

“BETWEEN THEE AND HIM ALONE”
Mt.18:15-17
OR
THE PERVERTED APPLICATION OF MT.18:15-17

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Often times when one has publicly taught error in sermons, group meetings, class arrangements, and in papers published by brethren, or has sinned in some public manner, and another brother publicly exposes the error taught or the sin committed
 - a. The guilty party will complain and charge sin against the one who exposed his error or his sin, saying, “You should have come to me privately before taking that action as Mt.18:15 requires you to do!” “You have violated Mt.18:15 by doing that without first going to the brother privately.”
 - b. Or, some sympathizing brethren will first ask if you went to the guilty brother privately before you exposed him as Mt.18:15 requires. Then they claim, If you did not, you have sinned against the brother you are exposing publicly, for you are in violation of Mt.18:15.
 - c. Examples cited.
2. In other words, there are brethren who, in fact, are trying to make Mt.18:15-17 control or become the pattern for all other passages dealing with rebuking a brother who publicly sins or publicly teaches error.
3. This is, of course, a perversion of Mt.18:15-17.

II. DISCUSSION

A. THIS RAISES THE QUESTION: WHAT IS THE ISSUE IN MT.18:15?

1. Does Mt.18:15 prohibit
 - a. Publicly responding to and publicly exposing published error, as in sermons preached, class or group meetings, or in papers published by brethren, or radio addresses?
 - b. Publicly correcting sins committed and error taught by brethren that are common knowledge among the saints?
2. Does Mt.18:15 require every brother who would admonish or rebuke the guilty party for his public error or public sin to first meet privately with the guilty party before doing so?

B. THE TEXT OF MT.18:15-17 EXAMINED.

1. It is clearly a private matter between two brethren, v.15.
 - a. It’s a trespass of one brother against another brother.
 - b. No one else is involved or necessarily knows about it.

- c. V.15 directs the one brother, the one sinned against, to go to the brother who has sinned against him, go to him and him alone – not to anyone else at this stage.
 - (1) “go and tell him his fault”
 - (2) “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone”
 - (3) “if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother”
 - (4) In this manner this private matter is settled privately.
 - d. Even in v.16, it is still a semi-private matter – certainly not a church or a public matter at this point in time.
 - (1) “If (and only if) he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more,” to confront the sinning brother with his sin.
 - (2) Once again personal efforts are made to solve the problem, efforts that will avoid involving the church and public exposure.
 - (3) This is to be done, “that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”
 - (4) At this point it is still a private matter. But witnesses are now needed in case he still will not hear his brother, because of the next step that must be taken, wherein the testimony of witnesses will be necessary.
 - e. According to v.17, the church is to become involved only if the two previous, private efforts fail.
 - (1) “If he shall neglect (refuse) to hear them, tell it unto the church”
 - (a) Tell it to what church?
 - (b) Obviously, to the local church of which both brethren are members!
 - (c) For “the church” here is not made up of churches, but of the members of the one local church.
 - (d) This should be enough to tell you there is something wrong with the claim about Mt.18:15 demanding a private meeting with a brother at large who has sinned publicly, or publicly taught error, before you can expose his sin or his error.
 - (1) Before what church are you going to bring such a brother?
 - (2) “If he neglect to hear the church (the local church of which the two are members) let him be unto thee as an heathen and a publican.”
 - (a) That is, as one no longer worthy of or to be considered as in fellowship with the church.
2. Obviously, Mt.18:15 is not about:
- a. The false teacher who teaches error in the pulpit or in the papers or on the radio.
 - b. The brother who sins publicly in the presence of others.
 - c. Sins that are commonly known and need to be publicly rebuked before all.
3. Why is this truth taught in Mt.18:15? Because of what the Bible teaches about hiding sin! The principle of love. Let’s see—

C. THE DIVINE TRUTH ABOUT “HIDING SIN”

1. The one who is a loving and wise person hides or covers sins, or secrets or shame or transgression. This is what Mt.18:15 deals with.
 - a. Prov.10:12 – “love covereth all sins”
 - b. Prov.11:13 – “a faithful spirit concealeth the matter (secrets)”
 - c. Prov.12:16 – “a prudent man covereth shame”
 - d. Prov.17:9 – “He that covereth a transgression seeketh (procureth) love”
2. God hides or covers sins by forgiving them, Psa.32:1; Jas.5:19,20.
3. However, you cannot and you dare not try to hide what is already out in the open!
 - a. To cover (hide) what is commonly known is sin, Prov.28:13.
 - (1) “He that coverth (hides) his sins shall not prosper,” v.13a.
 - (2) “but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy,” v.13b.
 - b. The way to deal with what is in the open and un-repented of is in the open without partiality, Gal.6:1; 1Tim.5:19,20; Tit.3:10,11.

D. WE ARE TAUGHT TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS (1PET.2:21) AND HE OFTEN REBUKED SINNERS PUBLICLY.

1. Some whom Jesus rebuked publicly:
 - a. The Pharisees, Mt.23:2-39.
 - b. The Sadducees, Mt.22:23-32.
 - c. Herod, Lk.13:31,32; cf. Lk.23:8, had never seen him.
 - d. The High Priest, Jno.18:19-24.
2. Objections: But that’s Jesus; we are not Jesus.
 - a. We shouldn’t judge, Mt.7:1-6; But:Jno.7:24; cf. 2Th.3:6ff.; Mt.7:15-19;Eph.5:11.

E. THE APOSTLE PAUL REBUKED SINNERS PUBLICLY.

1. Some whom Paul rebuked publicly.
 - a. Bar-Jesus, Ac.13:8-11.
 - b. The Jews in Antioch, Ac.13:45,46.
 - c. The Judaizers, Ac.15:1,2.
 - d. The High Priest, Ac.23:3-5.
 - e. Peter, another apostle, Gal.2:14.
2. Objections.

a. Paul was an apostle; we are not! True, but: 2Tim.4:1,2; Tit.1:13.

F. ICOR.5:1-13 EXAMINED. – does not fit under Mt.18:15; Mt.18:15 does not apply.

1. “It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you,” v.1. – Obviously, 1Cor.5 is not dealing with a private matter between two brethren, and Mt.18:15 does not apply!
2. “And ye are puffed up...have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you,” v.2.
3. “I absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,” v.3.

- d. “and the other Jews dissembled likewise with him,” v.13.
 - e. “Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation,” v.13.
 - f. “they walked not uprightly accordingly to the truth of the gospel,” v.14.
2. What Paul did as a result of Peter’s sin. And Paul didn’t sin in doing so! But the interpretation of Mt.18:15 that some make says he did!
- a. “I withstood him to the face” (v.11)...”before them all” (v.14).
 - b. Why? “because he was to be blamed” v.11.
 - c. Why? Because Peter not only sinned, but he influenced others, even Barnabas, to follow his example.
 - d. Paul publicly “withstood (rebuked, corrected, exposed) Peter to the face...before them all,” vv.11,14.
 - e. Why? “But when I say that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of a Gentile, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as to the Jews?” v.14.
3. Observations and conclusions based on Galatians 2
- a. Observations
 - (1) This was not a called church meeting to deal with a sinning brother after a first and second admonition, 2:11-13.
 - (2) This was not a private matter between only two brethren. Peter’s sin was public “before them all,” vv.11,14.
 - (3) Paul acted without first taking Peter aside, calling two or three witnesses, or waiting for others, v.14. Why?
 - (4) His action was public and was against the one or ones responsible and before the ones before whom the public error had been practiced, vv.11-14. Why?
 - (5) He didn’t take a chance on that audience being scattered and the sin being spread to others before and without correction.
 - b. Conclusion
 - (1) The duty to rebuke public sin publicly individually is recognized. Cf. 2Tim.4:1,2.
 - (2) It is done to save the souls of those guilty and of others, 1Tim.5:19,20; Heb.13:17; Jas.3:1.
 - (3) Requires judgment, Ac.18:24-28.
- J. MT.18:15-17 AND GAL.2:11-14 COMPARED**
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| 1. Private sin, 18:15 | Public sin, 2:11,12 |
| 2. “against thee,” v.15 | Gentiles, v.12 |
| 3. “thee and him alone,” v.15 | “before all,” v.14 |
- III. CONCLUSION**
- 1. Mt.18:15-17

- a. Applies only to personal and private matters, where one brother has sinned against another brother, both of whom are members of the same local church.
 - b. Is not a pattern for handling public sins, or sins committed or error taught by a brother of another church.
 - c. Is often perverted and made to apply improperly to public sin, and when it is it given ground to the heretic to take refuge in the perversion.
 - d. Can't be a pattern for all discipline because that would render the local church defenseless.
 - e. If a pattern, what local church is the public offender to be brought before?
2. In the case of public sins:
- a. Either or both the evangelist or the elders have a duty here.
 - b. The spiritual members also have a duty, Eph.5:11.
 - c. It requires vigilance of all, 1Th.5:13,14; 2Th.3:11-15.

Credit to: Jeff Asher for these notes on Mt.18:15-18.

“Oh, but we should do what they did in Ac.18:26!” No! The case of Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla is not applicable. For Apollos was not a Christian. You can't discipline non-Christians. 1Cor.5:9-13