

BEHAVING LIKE CHRISTIANS

August 18, 2013

Christ's final teaching moment with His disciples in Galilee, before traveling to the coasts of Judea, was prompted by their behavior. They came to Jesus and asked, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:1)? Like so many of His answers, His reply was designed so that these men could come to the proper understanding on their own. The Master Teacher's first demand was that they were to become childlike; keep in mind, He said childlike, not childish. He then began to discuss how followers of God were to get along with each other and live peaceably together (Mt. 18:6-7). After that, he commented on how God loves all of His people and how every single one is precious and priceless to Him (Mt. 18:12-14). The focus was then changed from one who has sinned against his brother to one who has been sinned against by a brother.

What is a Christian to do when he feels like a fellow saint has inflicted some type of harm upon him? Jesus gave the perfect answer for the dilemma when he said, "**Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother**" (Mt. 18:15). In order to come to a better knowledge of the passage, there are several things paramount to our understanding. The first point is that Jesus is talking about a fellow disciple; therefore, the passage applies to Christians, not to the people of the world. The second point is that Christ is talking about sin. That means that if a brother's conduct toward another is a violation of God's law, go and tell him his fault. The third point is that Jesus is talking about real sin, an actual violation of God's law. That is important because many people take offense over personality differences, cultural differences, social and economic differences, and many other types of differences that are not sins against God's commandments. Also, many people become offended over trivial matters that are not sins! Solomon said, "Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins" (Prov. 10:12). The wise man indicates that love covers offenses by being forbearing, conciliatory, and by not imputing another's motive. He cannot be talking about violating God's commandments because all the love in the world cannot hide that from Him, so he must be suggesting the annoyances of life by those around us.

Someone who has a "sensitive disposition" and is often offended is usually not loving nor forbearing, and is usually suspicious of others without real cause. This individual often has a judgmental, suspicious spirit and may be known for attributing bad motives to those they believe have wronged them in some way. God saves all sorts of people in the world, and not all of them will desire to spend a quantity of time together. Therefore, we must learn to coexist and love one another even if we view others or they view us as a little weird! Christ is talking about sin in the passage above, not differences of opinion!

Since He is speaking about sin, one must keep in mind that personal charges must be objectively proven by the guidelines of the Bible and not by personal feelings. If a charge of sin is cast at a brother's feet, it better not be a subjective feeling or an arbitrary sense of injustice. Remember, the one being charged has every right to ask for proof of wrong doing on his part; then if it is provided, he must repent of the sin and ask to be forgiven.

Finally, note that it is a personal sin that is under consideration. Christ is not discussing public sins that are known by the entire congregation, but a sin that is private between two parties. Since this is a private offense, the one who feels offended is obligated to go to the offender privately! If both parties

are willing to behave as Christians ought, they will consent to discussing the perceived offense and follow through with whatever is required to amend it. The Lord demanded, “...go and tell him his fault between you and him alone” (Mt. 18:15). This means it is a private meeting between the two, and the offense should not be made public to other members of the congregation. Gayle Oler, the longtime superintendent of Boles Children’s Home in Quinlan, Texas, said concerning such matters, “Before you complain to your husband or wife, your friends or relatives, the elders or the preacher, or even your dog, you should **first** go to that individual.”

When Christ’s rules for Christian behavior are ignored, nothing good comes from it. Often an offense or problem is discussed with everyone except the one that has supposedly perpetrated the offense, and that person may not even be aware of any problem. Keep in mind, members that are informed about a private offense are guilty of sin when they do not advise their brother or sister to go to the one about which the problem has been spoken. Many times, the situation is spread throughout the congregation by way of gossip because the conversation is often overheard by others and then repeated. This is a sin which also requires repentance by those engaged in the gossip. If a Christian makes a private sin public, a public repentance is required by the one who made it public in order for forgiveness to be received (Js. 5:16, 19-20).