

I wanted to post notes from my conversations with Pastor Bruce Morrison, especially those regarding criticism over whether we actually took a biblical approach to the sin we all saw at GFA. He said that I could share these notes with you, and I'm interested in your feedback. I hope you will find this as helpful and informative as I did as we defend our approach from these criticisms. -JD

Notes I took from our phone call:

2-3 witnesses don't have to be limited to 2 or 3, or necessarily have to be witnesses to the offense but rather to the appeal

These are not individual offenses. This wasn't a private thing that GFA did with individual people. This is something very systemic, at the very heart of the organization, for decades, involving 10,000+ churches in Asia birthed from this organization.

By there being 75 people we are at the 2-3 witnesses stage - it's collective and yet individual - each of us is bringing two or three people - and together we are coming as a group to appeal to a systemic problem, not to individual harms from one individual or another.

There's grace in how we apply these things - we are not under law as NT believers. The things that are wrong were not initiated by us.

The principles of Mt 18 about reconciliation and correction are definitely applicable, but this is a sin against the Holy Spirit, not against one person

Two women in church in Philippi who were arguing - Paul addressed it not privately and circumvented those first two steps, and addressed it before the whole church - because the whole church knew. What's going on here is not a private matter - it's much, much greater than that.

Biblically speaking, if it's a church offense, you deal with the offense in front of the entire body.

We could have possibly even gone to the whole Church right away, because this is an offense against the whole Church. We believe we handled this with as much grace as we possibly could have.

It's not about what people will think when we do this, rather, did we do what was right?

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Notes Bruce wrote and sent me in followup:

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February 24, 2015

Hi JD

After our conversation last night I thought it might be helpful for me to outline a few key points.

1. From the Matthew 18 passage, note that the onus is on the victim of sin, or the one observing the sin, to address the offender. It may seem that God is not being fair by requiring this, nevertheless, the Lord spoke clearly here. No doubt, His motive was the best interests of the entire church.

2. In Canada, every registered charity, which includes churches, must be governed by a Board of Directors. The Board is responsible for all matters concerning the function of a charity, which includes things like "due diligence" and "duty of care" in all matters.

Every charity must include in their Constitution and By-Laws, a statement of purposes that outlines the work of the charity. Courts make judgments on whether or not a charity has operated within the scope of their stated purposes. They are also judged on the basis of "good faith".

Issues with respect to duty of care, due diligence and good faith certainly apply to the situation you describe.

I'm not aware of Federal or State legislation that governs churches in the USA, or how Courts judge matters in your country when a church is involved. I suspect there are many similarities to Canada. In Canada, a Board of Directors is considered to be a single person under the Law. Therefore, the degree to which any church is operating outside the law, it is the Board as a whole that is culpable. If one person in a church commits a crime or a tort within a church, the Board is ultimately held responsible. This holds true even if the offender is not a member of the Board.

Keeping this in mind, when an appeal is made to a Board regarding something that is amiss in an organization, there is a sense that the appeal is actually being made to the offending party itself. This is the case even if the Board is unaware of the wrong done.

Should a Board dismiss an appeal that has merit, an obvious conflict of interest exists. It would be the same as asking someone charged with a crime to be the judge at his own trial.

Think of it this way. A bank teller notices that a fellow teller is embezzling funds. An appeal is made to the offending teller, but the appeal is rejected. Several more appeals are made, all to no avail. It cannot be said that the teller making the appeals has discharged his moral duty until he takes the matter to those in authority in the bank.

Similarly, if appeals based on serious concerns are made to a Christian ministry, and those appeals are rejected, it is time to go to the greater body. The individuals and churches that support a ministry constitute the body that is being victimized. From a scriptural standpoint the offended party must be informed of matters.

3. When it comes to responding to sin in the church, what Jesus taught in Matthew 18 is not the only pattern to observe. Other patterns are not contradictory, they reflect different circumstances.

For example, In Acts 5 and the story of Ananias and Sapphira, Peter first addressed their sin in front of the entire church. The result was a godly fear regarding the affects sin can have in a church.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul did not appeal to the offender directly, but instead brought the matter to the whole church. The reason was two-fold. First, the example being set by the one committing the sin could influence the behaviour of others in the church. Second, the Holy Spirit was again emphasizing the responsibility that churches have to deal with sin in the church.

The primary difference between Matthew 18 and the other passages is the exclusive nature of the latter. In Matthew 18 the focus is on a sin by one individual committed against another. Thus, the scope is more limited. It only becomes an issue for the whole church if appeals to the offender are rejected.

Early manuscripts and several modern translations do not include the word "you" in Matthew 18:15. For example, the NIV reads, "If your brother or sister sins...". There is no "you". The sin then, is not necessarily committed against the person called upon to make the appeal. It may simply have been a sin observed. Nevertheless, the sin does not appear to be known to the whole church, therefore is more private in nature.

Undoubtedly, it will have an indirect affect but not the direct affects such as seen in Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 5.

In both Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 5 passages, since the sins were having a more direct impact on the church, reproofs were made before the whole church.

With respect to applying Matthew 18 to your situation, think of the appeals your group have made so far to as being in keeping with step one. Since it is the organization as a whole that you are appealing to, it cannot be said that step two has been followed until objective outside parties are involved. Then, I would take care not to miss overriding scriptural principles that apply here. It seems to me that the Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 5 approach is more applicable to your case.

Feel free to share this with others if you think it may be of help.

Blessings,

Bruce

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March 7, 2015

Hi JD

I am troubled that GFA would fault you on the process you have followed so far. This, it seems to me, is avoidance through deflection. By that I mean that GFA is making you and others appear to be the ones at fault as a means of mitigation.

With respect to Matthew 18, in addition to the specific 3-step directions, Jesus taught some key principles regarding the presence of sin in the church.

I believe that the principles should be the primary focus of your group. Among them, first and foremost, is that whenever there is sin in the church it must be addressed, even if it becomes necessary to tell the whole church. The reason: since sin is contrary to the nature of Christ it is also contrary to the nature of His church.

Second, notice the wording of the text:

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.

"Just between the two of you", indicates that the sin committed was against one person. Thus, those who are aware of the sin are just the one who committed the sin and the person against whom it was committed, and perhaps another who witnessed it.

In your case, you are not describing a wrong committed by one individual against another. You are describing an organization practicing wrong against a group. To apply Matthew 18 to your situation, I believe that the group should be seen as the "one sinned against" and GFA as an organization being, "the party that has sinned". If you understand it this way then you have not proceeded past step one of Matthew 18. I say this inasmuch as you have not brought others to witness your appeal as per step 2.

Third, notice in the text that a 3-fold refusal is described. Jesus emphasized this.

The first refusal was when the individual made the appeal, the second refusal was the appeal made with witnesses present, and the third refusal was to ignore the church. In your case, there seems to be a strong resistance on the part of GFA to hear anything any in the group has to say. This suggests the presence of a spiritual stronghold that is not of God. Their refusal to give any credence to your concerns is not what one would expect from a credible organization.

You have also been very patient so they have had ample time to consider what you have said. Their silence is a form of refusal. Their criticism, alleging you have not properly followed Matthew 18, is another form of refusal.

I think you have made every reasonable effort to make appeals and have only met with repeated rejection. I believe you and your group have discharged yourselves with integrity in the way you have conducted yourselves.

As I indicated in my earlier letter, I am not sure that Matthew 18 is the method for you to follow. This seems even more apparent to me considering that the group that is being wronged is much bigger than those who worked for GFA. Every individual supporter as well as every supporting church acts in good faith when giving their support, believing that GFA is credible in every respect. From that standpoint the wrongs committed extend beyond those done to your group. Breaches of good faith extend to all the supporters as well. As I mentioned in my last letter, it seems to me that the Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 5 approach is more applicable to your case.

I am encouraged to hear that you will soon have your website ready. I will be praying for all concerned, including GFA.

I respect the integrity that I see in you. You are being careful to act honourably.

Blessings,
Bruce Morrison