

# **The Old Hickory Bulletin**

## **Old Hickory Church of Christ**

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### **A Closer Look at Matthew 18:15-17**

"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. 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. 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." (Matthew 18:15-17)

This passage is second only to Matthew 7:1 ("Judge not") in popularity among the replies given by those who have been called out for their sins and their sympathizers. It is especially invoked when one publicly sins in word or deed and is immediately or shortly publicly rebuked for his transgression. The one rebuked and his sympathizers often throw this passage back at the one doing the public rebuking. "You are also guilty because you did not first come to me, or go to him privately, like the Bible says."

These verses are not dealing with sin committed publicly. It is the pattern for dealing with private sin known only to the offender and offended. It has two objectives: to gain a brother and to keep private sins as private as possible. Notice the progression from being known by two individuals (the offender and the offended alone). If it is resolved at this level it need not be known by anyone else. If not resolved by the two alone, then it is made known to two or three more called upon to help resolve it. If this fails, then it is made public by telling it to the church. Then if the church cannot persuade the offender to correct it, then he is to be treated as a "heathen and tax collector" (the same as withdrawing and having no company with as in 2 Thessalonians 3). In this scenario, the sin began privately between only two people and then progresses to public knowledge only if private efforts to gain the offender's repentance is not accomplished.

Insisting on invoking this pattern to be applied to sin already public knowledge reduces the first two steps to mere formalities to say nothing of being unnecessary. When sin is

publicly committed it is already past the first two steps of our text. It is being publicly made known as it is being committed. It is known by the church.

Just one other observation about this passage. There is an idea that renders this passage totally unnecessary. If the offending party in a sin is to be unconditionally granted forgiveness by the offended party even before he repents then it makes this whole instruction unnecessary. If this be the case, then the instruction of these verses could be greatly reduced. It would read, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and put your arm around him and tell him that you love him and forgive him." Then one could go on his way feeling great that he has a forgiving spirit – while leaving the offender still guilty of his fault.

"Behold, the LORD'S hand is not so short That it cannot save; Nor is His ear so dull That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." (Isaiah 59:1-2)  
"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:7)  
- Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

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## You Know What?

[Editor's note: Robert F. Turner (1916-2007) was a gospel preacher who published a monthly bulletin that was very widely circulated throughout the country. Questions were submitted to brother Turner, and he provided a scriptural answer on one of the pages of his bulletin. One such Q&A is presented here for your study.]

Bro. Turner:

Our church does things I know are wrong, but most of the members accept them. I have tried to believe everything is all right, but I know it is not. How long may I continue to take part in and support these errors? L.W.

Reply:

I will be frank — and space forces me to be abrupt — please understand. You do not need answers as much as you need STRENGTH. The basic problem here concerns your attitude toward God, and response to your conscience.

Today thousands are captives — prisoners of their own spiritual wellness — lacking the courage and the strength to act upon convictions. And such weakness is more than a handicap: it is sinful. Fear, that prevents our doing what we know we should do, can condemn our souls (Revelation 21:8 James 4:17).

Paul wrote, "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:22-23). In this passage faith is subjective and refers to the individual's conscience. How can one be true to God, who has not the strength to be true to himself?

It is understandable, and commendable, that one should exercise patience toward those in error — while in an effort to correct the error. But even this does not excuse our own participation in error. Deliberate sin is presumptuous (See Numbers 15:27-31) and God has never, in this or any other age, tolerated such high-handed disrespect for divine authority.

I'll say it plainly, but — believe me — with all the love of my heart: you will go to hell if you continue to support and encourage something you know to be wrong.

- Robert F. Turner, via *Plain Talk*, December, 1973

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## **MAINTAIN THESE PRINCIPLES!**

In 1 Timothy 5:19-21, Paul instructed the young evangelist Timothy: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality."

Sometimes, it may happen that an evangelist is presented with an accusation against an elder. [The preacher's role is to preach the whole counsel of God without fear or favor. The elders' role is to resolve legitimate accusations to the Lord's satisfaction.] Elders can sin just like anyone else, but many times, because of their highly visible role of overseeing the flock, giving them instruction, admonishing the unruly, encouraging the fainthearted, helping the weak, and seeking the good for all (1 Thessalonians 5:12-15), a reaction to their efforts may not be in keeping with fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). They are open targets for criticism, character assassination, slanderous charges and malicious gossip from a wide field of members who may be disgruntled about their actions and decisions. One irresponsible accusation has the power to destroy the reputation and

effectiveness of an elder. The Holy Spirit here provides the way to protect godly elders from such reckless, self-serving, and frivolous accusations.

Any accusation among God's people calls for and requires justice. No man is justly accused by charges that cannot be proven as true. With impending public exposure threatening his honor, the Lord requires confirmation by the mouth of two or three witnesses, a principle of legal procedure quoted several times in scripture (Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1). This requirement certainly illustrates the seriousness of publicly accusing an elder of misconduct. [Note that personal transgression against another brother is initially handled differently (Matthew 18:15-17).] Elders must not be crippled in their effectiveness as shepherds of the flock by any ill-tempered person.

Sometimes, however, Satan may tempt an elder to feel as if he possesses a license to sin, and he does so with public knowledge. In such a case, the church is not without remedy. If he stiffens his resolve and refuses to repent, he must be rebuked "in the presence of all." (i.e., in the assembly of the church, Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:4). When a trusted elder refuses to make correction according to the commands of Christ, his error should have full publicity, and he must forfeit his leadership role as he is no longer qualified for the position. He is subject to church discipline, just like any other Christian.

An additional desired effect of public rebuke is "so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning." Every Christian should cultivate a fear of sinning against the Lord God! All members should come to understand that no Christian is exempt from corrective discipline in the body. Paul's admonition for Timothy to preach these things indicates familiarity with a common scandalous abuse in the dealings of men: preferential treatment. This "good buddy" special treatment has always been sinful among God's people, including elders. There is to be no "bias" and no "partiality." Unsubstantiated charges must not be entertained because a man is disliked; leniency must not proceed from favoritism when a charge is proven. Timothy was seriously charged to maintain these principles without allowing himself to be manipulated by scheming brethren who would willingly disrupt the leadership of the body.

Chastening is not pleasant, but it is necessary for the salvation of souls; it yields righteousness (Hebrews 12:5-11). Fearful reverence for the Lord's will and way must be maintained (cf. Acts 5:11). The faithful will continue to maintain these principles.

- Gary Smalley

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# How Can We Help The Gospel Meeting?

## *Before the Meeting:*

1. Invite everyone: friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, strangers, etc.
2. Advertise on your Social Media.
3. Be positive. Your excitement and enthusiasm can be contagious.
4. Pray.

## *During the Meeting:*

1. Attend every service you can.
2. Be prompt and ahead of time.
3. Greet and welcome all guests.
4. Come prepared to study and worship.
5. Continue to invite others to the meeting.
6. Pray.

## *After the Meeting:*

1. Contact those who visited and thank them for their interest.
2. Reflect on what you learned and share with others. This will reinforce your learning.
3. Look for additional opportunities to spread the gospel.
4. Let others know about resources that are available for Bible study.
5. Invite people to your regularly scheduled worship services.
6. Pray.

- Keith Hamilton

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\* "If some men grew physically at the rate they grow spiritually, they would spend their lives in a play-pen!"

\* "No one ever grows fat on excuses, but everybody gets fed up with them!"

\* "All people make mistakes; that's why they put erasers on pencils!"

\* "It is proper to be on the right track, but if you sit down there you'll get run over!"

\* "Prejudice is a great time-saver; it enables a man to form opinions without bothering to get the facts!"

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# ***What Must I Do To Be Saved?***

## **HEAR THE GOSPEL**

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

## **BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST**

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

## **REPENT OF PAST SINS**

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

## **CONFESS CHRIST**

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

## **BE BAPTIZED**

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

## **LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE**

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)