

Matthew 18:15-17. Christ Directs His Disciples How to Treat an Offending Brother.

by Favell Lee Mortimer

Christ directs His disciples to follow a specific process when dealing with an offending brother, including telling him his fault alone, taking two or three people with you, and telling his fault to the Church.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 5:4

Topics: "Church Discipline", "Conflict Resolution"

Description

Favell Lee Mortimer preaches on the importance of following biblical directions on how to handle conflicts with fellow Christians who have wronged us. The sermon emphasizes the need to address faults privately first, then involve a few others if necessary, and ultimately bring the matter to the church if the offender persists in wrongdoing. The ultimate goal is restoration and reconciliation, but if the offender remains unrepentant, exclusion from the community of believers may be necessary to uphold righteousness and discipline. The sermon highlights the biblical principles of rebuke, forgiveness, and maintaining the purity of the church body.

Transcript

What a privilege we possess in having these directions how to behave towards a fellow-Christian who has done us wrong! But how seldom are any of these rules observed! How much more apt we are, either to indulge in sullen spleen, or to break out in angry invectives, than mildly to remonstrate with an offending brother! We ought to go, in the first place, and tell him of his fault alone. That would be the most probable way to win him. Perhaps we might discover that we had suspected him unjustly; or, if not, that he was ready to change his conduct, when he found that it displeased us.

Directions like these are given in Lev. 19:17, 18; "You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall in any way rebuke your brother, and not suffer sin before him. You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people."

But if the offender should persist in his evil conduct, we are directed to take two or three people with us; and if he should still persevere, to tell his fault to the Church, that is, to the public congregation of believers; and then the people we had taken with us would be witnesses of the truth of our report; so that, through them, our words would be established. If the offender should refuse to obey the church, then he must be cast out of the society of believers, and not permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper.

We find, from the epistles, that the apostles and the early Christians pronounced this sentence of exclusion, when great offences were committed by professed Christians. We read of a man in 1 Cor. 5, with regard to whom Paul gives these directions--"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Some, on hearing these directions, may reply, "How can we follow these commands?" But do we follow them as far as we can? When a professing Christian behaves ill to us, do we in the first place tell him his fault alone? There are many called Christians who take delight in exposing the faults of their brethren. Sometimes they will even tell them to the world. The Church weeps over iniquity, and prays for the sinner; the world rejoices, and blasphemes the name of Christ.

When we have used all the means in our power to reclaim an offending brother, and all the means have failed, then it is our duty to show by our conduct that we disapprove the course he is pursuing. Whether the offence is committed against ourselves, or against another, or against God alone, we must not encourage sin. It is better that the world should know of the sin, than that they should think that Christians approve of it. The first missionaries in Tahiti acted on this principle. They refused to hold communion with one of their number, named Lewis, because he had married a heathen woman. The backslider speedily came to an dreadful end--he was cut off suddenly by an unknown hand.

When an offender repents of his sin, then we ought "to forgive him, and to comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." (2 Cor. 2:7.)

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