

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Matthew 18 and rebuking error

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In recent years, not only have passages been perverted in order to allow fellowship with those who teach error, but Scriptures have been perverted in establishing the procedure for exposing those who teach false doctrine. Matthew 18:15 is one of those passages.

Jesus said, “And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” (A.S.V.). Translations, such as the (N.A.S.) omit the phrase “against you” because some of the manuscripts do not contain it. Since some manuscripts contain the phrase “against you”, indicating sins against you personally, and some omit it, how is one to determine the proper application in rebuking error?

The immediate context should help us. When Peter heard Jesus’ instructions, he responded, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? ...” (Matthew 18:21). Even the N.A.S. includes the phrase, “against me” in Peter’s remarks. Peter apparently understood correctly that Jesus was instructing his disciples on how to deal with

sins committed against one personally. Secondly, it makes good sense that if we are to first go privately to a person about a sin, then the sin is probably pertaining to a private sin.

We have examples of the apostles dealing with those who teach and practice error. Paul did not contact the fornicating brother in Corinth and set up a private meeting to rebuke him of his sin. He wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, on the basis of a report he had heard concerning this brother and instructed the church on how they were to deal with the sinning brother (I Corinthians 5:1-5). Paul did not do wrong for publicly condemning a brother on the basis that “it is actually reported” instead of going to the brother first in private to rebuke him of his sin.

Paul did not go to Peter in private before he rebuked him of his sin. His sin of hypocrisy had influenced others to follow his error. Paul in writing to the churches of Galatia writes, “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, If thou being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how compellest thou the Gentiles

to live as do the Jews” (Galatians 2:14). Commitment to truth moved Paul to rebuke Peter in the presence of those who were carried away by his dissimulation. To publicly rebuke Peter was not from a motive to destroy Peter, but rather to make sure “the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Galatians 2:5, cf. I Timothy 5:20).

Paul instructs the brethren, “...mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which he learned and turn away from them” (Romans 16:17). Here were those who needed to be clearly pointed out to all due to their false teaching and the fact that “by their fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent” (Romans 16:18).

The desire to establish the truth of the gospel in men’s hearts is the scriptural motive for publicly refuting the error that may arise. In Matthew 18:15, Jesus instructs you in the case of one sinning against you personally, to first go to that person alone to rebuke and try to win back the sinning brother. For the sake of truth, may we understand the difference.