

14th Sunday in Pentecost/ Proper 18 2020

Readings - Exodus 12:1-14, Psalm 149, Romans 13:8-14, Matthew 18:15-20

Introduction - Outwardly, church discipline reflects publicly on the holiness of God and defends His honour. Inwardly, within the Church, church discipline restores purity and guards the church against sin.

Common Theme - The calling of the believer and the community of believers is to seek and save the lost and to defend the weak. This is the character of God and should be reflected in His people through their attitudes and behaviour. Specifically, in attention to our behaviour within the community.

Hebraic Perspective - God is both compassionate, faithful, and merciful to a thousand generations and at the same time a consuming fire, a judge who must judge in holiness and justice. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The same God who stretches out His hand to redeem the oppressed also stretches the same hand to destroy the wicked. These concepts appear to be opposites yet they are held in tension as we contemplate God, His Word, and sacred history.

Reading #1: Exodus 12:1-14 - The text describes the preparation instructions for the last plague to strike Egypt. It was only through the obedience of putting the blood on the doorposts that would deliver the Israelites from the Angel of Death. God is a judge and He delivers judgment on all the Egyptian gods. This affected everyone and everything in the land of Egypt. Everyone inside the house that had the blood would be passed over. Note, that is *everyone*. So if you knew that everyone inside the house would be saved what would you do? According to Oral tradition, the Israelites invited their friends, neighbours, and even the Egyptians to come into the house to eat the Passover Lamb. In the morning when the Egyptians had seen how the Israelites had loved them enough to save them and their children from the plague, despite mistreating them, they joined in the Exodus and left Egypt with Israel. As it says, a mixed multitude went with them (Exodus 12:38). God was bringing judgment and Israel had the opportunity to seek and save the lost Egyptians. Both sides of God's character were in action, the compassionate side was demonstrated through the Israelite behaviour.

Reading #2: Psalm 149 - The psalm blends praise to God as both the faithful King and defender of his people. It enjoins the people to dance and sing at the pleasure God takes with His people, while also acknowledging the vengeance of God against the nations. We can see love and discipline occurring together in this short 9 verse psalm.

Readings #3: Romans 13:8-14 - Paul reminds us of the tension between light and darkness, the deeds of the world, and the deeds of the Kingdom of Heaven. Paul admonishes us to act in love, which is the character of God and fulfills the Law. Knowing that the world rushes towards an encounter with the Creator who will bring judgment. Love and Judgement again in tension, knowing that judgment is coming we should act in Love.

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Reading #4: Matthew 18:15-20 - The mission of the community is to seek and save the lost. How should it behave then to its own membership? Firstly there should be no gossip within the community. Therefore go to the brother first, don't talk about him within the community. For that is gossip and dangerous. Speech is described as a powerful two-edged sword, for both blessing and cursing. Speech then is also important in the realm of Church discipline. What is important is that the brother 'hears' you! He doesn't have to agree or repent immediately, that involves the work of the Spirit. This action of going to the brother wins in two ways, firstly you have not wronged the brother by gossiping about him, and secondly, the potential problem has been cleared up and restoration has been made. The Name of Jesus has not been dishonoured by the deeds of His church.

A similar expression to Verse 20 occurs in the Mishna 'But if two sit together and words of Torah are spoken between them, then the Shekinah, the Divine Presence, rest between them'. Speaking and discussing the things of God can bring the presence of God. Be careful then what you say!

Binding and loosing have often been appropriated into the spiritual realm of casting out demons. However, in the Jewish context, it is about permitting and not permitting. Jesus invites His Church to engage in the creation of *halakha*. That is, how you walk out your salvation in practical daily community life. For example, if your community requires that men wear hats in church, then the rule for that community in Heaven is also that men should wear hats in church. If you deliberately rebel against that church command then that is counted as a personal sin. Should you not wish to wear a hat in church then simply change churches. Go to one where you feel more comfortable with the customs.

Hebraic Context - The same three-step procedure of discipline occurs in the Dead Sea Community at Qumran. 1QS5:25-6:1. Known as the *Community Rule*, the Qumran community noted that all attempts at reconciliation should always start with a one on one. And that members should rebuke one another in love, humility, and charity. Those who turned on the community would face expulsion. Taking witnesses along is based on the instructions by Moses in Deuteronomy 19:15. Although in the Torah the context was of proving a judicial charge, in the Gospels the context is about settling an internal community dispute. Interestingly the word Church (*ekklesia*) is only used here and in Matthew 16:18 in the Gospels. It refers to a local group of Jewish believers in the Messiah. Gentiles are lumped in with tax collectors as those not protected by the obligations of the Torah. Jesus at this point in His ministry was seeking the lost sheep of the House of Israel. Hence the term church used in this passage refers to purely a community of Jewish believers.

Further Reading: If you would like to read further into this subject and learn more on the concept of discipline in the Church, we highly recommend the two following resources:

- Article from [Bible.org](https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-16-biblical-church-discipline-matthew-1815-17-1-corinthians-51-13): <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-16-biblical-church-discipline-matthew-1815-17-1-corinthians-51-13>

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- Book resource: Handbook of Church Discipline, A right and privilege of every Church member, Jay E Adams, Zondervan 1986, Chapter 3 Corrective Discipline - [Buy it on Kindle](#)