

Dealing With Problems in the Church

- I. Problems will come.
 1. Offences will come, but don't be the person by whom they come (**Mat 18:7**).
 2. Heresies *must* come to manifest they who are approved (**1Co 11:19**).
 3. Pastors will offend church members (**Jam 3:1-2**).
 4. Trouble is common to all men (**Job 14:1**).
 5. It is a given that problems will come, but what is important is how we deal with them.

- II. Some types of problems that will arise in a church.
 1. A church member will commit a sin which is witnessed by one or more other church members.
 2. A church member will have a disagreement with something the pastor has taught.
 3. A church member will have a disagreement with a judgment call the pastor has made in a grey area.
 4. A church member will be offended by something the pastor or another church member said or did.
 5. The pastor or a church member will not approve of actions taken or choices made by another church member.

- III. Some generally important considerations when dealing with any problem.
 1. When an offence happens, the following questions should be asked before proceeding:
 - A. Is the offence/problem public or private in nature? Was it done in front of multiple people and therefore publicly known?
 - B. Is it a breach of God's law, or an area of liberty or preference?
 - C. If it is not a breach of God's law, is it worth addressing with the person, or can you live with it?
 2. When you disagree with something your pastor has taught, the following questions should be asked before proceeding:
 - A. Is the disagreement doctrinal in nature, or is it an area of speculation or opinion?
 - B. Can you live with it if the pastor doesn't agree with you after you have addressed him on it?

- IV. How NOT to deal with problems in the church.
 1. Backbiting, whispering, and talebearing are three wrong methods of addressing problems which will destroy a church in short order.
 - A. Backbiting
 - i. Backbite - *v.* To detract from the character of, to slander, traduce, speak ill of: a. a person absent.
 - ii. Slander - *v.* 1. trans. In or after Biblical use: To be a stumbling-block to; to offend; to cause to lapse spiritually or morally.
2. To bring into discredit, disgrace, or disrepute.
3. To defame or calumniate; to assail with slander; to spread slanderous reports about, speak evil of, traduce (a person, etc.).
 - iii. Slander - *n.* 1. The utterance or dissemination of false statements or reports concerning a person, or malicious misrepresentation of his actions, in order to defame or injure him; calumny, defamation.
 - iv. Backbiting is condemned by God (**Rom 1:30; 2Co 12:20; Psa 15:1-3**).
 - B. Whispering

- i. Whisper - v. 1. a. intr. To speak softly 'under one's breath', i.e. without the resonant tone produced by vibration of the vocal cords; to talk or converse in this way, esp. in the ear of another, for the sake of secrecy. (See also 4a.)
 - 4. With special connotations. a. intr. To speak or converse quietly or secretly about something (usually implying hostility, malice, conspiracy, etc.); also (with negative) to speak ever so slightly, to say 'the least thing' about something.
- ii. Whispering is condemned by God (**Rom 1:29; 2Co 12:20; Psa 41:7**).
- iii. Whisperers destroy friendships and churches (**Pro 16:28**).

C. Talebearing

- i. Talebearing - The carrying of injurious or malicious reports.
 - ii. Talebearer - One who officiously carries reports of private matters to gratify malice or idle curiosity.
 - iii. Talebearing is likewise condemned by God (**Lev 19:16**).
 - iv. Talebearers reveal secrets and shouldn't be trusted (**Pro 11:13; 20:19**).
 - v. Talebearers are injurious (**Pro 18:8; 26:22**).
 - vi. Talebearers cause strife (**Pro 26:20**).
2. This includes insinuations or questions about someone that will cause doubt.
- A. Some examples would be:
 - i. You suspect or know that Joe and Sally are having marital problems so you mention to a brother, "Joe and Sally don't seem like themselves, I sure hope everything's ok."
 - ii. You and a brother are talking about another brother who seems to be a genuinely nice person and your brother says, "Well, you know what they say about people who seem too good to be true."
 - B. This is called *evil surmising* and it is a sin (**1Ti 6:4**).

V. The Biblical way to deal with publicly known sins in the church.

- 1. If the offence is public (it is commonly known among most or all of the church) and it is listed as an "excludable" offence in the Bible, then the church must pass judgment on the person and purge him from the membership of the church (**1Co 5:1-13**).
- 2. The lists of excludable offences are found in: (**1Co 5:11; 1Co 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:3-5; 1Ti 6:3-5; 2Ti 3:1-5; Rom 1:29-32; 2Th 3:6-14 c/w 1Pe 4:15 c/w Heb 10:25 c/w 1Ti 5:8**).

VI. The Biblical way to deal with private sins in the church.

- 1. Address the person privately who offended you or sinned against God; do not tell other people (**Pro 25:9**).
 - A. If a sin or an offence can be covered, then it should be (**Jam 5:19-20**).
 - B. Covering a transgression is the loving thing to do, but spreading the matter around will destroy relationships (**Pro 17:9**).
 - C. Charity covers a multitude of sins (**1Pe 4:8; Pro 10:12**).
- 2. Sometimes loving someone means rebuking them (**Lev 19:17; Rev 3:19; Pro 27:5-6**).
 - A. Sometimes an admonition is sufficient (**Rom 15:14; 1Th 5:12**).
 - i. Admonition - 1. The action of admonishing; authoritative counsel; warning, implied reproof.
 - ii. Admonish - To put (a person) in mind of duties; to counsel against wrong practices; to give authoritative or warning advice; to exhort, to warn.

- B. Sometimes exhortation is in order (**Heb 3:13**).
 - C. Exhortation - The action or process of exhorting, of earnestly admonishing or urging to what is deemed laudable conduct; an instance of this.
 - D. Sometimes a warning is merited (**1Th 5:14**).
 - E. Warn - II. To make aware, to put on one's guard.
 - 2. a. trans. To give timely notice to (a person) of impending danger or misfortune.
3. If the person rejects the rebuke/admonition/exhortation, depending on the how many witnesses there were, there are a couple of options:
- A. If you were the only person who witnessed the sin, then you cannot accuse him before the church since such must be done by two or three witnesses (**Deu 19:15; 2Co 13:1**).
 - i. In such a case, you would have to wait on the Lord and pray that God would convict him of his sin.
 - ii. We must not judge before God brings the sin to light (**1Co 4:5**).
 - iii. Sin will eventually come out (**1Ti 5:24-25; Num 32:23**).
 - iv. God is not mocked (**Gal 6:7**).
 - B. If there were two or more witnesses to the sin, then the witnesses could take the matter to the church for judgment.
 - i. If the person is found guilty by the church, then he will be excluded from membership per 1Co 5.
 - ii. If the person is found innocent, then the accusers will be excluded for making a false accusation (**2Ti 3:3**).
 - C. If you are not sure what to do, you can always ask your pastor for counsel.
 - i. It is wise to attain unto wise counsel (**Pro 1:5**).
 - ii. There is safety in seeking counsel (**Pro 11:14**).
 - iii. Without counsel purposes are disappointed (**Pro 15:22**).
 - iv. Try to be discreet when doing so and not reveal the person or the sin.

VII. The Biblical way to deal with an offence which is private in nature between two brethren and which is not an excludable offence is to follow Jesus' instruction in **Mat 18:15-17**. This could also apply to a church member who was offended by the pastor.

Note: If the offence was an excludable offence (ex.: a brother suspects another brother of committing adultery with his wife), the Matthew 18 procedure would have to stop short of being taken before the church because if the church would determine that he was guilty, he could not then choose to hear the church and be reconciled to his brother, but would have to be excluded.

1. First of all, some good principles to remember:
 - A. Take no heed to all words that are spoken (**Ecc 7:21-22**).
 - B. Don't make a man an offender for a word (**Isa 29:21**).
 - C. Defer anger and pass over minor transgressions (**Pro 19:11**).
 - D. Mercy rejoices against judgment (**Jam 2:13**).
2. Example: Sister Sensitive is convinced that Sister Sharp spoke to her uncharitably and thereby offended her.
 - A. This is not an excludable offence.
 - B. Sister Sensitive now has two options:
 - i. She can choose to overlook the seemingly offensive speech and forget about it.
 - ii. She can address Sister Sharp privately.
 - iii. She does NOT have the option to tell other members of the church about it.

- C. If she decides on the second option, she will then go and tell Sister Sharp her fault between the two of them alone (**Mat 18:15**).
- D. If she hears her, then Sister Sensitive has gained a sister.
- E. If she doesn't hear her, then Sister Sensitive has two options:
 - i. She can drop it and forget about it.
 - ii. She can take it to the next level.
 - iii. She does NOT have the option to tell other members of the church (except the observers) about it no matter which option she chooses.
- F. If she deems it important enough and decides to go with the second option, she can bring one or two impartial observers (not co-accusers) with her to address Sister Sharp a second time (**Mat 18:16**).
- G. If the impartial observers agree with Sister Sensitive and Sister Sharp hears them, then the matter is settled and the sisters will be reconciled.
- H. If she doesn't hear them, then Sister Sensitive has two options:
 - i. She can drop it and forget about it.
 - ii. She can take it to the next level.
 - iii. She does NOT have the option to tell other members of the church about it if she chooses to drop it.
- I. If she deems it important enough and decides to go with the second option, she can bring it before the church to address Sister Sharp a third time (**Mat 18:17**).
- J. If the church agrees with Sister Sensitive and Sister Sharp hears them, then the matter is settled and the sisters will be reconciled.
- K. If Sister Sharp doesn't hear the church, then she will be unto Sister Sensitive as a heathen and a publican (**Mat 18:17**).
 - i. To say someone is as a heathen and a publican *to you* is to say that they are sinners outside of the church (**Mat 6:7; Mat 9:11**).
 - ii. If a person is as a sinner outside the church to one member of the church, he would be viewed the same way by the rest of the church.
- L. Sister Sharp would then be excluded from church for variance (**Gal 5:20**) and implacability (**Rom 1:31**).
 - i. Variance - II. 6. a. The state or fact of disagreeing or falling out; discord, dissension, contention, debate.
 - ii. Implacable - 1. That cannot be appeased; irreconcilable; inexorable: of persons, feelings, etc.

- VIII. The Biblical way to deal with your pastor if you are convinced that he is teaching heresy.
1. Example: Your pastor is uninformed about the true nature of the sonship of Jesus Christ. In a sermon he quotes **Col 1:13-17** and states that these verses prove that Jesus Christ is the eternally begotten Son of God who created the universe as such.
 2. You know what the Bible teaches concerning the sonship of Christ and you know that the pastor's teaching is wrong on the topic.
 3. What do you do?
 - A. What you don't do is talk to other church members about your disagreement with the pastor and try to convince them that he is teaching heresy.
 - i. That would be whispering, which is an excludable sin (**Rom 1:29**).
 - ii. It will create strife and tumults which will ruin a church (**2Co 12:20**).
 - iii. Strife - 1. a. The action of striving together or contending in opposition; a condition of antagonism, enmity, or discord; contention, dispute.

- iv. Tumult - 1. Commotion of a multitude, usually with confused speech or uproar; public disturbance; disorderly or riotous proceeding.
 - B. In this situation, as in others, you need to take it up with him privately (**Pro 25:9**).
 - C. You need to do as Aquila and Priscilla did when they heard the preacher Apollos preaching with insufficient information: approach him privately and expound the way of God more perfectly to him (**Act 18:24-26**).
 - D. A heretic must be admonished twice before being rejected (**Tit 3:10**).
 - i. Heretic - 1. One who maintains theological or religious opinions at variance with the 'catholic' or orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church, or, by extension, that of any church or religious system, considered as orthodox. Also transf. with reference to non-Christian religions.
 - ii. Admonition - 1. The action of admonishing; authoritative counsel; warning, implied reproof.
 - E. When addressing the pastor, who is an elder (**Tit 1:5**), do not rebuke him, but rather intreat him as a father (**1Ti 5:1**).
4. In this case, you would want to approach the pastor privately and respectfully relate to him your doctrinal disagreement and then show him from the Bible how that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity- the Word - (**1Jo 5:7**), who existed from all eternity as such (**Joh 1:1-3**) and in time became flesh (**Joh 1:14**) in the womb of the virgin Mary and it was at that time, and not before, that he became the Son of God (**Luk 1:35**), and any reference in the NT about the Son doing anything before the incarnation, like creating the world, is simply using present terminology to refer to someone when they acted in the past. Ex. - My dad was born in 1946...he wasn't my dad when he was born.
 - A. This would be his first admonition.
 - B. If he hears you and repents of his false teaching, then you drop it and go on as if nothing ever happened.
 - C. But what if he doesn't hear you and retorts and says that it is clear that Jesus was the Son of God before the incarnation as stated in **Psa 2:7** and as seen by King Nebuchadnezzar in **Dan 3:25**?
 5. Next you would once again privately admonish him and explain that all the places in the OT that refer to the Son of God are spoken in prophecy like **Psa 2:7** which was quoted in **Act 13:33** which shows that it was talking about the resurrection of Christ, not the "eternal begetting" and that we don't base our sonship theology from the idea of a pagan king who a few verses later identified the "Son of God" as an angel (**Dan 3:28**).
 - A. This would be his second admonition.
 - B. If he hears you and repents of his false teaching, then you drop it and go on as if nothing ever happened.
 - C. If he doesn't hear you and proceeds to offer more counter arguments, then, having admonished him twice, reject him.
 6. You would then officially charge him with heresy, which is an excludable offence (**Gal 5:20**) and present your case to the church to judge it.
 - A. If the church agrees that he is a heretic, he would then be excluded.
 - B. If the church sides with the pastor, you would be excluded for making a false accusation (**2Ti 3:3**) and for being a heretic yourself.
 - C. At that point (assuming you are right and the church has wrongly judged), you must withdraw yourself from the whole church which is walking disorderly (**2Th 3:6**).

- IX. The Biblical way to deal with a situation where you come to a different understanding of a verse/passage/doctrine which is contrary to the way that your pastor has publicly taught.
1. The church is supposed to be unified in belief and be of the same mind (**1Co 1:10; Rom 15:5-6; Phi 1:27; Phi 2:2; 2Pe 1:1**).
 2. A pastor is supposed to preach the word (**2Ti 4:2**) and things that *become* (to accord with, agree with, be suitable to; to befit) sound doctrine (**Tit 2:1**).
 - A. The primary purpose of the ministry is to bring the church to the unity of the faith so they are not tossed around by the winds of false doctrine (**Eph 4:11-14**).
 - B. A pastor must therefore charge the brethren that they teach no other doctrine (**1Ti 1:3**).
 3. So what do you do if through personal study you come to a different conclusion concerning a particular doctrine or passage of scripture?
 - A. Take up the matter with the pastor and him alone and do not discuss it with others (**Pro 25:9**).
 - B. It is the pastor who has taught the doctrine that the church holds and it is he with whom the question should be taken up.
 - C. Convert the pastor on the point of doctrine before you try to convert anyone else.
 - D. The church is not the court of the Areopagites where everyone says their own thing (**Act 17:16-22**).
 - E. If after discussing the issue with the pastor, you are still convinced the pastor's teaching is wrong, you can either 1) drop it and pray and wait for more light or 2) admonish the pastor twice and formally charge him with heresy as was described in the previous section.
 - F. *Tell the story of dealing with the adultery issue as an example of how to deal with differences with the pastor in a Biblical manner.
- X. What do you do if the pastor makes a judgment call that you disagree with?
1. The rule of the church is committed to the pastor (**Heb 13:7, 17**).
 2. Rule - I. 1. a. A principle, regulation, or maxim governing individual conduct.
 3. A pastor must hold the church to the law of God, but is not free to make up laws as he feels like it (**1Pe 5:3**).
 4. In grey areas where a line has to be drawn, it is he who has the rule and the oversight that must make those calls. Some examples would be: how often the church observes communion, how many songs are sung during the service, or what constitutes long or short hair, modest clothing, and such things.
 5. If you have a disagreement with the pastor on a judgment call he has made, some of the same basic principles apply as in the aforementioned situations.
 - A. Take it up with him alone and don't discover your disagreement to others (**Pro 25:9**).
 - B. Respectfully explain your disagreement with his call (**Pro 25:15**).
 - C. Ask him if there are reasons that he can share with you as to why he made that call.
 - D. If after discussing it, you still don't agree, then you need to do your best to make your peace with it and pray about it.
 - E. If you feel that the call was contrary to the law of God, and not just opposed to your preferences, then you can follow the steps outlined in the section above.
 - F. If after long forbearing, the pastor is not persuaded to agree with your preference and it is something intolerable to you, then you would be free to transfer to another church of like-faith.
 - G. This should be the last resort though.