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Matthew 18:15-17

15. “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

16. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that **BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED.**

17. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

In these three short verses Jesus gives us the Godly way for Christians to handle the problems and sins we face in this life.

The first step given by Jesus is the most critical. Jesus says, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private.” Notice we are to privately go to the one who has sinned and communicate to him what he has done wrong. Galatians 6:1 further explains how we are to approach someone about their sin: “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.” We are to have an attitude of humility as we privately and

gently confront a person about their sin.

Unfortunately, going to someone privately to point out their sin requires much courage. Often times people will discuss a person's sin with everyone else but the person who sinned. Such gossip and backbiting often perpetuates and generates more sin. But by going to the person privately, the truth can be revealed, and all parties can "save face", repent, and grow together.

Now this first step, of going to a person who has sinned privately, may happen many times over the course of long periods of time--depending on the individual and the nature of his sin. We are to love one another, which involves being patient and full of mercy.

But at some point, if a person refuses to listen to you and forsake his sin, it may be appropriate and necessary to take one or two witnesses to confront the individual about his continued sin. Verse 16 states, "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed." Again, this step may take more than one try to get the acceptable result.

If the person is a Christian, and he refuses to listen to yourself and witnesses concerning his sin, the matter is to be turned over to the church leadership of whom he is a member. Hopefully he will repent under the guidance of the elders, whose responsibility it is to shepherd, feed, and protect the flock.

If the person in sin rebels against the church

leadership, refusing still to repent of his sin, verse 17 gives the following instruction: “If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” In other words the church is to disfellowship such a one, so he will come to his senses, forsake his sin, and return to the Lord’s way of living.

Now in giving this instruction, Jesus does not want us to think of ourselves as the “purity police”--looking for others to sin, trying to find fault, so we can step in to correct others. No, this teaching of Jesus is to give us God’s way of handling problems when they come to us, as they inevitably will.

As Christians we are to love our neighbors and humbly try to help them--only after we have taken the logs out of our own eyes, having confronted our own sin and weaknesses. Seek God’s wisdom, so that you will know when and how He needs to use you.