

Matthew 18:15-17. When and How?

Introduction

Dear Brothers and Sisters

The purpose of the ecclesia is to provide a medium, a situation where the human mind can be conditioned through probation, through trial and error, to become no longer driven by human desires and wants, but instead becomes driven by spiritual requirements, to become less selfish, and more predisposed towards others. The basic commandments to love the Lord with all the heart soul and mind, and your neighbour as yourself. This probation, this testing ground, to change our mind, to repent, and reform, takes place though experience, and some rather unpleasant. Problems, we need them.

Matthew 18:7 provides some question to our Bible study on this passage. *Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!* On a similar theme the Apostle says this: 1

Corinthians 11:19 *For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

Without problems we would have no growth, no proving, and would certainly develop no fruits of the spirit. We would remain selfish, and self-centred. As we have read problems will come, because of human nature, and because of the tendency to lower the standard to the lowest common denominator 1 Timothy 4:1-3 *Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot*

iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

The parallel with the early ecclesias, and the warnings which the Lord Jesus gave to them in Revelation chapter 2 & 3 cannot be lost on us. Problems if not dealt with cause great damage, and result in a falling away. But how do we watch for these things, and ensure we are remaining true to the doctrine, and maintain the purity of the gospel, how do we save ourselves and the fellowship from corruption? Is it possible? It must be, or else the Lord Jesus would not have wasted his time with giving such warnings. Is it possible to discern problems? Most certainly it is. The Ecclesia has been formed for the purpose of three things, first and foremost, for the purpose of fellowship, second for collective worship, and thirdly for collective witnessing to the truth, these correspond to the three items of furniture in the Holy Place we remember, the table of shewbread, the altar of incense and the candlestick. These three functions are organised through cooperation one with another as a body of people working as one in harmony. How to manage this harmony with different people with different ideas is not always easy, but is always successful when conducted in the Spirit of Christ. What is that Spirit? It is one of love and mutual submission.

Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Colossians 3:14,15 And above all these things put on love, ...And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, Ephesians 5:21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. 1 Peter 5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: When there is love and submission one to another, being subject to one another, aware of individual

requirements and arrangements, the functions of the ecclesia run smoothly, efficiently, and effectively. But problems arise, and can be seen, when this spirit of submission is not adopted. Submission does not mean simply bowing down to the majority or not having a voice. It means that when queries or questions arise, or new ideas, **a proper process must be followed.** Proverbs 18: 19 *A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.* But in all this, the natural tendency is to over react, instead there is need to calm the waters. “Less said soon mended”. So much damage can be caused by a wrong approach. **But the process for dealing with problems has been specifically given** and it is time to show how once we have discerned a problem, how do we deal with it? Matthew 18: 15-17 reveals this process as does Titus 3:9-11.

It is important to focus on the ideal, the standard which has been set, and this is always where we should strive to be. Ephesians 4:3-4: *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; We are commanded to be perfectly joined together. The servant of the Lord must not strive. Let there be no divisions among you. Is Christ divided? 1 Corinthians 1:10 but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.* However, problems do come, disagreements, sicknesses, discontentment: 1 Corinthians 11:19 *For there must be also heresies among you...* Now, how do we discern? We look for evidence! Check and establish.

A pattern develops. It might not be false doctrine, but it might be behaviour which is causing disputes, and schism, through the manifestation of pride. What to do? The evidence reaches us. Oh dear! Our senses offended, what is the first thing that we as humans

do? Tell the person next to us. It is the natural reaction. A wrong one.

What must the spiritual man do? Pray for guidance. Check the evidence himself. Investigate. This is the first step in a process, and it is vital this is the first. *Between him and thee alone.* This is the teaching of the chief shepherd in Matthew 18: 15 *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.* Always the aim in sorting the problem, is to gain the brother. One thing that is not required is for all and sundry to know what is going on. Gossip, is probably one of the most dangerous problems in an ecclesia, and discipline must be maintained over this. It is imperative that if we are gossiped to about someone else, that we rebuke that person who is telling us, and remind them that they have sinned before God. Gossip is a sin. Everyone should know this. It is in our confession of faith in case we are not aware. It is strange too, that people are always indignant about gossips, but unaware they do it themselves. We stand before God. Let our own conscience judge us on this.

Step 1

So we point out to the offender, that he/ she has appeared to have offended. Of course, they must be given the benefit of the doubt, and the opportunity to explain the situation. If they see the point, and are sorry, and say so, and are repentant, well, there must be nothing more said about it. If they realise that they appeared to say something contrary to the sound doctrine of Christ, and do not believe it at all, it was a mistake, the matter is resolved. Hopefully this has been undertaken in the spirit of meekness and fear, knowing

that this can happen to us, and the roles can be reversed tomorrow, but hopefully ywe have gained our brother.

Step 2

But what if the brother or sister rejects the advice, and justify themselves, and it is found they are upholding wrong teaching? They may seem to be fixed on their pathway, and resist your approach. It can become awkward. What next? We must pray for guidance, - not blast it to all and sundry! We must bear in mind the words of the Apostle in Galatians 6:1 *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.* In the accompanying chart we have called this next step Admonition 1. To admonish means to reprove, and try to show the other person the seriousness of the situation. This must be done discreetly , and privately knowing that *love covers a multitude of sins.* (1 Peter 4:8) Nearly all problems should be sorted in this way.

But sometimes a tricky one develops, and only at this stage should others be involved, perhaps those who may have become already involved, to save creating the minimum of disruption.

Step 3

Jesus gives us this next step again in Matthew 18:16 *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.* And again in 1 Timothy 5:19 *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.* This meeting is carried out in the spirit of friendliness and kindness, ignoring provocation, always with a view

to recovery and forgiveness. Hopefully, the brother or sister sees the error of their ways, and is sorry for the upset they have caused, or they confirm that they have abandoned the corrupt ideas and so on... All are restored, and lessons learned for all concerned.

Yet still the matter might not be resolved. The person may become entrenched in their views, now the problem is getting difficult to deal with, the person is trying to influence others perhaps, and gain a following, as we recall Korah Dathan and Abiram did when they took men. (Numbers 16:1) But there is still hope, and a further step that must be taken. But first pray for guidance. This next stage we have called Admonition 2 on the chart. According to Jesus' instruction in Matthew 18:17: *And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the ecclesia:*

Only at this late stage, does the problem become the knowledge of everyone, and everyone is made aware of the difficulty, and as a body, they unite together to resolve the issue if possible. Despite the disruption and possible unpleasantness of the situation, all must work to gain their brother or sister, and there is to be no prejudging of the situation.

The individual might at this stage be asked to stand aside until the matter is resolved. In this we note the instruction of the Apostle Paul: in 2 Thessalonians 3: 13-15 *But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* Treat others how we would like to be treated. There is no time limit on this process, it takes as long as it takes, but the matter cannot and must not be ignored, that is how compromise and apostacy can creep in. Though matters do not normally get this far, in the history

of the truth, quite often a happy outcome is had by all, and all can benefit by the experience, there is to be no triumphalism, or “I told you so” over the errant member. They must be fully restored, and treated kindly, and lovingly.

However, because the matter has taken place before all, all must be aware that the problem has been properly discussed, this is why the gatekeepers of the flock (interviewing brothers) are required to go through the matter with the person concerned.

It may well be that the person concerned has no intention of changing their mind or position. What is to be done now? The scripture is clear. The ecclesia is not a social club, where anything goes. It is the pillar and ground of the Truth, and the standard must be upheld. Jesus says in Matthew 18: 17 *but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* In other words, not a pariah or outcast, but sadly no longer to be counted as a brother, instead an acquaintance, you cannot keep company anymore, - 1 Corinthians 5:13 *But them that are without God judges.* Again Titus 3:10: *A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sins, being condemned of himself.* This is the resolution of the matter, taken to its furthest limit. It is rare this takes place, but it is there as a process laid down by the Lord Jesus, to ensure all things are done decently in order.

How much better, to adopt the spirit of love and submission in the first place? Humble, and accepting, subject one to another, then none of this would be necessary. Is it the end then? Well, Jesus sat with publicans and sinners. It is always the duty of the faithful, and believers to pray for guidance and the welfare of the former companion. *Overcome evil with good* says the Apostle Paul in

Romans 12:21. So in God's grace, all things are possible with Him. In conclusion The Apostle James has this to say 5:19-20 *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converts the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

Brother Terry