

September 20, 2009

**DEALING WITH SIN IN THE CHURCH  
MATTHEW 18.15-20**

*Jesus teaches us the proper way to deal with sin in our relationships within the church and grants authority to deal with it as decisively as necessary so as to bring about reconciliation.*

Context: follows teaching about humility and followed by teaching on forgiveness.

Concern: not merely following a checklist but restoring the brother.

**1. EXPOSING SIN FOR RECONCILIATION (15-17)**

***If your brother sins against you (15a):*** sins come within the family; dealing with the brother, not outsiders.

Not a system of “blind jurisprudence” in which we deal with people in an impersonal way. These are *brothers*.

Note: this is a *sin* against the brother, not a matter of difference of opinions. Difference of opinion may lead to sin, but is not sin in itself.

Sin = definable by a standard. Violated the law of love toward you.

Sin may be against you personally (emphasized here), but also extends to sinning against you when sins against the family and you are the only one who knows about it.

***One on one (15b):*** 2 imperatives: “go” and “expose/reprove.” Who has the responsibility? *You*, the brother sinned against.

Imperatives = commands. They are non-optional. You don’t need to pray about whether or not you should go.

This one-on-one confrontation does not occur after calling 10 other people and asking them to pray about this with you giving them the details of the situation. That is simply an end around gossip.

Each member has responsibility with the other members. This is not left to the hands only of the officers of the church.

No lower age limit. This applies to children & young adults as well as older adults.

*Go.* Stop what you are doing and go.

When you go you are to “expose,” “bring to light,” or “reprove” the sin of your brother. You are to take a bright light into the area that he is wanting to keep in the dark and shine that light. Cf. Gal 6.1, going and exposing in humility but exposing nonetheless.

“If he hears you” = if he heeds your rebuke and repents.

“you have gained your brother” - sin has already begun to destroy the relationship. Sin is death of the relationship not the confrontation.

One other thing: if you don’t confront the other person in sin, you don’t love the other person. Cf. Prov 27.5-6

***Two or three witnesses (16):*** “If he ignores” - “two or three” quote from Dt 19.15; section deals with protection against false charges and wrongful punishment.

Protection doesn’t = “legal loopholes” so that people don’t deal with their sins. People who do this are disobedient.

The others that are taken to confront the brother and witness this first hand.

***Tell it to the church (17):*** Most likely refers to taking it to the “judges” in the church (considering following context). “Elders in the gate” + priest in Dt. 19.17 judge disputes (same context as quote earlier). Cf. also 1Cor 6.1f. Cf. also Heb 13.17; 1Tm 5.17.

Commands assume that you are part of and under the authority of a church of real people to whom you are accountable and where

this whole process can be carried out.

If he refuses to hear the church, he is then counted as an outsider. That is the import of being counted as a Gentile and tax collector. And if this does take place, the whole congregation needs to know about it. No “private excommunication.”

This person no longer has the privileges of a brother; and the rest of the family needs to know it. He is cut off from the family table. That *is* excommunication b/c that is where we are formed into the body of Christ (1Cor 10.16-17).

The excommunicates become the objects of evangelism as Jesus evangelized Gentiles and tax collectors.

Even in excommunication we are seeking ultimately to restore a brother. Hopefully he will feel the pain of what his sin has caused in the rupturing and death of these relationships, and he will want to come back.

## **2. EXERCISING AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH (18-20)**

***Binding and loosing (18):*** cf. 16.19 - Binding and loosing has to do with the church’s responsibility to interpret the Scripture in terms of how it applies to particular situations that arise in the church. It deals with what commandments are “binding” and from which commandments a person may be “loosed.”

The church has the authority to make interpretations that bind and loose in this way *and* carry out the consequences of disobedience if necessary. This is not absolute authority, but it is real authority.

The church is not free to be an authority *over* God’s revelation so that it may, through its courts and councils, overturn the very revelation of God and claim heaven’s imprimatur. God has spoken and the church’s decisions must be in line with what God has already said in some form or fashion.

***Effectual judgment (19-20):*** Not an assurance for all prayer, but for the decisions made by the church. “Again” emphasizes that Jesus is saying the same thing as above in a different way.

The two or three in these verses deals with the judges who are set up to settle the matter. They come together and they agree on the matter. They come to the same judgment. They are asking for guidance in how to apply God’s revelation to the situation.

Same authority is given to the “lowest/smallest courts” as to the apostles in Mt 16.

But how can we be sure that they are making the right decisions? It must be consonant with what God has already said.

Gathering in Jesus’ name is an important qualifier. This doesn’t simply mean that you claim you are gathered in Christ’s name. Anyone can make that claim. These are lawful authorities who are living and judging consistently with the revelation of Christ.

These judgments made are consistent with the nature and mission of Jesus. The commandments of God cannot be stood on their heads and claim Christ’s authority. But when judgments are made that are consonant with revelation, Christ stands behind them.

*a. Sin must be dealt with in the church.*

*b. Deal with the person who has committed the offense.*

*c. Sin between brothers should be dealt with at the lowest levels of publicity possible.*

*d. There can be no true reconciliation without dealing with sin.*

*e. Reconciliation is the goal of the confrontation of sin.*

