

THE INTERCONTINENTAL CHURCH OF GOD

SPECIFIC BIBLE STUDIES - THE MATTHEW 18 PROCESS

SUBJECT: Matthew 18 Process - Going to your offending brother.

QUESTIONS: what is the Matthew 18 Process? What is the goal of this process? What are the specific procedures of this process?

ANSWER:

The purpose of this Bible study is to bring clarity to an often abused and misunderstood process designed to maintain love, forgiveness and harmony in the Church of God. This process came from the very lips of our Savior, Jesus Christ right after He had discussed...

1. That we humble ourselves as little children.
2. That those who would offend members of the church should have a millstone placed on his neck and his body thrown into the abyss of the sea.
3. The parable of the Lost Sheep, where He states, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones (members of the church). For the Son of man is come to save that which is lost...and the will of the Father is that not one of His sheep should perish."

Why, then, has church history seen just the opposite when it comes to this very important process? Instead of one with the attitude of a humble child do we often see someone greatly offended, calling for an investigation, justice, revenge and even the destruction of his brother and his banishment from the very Church of God? As we are about to see, the Matthew 18 process is none of these things.

This Bible study will be followed by a Question & Answer section. Feel free to submit additional questions [here](#).

The Matthew 18 process is actually derived from 3 verses in Matthew 18:

Matt 18:15-17

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.

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.

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 an heathen man and a publican.

In early 2001, in a sermon, Mr. Armstrong stated that he had rarely seen a Matthew 18 process carried out correctly.

THREE-STEP PROCESS

The Matthew 18 Process is a distinct 3-step process.

Step One: Go to the alleged offending brother ALONE.

Step Two: If Step One fails, take one or two witnesses and go again to this brother. At this meeting, let these witnesses hear, for the first time, the situation between you and your brother. See comments on this step [below](#).

Step Three: If Step Two fails, take this issue to the church, which often means the ministry.

See diagram of this three-step process [here](#)

Percentages:

Step One should resolve 95% of all situations without anyone else in the congregation even being aware anything happened. **Step Two** should be invoked in the remaining 3-4% with 80% of them having resolution in this second step. This leaves only about 1% of all "offenses" ever having to come before the ministry. Why? Because it is assumed that the congregation is living by every word of God (Matthew 4), has put on Christ (Galatians 3:27) and are acting as a "living sacrifice" before God (Romans 12:1-2). A true firstfruit "seeks not his own" (1 Corinthians 10:24).

See additional verses here. Read these over BEFORE invoking the Matthew 18 Process.

EXCERPT FROM OUR DOCTRINE

There is only one reference to Matthew 18:15-17 in our doctrine

From our Doctrinal Statement: Our Relationship With Our Fellow Man---page 188

"Associated with jury duty is the question of whether a Christian should seek legal redress through the legal system. I Corinthians 6:1-9 categorically states that a Christian should not go to court against a fellow Christian. It says to do so is a "shame" (v. 5) and the one who does so has "[done] wrong" (I Cor. 6:8). Matthew 18:15-20 adds that a Christian who feels that he has been wronged by his brother should approach that brother personally to resolve the problem. If the brother will not hear, he should take one or two witnesses and approach the man again. If he will still not respond, the injured party should take the matter to the officials of the church where a judgment can be made. (There are, of course, areas over which the civil authorities have total authority, i.e., the legal granting of divorce; in such cases, the civil courts must be resorted to, but only after all Christian duties toward a brother or a sister have been fulfilled.)

"The question of whether a Christian should take a non-Christian to court is more complex. Obviously, a Christian should still use the same basic approach outlined in Matthew 18 - first trying to resolve the issue between him and the offending party. However, it is equally obvious that a non-Christian will not abide by, or submit himself to, the authority of the Christian's church. This means that if a matter is still unresolved, a Christian may take a legal dispute to the recognized civil authorities (to whose authority the non-Christian will, of course, have to submit). The question of whether a Christian should take one to court under these circumstances must be an individual decision, based upon a balance between the principles of Christian forgiveness and the man's responsibility to maintain his own integrity and rights before the laws of God and of man."

Note: From this, it would seem that the process is not a negative one. The element of forgiveness is even the focus of a Christian's difficulties with a non-member. If there is to be forgiveness with the non-Christian; how much more should it be with the Christian brother? The Matthew 18 process has a positive goal (stated in verse 15), which is to gain your brother. Therefore, this process is not about investigations or seeking to destroy a brother, but rather to resolve differences and to reconcile.

WHAT DO THESE VERSES SAY?

VERSE 15 -The mission of the Matthew 18 Process

Matt 18:15-17

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.

Conclusions:

- a)** One brother has sinned a sin. This sin affected or was against another brother or the sin offended the brother.
- b)** The offended brother goes and tells the offender and states what the sin or situation was.
- c)** Notice that it says "fault" which is singular. Therefore, this process should be limited to one sin/fault at a time or at least one situation at a time.

d) It is implied that this process should take place as soon as possible after the infraction. The sooner this situation can be addressed, the lesser chance of negative feelings or anger simmering and escalating into something more profound. Notice the commentar...

Matt 18:15-20

Go, and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. Let this be compared with, and explained by, Lev 19:17, Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart; that is, "If thou hast conceived a displeasure at thy brother for any injury he hath done thee, do not suffer thy resentments to ripen into a secret malice (like a wound, which is most dangerous when it bleed inwardly), but give vent to them in a mild and grave admonition, let them so spend themselves, and they will expire the sooner; do not go and rail against him behind his back, but thou shalt in any ways reprove him

(from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition)

Conclusions:

e) The offended brother goes to the offender ALONE. There is nothing to indicate that the offended brother went to a minister or the church first. There is no indication that he goes to other brothers first.

f) The phrase "if he shall hear thee" is a clear indication that the offending brother acknowledges the situation and does not spurn nor abuse the offended brother (see more on this below in discussion of verse 16). It also seems clear that we have a clear and open indication of sin. The sin or offense is a given. If a sin, it should be clear what law has been broken.

If the offended brother merely has an opinion or only suspects a sin, we may have a problem.

WHAT IF NO SIN OR OFFENSE WAS ACTUALLY COMMITTED?

We have a major consideration at this point: What if no sin was committed?

Matthew 18:15-17 states the process with a given that there was, in fact, a sin or valid offense, that is, a brother was truly offended in some valid way. However, what do we do when there was no sin? For example:

A] What if the offended brother merely has a suspicion of an offense? "I am offended because I suspect that you are committing adultery with a woman, not your wife."

B] What if the offended brother is wrong in his accusation? For example, "You lied to me the other day." (fact: He did not lie)

C] What if the offended brother is lying? What if the offended brother actually hates the person he is accusing? What if the offended brother is seeking to bring his brother down or to put him in a less than favorable light with his superiors, such as the ministry? What if the offended brother is attempting to expel or oust his brother from a position in the church or even the ministry?

This aspect needs to be addressed at the church administration level. The verses are for clearly valid situations where a sin or fault is a given element.

VERSE 16

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.

Conclusions:

a) It seems clear that these should be unbiased witnesses and not friends of the offended person or in any way predisposed against the offender. Actually, one commentary feels they should be friends of the offending person. Notice:

Matt 18:16

[Take with thee one or two more] The design of taking them seems to be,

1. That he might be induced to listen to them, Matt 18:17. They should be persons of influence or authority; his personal friends, or those in whom he could put confidence.

IMPORTANT ELEMENT: Point number one above is being read from a Bible commentary. Add to this what years of experience has shown the church:

a) These one or two witnesses should not be members of the ministry.

b) They should not be close, personal friends of the offended member. Better that they are friends of the alleged offender or better yet, members of the congregation not particularly close to either party. They should be people of some respect within the congregation - people of "good report."

c) THESE ONE OR TWO WITNESSES SHOULD NOT BE BRIEFED OF THE CONTENT OF THE OFFENSE UNTIL THEY ARE BROUGHT TO THE ALLEGED OFFENDER. They should hear the case for the first time at this meeting where offended and alleged offender are present

2. That they might be witnesses of his conduct before the church, Matt 18:17. The law of Moses required two or three witnesses, Deut 19:15; 2 Cor 13:1; John 8:17.

(from Barnes' Notes)

b) It would seem appropriate that the offended person should only tell these witnesses that they are needed for step 2 of the process and no more. There should not be any mention of the offense. They are to be witnesses WITHIN THE PROCESS and not outside of it. They should only be made privy to the situation at the Step 2 meeting. The reason for this is the same as why a brother should go to his brother as soon as possible after the offense, to wit, so that negative feelings and anger have no time to simmer and build over a period of time prior to the actual Step 2 meeting.

c) Regarding the phrase in the verse, "But if he will not hear thee": Notice the commentary:

Matt 18:16

[But if he will not hear thee ...] That is, if he spurns or abuses you, or will not be entreated by you, and will not reform.

(from Barnes' Notes)

Note: So, this offending brother is not just refusing to acknowledge the offense, he is willingly spurning and abusing the brother and possibly the witnesses (his friends). This seems to be a clear indication of a person with a bad attitude. Also, this phrase of "hearing the brother" is not necessarily a copping to a sin, but being of a good attitude during the process.

For a successful process, both the offended and the offender must be of a Christian attitude, allowing for the power of the Holy Spirit to have its way.

VERSE 17

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 an heathen man and a publican.

Conclusions:

A] Again, the indication is that the offender is abusing the process and the people involved. There is no repentance and no asking of forgiveness. He may actually be falling under the element of willingly sinning.

B] Some have asked me about the phrase here, "tell it unto the church." Does this mean the entire local congregation or rather the Headquarters elders? Notice a commentary...

Matt 18:17

[Tell it unto the church] Lay the whole matter before the congregation of Christian believers, in that place of which he is a member, or before the minister and elders, as the representatives of the church or assembly.

(from Adam Clarke's Commentary)

It would seem, by the latter part of the verse that the local congregation will be brought into this, if for no other reason than to tell them that this offender with the willingly abusive attitude is no longer welcome in that

congregation.

Clearly, depending upon the situation between the offender and the offended, the whole local congregation could easily be brought into this situation in short order. Clearly another reason why this process should be swift before it spreads and possibly causes damage to the church.

I would hope that most Matthew 18 processes move swiftly to a successful and loving end.

COMMENTARY ON ALL THREE VERSES

I will end this paper with some commentary on all three verses.

Matt 18:15; Matt 18:16; Matt 18:17

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.

[Moreover, if thy brother] The word "brother," here, evidently means a fellow-professor of religion. Christians are called brethren because they belong to the same redeemed family, having a common Father-God; and because they are united in the same feelings, objects, and destiny.

[Trespass against thee] That is, injure thee in any way, by words or conduct. The original word means sin against thee. This may be done by injuring the character, person, or property.

[Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone] This was required under the law, Lev 19:17. In the original it is "go and reprove him." Seek an explanation of his conduct, and if he has done wrong, administer a friendly and brotherly reproof. This is required to be done alone:

1. That he may have an opportunity of explaining his conduct. In nine cases out of ten, where one supposes that he has been injured, a little friendly conversation would set the matter right and prevent difficulty.

Note: An important point: The offender has the opportunity to explain (not justify, but explain). Some in the church have taken the absurd (in my opinion) of not allowing an explanation, assuming that the accusation is valid merely by being brought forth.

2. That he may have an opportunity of acknowledging his offence or making reparation, if he has done wrong. Many would be glad of such an opportunity, and it is our duty to furnish it by calling on them.

3. That we may admonish them of their error if they have done an injury to the cause of religion. This should not be blazoned abroad. It can do no good-it does injury; it is what the enemies of religion wish. Christ is often wounded in the house of his friends; and religion, as well as an injured brother, often suffers by spreading such faults before the world.

Note: Another good point: If the Matthew 18 process is not correctly carried out, the church will experience harm.

[Thou hast gained thy brother] To gain means, sometimes, to preserve or to save, 1 Cor 9:19. Here it means thou hast preserved him, or restored him, to be a consistent Christian. Perhaps it may include the idea, also, thou hast reconciled him to thyself-thou hast gained him as a Christian brother.

Note: This clearly shows that the purpose of this process is to preserve and reconcile.

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.

[But if he will not hear thee ...] That is, if he spurns or abuses you, or will not be entreated by you, and will not reform.

[Take with thee one or two more] The design of taking them seems to be,

1. That he might be induced to listen to them, Matt 18:17. They should be persons of influence or authority; his personal friends, or those in whom he could put confidence.

2. That they might be witnesses of his conduct before the church, Matt 18:17. The law of Moses required two or three witnesses, Deut 19:15; 2 Cor 13:1; John 8:17.

Matthew 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 an heathen man and a publican.

[Tell it to the church] See the notes at Matt 16:18. The church may here mean the whole assembly of believers, or it may mean those who are authorized to try such cases-the representatives of the church, or these who act for the church. In the Jewish synagogue there was a bench of elders before whom trials of this kind were brought. It was to be brought to the church in order that he might be admonished, entreated, and, if possible, reformed. This was, and is always to be, the first business in disciplining an offending brother.

[But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be ...] The Jews gave the name "heathen" or "Gentile" to all other nations but themselves. With them they had no religious contact or communion.

[Publican] See the notes at Matt 5:47. Publicans were people of abandoned character, and the Jews would have no contact with them. The meaning of this is, cease to have religious contact with him, or to acknowledge him as a Christian brother. It does not mean that we should cease to show kindness to him and aid him in affliction or trial, for that is required toward all people; but it means that we should disown him as a Christian brother, and treat him as we do other people not connected with the church. This should not be done until all these steps are taken. This is the only way of kindness. This is the only way to preserve peace and purity in the church.

(from Barnes' Notes)

ELEMENTS THAT SHOULD NOT BE PRESENT IN A MATTHEW 18 PROCESS Following are some elements or situations that should not be included in the process:

1. The church should not be an investigation cult.
2. The Matthew 18 process should not be one of investigation.
3. The individuals in this process should not harbor hate.
4. The process should not be used to unseat a person from a position, including members of the ministry.
5. The elders should not be approached in steps 1 or 2.
6. The offender should not be presented with long lists of offenses covering months and years of specific offenses.
7. The process should not include imputing of motive.
8. The process should not include mere suspicion.
9. **NO ELDER SHOULD, AT ANY TIME, LISTEN TO ONE SIDE OF THE STORY WITHOUT HEARING THE OTHER SIDE AT THE SAME TIME. Notice...**

Deut 19:16-20

16 If a false witness rise up against any man to testify against him that which is wrong;

17 Then both the men, between whom the controversy is, shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days;

18 And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother;

19 Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you.

20 And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you.

Note: This is not really related to a Matthew 18 process, but rather a situation where one toward another is bringing accusations. The point is, that as soon as the controversy between two brothers arises, get this before the elder who will hear both sides at the SAME TIME.

At the moment an elder enters the Matthew 18 process, the elder should hear both sides at the same time so as to better ascertain truth and to bring the situation to a swift end.

ELEMENTS THAT SHOULD BE PRESENT IN A MATTHEW 18 PROCESS

1. It should be coupled in love.
2. It should be composed of members who are "spring-loaded to forgiveness".
3. It should be a short and swift process. The meeting should be of short duration.
4. It should have an end.
5. It should concern itself with ONE fault or sin at a time.
6. It should be invoked as soon as possible after the one fault takes place.
7. It should MAINTAIN harmony in the congregation.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question 1: What if I have been offended by my minister?

Answer: There are a number of possible factors here:

1. Was the minister in the process of correcting you with just cause?
2. Was he correcting you without just cause or do you believe this the case?
3. Has the minister become a false minister as per Matthew 7:15-20?
4. Is the minister seeking to cause division?
5. Is the minister openly sinning as per 1 Timothy 5:20-21 (rebuking of an elder)?
6. Is the offense of the nature which is common and has nothing to do with him being in the ministry?

Factor 1] Being corrected should not offend anyone. We should seek to be corrected on a continual basis. Much of this correction should be SELF-correction by immersing ourselves into the Word of God, which is Spirit and which cuts to the intent of our actions (Hebrews 4:12).

Factor 2] If one feels the correction was unjust, he or she should counsel with that minister. If there is no resolution, take it first to your Area Coordinator and then to minister, Mr. Stan Roberts. Contact him in detail by e-mail or phone.

Factor 3] One becomes a false minister when he is preaching contrary to the scriptures. The word "fruit" in these scriptures means "close adherence to scripture". If you feel this the case, go to him first. If no resolution, take this to Mr. Stan Roberts. Keep in mind that any minister could make a mistake or simply be in error without knowingly preaching contrary to the scriptures. The minister, Apollos was in error, but was corrected and went on as a faithful minister (Acts 18).

Factor 4] Go first to this minister. If no resolution, take this first to the Area Coordinator and then to Mr. Stan Roberts.

Factor 5] In this case, the minister is openly sinning. Go to him and point this out. If he refuses to repent or there is no resolution, take it to the local elders, according to scripture. If none present in your local congregation, contact your Area Coordinator and then Mr. Stan Roberts.

Factor 6] In this case, proceed according to the Matthew 18 process as outlined above. In this case, the one or two witnesses COULD be ordained but this is not absolutely necessary depending on the situation, simple to complex.

In none of these cases is the offended to act in anger or (self-) righteous indignation or with strong emotion to get rid of this person from their midst. Proceed in peace and love, as discussed above. Never should anyone in the congregation be subjected to name-calling or gossip. Remember Hebrews 12:14.