and for people who are in good standing with a gospel-preaching church, and why it is significant for the good of souls both within and outside of the church.

And so, this is why we do what we do, and why we do what we do the way we do what we do. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.