

It Is Written

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If Your Brother Sins Against You

By Clarence Johnson

In Matt. 18:15-17, Jesus said, "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. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. 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."

In this passage, our Lord gives us the procedure to follow in seeking to resolve differences that arise between brethren in Christ. Sometimes this passage is applied more broadly than it was originally intended, as if it were the only way to deal with any problem. But more often, unfortunately, the passage is ignored altogether.

In Matt. 18:15-17, Jesus was not telling us how to deal with false teachers, or with those whose sin is already public in nature. This passage tells us how to deal with problems that are private in nature and most likely can be solved at that private level. If I sin against a brother and he comes and makes me aware of what I have done, I have the opportunity to repent and be forgiven - and others need never know of my mistake. Two brothers alienated by a private sin have now been reunited. On the other hand, if I have gone out in public and misbehaved openly before all, there is no way that error can be corrected privately and quietly without my influence continuing to suffer with all who know of my sin but do not know of my repentance.

If you have sinned against me personally and privately, I have no right to make that sin publicly known before I have attempted to settle it in keeping with the Lord's instructions. It could be just a misunderstanding. Perhaps you have not sinned, as I think you have. By getting together and discussing the problem, perhaps the misunderstanding can be cleared up -- and each of us has gained a brother. On the other hand, maybe you have sinned, but you do not realize the nature of what you have done. Privately, we discuss the problem. You recognize your error and repent. Each of us has gained a brother. Others who were never involved and never aware that a sin had occurred need never know there was a problem. Your reputation need not suffer. The sin has been properly dealt with and can be forgotten by the only two humans who know about it.

When a private sin cannot be solved by the two individuals immediately involved, a few others can perhaps help. They can listen and advise, and perhaps the matter can be laid to rest. Only when such efforts fail should the dispute become a matter for congregational involvement. And even then, the first hope is that the matter can finally be resolved without further estrangement. Only when one of the disputants will "not hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen...."

Sorrow That Saves

By Dan S. Shipley

God tells men they must repent in order to be saved (Lk. 13:3; Acts 17:30, e.g.). Some say this is the hardest command to obey. I don't know whether they refer to changing the mind (heart) or changing a practice, but suspect the latter. The man who would alter his life-style without altering his attitude faces an almost impossible task. On the other hand, changing the will not only helps, it almost assures the outward change.

But, as the starting point of repentance is not changing externals, neither is it in the changing of the mind, though both are vital to true repentance. Even behind these there must be godly sorrow, the seed of character alteration. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance..." (2 Cor. 7:10). Such sorrow is as necessary as the repentance it produces. Only the contrite heart is changeable, and even then its sorrow must be of the "godly sort" (2 Cor. 7:11). Not all sorrow that pervades and influences the heart is godly. Paul writes of a sorrow that is "of the world" and which "worketh death" (2 Cor. 7:10). Worldly sorrow does not accomplish godly ends. Sinners

may be genuinely sorry for their wrong-doing and for the shame and disgrace it has brought to them and their family without being properly concerned about sinning against God! They may confess and lament their sins, even "come forward" in tears - but without Godly Grief! Their response is not Godward; it is not in reference to God; it is not out of regard for God; therefore, it is not approved of God. Only godly sorrow can change man's heart and life in the way that is "unto salvation."

In commenting on godly sorrow, Albert Barnes says this term "shows the exact nature of that sorrow which is connected with a return to God" (Barnes on the NT, 2 Cor.--Gal.). He continues by showing it to be the kind of sorrow approved by God; the kind which is exercised toward God in view of sin; and the kind which leads to God in seeking forgiveness. Joseph saw a connection between sin and God that all men need to see. When tempted, he asks: "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). David came to see sin as Joseph had seen it and his prayer in Psalm 51 plainly indicates his godly sorrow. No man partakes of the divine nature while being indifferent to sin. "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil..." (Prov. 8:13). The God we sin against is the One we are to love above all. He so loved us that He gave His Son to save us from sin (Jn. 3:16). The cross shows the magnitude of sin - but it shows the magnitude of God's love as well. Learning of both helps one to come to that godly sorrow that works repentance - a repentance, as Paul says, that "bringeth no regret."

How true! The godly sorrow and all that it leads to - the changed mind, the reformed life, the salvation - has never brought regret to a single soul! Reams have been written about the regrets of men, but the first sentence is yet to be written of any regret in turning to God. Where is the man who was ever sorry for having been reconciled to God or having served Him too faithfully or too long? You'll never find such a man -- and you'll never be one either!

Being Naïve

By Rick Liggin

It's really kind of funny when we run into someone who is genuinely naive about certain things. We sort of chuckle at this innocence, and may even poke a little fun at such a person. But even though being naive may be somewhat foolish at times, it's not always bad. There are some things that we need to be naive about, especially if we are Christians.

The apostle Paul urged, "but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil" (Rom. 16:19). He means by this admonition that we need to be wise and experienced in those things that are good; but when it comes to our practical experience with evil, we need to be as naive as possible.

And there is certainly nothing wrong with that! Why is it that so many of us just have to experience things for ourselves - especially when it comes to evil? Why can't we be wise enough to learn from the bad experiences of others? You don't have to experience alcohol or drugs or sexual immorality in order to know how awful these things can be! We can know how bad these things are just by listening to the Word of God and the experiences of others who were not wise enough to avoid these evils.

Let's learn to be satisfied with our own innocence, and abhor that which is evil (Rom. 12:9)! Let's be glad that we're naive when it comes to experience in sin. There is nothing to be ashamed of in this! It is really the wise course to pursue! To choose the worldly path of practical experience is to choose the path that leads to self-destruction! Would you please think about that - and just choose to be naive?

Felix

By Kyle Campbell

In Acts 24:25, Luke records that Paul preached to Felix, the governor of Judea. When he had the opportunity to preach before him and his wife, Druscilla, he decided to preach about three subjects.

The first was self-control. This is a "holding oneself in." Self-control is a fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:23), and every one of us should realize that this is what we should be in order to fight sin and the devil. The second was righteousness. This describes the mechanism by which we are acceptable to God. Everyone who is born of God is righteous, instead of wicked (1 John 3:10). The third was judgment. This is our final end (Revelation 20:11-15). Everyone will stand before God, just like Felix and Druscilla.

When Felix heard these words, he "trembled." He knew it was the truth, but he sent Paul away. What will you do? Will you be satisfied with a "more convenient season" or will you obey the gospel of Jesus Christ?