

## HOW TO REACT TO OFFENCES OR ALLEGED OFFENCES BETWEEN THE BRETHREN:

(\*Not between us and people in the world. God will deal with them if necessary.)

1. If a brother or sister offends you (Jesus says in Matthew 18:15) go to them privately, and just between the two of you try to settle the matter. That is Step 1. If both parties<sup>are</sup> then satisfied that is fine. "You have won your brother". But if your brother wont see reason, or listen or talk on the matter, then Jesus tells us to proceed to Step 2. Which is to go to see him a second time. But this time have two or more witnesses, so that statements can be verified. Then if the brother is still intransigent, or wont discuss it, then Jesus points us<sup>to</sup> the third Step. That says we have to take the matter, and the brother, before the Church. The word, Church, (ecclesia in the Greek) means the group of ordinary believers. Never just the administrative head only. Then if the brother still refuses to cooperate and see reason, Jesus says that he is to be avoided by the members. Unless he were to repent at a later date, that would be the end of the matter.
2. Many Churches preach of impending persecution, that we ought to be braced for as Christians. But in the cosy Western World of the 20th Century, experience is obviously showing that the greatest cause of people falling away from the faith has been offences between brethren. Not persecution. Consequently Jesus has given us a three step mechanism in Matt.18:15, that sorts out and heals these offences. I think it is safe to say that any group of Christians that ignore Jesus' instruction on this procedure is leaving a door wide open for Satan. For him to utilize the grudge bearing festering resentments that human nature is so prone to. Once we prick that very sensitive area in all peoples and communities, the area of injustice. Even people merely hearing the description of an alleged injustice will take sides in the matter strongly. So that a root of bitterness can spread out from two people to draw in others, all with varied and incomplete perceptions of the event.
3. When the event is examined thoroughly with witnesses, as in the Law's requirements (Deut.19:18), so that light is shone on the matter. So exposing both private and obvious actions relevant, then a fair judgement can be made. The alternative to this procedure (of shining the light) is to try to evaluate the situation with some of the factors still in the dark. So requiring assumptions to be made, assumptions wide open to error and injustices. But we are to walk in truth and light, exposing the deeds of darkness and secrecy (Eph.5:11).
4. As Satan's style increases in communities, darkness is more and more dominant. In the Dark Ages the "Holy Inquisition" had courts of judgement conducted in secret (darkness) with the judges' heads covered. The Mafia thrives on secrecy. So too did the Third Reich and the regime of Stalin. Books were burned, the Bible forbidden, and records destroyed. The free press was suppressed, because it tended to expose the deeds of evil and encouraged true judgement and justice. But with the coming of the Reformation, old Bible laws were reinvoled to require open Courts with witnesses and juries. Distributing awareness of proper judgement procedures. And so constraining the wicked. Literacy increased, and the first Christian pamphlets appeared from Caxton's printing press. An industry that grew into our newspapers, which publicise issues of proper government and justice. All these things have been an increasing means to expose corruption. As now much more light was shining than in the Dark Ages.
5. The great lesson that emerges from God's laws and the painfully learned lessons of history, is that as many people as possible should be allowed to view any judgement procedure. Exposure is vital. Evil men love darkness. Thieves work at night. But exposure is of no threat to the innocent. In fact it is their only hope(in this world)of exoneration. Satan's system is darkness; God's Way is light. His people are to be lights, and let their lights shine and walk in the light. The first 21 verses of the First Epistle of John continuously talk about light and darkness, as love and hate, truth and The Lie. The foundational base of the Gospel witness that has been borne down to us in writing is the testimony of Matthew and John and Peter. Who were eye-witnesses (2 Pet.1:16). Even as the Law of God requires true witnesses. For God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all (1 Joh.1:5).
6. Now one may ask, are we not supposed to forgive and forget, and suffer the injustice? (1 Pet.2:18-21). This depends on the circumstances of the event. An action

in one situation may be a good deed, but in changed circumstances the same action may be a sin. The examples are in scripture itself. Paul in 1 & 2 Corinthians shows us an example of the judgement of a brother in action. Paul actually commands it of the Corinthians. 1 Cor.5 & 6 explain the situation, and give the instruction to judge the brother indulging in wickedness. But Paul also says that we are not to judge those outside of the Church (5:13). So here is the secret as to why Jesus said, "Judge not"; yet gave instructions to the Church to imitate the judges of Dt.19:18 (see Mt.18). It also explains why Peter says to bear with injustices virtually indefinitely. Peter addresses Christians in their everyday worldly contacts and coming and going. He is not referring to injustices occurring between members. In Luke 17 Jesus was speaking about the same event of offences as in Matt.18, and said to forgive your brother if he repents. ("Seven times seventy" if repentance occurs.) So we judge within the body by the 3 step process, but let God judge the world.

7. Although we may often lapse, the Christian is supposed to be walking (living) in an attitude of repentance, of reform from wrong ways. So if he offends his fellow member, and after the steps have been followed, may be found to be unreasonable and intransigent. Then that would clash with his avowed claim of being in the Christian Way of repentance. Therefore separation from such a one is instructed. As otherwise he can continue mauling the repentant members, inducing them to adopt a malicious spirit. So in Lev.19:17-18 the Law says not to hate our brother in our heart, or to seek revenge, but to rebuke him frankly. The same principle as in Matt.18. For by rebuking frankly we defuse our own anger.

8. In the original Law (in Deuteronomy) the judges were instructed to conduct a thorough examination of the witness. The result of obedience to this instruction was to demonstrate what I call the "Cross-Examination Mechanism". By comparing the detailed testimonies of two or more witnesses it soon becomes apparent if one or both are fabricating. The complexities of detail are almost impossible to fabricate completely, especially if analysed closely. So no wonder that this very mechanism has been employed with devastating success in case after case of our legal system. Revealing the guilty.

9. Now there is another area of Jesus' statement, "Judge not, lest you be judged", that I would like to cover. When we see or hear of a brother in the Church, or a neighbour in the world, sin and conclude he is guilty, then in the privacy of our own minds we are in reality conducting our own court procedure. With a concluding verdict in our mind. Such action clashes with God's Way on several points of law simultaneously. First it is secret. Secondly we have not gone to our brother privately and face to face. So that he has had no opportunity to explain his actions, including what is probably unknown to us and other relevant factors. Third, any witnesses have not been used. Fourthly, should the verdict be guilty it has not been presented to the Ecclesia. Fifth, the so-called guilty person is viewed as such in our eyes, and is left uninformed.

10. Further, in the Letter of James it is brought out that at whatever point we accuse or judge another in secret we automatically come under the full guilt ourselves on that very point. This happens because we are under forgiveness ourselves. Indeed we are under God's grace, with its pardon and bestowal of blessings. It is God who is the Creator, we the creatures and He the Judge of us all. Therefore it is right for the members of this community to judge its rebels and uncontrollables. As long as it is done above board, to preserve the rest of the community from the wicked element as the Law of Deuteronomy requires. And God says that He will back up two or more who gather together in His name.

11. With the 15th to 16th century decline of the power of the Vatican and the Holy Inquisition, the Puritan Cromwell, Lord Protector of England, established a Constitution of English civil law. Which, in line with God's instructions in 1 Sam.8, rejected a king and employed instead a body of literate persons. To meet regularly, and in obedience to the principles of Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 20:18; 24:6, to function as a council to attend to the nation's affairs. Nothing changed England as much as Cromwell! She was never to be the same again. He catapulted her to be centuries ahead of mainland Europe. To have a powerful navy. Christian Universities were established, to raise up a larger percentage of educated persons in her population than any nation in history. The free press evolved from Christian pamphlets of the

German Reformation. The vote for all males was debated, and granted to all landowners. Being postponed until full national literacy was achieved. Christmas was banned by full civil law and, of course, Parliament was established. After Cromwell's death events quickly unfolded, which by peaceful means left England with a Parliament in full control. The Crown not able to destroy her, only able to dissolve her for the purpose of a new one. This marriage of King and Council worked. And this provided the foundation for Empire to come.

12. Britain inherited Parliamentary Democracy from the blood and prayers of the Puritan reformers, who used the renowned authority of Christ's name. And so was set by 1800 to blossom into Empire, which cultivated educated classes in a multitude of colonies around the globe. These becoming nations who in turn imitated Parliamentary democratic systems. The European powers also followed London's pattern. So that we see from the beginning of the printing of the Bible, and its distribution in the Protestant Reformation, representative government flowered wherever God's people and their Bibles went. With it came the jury system, free Courts, and the healthy process of regularly throwing out the government. This done by lawful electoral process, so enhancing the accountability of public officials. In the 16th Century the word, "minister" meant "servant". And so in line with Matt.20:27, was the title given to members of Parliament; so being a permanent reminder of their purpose and station.

13. If this system seems to muddle along at times, laden under corruption and abuse, then let us lay the blame where it belongs. Namely upon the head of all that are wicked and corrupt, greedy for gain, for power and the praise of men. The system that we live under is marvelous, that with all of the abuse, mischief and corruption, it still works so well. For compared with most of the nations, we do dwell in great privilege under our system. As it were, behind a fence of comparative freedom, wealth, opportunity, stability and peace. Also having education, health, freedom of travel, of work and residence, of recreation and religion. And much more. Never in the history of the human race has any common peoples ever existed in such blessings. More justly distributed than to those outside our fence.

14. Hinduism has made India what it is. Confucionism and Communism, what China is. Mohomedism has made South-East Asia and North Africa what they are. Roman Catholicism has created what we see in Southern Europe, South America and the Republic of Ireland. And we now see the results of Communism in the U.S.S.R. But it is the Holy Bible which has founded our nations of North America and the Commonwealth, and of North-Western Europe. These facts should speak for themselves, and do so. For he who condemn our Western system is displaying a gross misconception of God's grace. Or is an ingrate. For by giving the Bible to ordinary folk a great power was released in the world, that made life much more bearable for many generations. And therefore God's people have become the "salt of the earth", preserving mankind from another Dark Age of degeneracy and destruction.

15. In each generation Christ has called people to His Light, and trained them so He could use them. To themselves function as lights in the world community, bringing true knowledge and its benefits. For He has bestowed them with "power from on high", so that their struggles for reform, in tandem with their faithful prayers, have wrought great works. Many too subtle to be visible to the world at this time. For that great body of credits and glories lies unseen, until the day when Christ shall reveal all things once and for all. And that New World shall be total Light. For the City in the Book of Revelation is translucent. All things above board, open for all to see, and no lie or ignorance shall then exist. Satan, the Father of Lies, shall have been cast down into the darkness of the Pit.

16. So, in view of all these things, I believe that our system of Parliamentary Democracy has been a gift from God, not from men. With its checks and balances the best system for a yet imperfect world. But should the sins of a generation increase greatly, God has warned that tyranny is the result. To bring the people back to moral values. For it is Satan who is the arch-tyrant, who craves centralised control, monopolising people's lives with his Nimrod-style domineering. But our God is not like that. For He brings us to learn self-control, self-government, to take personal responsibility. To contribute from their trained abilities. But Satan is like a Black Hole, sucking in all under himself to monopolise and retard others. But our God is like a Star, eternally out-going full of light, bestowing on His family all good gifts

And when we have finally learnt the lessons of this Age, we shall then be prepared for the liberty of God's Way. Having freely chosen His Way from the beginning, and so following the example of the Christ. And we will be a living testimony forever to the Foundation Stone of our eternal relationship with God. Saved by the shed blood of our Saviour, Who is the Light of the World.

17. So that we can see that the simple three step procedure in Matt.18, and the related principles, if employed at any time in history were indeed a great blessing. To both the community and the individual, bringing in a ray of light and peace into a world in turmoil. For all other methods, such as the Aboriginal payback tradition, the vendetta system of Southern Italy, and the vengeance mentality of the I.R.A. - all have brought their generations under bondage. Of judging others, and so being judged by God. As their fruits have shown.

J.D.