

“You should have gone to that brother before openly exposing his sin!”

We are hearing more and more brethren opine the title of this article in relation to a brother who has taught or practiced open error. The main premise of the argument hinges on Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18. 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*” (Matt. 18:15). Brethren today are claiming that each time a preacher publicly exposes another brother’s false teaching on a particular subject they are in violation of Matthew 18.

Who is under consideration in Matthew 18?

Note that Jesus was giving instructions for individuals who have been sinned against personally. Jesus said, “*and if thy brother SIN AGAINST THEE...*” (18:15). Matthew 18 gives instructions for how to handle a situation when a brother sins against me as opposed to sinning publicly.

Public sin demands public rebuke:

Consider the fact that Peter once “*stood condemned*” and was therefore publicly admonished by the apostle Paul (cf. Gal. 2:11, 14). Paul did not go to Peter in private because the sin was not private.

When I expose another’s public sin without his presence, am I guilty of gossip?

Consider that Paul warned Timothy in a public epistle regarding the false teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus (II Tim. 2:17). Paul exposed these false teachers saying of them, “*men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some*” (II Tim. 2:18). The teaching of these men would continue to affect the Lord’s church like a cancerous disease and continue to overthrow the faith of many if left alone (II Tim. 2:17). Again, Paul warned Timothy of Alexander the coppersmith because he “*did me much evil*” (II Tim. 4:14). Where was Alexander when Paul made these remarks to Timothy? Was Paul gossiping to Timothy? Paul stated the error of Alexander saying, “*of whom do thou also beware; for he greatly withstood our words*” (II Tim. 4:15). The teaching of these men was false and therefore had to be exposed. Paul did not mention going to these men first before exposing their public error because this was not a sin against any one individual; it was a public sin.

Is there more concern for a false teacher’s reputation than for the souls of men?

Sometimes we are left to ponder this question. When a brother is more concerned about the false teacher's reputation or feelings than the souls he is affecting with his doctrines, something is not right. While it is certainly admitted that we should have our facts straight and establish two or more witnesses to insure proper identification of false teachers and their doctrines (II Cor. 13:1), we must equally be concerned over who is affected by said teachings. When a brother writes erroneous doctrine and publishes these things, it ought to stir up every faithful brother and sister to put a stop to the damage the teaching can cause. Let us abhor sin and erroneous teaching knowing the awful consequences to men's souls (Rom. 12:9). Before I cry gossip or violation of Matthew 18, I should carefully examine the scenario involved and apply the proper scriptures to the situation.

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