

If a brother sins against you ...

Matthew 18:15-17. Is this relevant to the first half of the chapter, the parable of the lost sheep or is this a total change of subject?

It's about cohesion in a church or fellowship, it's very much a continuation. First half of the chapter is about the individual, the second is about us as a body.

Typically what common causes are behind us falling out? Here's a few - Jealousy, money, criticism, gossip, unwanted intimate approach, selfishness and thoughtlessness, heresy. Example, you find out your wife is having an affair with a church steward. Do you a) ignore it and hope it fizzles out, b) wait for him in the church car park and 'deck him' or c) have a quiet word with him after the service?

There's always a sin issue going on, maybe just one of the parties, maybe both. So, how do you handle this?

Matthew 5:23-26. In Matthew 18 Jesus is reaffirming His advice from the sermon on the mount. He goes further with the sermon and advises against going to court with a brother. This is taken up by Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:1-4. Even today Roman law is highly esteemed, British law is modelled on it but still Jesus warns against going to court. Are we talking just about civil matters here, or criminal? Romans 13:1-4. Catholic and Anglican Churches should have heeded that.

So we know what not to do, let's look at how Jesus tells us how to handle these situations.

What Jesus doesn't say? - ignore the problem, it'll go away? Then it becomes food for Satan to feed on. One or both parties are going to be left feeling miffed or sidelined and bad feelings start to fester.

1. Take it up with the other party. What are the possible outcomes?
2. Take it to 2-3 other church members. What are the possible outcomes?
3. Have a church EGM.

Where would you put repentance in this situation?

Let's look at a church issue that arose in Greece Galatians 2:11-13. How was that settled?

30th April Neil Parrish resigned as an MP having been caught watching porn on his smartphone in the House of Commons. Had Jesus's advice been followed, what would have been the outcome? Instead this was the start of the crumbling of the Government and the Conservative Party.

Let's look at a recent situation in the Inghamite church. Some people left the church over the handling of the Covid lockdown. Using the amazing powers of hindsight, could that have been handled differently with a better outcome? Maybe, maybe not, but we all of us must pray for wisdom and love when dealing with brothers and sisters who are hurting over something.

Peter's question. Was Peter referring back to what Jesus said in Luke 17:3-5 forgive 7 times a day? The answer to Peter's question- where were you when Jesus gave His sermon on the mount? Matthew 6:12. Where would we be if God only forgave 7 sins or for

that matter 490 sins (70 x 7)?

The unforgiving servant. Matthew 18:21-35.

This introduces the concept of repentance. Both give grovelling apologies but the first guy's apology only relates to his situation and is quickly forgotten when he's the aggrieved party.

The story is pretty self explanatory, there's no hidden message here. Is it possible that we can take it too literally? Is Jesus warning us that your salvation can be cancelled because of an unsolved grudge with a brother? Maybe Jesus is over emphasising the consequences of unforgiven grudges and issues between brothers because resolution is so very important to Him. Possibly, it's like a mother warning a son that's playing football in the lounge: 'You break any ornaments and I'll knock you into the middle of next week!'

Had the servant exercised the same forgiveness he'd received what would have been the outcome?

Colossians 3:12-15, forgiveness is equal to kindness, meekness and bearing with one another.

Ephesians 4:25-32. OK to be angry but don't sin and sort it before daybreak. Get rid of bitterness, evil speaking and malice, practice love, kindness and forgiveness.

Luke 6:37 Don't judge or condemn, do forgive.

Matthew 5:21-24 Don't sacrifice (confess, ask forgiveness or praise) to God whilst you have unresolved issues with a brother. How strong is that? Go away, I don't want to know you until it's sorted!!