

# Purity of the Church

## Matthew Chapter 18

Secular, a term we hear quite frequently in the church, has become synonymous with worldliness. It has infiltrated and influenced Christianity and Christ's church to such a degree that many have knowingly or unknowingly given into it. Personally, it shows up in our actions and decisions. How? Going to church to socialize instead of worshiping God and building each other up to work and good deeds. Being more driven by money rather than the Holy Spirit. Caring about what others say rather than knowing, respecting and obeying God's direction given to us in His Word. Your values are driven by culture and not scripture. God is such a compartmentalized part of your life you rarely pray, pick up His Word, study the Bible, or impact others for Christ yet you feel like you are safe and everything is OK. In the church, it shows up through compromise, syncretism, and complacency. How? Teaching there are many ways to God when scripture plainly says, "I am the way the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me". Promoting the relativity of truth, "it is true if it is true for you but it may not be true for me" when the Bible specifically teaches there are absolutes to measure moral turpitude, personal character and sin. Being cautious to the point that we are willing to compromise Biblical truth in order to avoid offending someone. Discussing the dangers of church discipline and risks of a lawsuit rather than holding individuals accountable for their actions. The personal or church list above merely scratches the surface of the problem.

Today we arrive at a chapter of the Bible familiar to the church member/attender and many in the secular community, Matthew chapter 18. Many of your Bibles may even entitle this area as "Discipline" or "Church discipline". To those outside the church it conjures up images of the Salem witch trials, the Diet of Worms, and harsh judgment. Many inside the church are confused, offended and sometimes enraged by the act of church discipline. After all none of us is perfect and how does that compare to the love we are to have for our brothers, sisters and the lost?

Since the creation of man, God established guidelines for His creation and told His people to obey. For Adam, it was the command not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden, for the day you eat of it you will surely die. When God established His covenant with His people, He told them, "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am holy". (Lev 11:44) The Lord tells Moses, "You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers." (Deut 6:17-18). When Jesus, God incarnate, came to earth, He confirmed and elevated the guidelines given in the Old Testament severely judging the hypocrites of the day. God's call, to all His people, throughout the Bible is a call to purity as defined by Him and contained in His word.

In three verses, Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus commands believers to resolve their issues and provides a framework in which to accomplish that goal. "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." The Greek word means to "convict him" or "to prove one in the wrong". Hopefully he listens, is repentant, seeks forgiveness and the issue is over. However, "... 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.**" It is the same type of guidance for witnesses we see in Deuteronomy 19:15. The unbiased witnesses need to evaluate and confirm the issue/issues, address each one with the goal of restoring relationship. If he fails to listen, tell it to the church and if he fails to listen to the church he is to be as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Remember we are addressing a believer or so-called believer, not a person who does not know Christ.

Books have been written on Matthew 15-17, so we are not even close to examining the depth and breadth of Jesus teaching in these verses. Jesus is not suggesting confrontation of sin, He is commanding it! We need to be a church that is authentic; that demonstrates a pure faith as contained in the Bible; that is willing to confront sin, identify false doctrine. Church Discipline is a difficult, hard to practice and rarely seen in the church today but it is vital to the purity, progress and power of the church. John Dagg, the author of a well-known and influential church manual entitled, "*Manual of Theology*" noted; "It has been remarked, that when discipline leaves a church, Christ goes with it." If so, and I fear it must be so, Christ has abandoned many churches who are blissfully unaware of His departure.

**1. What question did the disciples ask Jesus at the beginning of chapter 18? How did Jesus respond, what illustration did He use? According to verses 1-5, who are those who will NOT enter the kingdom of heaven and who are those who will enter the kingdom of heaven? What are the characteristics of those entering the kingdom of heaven and who will be the “greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”**

**2. Read verses 5-11. Who are the “little ones”? Describe in your own words the warnings contained in verses 6-11. What is the source of “stumbling blocks” and what do we learn about them? What would be an example of a stumbling block? Explain in your own words verses 8-9 and the warning in verse 10.**

**3. Read verses 12-14. What do you think? Were any of the disciples shepherds? What does the parable illustrate and what was Jesus teaching His disciples? What is the will of the Father according to these verses?**

**4. Read verses 15-20. What is to process given to address disputes between brothers and sisters in Christ? How many steps are there and what is the purpose of each? Who is “the church” in verse 17 and what would that look like today? If they will no listen to the church, what is to be done? Explain your answer. What do we learn from verses 18-22?**

**5. Read verses 17-35. What was Peter’s perception of forgiveness as indicated in verse 21? What was Jesus response to Peter’s question? Explain Jesus’ illustration contained in verses 23 – 34 and what line does Jesus draw that should catch every believer’s attention?**