

## “An Open Letter”: Looking Back



My end aim is to put together these various posts into a "book." I'm looking for a title which will sum up the need for churches, pastors, elders, deacons, leadership, and/or ministries to rethink the way they encourage or repress differences and disagreement and/or handle or manhandle people who call-out wrong-doing and wrong-doers about . . . .

- legitimate or illegitimate concerns
- fair-minded or unfair issues
- real or imagined problems
- important or petty differences
- relevant or irrelevant matters
- principle or preferences
- truth or opinion

### Looking Back:

One of the other values of putting down my thinking on this subject of "Pastoral & Leadership Abuse of Power" has been some personal introspection. Were there some situations which could have been approached better and/or were some of them terribly mishandled?

Even though I can only recall four times, in 36 years of ministry, church dismissal was invoked, it was only due to immorality. -- pornography, adultery, fornication, or pedophilia. I believed then, and believe now that issues of sexual immorality cannot be left unaddressed by "the church!"

Nevertheless, I have still tried to look back and rethink whether we could have approached it better than we did -(It is really an "I /we" -- since, quite frankly, the responsibility for how a church matter is handled lies first and foremost on the shoulders of the pastor - me.)

Let me offer a suggestion which comes from those years of ministry. Some may legitimately disagree, and they would have a fair argument to make as to these suggestions.

When we had to address genuine issues of church discipline -- not the fabricated attempts that twist disagreements and dissent into a concocted basis for removing a member from "the church" and literally blacklisting them from contact with God's people [1] -- We went the second, third, and fourth mile and attempted to follow this pattern.

1 - We asked every deacon to sit down with them directly and personally. We asked them to take the time to call them, set up an appointment with him/her, and speak with them one-to-one / face to face. [2].

"You and him alone": The congregation need know NOTHING and should know NOTHING about what is taking place UNTIL there is NO OTHER OPTION BUT going to the church! That is what Matthew 18 teaches, and that is why two of the three steps admonish and speak of containing, NOT expanding! If it can be resolved without going to "the church," then "the church" will have never known that the trespass was even existent!

2 - *If* we were still convinced that we should proceed with *revealing the issue to "the church,"* and recommending that he/she be removed from membership, we asked whether he/she wanted to remove his/her name from membership before we took that action ourselves.

3 - *If* "the church" *needed to be made aware of the situation, if* the issue *had to be mediated by* "the church" . . . .

We called a special business meeting, making sure that only those who were members were in attendance.

We invited any and all individuals to attend and speak to the issues at hand -- both the offended, the offender ( i.e. the "so-deemed-or-so-claimed" person who was sinned against and the person who had violated the covenant of marriage).

We allowed for ALL the time needed to provide for a full and fair hearing, time for any and all who wanted to address the issues or ask any questions. No one was cut off from speaking to the issue.

Light, not disingenuous cover and purposeful darkness, is the best disinfectant. Light gives clarity as to what has happened, versus what is only rumor, is an inadvertent or An intentional misstatement of the facts, and/or where were the misunderstandings.

4. We never forbid, prohibited, prevented, etc. an individual who was no longer a church member to attend if they so desired. There were those who we removed from the membership rolls and still attended the church services, along with all of us fellow sinners saved by God's grace! They knew we were no only right in our action, but fair and equitable!

When it states, "if they refuse to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen or a tax collector," it cannot mean "disbar them from attending," unless you disbar the lost. We don't demean the lost publicly. We don't send emails, text or voice messages, instructing tax collectors to "stay away" "You are welcome to be in our church only if you have come to repent!" We don't bar the lost from attending or even setting foot on the church campus!

And neither do we, nor should we, treat those who have been removed from the church in such a way. In fact, we are called upon to love -- even our enemies.

Citing and/or quoting passages such as I Corinthians 5:9, 11; II Thessalonians 3:6-13, 14-15 is but another example of Scripture twisting! It is an attempt to use the Scriptures to justify and defend terrible church practices and self-serving ends. And then we scratch our heads as to why the world has no interest in the Gospel, and no one comes to know the Lord through our local church ministry.

Any kind interpretation which results in a refusal to speak to another person, the breaking of all ties or contact, forbidding someone to attend a church service, or sending them a text, email, or voice message forbidding them to step foot on the church campus -- goes far beyond what these passages teach, and far beyond how you even respond to one who is unsaved, and even no an "enemy." Such is a reprehensible action and any pastor who stands by and allows that to take place, or worse yet, encourages such action, ought to be reprimanded by leadership and/or "the church!"

I Corinthians speak about gross immorality.

II Thessalonians 3:6-13 speaks about those who refuse to work, and are idle, who "bustle about uselessly."

II Thessalonians 3:14-15 speaks to all that which was taught in that book.

None of these passages speak about "the church's" exercise of discipline.

None of these passages even come close to any of the three steps found in Matthew 18.

None of these passages even relate to an ultimate meeting by "the church" to hear a matter.

Could such a meeting get out of hand. It never did and partly because we promoted a sense of fairness and justice by providing a legitimate forum for all to speak and be heard

I guess it could and even might. However, if someone began making strident or ardently felt opinions, or even strongly felt evaluations, God's people will apprise and evaluate it accordingly. It is fair for the moderator to caution and correct. At the end, "the church" can decide if the comments should be discounted, respected, dismissed, regarded, marginalized as unfair or unkind, or were feelings and not facts— just as did that judge!

Openness, fairness, equity, and light goes a long way in speaking to the hearts of God's people and in keeping a proper spirit operating among all those involved.

Covering, concealing, turning down the lights, secrecy, and shutting down differences only produces more distrust, disunity, anger, and continues to undermine pastoral influence.

**The presence or absence of fairness and equity is why some do, and some do not write "An Open Letter"**

**Titles:** Have any suggestions for a title?

- Looking Back: We should be doing this better by now!
- Looking Back: We could have done it better!
- Looking Back: Sad, But Nothing Learned.
- Church Politics: No wonder the world walks away!
- Ugly Churches: Fabricate & Retaliate
- The Ugly Side Of Ministries
  
- The Wake: The damage left behind!
- The Wake: Falwell, Ortberg, White, MacDonald, & others
- The Wake: It's may be heading to your "community."
  
- The Shepherding Ministry: Communicating, Caring, and Confronting
- Navigating Pastoral Leadership Through Troubled Waters

## **1. Excerpt from post: Weaponizing Matthew 18**

The very fact that step three involves bringing them before the church defines the seriousness of the issues. Step three is the final step for substantive and weighty matters of transgression. The very fact that step three involves dismissing brothers and sisters from the fellowship of the local church, establishes the nature of the transgression. It must be significant and serious enough to justify such a potential outcome. The "offense" must be commensurate with the penalty,

Surely, Matthew 18 is not a tool or a means for shutting down opposition, dissent, disagreement, or criticism. The seriousness of the issues is distinguished by the fact that you set up a special all church business meeting to hear both or all sides, and by the fact that the irresolution of the issue involves dis-membership. That is what took place in Acts 15 -- ardent disagreement --and no one was excommunicated.

Over the years of ministry, there have been passionate differences and disagreements over such concerns as whether . . . .

- √ we ought to support this-or-that missionary
- √ we ought to begin a new church outreach or ministry
- √ the church should call this-or-that pastor, administrator, staff member
- √ there was sufficient money available to do this-or-that at this point in time.
- √ the Christian school should expand and add more classes or grades
- √ another house should be purchased for faculty and staff

- √ that was a good or the right price for another house
- √ a church service ought to be canceled for the Super Bowl
- √ that was a fair wage, compensation, or raise for this or that person
- √ a vacation policy was sufficient or insufficient
- √ Pastor Martens should / should not have . . . (fill in the blank)

Disagree and make your case!

Legitimate leadership doesn't think they have all the knowledge needed to operate a large and diverse church. Join in the discussion! Stand up like you ought to in this world, and speak your mind, without fear of being threatened with the "silver bullet" of Matthew 18!

There is no end to the list of differences, disputes, and dissent when you bring together such a wide variety of people. The only churches which have little to no dissent or differences are churches that aren't growing, and everyone is settled and satisfied with each other. But if you are growing and seeing new believers join the fellowship, there will be a continuum of spiritually, materially, socially, educationally, and financially diverse people -- and opinions.

- Navigate it, Don't weaponize it!
- Don't fabricate it into Matthew 18 in order to drive out disagreement and dissent!
- You can have unity without uniformity!
- Talk it out, don't drive people out!
- Abuse Matthew 18 and it will be used as a tool for eliminating dissent and/or retaliation.
- Respect the differences, value the diversity, benefit from the disparities!
- "Argue" it out and arrive at a position where others understand that they are more than just the checkbook which finances the will of the leadership.

Not once do I remember ever invoking or even thinking about applying Matthew 18 to disagreement and ardently voiced differences and opposition. In fact, even when there were difficult times where a member or a group of members were stirring the pot, I never entertained using Matthew 18.

Let's Talk! & Let's Talk Again! Let's talk personally and directly before and after!

That's is what we did at our business meetings (and some would say today -- often too much and too long - lol)!

If a leader can't win in the forum of ideas, then let's move on and not roll over people!

Maybe there is another way to skin a cat!

Perhaps we need to wait until almost every one of us are aboard?

I VALUED the interaction! We all came out the better for it!

## 2. Excerpt from post: Weaponizing Matthew 18

Refusing Offers To Meet Privately: Two-thirds of Matthew 18 is aimed at resolution at the lowest level -- "between you and him alone" -- "μόνος / monos."

Of course, there is a time for an appropriate meeting of the minds as a group. Especially when a group of leaders, members, a committee, or pastors-deacons, are intricately involved in the disagreement and dispute!

But when the individuals involved in a dispute, personally and/or individually refuse to even sit down and talk, one-to-one, personally and/or privately -- then realize that there is little-to-no desire to genuinely resolve an issue! What you are seeing is an attempt to manage the issue, not resolve it!

Biblically, there is always worth and benefit in talking to people one-on-one. Such an approach sets aside many of the mixed currents which clearly operate within a group. The operating group dynamics are far different than that which operates when talking to people personally, privately, and one-to-one! "One-to-one" frees the discussion, in distinction to chilling the atmosphere! With a group, you begin dealing with a whole series of passions and currents flowing -- including pride, a wide mix of relationships, egos on all sides, past stances and statements, different standards of what is deemed a trespass or offense, a variety of outlooks on issues, a different reading of comments and criticisms, mixed temperaments, etc.

That is why it states - you and him alone!

That is why even when it comes to step-two -- it still demands one-on-one -- along with one or two who are only there to establish what was said.

When people refuse to meet personally and individually, and only allow for and virtually only seek a group meeting -- the message is clear. We are in management mode. This is not about sincere resolution! This is about power and control.

When leaders and/or leadership . . . .

- will not accept an offer to meet personally and individually
- do not themselves seek or even have a desire to meet personally and individually
- never attempt or initiate a personal and individual talk
- dismiss outright all offers to talk personally, individually, and/or face-to-face
- encourage or instruct others not to engage personally and individually

. . . . ***you are dealing with dishonest leaders!***

"If the counsel came primarily from loving friends, did their love discount the severity of the danger? Friendly counsel often supplies more support and even rationalization than the confrontation and rebuke that may be required. This is why I think it's always good to check in with a few detractors. They care less about your feelings and tend to shell out truth with no sugar (another reason to love your enemies—Luke 6:27).

Thinking back . . . . my church leadership would intervene to surround me with loving truth-tellers who shined necessary light onto my oblivious blind spots. We pastors tend to polish our personas to a sparkling sheen and then grow bedazzled with our own reflections." CT - Article On John Ortberg

**Other Articles:** (request any previous post cited below by sending a request to TMart2007@Gmail.com or through [RhetoricandHomiletics.org](http://RhetoricandHomiletics.org))

An Open Letter Pts. 1 & 2  
Weaponizing Matthew 18  
Why Leave A Ministry: #1 Reason  
Using "Love" To Silence Criticism  
They All Need To Resign

#WhenLoyaltyOverrulesPersonalIntegrity

#IsAHalfTruthStillAWholeLie

#Matthew18:FabricateAndRetaliate

