

GENTLE SHEPHERD COMMUNITY CHURCH

APRIL 30, 2017 ~ John Ferris

Text: Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1

Mat 18: 15-17 "If your brother sins against you; go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Gal 6:1 "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."

Path to Peace

1. Glorify God
2. Get the Log out of your own eye
- 3. Gently Restore**
4. Go and be Reconciled

Restoring means more than Confronting

Note that just before Matthew 18:15 Jesus tells the story by metaphor of the shepherd that goes to look for a wandering sheep (tell this story). The theme in this chapter is one of restoration, not condemnation.

Jesus often used an indirect approach to help people see their wrongs. For example, in John 4: 1-18 the story of the Samaritan woman at the well; Jesus did not directly **confront** her about living in adultery. Instead, he engaged her in questions and discussion that **led** her to assess her own life.

Jesus frequently used parables and stories to help people see their own sins.

We should ask God to help us discern the most effective way to approach the person – the time, the place and the words.

Galatians 6:1

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.”

“caught” in the sense of a fish in a net or animal in a trap, not “I caught you.”

Mat 18: 15 - 17

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

The four steps in Matthew 18 are sequential and are to be done in order. As one progresses through the sequential processes- “just the two of you”, “one or two witnesses” ,”the whole church” more third parties become involved at each level to assist in resolving the conflict.

Step One: Face to Face

Matthew 18: 15 - 18 instructs that when your brother has sinned against you, you are to go to him and show him his fault, **“just between the two of you”**.

This is not always the immediate thing to do.

There may be situations in which a neutral intermediary is involved first.

Examples:

1. When one person was abused by the other and there is a possibility that the abuser will use a private conversation to manipulate or silence the person who has been abused

2 When there is a third party who has a much closer relationship than you do with the person who may be caught in sin, and that third party is willing to raise the issue with the offender

Biblical examples:

Genesis 32-33 Jacob sent servants and gifts before meeting his brother Esau in person

Acts 9: 26-27 When the apostles would not meet with Paul after his conversion, Barnabas intervened to speak on Paul’s behalf and appeal for reconciliation.

At some point, a face to face meeting will be necessary.

You are to take the Initiative to **GO**

WHY is the onus on YOU if it is the OTHER person who has sinned against you?

- Jesus commands you to go
- The other person may not be aware of the hurt
- Your own peace of mind
- Love for your brother and concern for him
- The reason that we think the other should take the initiative to come to us is because of our PRIDE.

Proverbs 11:2 "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom"

By telling us to take the first step we are overcoming that pride or at least removing it as a barrier to reconciliation

In Verse 15, the meeting is to occur JUST BETWEEN THE TWO OF YOU.

Why?

- ❖ Firstly, keeping the dispute private shows respect for the individual. It tells that person that you care more about him or her and your relationship than gossiping or recruiting other people to affirm that you are "right"
- ❖ Secondly, it gives the person an opportunity to explain, to tell their side. I've mentioned that they may not even be aware that you have been hurt or annoyed. Also, there may be some explanation beneath the surface, something happening in that person's life that will explain why they acted as they did.
- ❖ Thirdly sharing the conflict with others forces them to take sides. It drives wedges in the body of Christ and destroys unity. I personally have a theory that in Churches particularly, GOSSIP is Satan's most effective tool. It can range from wounded individuals quietly withdrawing, to factions forming within the congregation, major blow-ups and church splits.

Step Two: Take One or Two Others Along

If the first step does not lead to repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, you're not done. **"But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses"**

This is the second step. Note that at this stage it is no longer just between two persons. Although the word used is "witnesses", it is useful to have a spiritual, trusted neutral person present to provide calm, to assist each person to see the other's viewpoint. These persons act as mediators, but if the conflict does not get resolved, they can attest to (i.e.) be "witnesses as to what was said."

Step Three: Take it to the Church

The third step is verse 17 **"If he refuses to listen to him tell it to the Church"**. The matter now comes before the larger community of the Church. Remember back at step one that this process began with a person who had sinned and that is why it is the business of the church, although church discipline is seldom instituted now.

The community of fellow believers seek to counsel the individual to recognise and acknowledge his actions (sin), and seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Step Four: Treat Him as a pagan or Tax Collector

The final step is **"if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as a pagan or tax collector" v17.**

If the person refuses to accept the authority of the church they are to be treated as a pagan or a tax collector. This does not necessarily mean excluding the person from the church. The person is to be treated as an unbeliever. Unbelievers are not to be excluded but rather encouraged to attend to hear the teaching of the Gospel. There may be circumstances in which the conduct of the individual would justify exclusion, for example deliberate malicious actions against the body or individuals.

At this stage, although the result is not what was hoped, you have done all that is required. You cannot force the other person to repent.

What do I say and How?

Proverbs 12:18 *“Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing”*

1. Speak the truth in Love

Ephesians 4:15 “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ”

- You start this by acknowledging what idols you have held onto in this or other conflicts
- Communicate so clearly that you cannot be misunderstood
- Plan your words
- Use “I” statements

2. Be Quick to Listen

James 1:19 “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

There is a very practical consideration here. Anger is an emotion that God gave us. However there are different parts of the human brain. When the part of the brain that controls emotions, particularly a strong emotion such as anger is active, the other parts of the brain become less active. Because of this physiological fact, when anger is controlling our thoughts, we are actually not able to make reasonable and rational decisions. It is possible to control our thoughts and our emotions and in fact is essential that we consciously control our anger lest it control us.

We are to be “slow to anger” i.e. control it because “man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

3. Breathe Grace

James 3:17-18 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law”

Breathe love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. When others receive this kind of grace they are less defensive and more inclined to listen to our concerns.

4. Make Charitable Judgements

“Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right decision.” John 7:24

Charitable means loving...make loving judgements. If you fail to heed this principle, people will sense that you have already made up your mind about them and it is pointless to talk with you.

I am going to provide two tools/strategies that help answer the question asked earlier :

“What do I say and How?”

1. PAUSE PRINCIPLE:

The Pause Principle is a helpful model of the steps to follow in Matthew 18:15-17 and to put into practice; when a brother has sinned against you and you must go to him, “just the two of you”

Prepare

Affirm Relationships

Understand Interests

Search for Creative Solutions

Evaluate options objectively and reasonably

2. SEVEN “A’s” of Confession: (apology should include)

Address everyone involved

Avoid “If, But, and “Maybe”

Admit specifically

Acknowledge the Hurt

Accept the consequences

Alter your behaviour

Ask for forgiveness

Be aware of the non-apology, “I’m sorry if what I said hurt your feelings”

You can only ask for forgiveness. It may or may not be given. It is a gift. If you are the person wronged, it is up to you to extend forgiveness. If the response to a true Apology is Forgiveness and vice-versa, the relationship is restored and may in fact be strengthened.

If you are the person wronged, you cannot demand an apology. If you are the person who hurt another, you cannot demand forgiveness.

Jesus has instructed and has modelled for us how we are to respond and what we are to do when we find ourselves in conflict or disharmony with another person (not just another believer—another person).

You can only control **your** actions.

Romans 12:18 *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Give an example of a conflict between two persons in which it would be difficult to meet one on one “just between the two of you”. In this situation, how can you arrange for a face to face meeting as stated in Matthew 18:15 -17.

2. If, in compliance with Matthew 18:15-17 you seek to meet with the person that has wronged you, and either they refuse to meet or are not communicative when you do meet, what would you do?

For biblical examples of assistance in facilitating a meeting, look at:

- i. Genesis 32-33
- ii. Genesis 50: 15-16
- iii. Acts 9: 26-27

3. What are the factors to consider in deciding whether it is appropriate to overlook the offense that a person has committed or is committing and when it is necessary to meet and discuss it?

4. Read the following. Does it meet the requirement for a true apology? Look closely for the 7 A’s of confession. Are the elements there? Explain your reasoning.

Todd Bertuzzi’s Apology: (Todd hit a player from behind, fell to ice and continued to hit him aggressively). Steve Moore, the injured player had a career ending injury)

A few days after assaulting Steve Moore, Vancouver Canucks hockey player, Todd Bertuzzi held a press conference and submitted the following public apology.

“These comments are for Steve. I just wanted to apologize for what happened out there. I had no intention to hurt you. I feel awful for what transpired. For Steve’s family, I am sorry for what happened out there. I am relieved to hear that Steve will make a full recovery. It means a lot to me, to hear those.....that’s going to happen. I want to apologize to Mr. Burks, Mr. McCaw, the Vancouver Canuck’s Organization and my teammates.”