

PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path"
Psalm 119:104*

July 8, 2018

When a Brother Wrongs You

by Frank Himmel

Since people are subject to error, any relationship involving people will face problems on occasion. The church is people—saved people (Acts 2:47). That means it will have difficulties to overcome from time to time. The problem may be widespread, involving an entire congregation, or limited to the relationship of two or three Christians.

Fortunately, our Lord foresaw this potentiality and made provision for its remedy. I particularly have in mind a problem arising between two brethren: one wrongs the other. Here is Jesus' solution:

And if your brother sins against you, confidentially tell everyone you know about it; if they listen to you, you have won some friends. But if that does not straighten him out, call him on the phone and give him a good working over, that by the blistering of your mouth your view will be confirmed. And if he still refuses to listen, stay home from church with no explanation; act toward all your brethren as if they were Gentiles and tax collectors.

No, I did not read that in my Bible. I "read" it in the lives of some Christians. (Remember what Paul told the Corinthians: "You are our letter . . . known and read by all men" [2 Corinthians 3:2]).

Honestly, brethren, is there any instruction from the Lord that is easier to understand and yet more ignored than how to handle wrongs between brethren?

Jesus' Teaching

The correct rendering of Jesus' teaching is found in Matthew 18:15-17.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

In another sermon Jesus placed the obligation of reconciliation on the one who has done the wrong (Matthew 5:23-25). Here He places it on the one wronged. The point is that *both* parties should be concerned enough about the breach to settle the problem. Do not wait for another to act. *You* get busy.

Jesus said,
"Go and show
him his fault ▶



in private.” That means do not involve others in the matter if it is not necessary to do so. Need I add that the going is to be “in a spirit of gentleness” (Galatians 6:1)? I suspect taking just this first step would resolve ninety percent or more of the problems we have. There is no reason it should not if attitudes are correct.

Nevertheless, additional measures may be necessary in some cases. “Take one or two more with you... witnesses.” A witness is someone competent to testify, not necessarily your best buddy or even one who you think will “take your side.”

Only after these measures have failed should the matter be made public. The local congregation then decides the matter; and if its authority is not respected, the one(s) involved must be properly disciplined.

Paul’s Teaching

Paul also addressed the situation of problems between brethren in 1 Corinthians 6. The context indicates these problems were of a financial nature, not uncommon when brethren do business together.



The Corinthians’ solution was what too many immediately think of today: go to court. Paul sharply rebuked them for that, urging two superior alternatives.

First, find some wise man among you who will be able to decide between his brethren. Surely these Corinthians, who boasted of their wisdom, could do that! When the need for such “counseling” arises, do not automatically think of the preacher. Likely an elder, whose qualifications include being prudent, sensible, and just, would be a good choice. Or perhaps an older sister, experienced in godly living, would be an effective advisor in some situations.

Second, just suffer the wrong. If getting “justice” requires going to court, Paul says you have already lost, regardless of the court’s decision. How so? You have demonstrated to the world that Christians are selfish, carnally minded, and do not love their brethren—the very thing that is supposed to be our mark of discipleship (John 13:34-35).

But do not think that going to court is the only way to reproach Christ. When you discourage the weak, cause division or ill feelings in the congregation, disrupt the peace, divert attention from spiritual things, and ruin the church’s reputation in the community, it is hard to imagine what further damage could be done. “Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?”

Far too many churches have been divided because one or two would not follow these instructions and settle their differences honorably. A divided church means lost souls. Do not allow Satan to claim your soul or your brother’s soul for eternity because you refused to follow God’s simple plan for solving this kind of problem. ■

Service Leaders for the Week

	Sunday	Wednesday
GREETER	Bruce Williams	Josh Baucom
SONG LEADER	Sam Walters	Daven Daniel
OPENING PRAYER	Albert Lee Harrison	
LORD’S SUPPER		
BREAD	Howard Moore	
CUP	Kerry Gray	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Adam Wilson	
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Carlos Garcia
CLOSING PRAYER	Justin Candella	Stachys McLeod