



TAKE ONE OR TWO OTHERS

MATTHEW 18:15-18

¹⁵ “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

In this portion of Scripture, Jesus gives his Church what we often call *The Ministry of the Keys*—the privilege to proclaim to the repentant that heaven’s doors are wide open to them, and the responsibility to proclaim to the impenitent that heaven’s doors will be closed and locked shut to them.

Even in instituting this difficult work, Jesus shows nothing but love! Let us count the ways.

1. Jesus shows love to the one who is caught in sin when he states the goal we have as we speak to them—not to shame or berate them. The goal is to “win them over,” to win them back for Christ.
2. Jesus shows love to the one who is caught in sin by calling for a gradual progression of admonishment. To protect the reputation of the individual, it is desirable that as few people as possible know about the sin.
3. Jesus shows love to the one who is caught in sin by calling for more and more individuals to be involved as time goes on. Maybe the person dismisses the warning of one church member as the overly pious concern of a “goody-goody”. What will he think when two members talk to him? Three? Jesus is willing to lovingly apply more and more pressure so that the sinner’s heart may be broken. Then, it will be quickly healed with the Gospel.
4. Jesus shows love for the one who confronts the sin by assuring him

that he will not have to do the job alone. If the individual does not repent, others will join in the task of trying to win him over. This protects the individual who has confronted the sinner from accusations of being heavy handed or even dishonest in his accusation. Other witnesses confirm the truth of the situation.

5. Jesus shows love to the church by letting them know the status of the individual who refuses to repent of the sin. Many of them would know and love this individual. They can join in the attempts to call the individual to repentance.
6. Jesus shows love to the church by eventually letting them know the unrepentant individual is like a tax collector. Tax collectors were considered ceremonially unclean, and thus not part of the congregation. This is a loving warning to the church body that unrepentant sin causes separation.
7. Jesus shows a final love to the person who refuses to repent of their sin by taking away any carnal security he might have. *"I'll be fine on Judgment Day. I'm a member of the church!"* Not anymore. Hopefully, the loss of that false security will serve as a wake-up call for the individual.

Thus, there are three things we can take from Jesus' words.

Church discipline is all about love. Jesus shows love for absolutely everyone when he encourages church discipline.

Church discipline will involve multiple individuals. This cannot be "the pastor's job." Certainly, the pastor is intimately involved in the process as the head under-shepherd of the congregation. But a church discipline program that relies almost entirely on the pastor is a ministry program set up contrary to the expressed will of Christ.

Church discipline will involve a gradual increase in admonition. It would be writing too much into this text to see a "three strikes, you're out" imperative. It might take dozens of conversations before you would conclude that a former member is now an unbeliever. Jesus' point is simply that gradually more people will become involved, and what might have been simple encouragement will transition into loving rebuke.

Yes, even rebuke can be loving. Jesus has shown us that here.

Now may he give us the Holy Spirit, so that we might apply his words wisely.