

## Dealing with Offences in the Church

How to deal with offences in a church setting (**Matthew 18:15-20** 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 a heathen man and a publican. **18** Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **19** Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. **Luke 17:3-4** **3** Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. **4** And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.)

In Luke 17:3, we see a phrase that expresses the importance of this subject: “Take heed to yourselves.” The meaning of the term “to have, to hold the mind or the ear toward someone (Sept.: Jer. 7:24), to pay attention. As a nautical term, it means to hold a ship in a direction, to sail towards. It means to hold on to one's course toward a place. In the NT it is used only figuratively. To apply one's mind to something, attend to, give heed to, and used as follows: unto oneself, meaning to take heed, beware.” In the church setting, we must take heed to take care of offences. Why?

First, because it is impossible, but that offences will come. Now offences “In the NT is used figuratively in a moral sense. It is concerned mainly with the fact that it produces particular behaviour which can lead to ruin.” Many times we are shocked when problems come into our Church. Instead of being watchful and taking heed, realizing offences will come, we start questioning the Church and people's love for us.

Second, because judgment is inevitable. (**Luke 17:1-2** It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! **2** It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea than that he should offend one of these little ones.)

We then see that Church people are to become active in taking care of trespasses. “To err in action, in respect to a prescribed law, i.e., to commit errors, to do wrong, sin.”

First, we are to rebuke. “One may rebuke another without bringing that one to a conviction of any fault, perhaps because there may not have been any fault or because there was a fault, but the rebuke was insufficient and ineffectual to bring the offender to acknowledge it. Hence, by implication, to admonish strongly, with urgency, authority, i.e., to urge upon, charge strictly, the idea of censure being implied.”

Second, if they are at fault, they must repent. “To repent, change the mind, relent. Theologically, it involves regret or sorrow, accompanied by a genuine change of heart toward God. It is distinguished to regret.” Now Matthew gives us more insight into this point.

First, go to the brother that offended alone and try to reconcile. “Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hears thee, thou hast gained thy brother.”

Second, “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.” (**Acts 6:1-7** And in those days, when the number of the disciples

were multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. **2** Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. **3** Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. **4** But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word. **5** And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: **6** Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. **7** And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. **1 Corinthians 6:1-8** Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? **2** Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? **3** Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? **4** If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. **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? **6** But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. **7** Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? **8** Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.)

Third, “**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 a heathen man and a publican.” (**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.)

Fourth, and finally, reconciliation (**Matthew 18:17-20** 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 a heathen man and a publican. **18** Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. **19** Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.) William MacDonald explains the verses this way: “The question arises, ‘How large must an assembly be before it can bind and loose, as described above?’ The answer is that two believers may bring such matters to God in prayer with the assurance of being heard. While verse 19 may be used as a general promise of answers to prayer, in this context, it refers to prayer concerning church discipline. When used in connection with collective prayer in general, it must be taken in light of all other teachings on prayer. For instance, our prayers must:

Conform to God’s revealed will (1 Jn. 5:14, 15). In faith (Jas. 1:6–8). In sincerity (Heb. 10:22a), etc.

**18:20** Verse 20 should be interpreted in light of its context. It does not refer primarily to the composition of an NT church in its simplest form, nor a general prayer meeting, but to a meeting where the church seeks the reconciliation of two Christians separated by some sin. It may legitimately be applied to all meetings of believers where Christ is the Center, but a specific type of meeting is in view here.

To meet “in His name” means by His authority, in acknowledgment of all He is, and in obedience to His Word. No group can claim to be the only ones who meet in His name; if so, His presence would be limited to a small segment of His body on earth. Wherever two or three are gathered in recognition of Him as Lord and Savior, he is there in the midst.”

**(Matthew 6:13a** And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:) “Lead” means “to bring into.” “Temptation” means “trial, temptation, a state of trial in which God brings His people through adversity and affliction in order to encourage and prove their faith and confidence in Him.” I like how William MacDonald explains the verse: “This request may appear to contradict James 1:13, which states that God would never tempt anyone. However, God does allow His people to be tested and tried. This petition expresses a healthy distrust of one’s own ability to resist temptations or to stand up under trial. It acknowledges complete dependence on the Lord for preservation.”

“Deliver” means “to draw or snatch from danger, rescue, deliver.” We are praying to be delivered from evil, meaning “sense, evil which corrupts others, evil-disposed, malevolent, malignant, wicked.”

Now we are to go to God to understand that we are totally dependent on His deliverance and protection. God provides a path of protection to His children concerning evil and that is clearly hinged on our dependances on God’s provision. **(2 Corinthians 7:2-16** Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. **3** I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you. **4** Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation. **5** For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. **6** Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus; **7** And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more. **8** For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. **9** Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. **10** For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. **11** For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter. **12** Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. **13** Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. **14** For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth. **15** And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. **16** I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.)

Seeing the purpose of God in our troubles is key for us to being delivered from evil. Is our sorrow derived from godly sorrow or the sorrow of this world?

Godly sorrow’s result is repentance. “In the NT, used with reference to, mind, as the faculty of moral reflection.” The result of this type of repentance is salvation. “In the NT, salvation is deliverance from sin and its spiritual consequences, involving an attachment to the body of Christ, and admission to eternal life with blessedness in the kingdom of Christ.” Not to be repented of “The second time that this word is used is in 2 Cor. 7:10: “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.” True repentance is changing one’s mind and asking God to change his heart that he may sin no more. What Paul is speaking about here is unregrettable repentance. No one would regret his repentance because of

the consequence of that repentance which is salvation. “Repentance unto salvation” must be taken together. “Unto salvation” qualifies the kind of repentance, and unregrettable qualifies the repentance unto salvation. It is not to be regretted because it has led unto salvation.

The sorrow of the world, the regret of the world. “The present world, the present order of things, as opposed to the kingdom of Christ; and hence, always with the idea of transience, worthlessness, and evil both physical and moral, the seat of cares, temptations, irregular desires. It is thus nearly equivalent to this age. Metonymically, for the men of this world as opposed to those who seek the kingdom of God, as subject to Satan, the ruler of this world.” “Worketh” means “to work out, to effect, produce, to be the cause or author of.”

The fruit of godly sorrow that saves us from evil

William MacDonald: “First of all, it produced diligence, or earnest care, in them. If this passage refers to the case of discipline described in the First Epistle, then this expression means that although at first they had been indifferent, they subsequently became very concerned about the whole matter.

Secondly he says, what clearing of yourselves. This does not mean that they tried to justify or excuse themselves, but rather that by taking resolute action, they tried to clear themselves of any further guilt or blame in the matter. Their change in attitude led to this change in action.

What indignation may refer to their attitude toward the sinner because of the reproach he brought on the name of Christ. But more probably it refers to their attitude toward themselves for ever having allowed such a thing to go on for so long without taking action on it.

What fear doubtless means they acted in the fear of the Lord, but it may also include the thought that they feared a visit from the apostle, if he had to come with a rod.

What vehement desire literally means “what longing.” Most commentators agree that this refers to a genuine longing which had been awakened in their souls for a visit from Paul. However, it could also mean a strong desire to see the wrong righted and the evil corrected.

What zeal has been variously explained as meaning zeal for the glory of God, for the restoration of the sinner, for their own cleansing from defilement in the matter, or for taking sides with the apostle.

What vindication means “what punishment or what avenging.” The thought simply is that they took corrective action against the offender in the assembly. They were determined that sin must be punished.”

Paul then adds: In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in the matter. Of course, we are not to understand by this that they were never to blame, but simply that they had done everything they could to take the proper action and to act as they should have acted in the first place.”