

Church Leaders and Discipline

Let us listen attentively to the Word of God. 1st Timothy 5, 19 and 20. Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses.

Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all that the rest also may fear. Let us pray. Gracious God above, may these words be understood and may they be applied in the life of the Church, God Almighty.

May we understand the importance of the office, officers of the Church of God and how they are held to a stricter judgment insofar as they are public and people see what they are doing and therefore, Lord, when there is discipline, that it be there for all to learn thereby that the rest may also have a godly fear. Gracious God, be with us, we pray, in understanding your Word and understanding how to live and pray in accordance to the truth therein. Amen.

So, Paul is winding down on the function and work of the Church officers in the relationship between poor widows. In these next few verses, he fires off a series of to-the-point sentences targeting some problems he saw coming down the line. The advice and warnings are not unusual and would fit in any group of people at work, community or a legal court for that matter.

Yet, it needed to be said, apparently, because a temptation was there to skip these things, perhaps just to get things done or whatever the reason is. So, let's see how Jesus would protect the Church officers, ourselves, and our churches with these simple, powerful truths.

Accusations Require Witnesses

So, the first point, accusations require witnesses, verse 19, or specifically here, accusations against public officers.

They do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. So, this public rebuke and the like reminds us of the importance of the office, but also of the importance of maintaining the good name and bringing the appropriate evidence against them. It assumes that there is evidence and that the witnesses here are there to bring forth this evidence of a charge.

It's not just men saying things, but men who can prove things in this manner. But, I think what you'll notice here, in verse 19 in particular, when he says, except from two or three witnesses, is that not how we typically do things anyways? We want multiple witnesses, not just one person against another. So, Paul, in other words, is not bringing up something brand new.

Well, where'd this come from? Well, like, well, yeah, of course, Paul. And that's not uncommon with many things in the Bible. Like I mentioned, the sentence class Proverbs has lots of common sense things of living and way of doing things and thinking because it's rooted in God's creation or natural law, as we said, which is unpacked in the Word of God in particular.

But, we have actual precedents for this in the book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy chapter 17, verse 6, we read, at the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses shall he that is worthy of death be put to death. But, at the mouth of one witness, he shall not be put to death.

That is good advice because, obviously, it's from God on high. But, it's commonsensical. And, I wanted to highlight that point that this is not really surprising.

So, it tells us, at least tells me, that something was going on at the churches, the church underneath Timothy, where some people were doing these things. There was a danger, and he wanted to warn them about it. It's brought up again in Matthew 18, verse 16.

Jesus says, but if he will not hear, take with you one or two more that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. So, Jesus reiterates what was there in Deuteronomy. Although, specifically there, the emphasis was for murder.

It's true for many other serious accusations that people may face. And, I mentioned, of course, two to three here at a minimum. It's not like you can't make up his mind.

I think he's saying, perhaps, more serious charges, perhaps, require more witnesses, three or more witnesses. He says, two for some, or three or more, perhaps, or whatever is appropriate for the issue at hand. And, a requirement of some formal charges here, the accusation, the word accusation here is semi-technical.

It's not just me saying something. It's me saying something with more force. I am accusing you.

If you remember playing the game Clue, you had that kind of thing. I suspect, we'd say, I suspect you're up to no good. You went into this room, and you had the candlestick, and you hit Dr. Purple over the head.

But, once you say, I accuse you of doing it, that triggered something in the game, if you recall. And, same with here. We do this in life because we believe, at least the American tradition of freedom of speech.

We could say, well, I suspect, or I think, and you say your opinion. But, it's not the same thing as saying, I accuse you of something. I'm going to go to the law courts.

I'm going to bring up charges. That's what's going on here. It's serious stuff.

And, of course, it applies to everyday life in so far as, if it's a serious enough matter, you're going to want two or three witnesses, even if it isn't a formal charge. It's, I have a concern. So, we understand that, although here, he's specifically dealing with formal accusations in everyday life, we still often want a few more witnesses than just a he said, she said scenario.

And, it's important here that our public reputation be not ruined in general. So, it's not just for the elders, the officers of the church, of course, that this is true. It's for anybody, as Christ points out in Matthew 18.

Because, it's almost impossible to get back your good name. When you have backroom calls, and conversations, and private phone calls, and the like, and it ends up being multiple people in this chain of false accusation, it's hard to pin down who exactly did it. And, therefore, undo the damage to your good name.

And so, there's always been a long-standing policy to have evidence, witnesses, in this case, needing to verify what had happened. Not for your sake, of course, but also for the ones bringing, that is, if you are bringing the one, bringing the charges, you know the truth. So, in your mind, you're like, why do I need more witnesses? I saw it, I have the evidence, you know, he wrote it down here, or something, or I heard it in my own ears, more than likely, is the scenario here.

Why do I need other witnesses? If the guy being charged is your friend, and the other person is a friend, or a family member, and they're at it with one another, you really want to get in the middle of that without evidence? You're like, I like this guy, I like that guy, I like this girl, I like that girl, and they're making accusations against others, or other person, you're going to want evidence, for our sake, for the third party objectivity, to deal with this matter, or are you just going to be sitting there going, I don't want to be involved, are you going to jump in without evidence, and you're going to get either both parties angry, at least one party, but of course, if the one is humble, and you have evidence, and you come along, and you have to examine the evidence, we're hopeful that we'll tip the scales, in terms of what is to be done in the situation here, because you don't know who to believe, I trust this person, I've known this other person, all these years, and now you have this accusation, what do I need? I need evidence, because you know people sin, even the best of them, so it assumes a discrete church government, what do we mean by that? And that is a local church membership, not just, well I'm a Christian, so any church I go to is my church, people say that, well this is what I've found out in practice, I ask them, am I your pastor? No, because they know what that means, if I'm your pastor, so I say something to you, has a little more oomph, if I'm your pastor, than some random guy down the street, who's in someone else's pastor, we understand this, and so this assumes some kind of accountability, mutual accountability, in fact, it's not just, oh I'm under the pastor, the pastor is accountable to you, as you see here, he's not saying, never bring charges, these people are holy, you can never touch the church officers, but that if you do, just like the rest of you, right, Matthew 18, Deuteronomy 17, you got to bring witnesses, and so local church membership is the only way this makes sense, and it seems to be lacking that is discipline in the American church in this regard, unfortunately, but why especially church officers, he's not saying just any member of the church of God, but against elder, against an elder, probably the pastor, because we had just finished up in verses 17 and 18, let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and doctrine, and he argues that you ought to pay them, or you know, provide for them one way or the other, and off that point, verse 17 and 18, he says, don't bring an accusation against an elder, probably a pastor, is how Calvin and others look at it, because as a public figure, they are easy targets. As public figures, church officers are easy targets for abuse and lies

and whatnot, especially pastors who publicly teach, and which ends up being what, poking people in the eye sometimes, not on purpose, but with the word of God and the Holy Spirit, and people get offended, they want to strike back. This has happened.

Presumably, of course, these are faithful pastors who are not watering down the truth, and they need to be protected. One commentator puts it this way back in the old days, this is an old idiom they had, every fool has a bolt to shoot at a faithful preacher. Maybe today he would say gun, because when you're faithfully preaching the whole counsel of God, people will be poked.

The world, the flesh, and the devil will try to take him down. Calvin says this, not only does it arise from the difficulty of their office, that is pastors, that sometimes they either sink under it, or stagger, or halt, or blunder. They make mistakes and errors.

In consequence of which, wicked men seize many occasions for finding fault with them. But there is this additional vexation, that although they perform the duty correctly, so as not to commit any error whatever, they never escape a thousand censures. That was his experience.

It's been experience of faithful pastors over the generations, that they can be easy targets. And so there are two things in particular that offend here. First, faithful preaching of the law, because the law brings conviction.

We talked about that in Sunday school class, its purpose and function for the unbeliever, and the believer, and the Christian walk of our sanctification. And of course people don't like this. It's not just the tone or the volume.

Talk about tone, I don't like a tone of voice. Sometimes simply reading the Bible itself is offensive. They don't want to hear it.

That's crazy stuff. We mean I'm a wicked sinner. My feet are quick to shed bloodshed.

What are you talking about? Then you have an opportunity to explain these things to them, that often they get offended. So it's enough that they get angry, and they use that anger perhaps silently. They walk away thinking how they can plot to take you down, or lie about you, or undermine you.

These things happen. They've been exposed in, you know, politics and like, in the public courts over the years, although we don't often hear about it. Newspaper you usually hear the scandal part.

You don't hear whether he was vindicated or not. It's never a follow-up. It's really annoying, but that's where we are in society, and it happens in the church as well.

Faithful preachers, of course, preaching the gospel can bring anger, top of conviction, to those committed to what? Self-salvation. You're saying my going to church, my baptism, my obedience to God is not enough to bring me to heaven? What kind of a preacher are you? And they get offended, and they come after me at times. It's no big deal.

It's just, you know, social media. I haven't had, well, there was an email once, right, but, you know, in my life there, against me, but usually Roman Catholics angry at what I said about the gospel. It's unfortunate.

Now, I see a different direction today. So we're talking about why the focus on elders here. He is, of course, speaking and writing, to the young pastor, Timothy, and through Timothy, to his ministry, what he should do, and talk to the women, and the men, and the families of the church there underneath him, how to encourage, and protect, and warn, and guide, and instruct, and so this matter of the eldership, and how they are accountable, but there are safeguards, not only for yourself, but for them as well in this matter.

I see it going a different direction today, and I want to say this clearly, but carefully. We have, I think, the opposite problem, more often than not, perhaps, I don't know, because we don't have polls or statistics on these matters. You just see it over the years.

You have a sense of it, or at least I do, that popular preachers in particular end up becoming untouchable. You can have 10 witnesses. It doesn't matter.

Everyone likes the guy. He helped the church grow. That's not good.

That's kind of like the opposite problem here, where I'm going to listen to these people, because look at the good fruit he did. He might have done good fruit, but we're not talking about that. We're talking about this particular sin, rises to such an occasion, such a scandal in the church of God, he must, as we see in verse 20, rebuke in the presence of all.

It's so bad, because there are degrees of sin, of course, in censure. They get a pass, unfortunately, in a way other pastors won't get a pass. I'm not going to name them.

We've seen some of them even this last year or so, and I've seen plenty of people even make excuses for them. One guy chasing me down on Facebook. He's so agitated that I gave an opinion about someone, a popular ministry guy, making a gross error, a significant public error.

Oh, he did wonderful things. I'm sorry, brother. You got to get over that emotional hump and acknowledge you can do great things and still do bad things.

That's where the world we live in, but it must be dealt with if it's serious enough.

Rebuke Requires Publicity

Secondly, rebuke requires publicity. That is, it has to be public if it's bad enough here.

In this case, verse 20, rebuking public officer. First of all, they have a greater responsibility. James 3.1, where we read, My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive to what a stricter judgment.

There's more responsibility upon them, not only for what their responsibility with respect to teaching and preaching and admonition and the like, publicly, but that their life and people are watching them. The things they do or don't do is also part of their duty before God and before men. And therefore, such publicity comes with a price, greater scrutiny.

Even if unwarranted, there'll be greater scrutiny. And this is one reason why 1 Timothy 3 tells us what? That he must be blameless. There's a list of requirements for the bishop or the pastor or minister of the church, and one of them is he must be blameless, just across the board.

It's just a simple word, and he gives other various details that seem to unpack with that idea of blamelessness. Now, of course, he doesn't mean absolute blamelessness. The guy never sins.

He's perfect. This guy's an angel. No, that's not what he's talking about.

But of such a nature that he could go in a public office, and even if people come after him, and if lies, and into windows, everyone else is like, what are you? It's just lies. There's nothing here. There's nothing to see.

This guy, by God's grace and sanctification, has a relatively blameless life. But if we're quick to lay hands, we're going to cross that later, lay hands not suddenly on any man, to ordain them and not pay attention to that kind of reputation he ought to already have, then we're setting ourselves up and our ministers up for failure. When men enter the ministry, when you meet people who are interested, usually young men who are very zealous, and that's good.

I'm glad they have zeal. I don't want them to lose that. They need to understand what the cost is to being a public officer.

Because if you have done something, there will be, and should be, some public rebuke. Rebuke in the presence of all, not privately. Oh, you did a bad thing.

That's what I've seen with the celebrity pastors. Well, yeah, the session sat down with him, had a little talk with him. Yeah, but okay, but what about the rest of us? What do we get to hear? It's a public rebuke, right? That's what it's supposed to be.

Again, if it's a serious enough matter. Another commentator here describes here, those presbyters, because that's the word there for elder, that sin publicly, scandalously, as did Peter. Remember Peter? Opening his mouth in here, not just opening his mouth, but showing bad actions in Galatians 2.14, where he sat with the circumcised, because he didn't want to sit with the uncircumcised, because he wanted not to offend the Jews.

And those who are convicted by two or three witnesses, as 1st Timothy 5.19, rebuke before all, yet not as if they were whipping boys. The point here isn't to beat them down in the public admonition of their sin. And I think that's a good thing to highlight here.

Now, Paul doesn't unpack that, but that's the assumption here. Paul isn't interested in just being mean for mean's sake. That's not the point.

The point is, as he says, that all would fear, to bring them more purity of walk and holiness. And of course, as he says elsewhere, as we know Christ talks about, to bring them back into the fold and to repentance. It's out of love and conviction in these matters.

Now, there's an assumption here of two types of offices, private and public. Offenses, excuse me. Private and public.

Private to be dealt with privately, right? You have family matters all the time. I don't want to hear about them. I'm your pastor, but I don't need to micromanage your life, right? Nor the session.

It's usually between them or between families, between friends. Keep it as private as long as possible, brothers and sisters. But if it's a serious enough problem, it goes public.

Galatians 6.1-2, we read, Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. So Galatians 6.1-2 is about private admonitions, private encouragement, private warnings and the like. And of course, if the matter becomes serious enough, Christ gives us that pattern, Matthew 18.

Well, if you can't deal with it there, you bring witnesses. If you can't deal with it there, then eventually you're on your way to the church. That is the session represents the church.

We talked about the elders represent the people all over the place in the Bible. So that's private offenses and private matters and private concerns and private foibles publicly to be dealt with publicly through this matter as well. And it can be done in two ways publicly, just as it can private.

I didn't mention this, but you'll see it's the same way. You can deal with it face to face. You can deal with it not formally.

The word I use is informal discipline. You rebuke them privately. You can rebuke them publicly.

Jesus rebuked many publicly, the disciples. Paul rebuked Peter publicly in a letter to all the churches in the book of Galatians. Peter rebuked Simon, Magus, the magician there in Acts, again publicly.

They didn't bring charges. They didn't get witnesses and come together and said, you're an error. It was so gross.

It was so obvious. It was on the spot right then and there. And he called them out on it.

So I call that, for lack of a better word, non-formal or informal. They didn't bring, you know, paperwork and sit down with the session, bring the witnesses and examine these things in a trial, which is what we do ordinarily. But that's the other way, of course, to do it.

Formal public discipline, which should not be taken lightly. You got to count the cost if you're the one bringing the accusations. We have, in fact, in our presbytery, that is our collection of churches, regional collection of churches, that if matters come before them, charges, for example, against a minister, and they are examining these things, and the man who brought the charges, it turns out the charges were a waste of their time.

There is no substantial evidence in favor of it. The session, the presbytery, excuse me, can turn around and reprimand the man for wasting their time by bringing false accusations. I think that's good.

I wish we had more of that in the legal system. I don't know, legal legal courts, it seems like we don't have enough of that. People can bring all kinds of accusations, it seems, and get away with it.

So charges here are more along the lines of formal church charges and accusations, and where a pastor is brought before the presbytery is how we do it in Presbyterianism. In the Dutch tradition or the continental tradition of France and Germany and the like, of Calvin and them, the pastor is actually a member of the local church, interestingly enough. So there's a slight difference between us and them, but they too have presbyteries or regional collection of churches that have authority over one another, and of course a general assembly or a gathering of God's leadership over all the entire church, just like in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.

We're following the Word of God. So the charges here, ruling elders and the deacons and the like, can and should be examined, but they are examined in case of accusations at the local church. The ruling elders and deacons would be brought before the session, and they would in that regard look for witnesses.

One thing I want to point out here, he doesn't say this, but we know this from the rest of the Word of God and common sense. Anyone can bring accusations, last charges, to a church or against a church officer. They ought to be, you know, correct ones, assuming there's sin there.

Out of such a nature, you ought to bring charges. You can do it. They're not untouchable.

Jesus Christ did not give the authority of the pastorate so that they're untouchable. He knows they're going to sin. Paul, Peter, evidence of that.

We're one rebuking the other. And so don't hold back or shrink back from this matter if it's serious enough. People should not be afraid of the pastor in that sense, and that may happen in some of the other churches and maybe even our churches at times.

I've run across that people are afraid to bring something up for another five or six years. Don't. We have a two-year limit typically, just like the legal courts, because things, memories get lost.

It also holds back from people abusing the system by, oh yeah, you know, 20 years ago all this crazy stuff happened. Well, you know, half the witnesses are dead. No one remembers anything.

What's the point? You can't always just, you can't, in other words, you can't always deal with all sins and all crimes all the time. You have to leave it in God's hands eventually. That's true.

But you can bring charges. We are accountable to one another and to you, and especially to God. Rebuking Christians in public.

Why? Why the rebuking of Christians in public? He tells us why. That all the rest may also fear. Now if he means in verse 20, those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, he means the pastors who are caught, they have two or three witnesses, and therefore he's saying that all may fear.

He perhaps means the other church officers may also live with godly fear, but certainly it's the case for all Christians to live in godly fear in that regard and say, you know, even the pastor can be disciplined. The churches take God's words seriously and holiness enough that these men don't get away with these things. And of course, presumably he's humble enough to repent, and that also would bring on the flip side encouragement to the saints of God that the church does discipline and that by the spirit of God things can change.

If the pastor can change from such sins, so can I. So although more negative here to bring what fear, godly fear, the kind of fear that would hold us back from transgressing the word of God, keeping us on the straight and narrow of sanctification and holiness. That's why it's there. So the punishment of the pastors has this important function, not just the pastors, but anybody who gets punished.

If it's serious enough, it would be dealt with publicly and the whole church will know and say, yeah, I don't want to go down that path. And on the flip side, they're also taught to pray for him or her, whoever's being disciplined. The Bible examples, of course, are usually of rebuke of public officers.

In fact, Old Testament prophets rebuking entire communities and tribes and nations, not just leadership. Now, what of non-church officers interacting with fellow Christians, other non-church officers, other members who are not officers in the church of God? You have to go through a number of things here if you need to ask yourself, should I bring accusations not only to an elder, but to non-elders, to one another, because that's still there. Matthew 18 is still there.

This is just a special application of it, not even special, just a particular application to pastors, that they too have the same rights as the rest of you that have witnesses. How and

under what conditions do you bring accusations? So I want to cover a little bit of that and not excessive detail, but enough to give you an idea. You've got to weigh the scandal.

That is, is it a scandal or is it just offensive to your sensibilities? Because we have different sensibilities. I've pointed this out before. One of the difficulties we're going to run across, we have run across, I think it's going to grow, is as we have more and more people from different parts of the country moving out.

Denver is one of those places. We get lots of people from different subcultures in America. The Northeast is different than the Southwest, which is different than the South, which is different than the North, and what they expect and what's sensible offensiveness.

Our former pastor, Dr. Kopp, as you may recall, he mentioned a few times the story of him not wearing a white shirt. I have a white shirt on now. Sometimes I don't wear a white shirt.

It turned out in Pennsylvania where he was, he didn't wear a white shirt. They got offended. You're supposed to wear a white shirt with your suit.

What are you doing not wearing a white shirt? That's not a scandal. That's just you being, you know, a cultural thing. Now I wouldn't fight it as a pastor.

I don't think Dr. Kopp has did either. He's just, okay, fine, I'll wear white shirts. Is it really, does it really rise to the occasion to bring accusations to the church? Of course not.

Of course not. Is it a serious sin, is the other question. It can be a sin, but is it a serious enough sin to go even further than private admonition or bringing other witnesses? In the case of murder, being an obvious serious sin, it's not a matter of private admonition.

Why do I have to come up to the guy and say, why did you murder? No, you go right to the police, and you go right to the session. You skip all the little steps, is what I'm saying, because Christ is assuming, of course, he's just giving a summary, by the way. He doesn't give all the details.

We have other details in the New Testament, a summary of the path you normally take to deal with these matters of offense. Sometimes you have to skip it because the seriousness of the sin, then skip the lower steps and go right to the public matter, because murder is a public sin, not private. I wouldn't get very close to a murderer privately anyways.

You just don't do it. Does it require immediate rebuke, or does it take a little time to deal with these matters? Some things are serious enough, you may want to do an immediate verbal rebuke, as the case of Christ does to the disciples, or, well, Paul's not immediate. He wrote it down and finally processed out over time, if you think about it, but Christ was immediate on the spot.

You may do that maybe in person, on social media, if you see someone using God's name in vain. That's public, but it doesn't have to be a formal charge. You just give a rebuke and say, brother, what's going on here? What's with your language? You can say it that way, it could be more strong about it.

Between you and God, what you think the situation needs. Weigh the response as well, that is, weigh the circumstances more particularly in there in particular. Is it online? Is it with a stranger? What influence do they have? Is it in person? Is it semi-private or public? Do you even know them? Is it secondhand? If it's secondhand that you hear about, ignore it or investigate it, but don't carry on with it, because secondhand often can be a problem.

In some cases, it doesn't really matter if it's not a scandal, but if it's a scandal, if it's a serious enough matter, secondhand investigate or drop it, because if it's secondhand to you, it's not something you know immediately about, but again, it depends if it's the church or someone outside the church, depends on the circumstances. You have to weigh those matters. Now, one note I want to give here, because it covers all kinds of things, accusations, right, against an elder, and the elder here, and I think it is in particular as the pastor, he talks a lot.

What's with the guy? He's preaching, he's teaching, or he writes a lot as well. As you know, I'm on social media, on Facebook and Twitter. I'm not doing that just for my, for the fun of it, my health.

I'm doing it because I'm trying to reach out to people, interact with people, so they know we exist. They can hear the gospel or whatever the case is, because often I'm dealing with strangers. I don't know their background.

It makes it kind of hard to have a conversation with them, so they hear this, they hear that, and on those contexts, there is one of the places where the pastor would easily be targeted. Well, he said this, or he wrote that, I don't like it. It sounds mean, or it sounds whatever, or it is mean, or it's vindictive.

Why is he so angry or something like that? That could be the case, but I want to balance a little bit of that, because those do happen, with the tradition we have in American churches. I say tradition in the best sense of the word. We believe in freedom of speech.

That's how we talk about politics. The question is, do we have that in our churches? My experience has been, kind of, maybe. If we say something that is a church leader, that's against the grain of someone's political opinion, or whatever, they're like, well, what's going on here? Well, I thought we had, it's my opinion.

I mean, I am a pastor, but I can have an opinion, can't I, on some matters of politics, or social matters, or the church matters, for that matter. So, this is an interesting balance here, and carefulness, that when you speak, or I speak, particularly the pastors, that we give them the same courtesy we give one another, that sure, we can write, or speak on the fly, about matters that are just our opinion. It's not necessarily them saying, you're wrong, and you're in sin.

It's just, I think this, I think that. I'm not accusing anybody, right? The flip side is the pastor. I'm not accusing anybody.

I'm giving an opinion, or you're giving an opinion, again, especially with political, or hot topic matters, but we should, of course, be willing to change our minds. So, I think that's one thing we need to be careful of. I run across that a lot.

People seem to be very, they have these unwritten rules, not intentional, but we just have different opinions on some things. I'd apply God's law, and, of course, don't be quick to rebuke publicly. I kind of implied that earlier.

First Timothy 5.1, do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, etc. So, use the gentle approach first, again, ordinarily. If he's a murderer, if he's preaching rank heresy, you don't have to be gentle.

I think they're just asking for it, and, of course, adjust, as we saw there in First Timothy 5. I preached on that. Adjust according to office. The older man, if he's a pastor, accordingly, treat him as a father, not just the older man as a father, but an older man, if he's an officer, all the more as a father, and the women as sisters and mothers, and so you adjust according to the gender.

Now, lastly, here are full discipline cases. I haven't gone through the whole path of this. You already have an idea, because Christ tells us.

Start small, small circle, immediate circle, and you work your way up to the entirety of the church. Not covered here, most of Paul's writing assumes that. We know the rest of the Bible.

We know what God requires, what Christ requires, the proper rules of judgment and evidence, that we adjust, of course, if the witness is a family member, like the wife. We have the law courts do this as well. It's kind of different, I think, and maybe it's per state, that you kind of, well, does it really count if it's the wife, because she's had this, you know, inbred bias towards the husband or with the husband, and that makes sense.

You have to have some wisdom in those, along those lines, and back then, during the time of Paul and the Apostles, although we don't have a lot of details, we don't have the specifics, what was the flow chart of how they went through the process of judgment and going through the law courts of the church? I mean, when I say law courts, I mean the church. Matthew 18. We don't have that, but we do know, historically, they typically follow the Jewish approach to things, which more or less was common sense.

You got to have witnesses. Witnesses have to be competent, not just, you know, a five-year-old or something like that, and the like, and it has to be, you know, serious enough crime to take our time, and etc., and so much time for the appeal. Is there an appeal? We believe in the appeal process in Presbyterianism, and we have that as well.

Now, these kind of details differ per denomination, because Christ has not given us all these details, which tells us he's giving us some freedom to connect the dots, right? Which path am I going to use from this bottom first approach to Matthew 18, one, talking to one another, to bringing in two or three witnesses? Does that mean I always have to bring an elder with me, or just two or three, any random Christian, probably random Christians, but

an elder would be even better, a church officer, and the like. How you go through those paths, every church is a little different. I'm not going to go through that for us.

We have what we call the Book of Discipline for the OPC, and we have it written out, so that if you bring accusation charges, you know the path to go through in the book, and if it's unclear, because I grant it's not always clear, I think we can write it better. The session is supposed to help you make it clear. That's their job.

That is the ruling elders and the pastors. That's the rights that you have as members of the body of Christ and Presbyterianism. And of course, all this is summarized in Matthew 18.

From the smaller circle to the larger circle, every step in between, which you can stop at any step, in fact. He's not saying you've got to go the whole gamut to the whole church, just that if it's not being dealt with sufficiently at the lower level, you're going to have to appeal to the higher level. But whatever the case, and any and all accusations and rebukes from public to private brothers and sisters, should be done with a heart of love, with a desire to bring repentance and change, and the glory of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Amen. Let us pray. Precious Spirit of truth and light, guide us, we ask, in accordance to your word, and some humble our hearts, we pray, that if matters become serious enough, and they can get us quite agitated in a very righteous way, righteous zeal, always to do such accusations and even private rebukes, in a spirit and a desire of love and care and compassion, our God and Savior, help us to this end and purify your church, we pray, and strengthen us, Lord, and give us the conviction to do the right thing when it comes to pastors and ruling elders and deacons, that they also should have the right of two or three witnesses.

But if they are found guilty, that they would be properly rebuked, God Almighty, so that the rest may fear. We pray these things, God Almighty, in accordance to your word. Amen.