



“The Art of Christian Confrontation” Part 1

Matthew 18:15-20

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15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If

he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 "And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

This passage has a great many unique qualities to it... aspects that are rare in scripture and even more rare in our kingdom living. For one thing, in this passage, God gives a great deal of specific power and authority to His people. There even seems to be an “acquiesce” towards us, saying **He** would “bind” what **we** bind, and “loose” what **we** loose. He promises as well, an affirmative answer and action on our behalf if we agree on an issue as a mere couple of believing individuals! He also promises, without qualification, to join us, *the church*, when we gather as a body of believers! So **He** shows up because **we** show up! In a relational dynamic that places God firmly and absolutely in charge, this passage seems to allow us a measure of clout and power.

On the flip side of this, Jesus has something to say... something to command for us in what is understood as a reciprocal relationship although clearly parasitic for us! As if to underscore the emphatic nature of what is being said, we should note the serious tone in which it is written. Jesus says “...**assuredly** I say to you.” Jesus is definitely stressing His words! He emphasizes all of this then even further saying “...**again** I say to you.” He also issues in rapid succession several ‘imperative’ commands... “go”, “tell”, “take”, “tell”, “let him.” It is clear that whatever He is wanting done herein... whatever He is telling us to do, is not a passing suggestion or merely casual coffee talk. Jesus was “going on the record,” and wanted us to hear Him. We may be “empowered” here in this passage but there is a *response* that is expected for such influence and authority! Apparently Christ is looking for us to take some responsibility on this issue... some action on our part, to foster an air of peace in our churches.

The intensity of the passage begs the questions: *Why the ‘throw down?’ Why the weight behind these words?’* Perhaps it is because few issues have resulted in more harm and loss to the church than the flagrant rejection of this passage! Our rejection of any passage in scripture is an offense and is indefensible within true Christianity. However, the quiet sweeping under the rug of this passage has factually brought about great devastation! It has brought to the greater church fellowship wreckage, broken homes, destroyed marriages, and split congregations. All because we will not embrace this passage as well as its obedience! Instead we get entrenched sin in the lives of individual believers as well as whole churches, and the subsequent shame it brings to the faith and God’s kingdom.

So many of these things could have been avoided had our Lord’s instruction been herein faithfully obeyed by those who claim Him as not just Savior but also Lord of their lives! But the fact is, sometimes His instructions are uncomfortable for all involved, so we embrace the cultural norms and avoid responsibility, retaliate, and become

embittered. In fact, we have entire social constructs that are designed for just such activity! Social media has become the great arena for retaliation, and sadly, those who claim Christ are easily as guilty as anyone in the secular world!

Recently someone took to venting about us on a social media sight, and what was notable about this one...*because such happens on a fairly regular basis*...(hmmmm...about as often as it did with Jesus in the gospels!)...was that all of the complaints were issues and topics that were at least 10 years old! I mean, this person was carrying on about our departure from Calvary Chapel, about how I hate children, and I spy on all of you. These are old cannon fodder...*real old*. I think I have heard it all, but I hadn't heard that stuff for a very long time. So while part of me felt bad for the individual, I also wanted to see the person actually move on! I mean, 10 or 15 years? Seriously? The lies and spewing hatred after that long? Wow...seriously you need to deal with this! All of this from an individual that claims Christianity! But the two obviously do not mix and so there is a short circuit someplace for anyone who believes that such behavior is in anyway according to the will or teaching of Christ.

Our text begins with the directive "... *if your brother sins against you . . .*" Some translations simply say, "*If your brother sins . . .*" Now immediately one thing that easily comes to mind here is "When should I follow this process?" Because I could be pretty busy if I embraced this principle for every time I am spiritually slighted by someone! Well, a couple of things to keep in mind: One, the Bible also tells us that "love will cover a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8 and Proverbs 10:12). Frankly, some offenses that our brother or sister may commit are just best overlooked in love. If we pause to consider the issue and the impact of the offense, I am confident that we can tell the difference!

Secondly, this scripture calls upon us to exercise said directives with a *BROTHER*. I think it is safe to include *sisters* in this also, but note that we are dealing "*in family*." Meaning, this is an internal issue and instruction concerns believer to believer. I, for one, would tend to believe that if an attempt such as this is made...a brother reaches out effectively to remedy the situation, and the other person refuses, the second party is in flagrant disregard for biblical directive...*straight from the Master's mouth*, that that individual's very salvation is therefore suspect.

That's not meant to take the position of judge, jury and executioner, but it is high time that the Christian community stop accepting open rejection of scripture as normative behavior for the redeemed. This slack has extremely muddied the pool in the past couple of decades and now the name "Christian" holds a varied if not empty meaning. For the unredeemed, such just presents confusion instead of clarity, in a situation where two individuals both claim the title but live and act in two very different ways!

It's dangerous to step into that seat of judgment, for we know the warnings! But if we let scripture be the guideline, we also herein must embrace that other uncomfortable edict that calls for us to "*Test all things; hold fast what is good*." Yet James makes it clear, as well as Romans 14:4 and 10, that to use your own criteria... to make such a declaration ...is sin on our part, but to use the words of God, well that's another story! There are times we must make a call on such matters, because our future actions and responses are contingent upon the answer.

Jesus declared *HIS* criteria for such, saying in John 5:30 "I can of Myself do nothing. *As I hear, I judge*; and My judgment is righteous, *because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me*." What that means is that even HE is not using His feelings and whims to make such a call (if Jesus has whims?), but rather the will of the Father is the final word on such matters.

Other supportive passages are: Luke 12:57 "*Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?*" John 7:24 "*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*." 1 Cor 2:15 "*But he who is spiritual judges all things...*" Luke 7:43 "*Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.'*" And He said to him, "*You have rightly judged.*" (Note also 1 Corinthians 6:4-5, 1 Cor 5:12)

The first step we are to take in this path is to approach the offending (or *perceived* offending) brother or sister and talk to him or her about it. We are to do this directly and do this alone. Eeek! That sounds hard and potentially messy! Yes, but where did we ever get the idea that obedience is innately easy and comfortable? It also holds the possibility of being very loving and healing! But we cannot know until we try, and ‘trying’ is not an optional Christian activity but rather a biblical edict. And please do not wait for the pastor or someone in the leadership to do it. Nothing herein instructs such ‘passing of the buck.’ And thankfully, we as a church have grown enormously in the past few years on this account, and we are living a far more “body-life” dynamic than in the past!

We must also see this passage in light of the rendering that says “if your brother *sins*.” Because some of us are willing to step up if the offense is directed towards you personally, but much much slower if the offense is upon someone else or toward God alone! Now at this point I would recommend a “pause” and a “step back.” We shouldn’t be “sin sniffers”...ready to ‘pounce’ upon the first ‘hic-up’ that we see in someone! Give the individual and the Holy Spirit and chance to deal with such issues, or you run the chance of stepping between them and becoming “Holy Spirit Junior.” Because as they say “I have met the Holy Spirit, and you sir, are no Holy Spirit...” Timing on this issue matters: *so let God lead*. But if the days turn into weeks turn into months, it’s time to step up before the wound becomes infected...*yours or his*, and there is no coming back.

If the brother or sister hears you, then praise the Lord, let’s move on! But if he or she fails to, then you are again at the crossroads. You can step off saying “*well, I tried...*” and let the matter accelerate or you can take it to the next level. Our instruction is to do the latter, because ‘surrender is not an option.’ Often we quickly and initially find out that things were not what they seemed or the brother didn’t even know he offended you. I remember one fella that got upset because I would pass him sometimes in the church halls and not greet him. He thought I didn’t like Him, which is pretty ironic because I have great admiration and respect for this guy!

Anyway, we’re all cool now, but I had no idea that he was upset or even that he thought that way. And the fact is, I often can be aloof or lost in thought or simply ‘on a mission’ to get from point A to point B in a hurry. And further more, the less I pay attention to you in the church probably means the more I think of you as my friend and don’t need my affirmation. But the point is, we can flat out be wrong in our perceptions, and such can be ‘nipped in the bud’ quick and easy by simply *saying something*.

But if they won’t hear you, we have to ramp things up. So, the next step is taking a brother or two with you and give it another shot. One of the benefits in this step is maybe...just *maybe*, you might be crazy and it’s YOU who needs correcting! And however uncomfortable *that* might be, it’s still the resolution that God is seeking for His children. Because it’s not an issue of winning the argument but rather winning a brother! It may be that while the individual will not hear YOU, they may hear the guy or guys that you brought along. It could be that such a step will wake the guy up to the issue, and that is what you want after all.

And lastly...and this is an important one, the accompanying individual or individuals will serve as witness to what is said. This is crucial because the fact is I have had folks regurgitate a verbal exchange in a skewed manner or even a just down right fictitious manner. I have learned this step the hard way, I must admit! Accountability is a big issue with me, so I tend to have another pastor or elder with me when I have to dig deep with someone. It has helped enormously on the “he said, she said” stuff. The goal is never to embarrass or shame the person, but to get to the truth, clean it up, and move on.

Now, if this all hits the mark, then great! Let's move on! But if not, things start to get serious. Again, letting this go at this point is not a biblical option albeit an easy one. So things ramp up again, and according to the text, we are to "tell the church." Ok...*here we go!* I must say, that while all of this is presented as a 'roadmap' of how to deal with this stuff within the church, every step we move forward in this process a major percentage of the greater church stands down. Meaning, they may do step one, but if that fails, that is the end of it and you are 'on your own.'

Perhaps they are brave however and move to step two. But if THAT is a bust, most of the rest of these folks will step off, and that's the end of that. Because when we get to step 3, *well*, the field is vastly empty of players, especially in today's church climate! We will excuse ourselves with all sort of Christian ease... "Our church just *loves...*" or "...we practice grace here" as if grace is a cover for sin, or better, a reason to avoid confrontation. But in fact it is a fight for the soul and future of an individual who is part of our body!

For those who are willing to be obedient herein and go on to step 3, you had better buckle up and hang on! Because this is where things get really hard. For those of you that have attended here, you know that there has been a handful of times that we have been in such a place and have exercised the "full church option." It is not fun and I hate doing it. But God has always been with us, and we have lived to tell the story. Not too long back we did this when I had to deal with the sin of a very close brother of mine, and it was one of the hardest things I have ever had to do!

While there was not an immediate 'stepping back' by this individual, the flock became informed of the situation, and there was then the Christian transparency that is so crucial in such situations for the sake of quashing gossip, emotional burden, and clarity for future communication with and concerning this individual. Eventually, *and thankfully*, there was complete repentance on the part of this man, and there was his immediate and total restoration into the hearts and minds of this body of believers, and restored his legacy. But please note, *it took all three steps to get there*. Had such not been undertaken, where we would be on that issue today is anyone's guess.

If this passage is followed as written herein, it will rarely endear you in the hearts of many believers. There will be accusations of cruelty, legality, un-christian behavior, and spite. Ironically, such retribution will come from *other churches!* So, the only thing I can promise on this account is that it will rarely win you any friends. Except maybe, *the individual in question*. But I promise you there will be no ambiguity at this point. They will either love you or commit to hating you, and we have experienced both here.

If it comes to this, every detail need not be shared with everyone, but enough to clarify the situation. In this fellowship, such meetings are reserved for Covenant Members of the church, because it is these that are completely "in the pool" and share in the blessings and the costs of being here. It is these folks that 'take the hit' if retribution is exercised by the individual. Covenant Members are the committed folks here and in that fact they are the ones for which the blessings and the pain is shared.

If a wandering sheep is restored, then again, praise God! But if not, then that person has to go. Usually step 3 takes care of that by itself, but for the spiritual health of the body, it must be this way. See, while you may have the freedom to attend open church services here, actually *belonging to the body* here is not a right, but an awesome privilege and responsibility! And both of those aspects are required by both God and us to be a part of this family. If cancer is in the body, you do not 'play nice' but rid that body of the cancer for the survival and purity of the body.

This is not "Jesus-meeek-and-mild" but Jesus the living God. His instructions are not optional in our eyes, but rather *mandatory*... But then again, *so are His blessings* for obedience to His directives!