

# Dealing with Erring & Unrepentant Church Members

A Study of Matthew 5:23, 24 & 18:15-17 for Seventh-day Adventists

By Pastor Joel Laswell

Let's begin by looking at Matthew 18:15-17:

**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.

**NOTE:** 'TRESPASS' is Strongs 264 hamartano {ham-ar-tan'-o} means to miss the mark; to err, be mistaken; to wander from the law of God, violate God's law, sin.

'TELL' is Strongs 1651 elegcho {el-eng'-kho} and means to convict, refute, confute; to call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation.

'HEAR' is Strongs 191 akouo {ak-oo'-o} and means consider what is or has been said.

To circulate reports concerning what "thy brother" may have done will make it more difficult, perhaps even impossible, to reach him. Here, perhaps more than in any other aspect of personal relationships, it is our privilege to apply the Golden Rule (see Matthew 7:12). The less publicity that is given to a wrong act, the better. Someone has said that the best way to dispose of our enemies is to make friends of them. The talent of influence is a sacred trust, one for which we will inevitably be called upon to give account in the day of judgment. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9).

**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.

**NOTE:** '**if he will not hear thee**'... That is, if he will not admit his wrongdoing, change his course of action, and make right, as far as possible, the wrongs of the past.

The "**one or two more**" are, presumably, not involved personally and are therefore in a better position to express an unbiased opinion and to counsel the offending brother. In case the offending brother neglects to heed their admonition, they can bear witness to the efforts that have been put forth on his behalf and also to the facts in the case.

'**two or three witnesses**'... According to Hebrew law no man might be punished on the testimony of a lone witness. It is well to remember, also, that there are two sides to every disagreement, and both must have a fair hearing before a decision can be reached.

**18:17** And if he shall **neglect** to hear them, tell [it] unto the **church** but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a **heathen** man and a **publican**.

**NOTE:** 'NEGLECT' is Strongs 3878 parakouo {par-ak-oo'-o} and means to refuse to hear, pay no regard to, disobey.

'CHURCH' is Strongs 1577 ekklesia {ek-klay-see'-ah} and means an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting according to regulations prescribed for the body for order's sake. Here the "church" is the local body of believers acting in their corporate capacity, not the church universal as in ch. 16:18.

'HEATHEN' is Strongs 1482 ethnikos {eth-nee-kos'} and means alien to the worship of the true God; of the pagan, the Gentile.

'PUBLICAN' is Strongs 5057 telones {tel-o'-nace} and means a tax gatherer, collector of taxes or tolls. The tax collectors were as a class, detested not only by the Jews, but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception, with which they did their job. This does not mean that he should be despised or shunned or neglected. Efforts should now be put forth for the erring member as for any nonmember. In working for a person who has thus severed himself from the church, members should beware of associating with him in such a way as to make it appear that they share his point of view or participate with him in his evil course of action.

Heaven's ratification of the decision on earth will take place only if the decision is made in harmony with the principles of Heaven. All who deal with erring brethren should ever remember that they are dealing with the eternal destiny of souls, and that the results of their work may well be eternal.

Let's also look at Matthew 5:23 and 24:

5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath **ought** against thee;

5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be **reconciled** to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

**NOTE:** 'OUGHT' is Strongs 5100 tis {tis} and means certain; something; somewhat.

'RECONCILED' is Strongs 1259 diallasso {dee-al-las'-so} and means to change.

Those who listened to the sermon on the mount no doubt understood "brother" to refer to a fellow Jew. To Christians he would be a fellow Christian. The term is rightly understood as designating those with whom we are closely associated in one way or another. But Christ later made it clear that all men are brothers, regardless of race or creed (see Luke 10:29–37).

The act of offering a personal "gift," or sacrifice, was considered to be among the most holy and important of all religious acts, but even it must take second place under the circumstances set forth. It is possible that the "gift" here mentioned was a sacrifice made to secure divine forgiveness and favor. Christ insists that men must make things right with their fellow men before they can be reconciled with God (see Matt. 6:15; 1 John 4:20). The more important obligation takes precedence over one of less importance. Reconciliation is more important than sacrifice. The living out of Christlike principles in the life (Gal. 2:20) is of far greater value in the sight of God than practicing the forms of religion (see 2 Tim. 3:5).

There are a couple of things to consider in regard to Matthew 18:15-17. The first deals with the 'time' element involved... such as 'when do you take witnesses with you?' and 'when do you take it to the church?' etc... The second has to do with 'how' you contact the erring one.

First, concerning the 'time' element, the Scripture in Matthew 18 says:

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.

By looking at this it would seem that the timing of when to 'go' to the brother is left up to the individual who has been trespassed against to some degree. It is clear that the person who is wronged IS

REQUIRED to tell the brother his fault at some time. He cannot just forget about it and let it go! So when is the person to be approached? This is where other Scriptures give us insight. Looking at Matthew 5:23, 24 we read:

5:23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

5:24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

This gives us some insight into the timing question. We can see that we are to go to the brother ASAP... **before** we offer our 'gift' to the Lord or our gift will not be acceptable. There are also several counsels in the SOP that tell us to make things right **before the Sabbath** comes, but here is one:

*"When difficulties arise among church-members, let them be cleared away before the Sabbath comes. This should be regarded as a Christian duty by every church-member."* {AUCR, April 15, 1903 par. 11}.

The sooner you approach the one who is in sin (who has trespassed against you) the better and before the Sabbath is the ideal! Here is the strongest reason I believe to act as quickly as possible... it is found in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 33:

33:8 When I say unto the wicked, O wicked [man], thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked [man] shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.

33:9 Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

We do not want the one who is in sin to go to his grave BEFORE he has been approached by us for this would have dyer consequences! They will lose their eternal life and we may as well. So we approach the person ASAP! The next question in regard to 'timing' is when do we take witnesses... when is step two carried out, step three, etc...?

The answer is in Matthew 18:16...

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.

If the brother **will not listen or refuses to listen**, the Scripture says '**THEN**' the next step is to be taken. Considering the Scriptures we have already looked at, the next step is to be taken as quickly as possible... just as the first step is to be taken ASAP. Notice that the Scripture DOES NOT SAY that we are to keep going alone and trying and trying and trying **until** he listens... it says if he REFUSES to hear... THEN take witnesses. The same is true if he refuses to hear you with witnesses... you do not keep trying and trying and trying with witnesses until he listens... and if he refuses to hear the church you do not keep trying and trying and trying until he listens before you take the next step:

18:17 And if he shall to hear them, tell [it] unto the church but if he **neglect** to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.

The sooner this is carried out, the sooner the erring can be saved from his sin, or the sooner sin is

removed from the camp and God can again bless. Is it possible to move too quickly or too slowly? I don't believe so **if** this process is carried out **exactly** as it is laid out. Jesus gave us this process and it is set up to protect all parties involved. It guards against a leader taking matters into his own hands to remove a person from membership unjustly, for the final decision falls upon the church, not the leader. It protects the erring one in that they have an opportunity to plead their case. If they do not take the opportunity, then they are not 'hearing' the brother, the witnesses, or the church and if they refuse to hear the church, then **'To retain them would be an insult to the God of heaven.'** [(Letter 215, 1902). {5BC 1096.7}].

Once the person has been removed from membership, **different principles** are to be followed to reach the person. They are to be treated as a 'heathen man' and a 'publican.' In a nutshell, this means that they are to be treated as unbelievers and as those who have outwardly and openly rejected Christ. There is to be NO fellowship with them other than to draw them to repentance. Friends, these are not my words, but the words of Jesus Himself! This also applies to their family members as well **if they have sided with the erring one...** notice the examples of Achan and Korah:

### Joshua

7:24 And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had: and they brought them unto the valley of Achor.

7:25 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

Achan died because of his unrepentant sin. His family perished with him because they chose to stand with their husband and father even though he was wrong and unrepentant, thus becoming a partaker of his sins.

### Numbers

16:27 So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.

16:32 And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that [appertained] unto Korah, and all [their] goods.

Korah died because of his unrepentant sin. His family (as well as Dathan and Abiram and their families) died because they sided with their husband and father in his sin, thus becoming a partaker of the same.

Not all of Korah's children died because not all sided with Korah, and so they were spared by the Lord:

### Numbers

26:11 Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not.

The second question has to do with 'how' you contact the erring and here the Scriptures seem to leave it up to the individual who has been wronged. While I believe that meeting eye to eye is the ideal, I do not believe that it is a requirement (I cannot find that it is in Scripture or the SOP). The idea is to contact the person IN SOME WAY, and not to neglect doing it. The apostles sent letters to the churches. EGW sent letters and telegrams to individuals. Today we can use the telephone,

video, and e-mail to contact someone. It isn't the method of communication, it is the principle that needs to be the focus and whether the principle is being strictly adhered to. Has the erring one been contacted in some way? Once they have (whether in person, by phone, or by e-mail) the process has begun.

Some may look at this process as being too harsh but we must remember that Jesus commanded this procedure to be carried out when the circumstances called for it. We must remember too that the ultimate goal is to have reconciliation and unity among members of the church and protect the church from division. Following these principles will ensure just that and may also show the erring one their true condition, thus snatching a soul from the fire! These counsels are in reality principles of compassion.

Here are many counsels from the Spirit of Prophecy that will help our understanding [**ALL emphasis mine**]:

“The **greatest deception** of the human mind in Christ's day was that **a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness**. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness. **A jealous regard for what is termed theological truth often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life**. The darkest chapters of history are burdened with the record of crimes committed by bigoted religionists. The Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham, and boasted of their possession of the oracles of God; yet these advantages did not preserve them from selfishness, malignity, greed for gain, and the basest hypocrisy. They thought themselves the greatest religionists of the world, but their so-called orthodoxy led them to crucify the Lord of glory. {DA 309.2}

**The same danger still exists. Many take it for granted that they are Christians, simply because they subscribe to certain theological tenets.** But they have not brought the truth into **practical life**. They have not believed and loved it; therefore they have not received the power and grace that come through sanctification of the truth. **Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world.**” {DA 309.3}

“Jesus said, *“If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”* The sacrificial offerings expressed faith that through Christ the offerer had become a partaker of the mercy and love of God. But for one to express faith in God's pardoning love, while he himself indulged an unloving spirit, would be a mere farce. {MB 58.2}

When one who professes to serve God wrongs or injures a brother, he misrepresents the character of God to that brother, and the wrong must be confessed, he must acknowledge it to be sin, in order to be in harmony with God. **Our brother may have done us a greater wrong than we have done him, but this does not lessen our responsibility. If when we come before God we remember that another has aught against us, we are to leave our gift of prayer, of thanksgiving, of freewill offering, and go to the brother with whom we are at variance, and in humility confess our own sin and ask to be forgiven.** {MB 58.3}

If we have in any manner defrauded or injured our brother, we should make restitution. **If** we have unwittingly borne false witness, **if** we have misstated his words, **if** we have injured his influence in any way, we should go to the ones with whom we have conversed about him, and take back all our injurious misstatements.” {**MB 59.1**}

“Do all that lies in your power, **without the sacrifice of principle**, to conciliate others. *“If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave*

*there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*" Matthew 5:23, 24." {MH 485.3}

"The words given me were of that character that I knew the people needed, and which would benefit them if they would hear. One discourse was upon how to treat those united with us in church capacity if they erred. They were not to permit their minds to be affected to action by the words of the Lord's enemies against His children. **If complaints or murmurings or charges are made they must study in Christ's school as to the course to be pursued toward the ones of whom complaints are made.** Tell the matter between him and thee alone, and if he will not hear, then take two or three others; if he will not hear these, tell it to the church." {TM 269.1}

**"Matthew 15-17 (Joshua 7:10-26).** Some Are Not to Be Retained.--*The names of those who sin and refuse to repent should not be retained on the church books, lest the saints be held accountable for their evil deeds.* Those who pursue a course of transgression should be visited and labored with, and if they then refuse to repent, they should be separated from church fellowship, in accordance with the rules laid down in the Word of God. . . . {5BC 1096.5}

Those who refuse to hear the admonitions and warnings given by God's faithful messengers are not to be retained in the church. They are to be disfellowshipped; for they will be as Achan in the camp of Israel--deceived and deceiving. {5BC 1096.6}

Who, after reading the record of Achan's sin and punishment, can think it according to the will of God that those who do wickedly, refusing to repent, are to be retained in the church? **To retain them would be an insult to the God of heaven.**" (Letter 215, 1902). {5BC 1096.7}

"In a trial for murder the accused was not to be condemned on the testimony of one witness, even though circumstantial evidence might be strong against him. The Lord's direction was, *"Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death by the mouth of witnesses: but one witness shall not testify against any person to cause him to die."* Numbers 35:30. It was Christ who gave to Moses these directions for Israel; and when personally with His disciples on earth, as He taught them how to treat the erring, the Great Teacher repeated the lesson that one man's testimony is not to acquit or condemn. One man's views and opinions are not to settle disputed questions. ***In all these matters two or more are to be associated, and together they are to bear the responsibility, "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established."*** Matthew 18:16. {PP 516.1}

"If one of these little ones shall be overcome, and commit a wrong against you, then it is your work to seek his restoration. **Do not wait for him to make the first effort for reconciliation.** *"How think ye?"* said Jesus; *"if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."* {DA 440.2}

In the spirit of meekness, *"considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted,"* (Gal. 6:1), go to the erring one, and *"tell him his fault between thee and him alone."* **Do not put him to shame by exposing his fault to others, nor bring dishonor upon Christ by making public the sin or error of one who bears His name. Often the truth must be plainly spoken to the erring; he must be led to see his error, that he may reform.** But you are not to judge or to condemn. Make no attempt at self-justification. Let all your effort be for his recovery. In treating the wounds of the soul, there is need of the most delicate touch, the finest sensibility. Only the love that flows from the Suffering One of Calvary can avail here. With pitying tenderness, let brother deal with brother, knowing that if you succeed, you will *"save a soul from death,"* and *"hide a multitude of sins."* James 5:20. {DA 440.3}

But even this effort may be unavailing. Then, said Jesus, *"take with thee one or two more."* It may be that their united influence will prevail where that of the first was unsuccessful. Not being parties to

the trouble, they will be more likely to act impartially, and this fact will give their counsel greater weight with the erring one. {DA 441.1}

**If he will not hear them, then, and not till then, the matter is to be brought before the whole body of believers.** Let the members of the church, as the representatives of Christ, unite in prayer and loving entreaty that the offender may be restored. The Holy Spirit will speak through His servants, pleading with the wanderer to return to God. Paul the apostle, speaking by inspiration, says, "*As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*" 2 Cor. 5:20. **He who rejects this united overture has broken the tie that binds him to Christ, and thus has severed himself from the fellowship of the church.** Henceforth, said Jesus, "*let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.*" But he is not to be regarded as cut off from the mercy of God. Let him not be despised or neglected by his former brethren, but be treated with tenderness and compassion, as one of the lost sheep that Christ is still seeking to bring to His fold. {DA 441.2}

Christ's instruction as to the treatment of the erring repeats in more specific form the teaching given to Israel through Moses: "*Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbor, that thou bear not sin for him.*" Lev. 19:17, margin. That is, **if one neglects the duty Christ has enjoined, of trying to restore those who are in error and sin, he becomes a partaker in the sin. For evils that we might have checked, we are just as responsible as if we were guilty of the acts ourselves.** {DA 441.3}

But it is to the wrongdoer himself that we are to present the wrong. We are not to make it a matter of comment and criticism among ourselves; nor even after it is told to the church, are we at liberty to repeat it to others. **A knowledge of the faults of Christians will be only a cause of stumbling to the unbelieving world; and by dwelling upon these things, we ourselves can receive only harm; for it is by beholding that we become changed.** While we seek to correct the errors of a brother, the Spirit of Christ will lead us to shield him, as far as possible, from the criticism of even his own brethren, and how much more from the censure of the unbelieving world. We ourselves are erring, and need Christ's pity and forgiveness, and just as we wish Him to deal with us, He bids us deal with one another. {DA 441.4}

"*Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*" You are acting as the ambassadors of heaven, and the issues of your work are for eternity. {DA 442.1}

But we are not to bear this great responsibility alone. **Wherever His word is obeyed with a sincere heart, there Christ abides. Not only is He present in the assemblies of the church, but wherever disciples, however few, meet in His name, there also He will be.** And He says, "*If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven.*" {DA 442.2}

Jesus says, "*My Father which is in heaven,*" as reminding His disciples that while by His humanity He is linked with them, a sharer in their trials, and sympathizing with them in their sufferings, by His divinity He is connected with the throne of the Infinite. Wonderful assurance! The heavenly intelligences unite with men in sympathy and labor for the saving of that which was lost. And all the power of heaven is brought to combine with human ability in drawing souls to Christ." {DA 442.3}

"There are in the church unconsecrated, unconverted men and women who think more of maintaining their own dignity and their own opinions than they do of the salvation of their fellow creatures; and Satan works upon these to stir up difficulties that consume the time and labor of the minister, and many souls are lost as the result. {5T 616.1}

**While the members of the church are in a divided state of feeling, their hearts are hard and unimpressible. The efforts of the minister are like blows upon cold iron, and each party becomes more set in his own way than before. The minister is placed in a most unenviable position; for, though he should decide ever so wisely, his decision must displease someone, and thus the party spirit is strengthened.** {5T 616.2}

If the minister makes his home with some one family, others are sure to be jealous lest he shall

receive impressions unfavorable to themselves. If he gives counsel, some will say, "Such a one has been talking with him," and his words have no weight with them. **Thus their souls are armed with distrust and evil surmising, and the minister is left at the mercy of their prejudices and jealousies...**

Ministers and lay members of the church displease God when they allow individuals to tell them the errors and faults of their brethren. They should not listen to these reports, but should inquire: Have you strictly followed the injunctions of your Saviour? Have you gone to the offender and told him his faults between you and him alone? And has he refused to hear you? "Have you carefully and prayerfully taken two or three others, and labored with him in tenderness, humility, and meekness, your heart throbbing with love for his soul?" If the Captain's orders, in the rules given for the erring, have been strictly followed, then an advance step is to be taken-tell it to the church, and **let action be taken in the case according to the Scriptures. Then it is that heaven will ratify the decision made by the church in cutting off the offending member if he does not repent.** If these steps have not been taken, close the ear to complaints, and thus refuse to take up a reproach against your neighbor. If there were no brethren and sisters to do this, evil tongues would soon cease; for they would not find so favorable a field in which to work in biting and devouring one another." {5T 616.4}

"He [Jesus] bids us go to the one who has fallen into temptation, and labor with him alone. **If it is not possible to help him, because of the darkness of his mind and his separation from God, we are to try again with two or three others. If the wrong is not righted, then, and only then, we are to tell it to the church.** It is far better if wrongs can be righted and injuries healed without bringing the matter before the whole church." {5T 646.2}

"The Lord would teach His people to acknowledge the justice of His corrections, that others may fear. There were those in Israel whom the warning of this terrible judgment might save from presuming upon God's forbearance until they, too, should seal their own destiny. The divine rebuke is upon that false sympathy for the sinner which endeavors to excuse his sin. It is the effect of sin to deaden the moral perceptions, so that the wrongdoer does not realize the enormity of transgression, and without the convicting power of the Holy Spirit he remains in partial blindness to his sin. **It is the duty of Christ's servants to show these erring ones their peril. Those who destroy the effect of the warning by blinding the eyes of sinners to the real character and results of sin often flatter themselves that they thus give evidence of their charity; but they are working directly to oppose and hinder the work of God's Holy Spirit; they are lulling the sinner to rest on the brink of destruction; they are making themselves partakers in his guilt and incurring a fearful responsibility for his impenitence.** Many, many, have gone down to ruin as the result of this false and deceptive sympathy." {PP 361.2}

"Reproofs always hurt human nature. Many are the souls that have been destroyed by the unwise sympathy of their brethren; for, because the brethren sympathized with them, they thought they must indeed have been abused, and that the reprover was all wrong and had a bad spirit. The only hope for sinners in Zion is to fully see and confess their wrongs, and put them away. **Those who step in to destroy the edge of sharp reproof that God sends, saying that the reprover was partly wrong and the reproved was not just right, please the enemy.** Any way that Satan can devise to make the reproofs of none effect will accomplish his design. **Some will lay blame upon the one whom God has sent with a message of warning, saying, He is too severe; and in so doing they become responsible for the soul of the sinner whom God desired to save, and to whom, because He loved him, He sent correction, that he might humble his soul before God and put his sins from him.** These false sympathizers will have an account to settle with the Master by-and-by for their work of death." {3T 329.1}

"In almost every case where reproof is necessary, there will be some who entirely overlook the fact that the Spirit of the Lord has been grieved and His cause reproached. **These will pity those**

who deserved reproof, because personal feelings have been hurt. All this unsanctified sympathy places the sympathizers where they are sharers in the guilt of the one reproved. In nine cases out of ten if the one reproved had been left under a sense of his wrongs, he might have been helped to see them and thereby have been reformed. But meddling, unsanctified sympathizers place altogether a wrong construction upon the motives of the reprover and the nature of the reproof given, and by sympathizing with the one reproved lead him to feel that he has been really abused; and his feelings rise up in rebellion against the one who has only done his duty. **Those who faithfully discharge their unpleasant duties under a sense of their accountability to God will receive His blessing.** [VOL. 3, P. 359 (1875).] {5T 679.1}

“Be determined that you will not shun the disagreeable part of the work, and by unfaithfulness be a partner to the ruin of some human soul. If we are Christians indeed, we shall have in us the spirit of Him who died for the perishing. **We shall love the erring and the sinner too well to flatter him, and thus encourage him in his course of wrong-doing.** We must watch for souls as they that must give an account. **We must be sure that we display that love that is holy and sanctified, not that favor which savors of sentimentalism.** There is an abundance of this counterfeit current in the world; but it is not current with God. We must unfurl the banner which the Eternal has given to us to be displayed in the world. If we are true to God in minor matters, we shall have a holy boldness when we are called upon to make wise decisions, and shall be enabled to have a close walk with God, and be laborers together with God.” {RH, September 28, 1897 par. 12}

“If persons are as deserving of being separated from the church as Satan was of being cast out of heaven, they will have sympathizers. **There is always a class who are more influenced by individuals than they are by the Spirit of God and sound principles;** and, in their unconsecrated state, **these are ever ready to take sides with the wrong and give their pity and sympathy to the very ones who least deserve it.** These sympathizers have a powerful influence with others; things are seen in a perverted light, great harm is done, and many souls are ruined.” {3T 114.2}

“Those who so readily sympathize with the wrong consider it a virtue; but they realize not that they are exerting a scattering influence, and that they themselves help to carry out Satan's plans. I saw that many souls have been destroyed by their brethren unwisely sympathizing with them, when their only hope was to be left to see and realize the full extent of their wrongs. But as they eagerly accept the sympathy of unwise brethren, they receive the idea that they are abused; and if they attempt to retrace their steps, they make halfhearted work. They divide the matter to suit their natural feelings, lay blame upon the reprover, and so patch up the matter. It is not probed to the bottom, and is not healed, and they again fall into the same wrong, because they were not left to feel the extent of their wrong, and humble themselves before God, and let Him build them up. False sympathizers have worked in direct opposition to the mind of Christ and ministering angels. Ministers of Christ should arise and engage in the work of God with all their energies. **God's servants are not excused if they shun pointed testimony. They should reprove and rebuke wrong, and not suffer sin upon a brother.**” {1T 213.1}

*“If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.”* **Let the church take action in regard to its members.** *“But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”* **If he will not heed the voice of the church, if he refuses all the efforts made to reclaim him, upon the church rests the responsibility of separating him from fellowship. His name should then be stricken from the books.** No church officer should advise, no committee should recommend, nor should any church vote, that the name of a wrong-doer shall be removed from the church books, until the instruction given by Christ has been faithfully followed. When this has been done, the church has cleared herself before God. **The evil must then be made to appear as it is, and must be removed, that it may not become more and more widespread.** The health

and purity of the church must be preserved, that she may stand before God unsullied, clad in the robes of Christ's righteousness. If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. **They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance.** And however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit, **and by confessing and forsaking his sin gives evidence of repentance,** he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted." {GW 501.2}

"The eternal God has drawn the line of distinction between the saint and the sinner, between converted and unconverted. The two classes do not blend into each other imperceptibly, like the colors of a rainbow, but are as distinct as midday and midnight. **God's people cannot with safety enter into intimate associations with those who know the truth, but do not practice it.** The patriarch Jacob, when speaking of certain deeds of his sons, which he contemplated with horror, exclaimed, "*O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united.*" He felt that his own honor would be compromised if he associated with sinners in their doings. **He lifted the danger signal, warning us to shun wrong associations, lest we become tainted with evil.** And the Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, utters a similar warning, "*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" {YI, February 4, 1897 par. 10}

**"Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. *Reprove, rebuke, exhort,*" the Lord says, *"with all long-suffering and doctrine."* 2 Tim. 4:2. Deal faithfully with wrongdoing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. **Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbathbreaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil.** *"They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."* Gal. 5:21. If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God's word is pronounced upon them in heaven. **In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs,** and her action is ratified in heaven. **He who despises the authority of the church despises the authority of Christ Himself.** {DA 805.4}**

"The work of the believers had been given them by God. By their faithful adherence to the truth they were to give to others the light which they had received. The apostle bade them not to become weary in well-doing, and pointed them to his own example of diligence in temporal matters while laboring with untiring zeal in the cause of Christ. He reproved those who had given themselves up to sloth and aimless excitement, and directed that *"with quietness they work, and eat their own bread."* **He also enjoined upon the church to separate from their fellowship anyone who should persist in disregarding the instruction given by God's ministers.** "Yet," he added, *"count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."* {AA 267.2}

"Many do not realize the sacredness of church relationship and are loath to submit to restraint and discipline. Their course of action shows that they exalt their own judgment above that of the united church, and they are not careful to guard themselves lest they encourage a spirit of opposition to its voice. **Those who hold responsible positions in the church may have faults in common with other people and may err in their decisions; but notwithstanding this, the church of Christ on earth has given to them an authority that cannot be lightly esteemed.** Christ, after His resurrection, delegated power unto His church, saying: *"Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained."* {4T 17.2}

Church relationship is not to be lightly canceled; yet **when the path of some professed follow-**

**ers of Christ is crossed, or when their voice has not the controlling influence which they think it deserves, they will threaten to leave the church.** True, in leaving the church they would themselves be the greatest sufferers; for in withdrawing beyond the pale of its influence, they subject themselves to the full temptations of the world. {4T 17.3}

Every believer should be wholehearted in his attachment to the church. **Its prosperity should be his first interest, and unless he feels under sacred obligations to make his connection with the church a benefit to it in preference to himself, it can do far better without him.** It is in the power of all to do something for the cause of God." {4T 18.1}

## **Church Discipline**

"In dealing with erring church-members, God's people are carefully to follow the instruction given by the Saviour in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew. [SEE MATT. 18: 15-18.]

Human beings are Christ's property, purchased by Him at an infinite price, bound to Him by the love that He and His Father have manifested for them. How careful, then, we should be in our dealing with one another! Men have no right to surmise evil in regard to their fellow-men. Church-members have no right to follow their own impulses and inclinations in dealing with fellow-members who have erred. They should not even express their prejudices regarding the erring; for thus they place in other minds the leaven of evil. Reports unfavorable to a brother or sister in the church are communicated from one to another of the church-members. Mistakes are made and injustice is done because of an unwillingness on the part of some one to follow the directions given by the Lord Jesus.

"If thy brother shall trespass against thee," Christ declared, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Do not tell others of the wrong. One person is told, then another, and still another; and continually the report grows, and the evil increases, till the whole church is made to suffer. Settle the matter "between thee and him alone." This is God's plan.

"Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame. Debate thy cause with thy neighbor himself; and discover not a secret to another." [PROV. 25:8, 9.] Do not suffer sin upon your brother; but do not expose him, and thus increase the difficulty, making the reproof seem like a revenge. Correct him in the way outlined in the word of God.

Do not suffer resentment to ripen into malice. Do not allow the wound to fester and break out in poisoned words, which taint the minds of those who hear. Do not allow bitter thoughts to continue to fill your mind and his. Go to your brother, and in humility and sincerity talk with him about the matter.

Whatever the character of the offense, this does not change the plan that God has made for the settlement of misunderstandings and personal injuries. Speaking alone and in the spirit of Christ to the one who is in fault, will often remove the difficulty. Go to the erring one, with a heart filled with Christ's love and sympathy, and seek to adjust the matter. Reason with him calmly and quietly. Let no angry words escape your lips. Speak in a way that will appeal to his better judgment. Remember the words, "He which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." [JAMES 5:20.]

Take to your brother the remedy that will cure the disease of disaffection. Do your part to help him. For the sake of the peace and unity of the church, feel it a privilege as well as a duty to do this. If he will hear you, you have gained him as a friend.

All heaven is interested in the interview between the one who has been injured and the one who is in error. As the erring one accepts the reproof offered in the love of Christ, and acknowledges his wrong, asking forgiveness from God and from his brother, the sunshine of heaven fills his heart. The controversy is ended; friendship and confidence are restored. The oil of love removes the soreness caused by the wrong; the Spirit of God binds heart to heart; and there is music in heaven over the union brought about.

As those thus united in Christian fellowship offer prayer to God, and pledge themselves to deal

justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God, great blessing comes to them. If they have wronged others, they continue the work of repentance, confession, and restitution, fully set to do good to one another. This is the fulfilling of the law of Christ.

"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." Take with you those who are spiritually minded, and talk with the one in error in regard to the wrong. He may yield to the united appeals of his brethren. As he sees their agreement in the matter, his mind may be enlightened.

"And if he shall neglect to hear them," what then shall be done? Shall a few persons in a board meeting take upon themselves the responsibility of disfellowshipping the erring one? "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church." Let the church take action in regard to its members.

"But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." If he will not heed the voice of the church, if he refuses all the efforts made to reclaim him, upon the church rests the responsibility of separating him from fellowship. His name should then be stricken from the books.

No church officer should advise, no committee should recommend, nor should any church vote, that the name of a wrong-doer shall be removed from the church books, until the instruction given by Christ has been faithfully followed. When this has been done, the church has cleared herself before God. The evil must then be made to appear as it is, and must be removed, that it may not become more and more widespread. The health and purity of the church must be preserved, that she may stand before God unsullied, clad in the robes of Christ's righteousness.

If the erring one repents and submits to Christ's discipline, he is to be given another trial. And even if he does not repent, even if he stands outside the church, God's servants still have a work to do for him. They are to seek earnestly to win him to repentance. And however aggravated may have been his offense, if he yields to the striving of the Holy Spirit, and by confessing and forsaking his sin gives evidence of repentance, he is to be forgiven and welcomed to the fold again. His brethren are to encourage him in the right way, treating him as they would wish to be treated were they in his place, considering themselves, lest they also be tempted.

"Verily I say unto you," Christ continued, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This statement holds its force in all ages. On the church has been conferred the power to act in Christ's stead. It is God's instrumentality for the preservation of order and discipline among His people. To it the Lord has delegated the power to settle all questions respecting its prosperity, purity, and order. Upon it rests the responsibility of excluding from its fellowship those who are unworthy, who by their unchristlike conduct would bring dishonor on the truth. Whatever the church does that is in accordance with the directions given in God's word, will be ratified in heaven. **{GW 501.4}**

## Remission of Sins

"Whosoever sins ye remit," said Christ, "they are remitted; . . . and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." [JOHN 20:23.] Christ here gives no liberty for any man to pass judgment upon others. In the sermon on the mount He forbade this. It is the prerogative of God. But on the church in its organized capacity He places a responsibility for the individual members. Toward those who fall into sin, the church has a duty, to warn, to instruct, and if possible to restore. "Reprove, rebuke, exhort," the Lord says, "with all long-suffering and doctrine." [2 TIM. 4:2.]

Deal faithfully with wrong-doing. Warn every soul that is in danger. Leave none to deceive themselves. Call sin by its right name. Declare what God has said in regard to lying, Sabbath-breaking, stealing, idolatry, and every other evil. "They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." [GAL. 5:21.] If they persist in sin, the judgment you have declared from God's word is pronounced upon them in heaven. In choosing to sin, they disown Christ; the church must show that she does not sanction their deeds, or she herself dishonors her Lord. She must say about sin what God says about it. She must deal with it as God directs, and her action is ratified in heaven. He who

despises the authority of the church, despises the authority of Christ Himself.

But there is a brighter side to the picture. "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted." Let this thought be kept uppermost. In labor for the erring, let every eye be directed to Christ. Let the shepherds have a tender care for the flock of the Lord's pasture. Let them speak to the erring of the forgiving mercy of the Saviour. Let them encourage the sinner to repent, and believe in Him who can pardon. Let them declare, on the authority of God's word, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." [1 JOHN 1:9.] All who repent have the assurance, "He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." [MICAH 7:19.]

Let the repentance of the sinner be accepted by the church with grateful hearts. Let the repenting one be led out from the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith and righteousness. Let his trembling hand be placed in the loving hand of Jesus. Such a remission is ratified in heaven.--"The Desire of Ages," pages 805, 806. **{GW 503.2}**

### **Some More SOP References:**

#### **CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

evils that call for: adultery AH 346  
disbelief re Testimonies by the well-enlightened 1T 328-9, 382-3  
dishonoring truth by un-Christlike conduct GW 502; 7T 263  
forbidden exhibitions of pride in dress 4T 647-8  
impenitence 5BC 1096; DA 805-6; GW 500-1; 7T 262-3  
licentiousness AA 303-4  
manufacture of hard cider or fermented wine 5T 359  
open sin COL 71; DA 656; TM 449-50  
persistent disregard for instruction given by ministers AA 267-8  
persisting in profligacy AA 300  
refusal to give up error 1T 117  
stubborn persistence in remaining at variance 5T 241  
wronging the unfortunate 3T 517-8  
must be administered by vote of church GW 500; 7T 262-3  
neglect of, let there be no 7T 264  
parents who should be subject to 5T 327  
rigid and impartial, need of 5T 538

#### **CHURCH CENSURE**

Church censure, place rebellious members under, who manufacture hard cider or fermented wine for market 5T 359

#### **CHURCH FELLOWSHIP**

conduct by which member severs himself from DA 441  
dismissal of members from, who propagate error 1T 117  
members who should be separated from AA 267-8; 5BC 1096; 7T 262-3; TM 128

#### **CHURCH BOOK**

having your name on: does not make you true Christian CS 84; 2T 168; 5T 52  
does not guarantee that you are faithful MYP 139  
is not enough COL 312  
is not salvation Ev 319; 2SM 381; 9T 48  
names should be dropped from, only by vote of church GW 500-1; 7T 262-3  
names that should be stricken from 5BC 1096; GW 500-1; 7T 262