



He's No Sinner, He's a False Prophet

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."

Matthew 18:15-20 (NASB)

This, my friends, is one of the most misquoted, misused passages of Scripture in the New Testament. And it's driving me crazy. This is the favorite passage of choice by the false prophets and false teachers among the church and because the sheep have so little understanding of Scripture, they go right along with its gross misrepresentation, often repeating the ill-conceived interpretation offered. In all seriousness, folks – if we can't tell when someone is using the plain text of Scripture to deceive us, what hope is there when it comes accompanied by false signs and miracles? God's people are required to know the difference between a sinner and a false prophet and deal with them differently according to His Word. A "sinner" is something entirely different from a "false teacher".

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If for some reason it's not at all clear to you that this passage of Scripture is exclusively limited to personal relationships, just read Peter's remark in the verse immediately following:

*Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall **my brother** sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"*
Matthew 18:21 (NASB)

In some manuscripts verse 15 specifies, "If your brother sins **against you**", adding "against you" to clarify the meaning, but in others they're omitted. That's OK. Peter provides the proper context. He was there and listening and got the meaning. Jesus is talking about people who personally sin against us. Peter even qualifies it a bit more by showing it's about the relationship with "my brother". Jesus has given us parameters for conducting our personal relationships.

But when the false prophet and/or false teacher is called out for what he/she is, when they're confronted publicly as Scripture demands, what do they do? They cry, "Matthew 18! Matthew 18! You didn't come to me privately! You didn't try to reconcile with me! Matthew 18!" And the sheep who rarely if ever actually read their Bible for themselves say, "Yeah, that sounds right. What about Matthew 18? Shouldn't you try that first?"

*'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, **that prophet shall die.**' You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; **you shall not be afraid of him.***

Deuteronomy 18:20-22 (NASB)

Unfortunately (in my opinion) we no longer publicly and immediately stone false prophets to death. Instead we use **the** Stone – the Word of God – against them. But we're certainly **NEVER** to be afraid of them.

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In both Testaments, no one ever hesitated to not only publicly rebuke false prophets in general but to also name them by name!

- Jeremiah names Pashhur (Jer. 20:1-6) and Hananiah (Jer. 28) publicly as false prophets.
- Paul warns against Alexander the coppersmith (2 Ti. 4:14-15), Hymenaeus (1 Ti. 1:20), and Philetus (2 Ti. 2:17-18).
- John warns against Diotrephes (3 Jn. 9).

Even when Peter got out of line, Paul did not hesitate to publicly correct him.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Galatians 2:11 (NASB)

And of course we have the repeated example of Christ Himself who would publicly, loudly, and pointedly rebuke and name the false teachers.

Paul states the situation plainly...

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

Galatians 1:8 (NASB)

So why exactly am I all hopping excited about this particular topic? Time and time again over the past decades I've seen this ruse played out over and over and **over** again. God's true shepherds such as Dave Hunt, Roger Oakland, Jacob Prasch, and others repeatedly take the biblically correct (and public) stand against the false personalities assaulting the flock only to be attacked themselves by these wolves in sheep's clothing intoning, "Matthew 18! Matthew 18!"

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One of the latest in a very long line of succession is a false teacher by the name of Stephen Sizer. Writing from the safety of his blog and refusing to follow through with his earlier promise to debate Jacob Prasch publicly, he wrote one of the most eloquent statements misrepresenting Matthew 18 I have ever read. It was gentle and likable and compelling, except for the fact that it's dead wrong biblically! I'm quite sure those who are swayed by form rather than substance were once again fooled by him. And I have to say that this is **NOT** the fault of the likes of the Jacob Prasch's and Dave Hunts of the world who properly respond in truth to these deceivers. No, in reality the problem is out here among *us* in the church's rank and file.

Just from a common sense point of view, the fact that sinners have to be treated differently than heretics should be apparent. Personal sin between brethren is a form of *self*-deception which needs loving correction to overcome. But heresy is a form of sin which engages in *active* deception of everyone else around them. One is self-injurious, the other is an assault on others. But even if you don't want to see the plain difference between the two, the biblical examples are consistent and plentiful. There's no reconciliation between darkness and light, only the light exposing the darkness for what it is.

I have become very concerned because I've come to realize that just a generation ago, Bible-believing Christians like my father and grandfather rejected outright every single thing which the average Christian today is allowing into the Church. The Word-Faith movement, the Faith-Prosperity Gospel, ecumenism, Kingdom Now Theology (and all its variants), and even market-driven psycho-babble like that manufactured by Joel Osteen, Rick Warren, and Robert Schuller – **ALL** of it – was soundly rejected. It was never allowed into mainstream Evangelicalism and was the exclusive domain of the lunatic fringe. But what is happening now? No longer biblically equipped to discern the difference, the majority are in acceptance of these things and more.

I can't recommend strongly enough that every true believer make their best faith effort to re-introduce the absolute truth of God's Word into their fellowship. It's not Jacob Prasch's fault that people side with the Stephen Sizer's of this world, but an indication of the degree to which God's Word has been withdrawn to near obscurity in the very body of Christ. If people aren't equipped to identify an obvious deceiver like Stephen Sizer in his mishandling of a plain and simple passage of Scripture, what is to be expected when the Antichrist and False Prophet come in their full power to deceive, if possible, even the Elect?

In His Love,

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