

**LAWS GOVERNING CHURCH SPLIT
- REPROOF -
A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY**

TEXT:

Matthew 18:15–17: Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

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 may be established.

¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, 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.

When anyone wrongs us, we are not to wait until they come to us asking for forgiveness. We are to go immediately to them as a physician visits a patient, or as a shepherd goes after the wandering sheep.

We should never allow bad feelings to germinate in our hearts, but nip them in the bud. Further, we should not spare any efforts to recover the erring brother, but should tell him of his fault secretly, reminding him of the evil he has done. The erring are reluctant to see their faults. They are too proud to admit them when they do see them. Therefore, we are supposed to go and remind them of the evil of their ways, and recover them – as in:

Galations 6:1-2: Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

² Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ.

And in:

2 Timothy 2:25: In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

Faults and sins very often numb the spiritual senses, stupefy the conscience and we need to awaken it as in David's reaction in these two instances:

2 Samuel 24:10: *And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech Thee, O Lord, take away the iniquity of Thy servant; for I have done very foolishly."*

1 Samuel 24:4b-5:

^{4b} *Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.*

⁵ *And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.*

But other times David responded differently, it did not even register when he tried to get Uriah drunk, committed adultery with Uriah's wife, and had him murdered. God called Nathan to go and prick David's conscience and wake it up.

In the New Testament, Jesus says

Matthew 18:15: *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*



This way you are letting the other one know you seek not to reproach him, but to recover and restore him. And there is another reason - he should know that we have spoken of his faults to no one else. This procedure will cause the offending person to respect, love and appreciate our attempt to restore him.

James 5:19-20: *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;*

²⁰ *Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

However, if he bows up at us and refuses to repent, then we are to take ONE or TWO others with us and go to him again. God does not want us to give up on the person who is falling by the wayside.

If taking one or two others with us to the person does not help - then we are to take it to the true body of believers.

- First - one goes, that is yourself.
- Then - two or three go.
- Finally - the whole household of faith are to get into the rescue operation.

This teaches us the value of a soul,



and how very much God is concerned about his recovery. If the soul is lost, there is a great loss; and if gained, there is a great gain to the Kingdom of Heaven.

This further teaches that we must not be weary in well doing.

Deep Devotion and Consecration of the Heart

This kind of work demands deep consecration of heart. For, often when a person is offended, he is out of victory and therefore we have a very difficult person with which to deal.

We are told in:

Leviticus 19:17a: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart . . ."

It is easy to conceive resentments and allow them to ripen by brooding about them. Then we are in no fit condition to help and recover our brother for, actually, we have need of help ourselves even perhaps deliverance from a spirit of resentment. If we go to our brother with strife or resentment we cannot gain him.

Proverbs 25:8-9: Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.

⁹ Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another:

An unhappy ending of the troubleshooting would defeat the purpose of your going.

God wants it to be a happy ending, one of reconciliation, and restoration, and friendship. Jesus said,

Matthew 18:16: 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 may be established.

If he will not own up to his faults or sin, get some reinforcements, the chapter continues:

Matthew 18:17a: And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church,

There are several benefits to this approach:

1. We are protected from his twisting around of our own words.
2. Often he will listen more readily to a disinterested party, to whom he has no resentment.
3. The one or two more may effectively speak some convincing word which we did not think of.
4. If the offender is too headstrong and obstinate, and resists efforts to restore him, then, the two or three witnesses are in fulfillment of the required number to obey God's Law:

Matthew 18:16: 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 may be established.

5. He will be more likely convinced of his wrong, for many eyes see more than one pair.

Deuteronomy 19:15: One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.

So, if he is too stubborn or adamant in his wrongs, we are required to obtain reinforcements to dislodge him from this snare and to restore him, at any cost of time and effort. The church ministers, officers and elders are to get into the rescue operation.

This is more fully explained in **1 Corinthians 6** where the Apostle Paul reproves those who went to law before the unsaved instead of the saints. He also shows which people are the ones in the church to handle these matters:

1 Corinthians 6:5: I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?

This matter then should go to those who are assumed to be the most capable of handling such matter. In verse 4, Paul speaks ironically to the Corinthian Church:

1 Corinthians 6:4: If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.



If you can do no better yourselves as the church's spiritual physicians, you will then have to use the interns, rather than to leave the patient in his unhealthy state. Better to use the unskilled than let him go to his ruin. The Church has to get involved in the restoration of an offending member, for in the multitude of counselors there is safety. Paul says,

2 Corinthians 1:6: And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

The church is supposed to concern herself with the illnesses of the brothers and sisters in Christ. Then, if he will not hear the church, there is but one alternative left: if he continues in his wrong-doings, if he persists in wounding and injuring any member of the church, then he is to be classified as a heathen, a sinner, a child of the devil.

Matthew 18:17b: . . . let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

Then, you can take the benefit of the law against him for the law is not made for the righteous man, but the law is for the lawless and for the disobedient, for the ungodly, sinners, the unholy and the profane. We are to let that be the last resort, however.

Appeal to the courts of justice only after you have exhausted every other resource. You are to break off all ties as a church with this person. This is not as a means of revenge, but to make him ashamed of himself. Treat him as poison and he will feel more keenly the seriousness of his wrongs. With such a punishment, suffering the loss of all friendships of the church, he will be moved to repent if there is any hope for him.

We are to go to any lengths to preserve the unity of the Church and we are not to allow divisions or strife to either enter or stay. A little leaven will leaven the whole church. Christ will not have a blemished, spotted church. It must be holy, free from blemishes.

Ephesians 5:27: That He [Jesus] might present it [the church] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be Holy and without blemish.

To retain this purity, sometimes it must be at the expense of expulsion of the unrepentant.

We see this action taken in the Corinthian Church. Paul had to scold the church for allowing a fornicator to remain in the congregation. This is what he said:

1 Corinthians 5:2, 7, 11-13:

² And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

⁷ Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

¹¹ But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

¹² For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within?

¹³ But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Romans 16:17-18: Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

REPROOF: A CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

When the Corinthian church took earnest heed to this admonition in disciplining the wayward brother, they put it into motion in such a severe chastisement that went a little too overboard. Paul had to write and help put the brakes on their disciplinary actions.

2 Corinthians 2:6: Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

He has had enough correction. Now, here is what you are to do for those who are sorry and repentant:

2 Corinthians 2:7-11:

7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

11 Lest satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Church discipline is only for church members, and if they sin against us we are to forgive them seventy times seven. Peter restricted the flow of his forgiveness to seven times by saying to Jesus:

Matthew 18:21: Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus told Peter, as well as the whole church, **we are to carry a forgiving heart with us toward everyone**, to the extent that we are to forgive 490 times, so many times, until we lose track of the number.

Christ and the believers are to have a very precious interest in each other. We are members one of the other and the hand cannot say to the ailing foot, "I have no need of thee." Though that ailing foot is of little use to the body until it is healed and

well again; so a carnal Christian, infected by sin, is of little or no use to the body of Christ until he is made spiritually whole. However, we are to feel and act as though no person is incurable.

If the more gentle remedy will not work, then the more severe censure must be used. If that is ineffective, then the rougher measures have to be taken lest the whole body of believers is infected.

Titus 3:10-11: A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

¹¹ Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

Those who cannot be reasoned out of their carnal living or sinfulness after the third reproof, no more further remedies are left to shame them out of their awful state. Their moral corruption is too far advanced to cure. Let them be put to disgrace; severed from the privileged fellowship of the Church. This separation shall continue so long as they remain unrepentant. This is the way Christ has ordained for the vindicating of the Church's honor and preserving its purity.

Paul turned a man over to the devil for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the Day of Jesus Christ. The death warrant was visited only upon the incurables.

Psalms 1:5: Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

It is well worth noting that a revival was in the making when Peter dealt with Ananias and Sapphira in divine retribution. When the church got cleaned up, then a mighty revival broke out and multitudes came to know Christ in saving grace.

Akron Shalom Bible Learning Center

www.AkronShalomMinistries.org