

The Right Use of Matthew 18:15-17

By J. L. Collins

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Pastors and churches get in a lot of trouble by misusing Matthew 18:15-17. In addition, the church never benefits from the intended use of these important concepts.

What follows is originally presented within the context of a discussion about church government; however, the clarification of Matthew 18:15-17 is the result.

MATTHEW 18:15-17 IS NOT DEMOCRATIC RULE!

Anyone can disagree with me on the meaning and application of Matthew 18:15-17 and still agree that the church is not intended by God to be a democracy. I give a lot of emphasis to Matthew 18 for two reasons:

1. Some people use Matthew 18:15-17 as their favorite text to justify killing theocracy and keeping democracy alive as their form of church government, and
2. A good understanding of Matthew 18:15-17 is necessary if one is going to properly understand and apply 1 Timothy 5:19-20 (which was discussed toward the end of Chapter Three).

This dual purpose mandates that a great deal of time, energy and space be given to the analysis of Matthew 18:15-17.

Those who opt for democracy for church government over theocracy often do so based on a misunderstanding of Matthew

18:15-17. Dispelling the confusion over this verse is mandatory because many church member's first response to, "The kingdom of God is not a democracy" is, "Matthew 18 calls for a democratic meeting of the church."

A few months ago while I was watching the Christian television channel, and saw a movie about a pastor that faced the problem of having a prominent man of the congregation sexually involved with a woman that was not his wife. (I have forgotten the name of the movie.) The pastor followed what he thought were the dictates of Matthew 18. The pastor talked with the adulterous man (a deacon of the church) privately. The man remained unrepentant, and sexually active with a woman not his wife. Then the pastor took two witnesses to the man. That approach failed to make the man repent. Then, the pastor brought the man before the congregation for rebuke. The man failed to repent, and determined to remain in adultery. At that meeting, a vote was taken and the adulterous man was expelled from the membership of the church.

The adulterous man brought suit against the pastor and the church for slander and won a financial settlement.

The pastor, the next day, while still reeling from the court judgment against the church and while seated at his desk an angel visited him. The angel told him that what he (the pastor) did in following Matthew 18:15-17 was the right thing to do. The pastor

asked the angel, "Then why did we lose in court?" The angel responded, "The world's judicial system is not Christian in nature," and "Any church that follows the direction of Matthew 18:15-17 should anticipate losing in court, if charges are brought."

The angel comforted the pastor by telling him, "Everything would be alright," and "Keep the faith."

In the next scene the adulterous man came into the Pastor's office weeping over his sin, and asked his pastor to forgive him. The man repented of his adultery, refused that the thousands of dollars awarded to him by the court, was restored to the church, and attendance at the church skyrocketed.

The producer of the film had to have a happy ending. However, if your church uses Matthew 18:15-17 in the traditional manner do not hold your breath waiting on the person awarded \$500,000 to break down in tears, tell you he left his mistress, and refuse the court awarded settlement to the church.

I submit to you that the reason churches can expect to be found liable for their traditional use of Matthew 18:15-17 is not because the court system is ungodly, but because the churches' use of Matthew 18:15-17 is ungodly. Keep reading, and I will tell you what I mean.

Some mistake Matthew 18:15-17 for a democratic vote in the church. A simple analysis of the text will dispel that theory. It is impossible to have a democratic church vote placed in this text without reading something into the text that is not there. The proof is in the Greek word "σοι" found in Matthew 18:17, and translated "you" in that passage. It is second person, singular. It means you, as an individual, not you as a group or church. It is "you person," not "you all."

I will paraphrase Matthew 18:15-17 to clarify.

(15) If your brother does something wrong to you, tell him is fault in a private session between you and him. If he responds well, then you have gained a good relationship with your brother. (16) But if he does not respond well tell him the same thing in the presence of two or three witnesses. This will establish your words and your sincerity. (17) If he still does not respond well, then tell the same thing to the entire church at a church meeting. If he still does not respond well, then you can treat him like a heathen and publican (having nothing more to do with him).

Where is the church vote or call for excommunication in the above verses? There is nothing in Matthew 18:15-17 about having a church meeting for the purpose of withdrawing church fellowship from a person you are not getting along with. This is a passage

designed to let the church know that you are doing right when you ignore a person in church. It is for your personal protection when your personal problems with another church member create a public environment where you have nothing to do with him. Others in the church might look upon ignoring him as an evil act on your part. Matthew 18:15-17 is designed to let the church know that you are not being evil when you ignore him. You are being godly.

Put a name to the offended brother in Matthew, and you will see what I mean:

"If FRANK'S brother sins against FRANK, (FRANK IS TO) go and tell him his fault, between FRANK and him alone. If he listens to FRANK, FRANK has gained FRANK'S brother. But if he does not listen (TO FRANK), take one or two others along with you FRANK, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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 (FRANK, ONLY) as a Gentile and a tax collector." The key is in the word "you." It is second person singular. This is "you, only," not "you-all church."

Matthew 18:17 does mention the whole church, but this is not a reference to an entire church body withdrawing fellowship from a person who is having personal fellowship troubles with one

member of the church. It is the corporate body of the church agreeing with the offended brother that he has the right to treat the fellow church member as a heathen and publican. The reference in verse 19 ("...if two...agree...it shall be done...(by) my Father...") is that even if there are but two in the church who agree that the offended brother has a legitimate right to withdraw association with the charged brother, that such a decision is approved of and "binding." It is binding both on Earth and approved of and "bound" by God in Heaven. Rather than debate the subtitles and intricacies of this verse suffice it to be known that verse 19 is does not require half of the church to agree with the offended brother before action is taken!

This is court, where two brothers appear before the church body. The offended brother states his case against the offending brother.

There are three possible conclusions to this trial.

1. The offending brother repents, and all is forgiven (see verse 21), or
2. The offended brother cannot find anyone in the church to support his charges against the so-called offending brother, and thus the offended brother loses the right in the sight of both church and God to treat the other brother as a heathen and publican (see verse 19), or
3. The offending brother is deemed guilty by the church and this sets the offended brother free to treat the offending

brother as a heathen and publican without the offended brother being criticized for his rejection of the offending brother.

However, telling the matter to the church is not synonymous with asking for a church vote to withdraw fellowship from the offending brother on the basis of his personal problems with a fellow church member. The group action of the church is to evaluate the offended brother's claim that he has rights to personally withdraw fellowship from the offending brother. Again, this is clarified in the statement (verse 17) "if he does not hear the church (or those in the church that agree with the offended brother), then let him (the offending brother) be unto you (the offended brother, alone) as a heathen and publican. It seems that any in the church that might side with the offended brother might have the right to also withdraw fellowship from the offending brother, but that is as far as the text will allow. There is no ultimatum in this verse that the church, as a whole, is placed in the position to or not to withdraw fellowship from the accused brother. Their corporate support is thrown behind the offending brother, or behind the offended brother but not "at" the charged brother. Matthew 18:15-20 is not a text on whether or not to throw the charged brother out of the church by democratic vote.

Matthew 18:15-17 is and has been often used as a text that puts the church in the awkward position of excommunicating an offending

brother on the basis of a private and personal disagreement with another church member. To call for a church vote on such a thing will always create difficulties. No man is an island. The offending brother will have friends, relatives, and followers in the church. To call for a "Vote him out; Yes or No!" decision is to court disaster in and for the church. Harm to the church is not the intent of this verse. If you let these verses speak for themselves you will find the interpretation that Matthew 18:15-20 calls for is the vote of the church on excommunication of a member charged by another member for a private offense, has no merit.

In churches where Matthew 18:15-17 is used at a corporate meeting to oust a member by democratic vote, it usually backfires and severely damages the church. God does not bless that action. Why? Because Matthew 18:15-17 is not intended to end in a democratic vote of the church for or against excommunication of anyone. I know most people have been told otherwise. Being told so, does not make it so.

If the offended member brings a false charge should the church vote to excommunicate the liar? Isn't slander a sufficient reason for excommunication? No.

The act of not supporting the lying church member in his charge against the so-called offending brother is sufficient for the moment. Likewise, the act of supporting the offended brother's

action of withdrawing personal fellowship from the offending brother is sufficient action on the part of the church. These are the ONLY actions that are called for in Matthew 18:17-20.

One might ask, "How then do we deal with troublemakers in the church?" Strangely enough, the answer is Matthew 18:15-17! If enough people do this, then the troublemaker will go away. And, if the pastor is positioned in the church as the theocratic leader, then the pastor can deal successfully with him with little or no disruption to the church! And, the information gleaned during the process of Matthew 18 can be used as a starting place for excommunication; but, more about that later.

It is the responsibility of every church member to deal with troublemakers.

Galatians 6:1 -- Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

"If a man be overtaken in a fault, that is, be brought to sin by the surprise of temptation. It is one thing to overtake a fault by contrivance and deliberation, and a full resolution in sin, and another thing to be overtaken in a fault. The latter is the case here supposed, and herein the apostle shows that great tenderness should be used. Those who are spiritual, by whom is meant, not

only the ministers...but other Christians too... must *restore such a one with the spirit of meekness*. Here observe, 1. The duty we are directed to--to restore such; we should labour, by faithful reproofs, and pertinent and seasonable councils, to bring them to repentance. The original word, *katartizete*, signifies *to set in joint*, as a dislocated bone; accordingly we should endeavour to set them in joint again, to bring them to themselves, by convincing them of their sin and error, persuading them to return to their duty, comforting them in a sense of pardoning mercy thereupon, and having thus recovered them, confirming our love to them. 2. The manner wherein this is to be done: *With the spirit of meekness....*" Matthew Henry *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1721). Public domain text. No rights reserved.

1 Timothy 5:20 -- "but ([v. 20](#)) *those that sin rebuke before all;*

“...thou needest not be so tender of other people, but rebuke them publicly." Or "those that sin before all rebuke before all...and that those who are in danger of sinning by the example of their fall may take warning by the rebuke given them for it, *that others also may fear.*" Observe, (1.) Public scandalous sinners must be rebuked

publicly: as their sin has been public, and committed before many, or at least come to the hearing of all, so their reproof must be public, and before all. (2.) Public rebuke is designed for the good of others, that they may fear, as well as for the good of the party rebuked; hence it was ordered under the law that public offenders should receive public punishment, that *all Israel might hear, and fear, and do no more wickedly.*” Matthew Henry *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1721). Public domain text. No rights reserved.

Romans 16:17 -- *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.*

“How earnest, how endearing, are Paul's exhortations! He teaches them, 1. To see their danger: Mark those who cause divisions *and offences*....Those who burden the church with dividing and offending impositions, who uphold and enforce those

impositions, who introduce and propagate dividing and offending notions, which are erroneous or justly suspected, who out of pride, ambition, affectation of novelty, or the like, causelessly separate from their brethren, and by perverse disputes, censures, and evil surmisings, alienate the affections of Christians one from another--these cause divisions and offences, contrary to, or different from (for that also is implied, it is *para ten didachen*), the *doctrine which we have learned*. Whatever varies from the form of sound doctrine which we have in the scriptures opens a door to divisions and offences. If truth be once deserted, unity and peace will not last long. Now, *mark* those that thus cause divisions, *skopein*. Observe them, the method they take, the end they drive at. There is need of a piercing watchful eye to discern the danger we are in from such people; for commonly the pretences are plausible, when the projects are very pernicious. Do not look only at the divisions and offences, but run up those streams to the fountain, and mark those that cause them, and especially that in them which causes

these divisions and offences, those lusts on each side whence come these wars and fightings. A danger discovered is half prevented. 2. To shun it: "*Avoid them. Shun all necessary communion and communication with them....*" Matthew Henry *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1721). Public domain text. No rights reserved.

1 Corinthians 5:11 -- *But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. 12 For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13 But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*

“...the apostle (Paul)...tells them that if any man called a brother, any one professing Christianity...were *a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer*, that they should not *keep company with him, nor so much as eat with such a one*. They were to avoid all familiarity with him; they were to have no commerce with him; they were to

have no commerce with him: but, that they might shame him, and bring him to repentance, must disclaim and shun him. Note, Christians are to avoid the familiar conversation of fellow-Christians that are notoriously wicked, and under just censure for their flagitious practices. Such disgrace the Christian name. They may call themselves *brethren in Christ*, but they are not Christian brethren. They are only fit companions for the brethren in iniquity; and to such company they should be left, till they *mend their ways and doings*. He does not forbid the Christians the like commerce with scandalously wicked heathens....But, as to members of the church, they are within, are professedly bound by the laws and rules of Christianity, and not only liable to the judgment of God, but to the censures of those who are set over them, and the fellow-members of the same body, when they transgress those rules. Every Christian is bound to judge them unfit for communion and familiar converse. They are to be punished, by having this mark of disgrace put upon them, that they may be shamed,

and, if possible, reclaimed thereby: and the more because the sins of such much more dishonour God than the sins of the openly wicked and profane can do. The church therefore is obliged to clear herself from all confederacy with them, or connivance at them, and to bear testimony against their wicked practices. Note: Though the church has nothing to do with those without, it must endeavour to keep clear of the guilt and reproach of those within....'Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person,' [v. 13](#). Cast him out of your fellowship, and avoid his conversation." Matthew Henry *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1721). Public domain text. No rights reserved.

Troublemakers should not be ignored, tolerated, or permitted to cause trouble.

Beyond this, there was no official membership status of the first-century church. Those who attended church did so under the threat of their lives. There was no need for official membership status. To declare that Matthew 18 ends in the termination of official

membership status is adding to the scripture because no such status existed in the first-century church.

God will not change his mind and declare that Matthew 18 is a text on democratic rule in the church if enough churches say it is, or if some really big churches govern as if it is. Contrary to popular opinion, God is not swayed by the majority vote of churches.

Matthew 18 relates to a private offense between two people and how to deal with such personal offenses. A result should not be the excommunication of the offender from the church by majority vote of the congregation. Doesn't automatic excommunication from a church because one man does something wrong, no matter how trivial, to another man seem like a huge step to take?

Beyond that, how would you like to be in a church of 1,000 and be put in the position to be asked to vote someone you don't know and never personally met out of your church on the basis of one complainer and two witnesses? How great would the offense have to be for you to vote someone out of the fellowship of the church? It would have to be pretty big, wouldn't it?

What if the offended brother got upset with another brother because the offending brother chose to set next to him in services, and during services the offending brother often talked. Despite the repeated requests of the offended brother, and no matter where the

offended brother sat, the offending brother found him in the worship center, always sat by him, and continually talked through every service.

What if the offended brother then called a couple of his friends to accompany him to present the request to the offending brother to either sit elsewhere or stop talking throughout the worship service. What if the offending brother said, "I can sit anywhere I want, and there is no law that says I can't talk." What if the offended brother then started giving the offending brother the cold shoulder, avoiding him and such? What if the offending brother started a rumor around the church that the offended brother was a rude and unkind man? What if some of the church members saw the offended brother purposefully avoiding and not communicating with the offending brother, and started believing that there was something wrong with the offended brother and the rumor, even though untrue, begins to appear valid. What if the church started shunning the offended brother because of his seeming unchristian behavior towards the offending brother? What recourse would the offended brother have? Is he supposed to take this matter before the church and call for the excommunication of the offending brother? Ludicrous. The offended brother would be laughed out of the church, and the rumor started about his unchristian attitude would seem more valid than ever. But, what if the offended brother could defend himself by asking the church to hear his case? When he did that, the offending brother would have to leave the

church (most do), or face the reality of being caught in his wrongs. If he stayed in the church, then the offending brother would be exposed, and he would get another chance to sit with the offended brother, but quietly. If the offending brother continued to disrupt the worship and listening of the offended brother, then those seated around would know what was going on and a withdraw of the offending brother from the church would be seen as an act befitting good Christian behavior. The result is the offending brother is exposed, and the offended brother is validated.

This is how it is supposed to work.

The corporate vote of the church is designed to give strength to the offended brother's withdrawal of fellowship as an act of godliness, not an unchristian act. Or, best case scenario, the offending brother gets caught, and repents. Either way, the problems are solved. This is the purpose of Matthew 18. Creating more problems by making a private matter a basis for a church wide democratic church vote on whether the offending brother can be a member ruins the value of this procedure, and more often than not creates problems that could have been and should have been avoided.

Matthew 18 relates to a private offense between two people and how to deal with such private offenses. The ultimate goal of this

private offense is not excommunication of the offender from the church by majority vote of the congregation.

Another negative factor is making Matthew 18 a democratic vote for excommunication is that a person who is having difficulty with a church member would have to feel that the difficulty would warrant at least one-half of the church voting to withdraw fellowship from him before he felt justified in confronting that brother. This would leave all but the most serious of personal offenses unaccounted for. If Matthew 18 were used as a route for church excommunication, dealing with personal offenses would delete all scenarios but the most extreme. It would mandate that you and I continue in uninterrupted fellowship with every Christian who treats us unkind, but below the level where 50% of the congregation might think such treatment warrants his excommunication. A wonderful tool which is designed to help the church tolerate, understand, or support our justified coolness towards a fellow church member becomes lost.

I feel any historic reference, no matter how respected the author, to Matthew 18 being used for excommunication is nothing more than an example of this verse being misread and misapplied for a very long time, and to the long time detriment of the body of Christ.

Matthew 18 is designed for private offenses between church members. These offences could be minor or major. If during the

"tell it to the church" time it is learned that the offense is severe enough that the church would be directly effected, then Matthew 18 may be the starting point for excommunication (1 Corinthians 5), or direct public confrontation (Galatians 2). It would be unwise to excommunicate "on the spot." The limited provisions of Matthew 18 would discourage that.

The text identifies the participants as two Christian men in the same church. Mt 18:15 and following seems like it best fits a private (no witnesses) or semiprivate (limited witnesses) offense. Galatians 2 gives us the steps to take in a public offense.

Some take Matthew 18:15-17 as the text to use when the offense is slanderous and will bring a bad reputation to the church if the offense became known, and/or the private and personal sin against the offended brother is so grievous that the majority of the assembly would be appalled by the sin and be driven to take some kind of action in the absence of the repentance of the offender. Thus, the offended brother is taking offense both personally because he is a member of the church, and he is taking offense on behalf of the general assembly, or at least feel the personal offense is grievous enough that if the general assembly knew of it and the offender did not repent, the general assembly would take empathic or sympathetic offense on behalf of the offended brother. It is this "taking offense on behalf of the general assembly," or "taking offense on behalf of the offended brother" that gives this text

(according to some) its major emphasis, and sets the stage for the final act of "let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" which they (wrongly) deem synonymous with "excommunication."

Thus, this text is moved away from its original intent of attempting to solve a personal and private (or semiprivate) difficulty between two men in the same church; one feeling personally offended, the other charged by the offended brother with the personal offense, to the offended brother bringing to the attention of the whole assembly such a grievous sin that the whole (or at least the majority) would take personal offense directly, or take empathic or sympathetic offense on behalf of the slighted brother.

Moving away from the stated intent of the verse: "*...if your brother shall trespass against you...*" to a generic and extended meaning of:

"If a brother shall do a great enough sin against you or do a great enough sin against the church that such a sin would warrant excommunication if he (the offending brother) remains unrepentant, then approach him privately about his sin."

You can see that moving the text away from the original intended use greatly lengthens this passage.

It is in this expanded and convoluted reading that proponents of "extending this verse to include meanings not found in the original writing" gain their strength. So, in order to make their position more clear I have rewritten the verse twice to reflect their actual and proposed use of Matthew 18:15a. Proponents of adding extended meaning to this verse will often take offense at the following rewrite, but when confronted and cornered (that is, when their actual application of Matthew 18:15a is accomplished), these rewrites do reflect their position, exactly. Let me encourage you not to be swayed by their protests. People are what they do, not what they say.

15a: "If your brother shall sin a great enough personal and private (or semiprivate) sin against you that you feel the majority of your church members would vote for excommunication if this personal and private (or semiprivate) sin was made known to the whole assembly and was not followed by the offender repenting, then go and tell him his fault between you and him alone...."

or/and

"15: "If your brother shall sin a great enough sin against the church you are a member of and as a member of the church you take offense to this sin against the church, and you feel the majority of the church would vote for excommunication if the sin was made known to the whole assembly and was not followed by the guilty

person repenting, then go and tell him his fault between you and him alone...."

The second area of difficulty with Matthew 18 comes in the analysis of verse 17, "*...but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.*"

Those who would extend the personal and private (or semiprivate) difficulties between two brothers to the offended brother taking offense due to a crime or sin against the good name of the church body, or the church body taking offense due to the severity of the personal sin against the hurt brother now have to deal with the problem of the word "thee" in this text. The word "thee" is second person singular. Proponents of "the whole church is offended therefore we are excommunicating" want to use the plural, "you all" here.

This verse also, they must rewrite in order to support their position that the action of declaring the offending brother worthy of treatment as a heathen and publican is action taken by the church against the offender. In other words, at the point of the "guilty verdict coupled with the lack of repentance of the one charge to be guilty" the entire church, by majority vote, declares that everyone in the church is to treat the guilty brother as a heathen and publican. The rewrite requires "thee" to be replaced with "everyone in the church" and is rewritten as follows:

V17 *"...let him be unto everyone in the church as an heathen man and a publican."*

Their position is that since the word "church" is used in verse 17 that the "thee" that follows must be "thee church body."

The problem is solved by simply asking the question: Who is Jesus talking to in Matthew 18:15-20? Is this a text written to the church body? If so, then "thee" might be "the unified church." However, it does not take a genius to read Matthew 18:15 (the introductory verse for the issue) which clearly states that Jesus is addressing, not the church but any individual within the church. The "thee" of verse 15 is the individual within the church to the exclusion of the church body. Every "thee" that follows (through verse 20) is the same individual within the church. If we take these words "the individual within the church to the exclusion of the church body" and use them or a variation of them (i.e., "thee alone" or "thee only") in place of every "thee" in Matthew 18:15-20 the text reads:

V15 -- Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee (alone or only), go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone (and only). If he shall hear thee (alone), thou has gained thy brother.

V16 -- But if he will not hear thee (alone), then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

V17 -- And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee (alone) as an heathen man and a publican.

That makes sense. Now, let's take "thee" and make it the "church assembly." The text will not make sense.

V15 -- Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against the church body, go and tell him his fault between the church body and him alone. If he shall hear the church body, thou has gained thy brother.

V16 -- But if he will not hear the church body, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

V17 -- And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto the church body as an heathen man and a publican.

See it as it is. Read this text leaving Jesus' singular references singular and his plural references plural. That will give an accurate account of Jesus' words. An analysis of those words will give an accurate intent. The proponents of changing singulars to plurals do so subtly and to the detriment of any church that would adopt their rewrite of God's Word. It is in the application and intent of that change that they become bold. They are timid, or illusive when confronted with the fact they have changed the scripture.

The best way to read singular references is to add the word "alone" after the singular reference. That is the intent of a reference in the singular. For example, if I say, "I will give you \$100 if you will wash my car," that does not mean that every church member will receive \$100 for washing my car. The "you" is "you alone."

Verse 17 states; *"...let him be unto you (alone) as a heathen man and a publican."* This cannot be argued as incorrect by anyone with 7th grade or higher level English skills. Every English translation of the Bible honors the "you alone" concept of verse 17.

Those who would make "you alone" mean "the whole of the church assembly" do a lot of fancy footwork to get your eyes off of the simple fact that Jesus said what he meant and meant what he said. The action of verse 17 is that the result of the church trial brought by the action of the offended brother has yielded in a verdict approved by the church. That verdict is, "...let him (the

offending and unrepentant) brother be unto you (the offended brother, alone) as a heathen man and a publican."

To take it further is to add to the scripture. It is dangerous and ill-advised.

However they say, "But this is the historic position of the church is that the offending and unrepentant brother becomes as a heathen and a publican to the entire church, thus excommunicated as a result of the guilty decision of the church." And, they are right; this is a long-standing misapplication of these verses. Somewhere we can apply the words of Jesus, "Let God be true and every man a liar." This seems like a good place.

The majority was wrong when they wanted to return to Egypt. The majority was wrong when they wanted to return from the borders of the Promise Land back to the wilderness. The majority was wrong when they tolerated the sin of the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5, and the majority was wrong when they refused to receive him back after he repented. The majority was wrong about Jesus when they said he was not the Christ. The majority is not always right. To hang with the majority when overwhelming evidence proves the majority in error, shows poor character.

This is the same charge the Pharisees made against Jesus. He broke tradition. Jesus said, "Ye do error, teaching for commandments of God, the doctrines of men."

I guess each generation must face the words of Christ for themselves. Personally, I opt to stay with the scripture even if I am in the minority. I would rather place my faith and practice on what Jesus said, than on what men who study Jesus tell me he should have said, or meant to say. I sleep better at night doing that. And, guess what! Using Matthew 18:15-17 the way it is written, rather than the way it has been rewritten by others past and present works better in real church life.

In 1998 I completed a book entitled "Does God Call Women to Pastor or Lead Men?" It has a simple theme: Women are not called of God to serve in leadership over churchmen or teaching over churchmen. I gave the book to several pastor friends of mine who disagreed with my position. Some of them changed their position to adhere to mine after reading the book. Most of them said they agreed with the book, but did not change the tradition and practice of their church that had women leading and teaching men. When a person's integrity is low, even tradition that he knows violates scripture is more valuable than the Word of God to him. Some people are more comfortable with wayward tradition than with Christ.

Does *"let him be unto you as a heathen man and a publican,"* mean the church is to kick this guy out of the church, remove his name from the membership role, and deny him voting rights? Most believe that is what this verse means. There are a number of problems with this analysis. First, the first-century church did not have a membership role. You came to church and as a result of habitual attendance and involvement were considered a functional part of the church, or you did not come to church enough to be regarded as a functional part of the church. "Official membership" is a Western world idea.

The United States Federal Government and the Internal Revenue Service says you must have an "official membership role" if you are going to be tax-exempt as a religious organization in America. It is very hard now, and it was very hard then to deny a person access to a place of worship, or a private home during a time of public worship. There were very few "business meetings" and "voting sessions" in the first-century church. There is no biblical evidence there the first-century had American style democratic voting sessions. The church of the first-century lived in a government of a dictator (the Caesar), and understood the concept of the kingdom of God (theocracy) in a way that Westerners living in a democratic environment struggle to grasp. Kingdoms are not conducive to democratic business meetings and voting sessions. To deny a person that right to vote means little today and meant little to nothing during the first-century church.

The second area of difficulty with Matthew 18 comes in the analysis of verse 17, "*...but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.*"

Whatever "*let him be unto you a heathen man and a publican*" does mean, the "you" of this verse is singular. This means the ultimate conclusion (or punishment) for this unrepentant brother is limited, in some way if not in the most important way, to his relationship with the harmed brother.

The criticism of this position is that some claim it would be unchristian to treat a fellow church member (or fellow Christian) in such a way (that is, personally withdrawing fellowship). Yet those same people claim that the entire church withdrawing fellowship from the offending brother is a Christian treatment! Odd folks.

Some that challenge my position often say that "*let him be unto you as a heathen man and a publican*" is a positive thing, and that the offended brother (or/and the church) is to be extra nice to the offending brother in an effort to win him to the Lord and back to the church. Their position is that we are to treat the world (heathens and publicans) with the love of Christ in an effort to win them to Christ. So, the offended brother is to get an extra dose of love and kindness as a result of his failure to repent when caught in an offense (sin) against a fellow church member (or fellow

Christian). This sounds good. Certainly "the love of Christ" for a sinner, sounds good. However, EVERY thrust of this text screams against such an analysis.

1. The offending brother:
 - A. Sinned against a fellow church affiliate.
 - B. Refused to repent when confronted by the harmed brother.
 - C. Maintained his refusal to repent when his sin was exposed to witnesses.
 - D. Stood strong in sin against the harmed brother even when his violation was made public to the church body.

The conclusion of these four consecutive negatives cannot be a positive any more than it would make sense for a parent to reward a teenager with the keys to the car and a pocket full of money to go have a good time after the teen sinned against the parents followed three consecutive decisions to stand defiant towards his parents and proudly in favor of his sin.

Without writing another chapter to clarify how the following verses might apply to this situation, I call your attention to the negatives demanded in the following verses and to the fact that these negatives are mandated from one church attendee to another church attendee. "Mark and avoid" (Romans 16:17). "Deliver such an one unto Satan" (1 Corinthians 5:5). "Reject" (Titus 3:10). "Have no fellowship with" (Ephesians 5:11). "With such a one no

not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11). There are more, but you get the idea.

Why does Matthew 18:17 use the second person singular "thee," rather than the person plural, "us" or "them," or "you all?" Respond in the space that follows:

According to Matthew 18:17, who is to treat the offending brother as a heathen and a publican? Respond in the space provided below:

It was not hard to find a large representative sample of pastors and other church leaders that disagreed with my position on Matthew 18. I carried on extensive email discourses with them for as long as each one had the stamina to do so. The last one quit after about two months of almost daily email exchanges. I learned a great deal about how they framed their theological position. And, that allowed me to develop, what I feel, are great responses.

What follows is a synopsis of their best defenses for the "traditional" position for Matthew 18:15 and following, and my best rebuttal. First, are general statements about my view of Matthew 18:15-17. Second, are statements relative to my view of Matthew 18:15-17 not being a democratic mandate.

Their Statement: Your entire interpretation of Matthew 18:15-17 is built on the two words in Matthew 18:15 "against thee." The words, "against thee", do not appear in any ancient Greek manuscript, but have been added by the translators. If you drop "against thee" from the verse then verse 15 reads, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." This reading, then, means that while Matthew 18:15-17 can be used to deal with a private matter between two brothers, it has a broader application and can be used as a basis of approach to any and every brother who is sinning.

My Response: First, you are wrong. The words "against thee" as found in Matthew 18:15 do appear not only in some New Testament Greek manuscripts, but in all New Testament Greek witnesses (manuscripts) up until the time of about 350AD. Some manuscripts from the time period of about 350 to 450AD and penned in Egypt (Alexandrian Texts) delete "against thee." However, these texts delete a lot more than that, even from Matthew 18:15. It is widely known that these copies were heavily

influenced by Gnosticism and the Gnostics rejoiced then, like heretics rejoice now, to delete the Word of God and build their beliefs on the blank spaces they create.

Now, let me address your statement that my "entire interpretation of Matthew 18:15-17 hinges on the two words...'against thee.'" My primary point relative to my interpretation of Matthew 18:15-17 is that this text is not designed to lead the church to a place of voting on whether to excommunicate anyone. Whether Matthew 18:15-17 is rightly or wrong used to "as a basis of approach to any and every brother who is sinning" is immaterial to the primary conclusion that these verses do not support democratic process (voting on excommunication) in the church. Beyond that, the internal evidence of the text bears witness that this is a private offense. The goal is for one man to gain his brother; *"thou has gained thy brother"* and *"let him be unto thee (you, alone) as a heathen man and a publican."*

You propose that Matthew 18:15-17 is a text rightly used for a brother to approach another brother about a private matter, and rightly used for a brother to approach another brother about a sin that is (or may be) widely known to others and whose sin may affect many more than one. I disagree with your second point but it is an interpretation I can live with as long as the ultimate act is not a democratic vote of the church for or against excommunication.

In addition, verse 21 reads, "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" Peter's response to Jesus' teaching on Matthew 18:15-20 was a question from Peter about Peter forgiving a man that sinned against him (Peter). If Matthew 18:15-17 was intended to teach a one church man taking offense at the sin of another church man who has sinned against a group, this would be inconsistent with Peter's response of a one on one situation.

Their Statement: The issue at hand in Matthew 18:15-17 is not whether a person sins against us, but whether a person sins against God.

My Response: Peter would disagree with you. Peter thought Jesus was talking about a brother sinning against him alone, and Jesus did not tell Peter he misunderstood the teaching. Verse 21: *"Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"* Rather, Jesus answered Peter's appropriate question with an appropriate answer. Verse 22: *"Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven."* Therefore, I am inclined to stay with Peter's analysis of the intent of Jesus' teaching rather than yours.

Statement: Your references to the "sins" or "offenses" that constitute action based on Matthew 18 are all trivial sins. Matthew 18 should not be used for trivial sins but for big sins.

Response: It is always dangerous to make a list of sins placing little sins in one category and big sins in another category and then pronounce that none should be offended at the sins found in another's "little sin list." Moses hit a rock, Achan took one idol, Jesus said to look on a woman with lust is adultery in the heart. If a person lived a perfect life except for one of the little sins in your "little sins list" that person would still need Jesus as his or her Savior to avoid being thrown into everlasting Hell. God would take offense to even one of your "little sins." Again, Peter's response to Jesus' teaching (as recorded in Matthew 18:15-17) is to ask how many times he should forgive a brother who sins against him. Jesus did not respond, "How dare you take offense over things on my little sin list!" I don't think Jesus had such a list. Rather, Jesus said, we are to always forgive the sins of others committed against us if the person committing the sin asks us for forgiveness. Besides that, it is precisely my position that the sins that initiate the use of Matthew 18:15 are sins that do not ascend to the level of warranting excommunication.

Statement: After reading your position on Matthew 18:15-20 it seems to me you forget that Matthew 18:18-20 reminds us that God must agree that the action that initiates Matthew 18:15 has to be a real sin.

Response: I haven't forgotten that at all. Nor, is my theological position in opposition to your observation. You misread. I never

claim a person has a right to be offended if such offense would be an offense to God.

Statement: The teaching of Matthew 18:15-17 is hypothetical at best. Ephesians 4:32 instructs us to be kind and tenderhearted "forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you." God forgives us of everything out of his great love for us, and His forgiveness is based upon his perfect character to the point that he forgives us even when we are not repentant of our sins. So, rather than quote Matthew 18:15-17 and insinuate it is a real scenario for mature Christians, realize that Matthew 18:15-17 is only for those Christians so unlike Christ that they would require a person to ask for forgiveness before they would provide forgiveness. Real Christians forgive even if the sins keep coming because real Christians are like God.

Response: That is hogwash times a thousand. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* 1 John 1:9. There is a time to forgive when the trespass is out of ignorance. *"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* Luke 23:34a. *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent."* Acts 17:30. Matthew 18:15-17 calls for the sin to be clarified, thus the person is not ignorant. Automatic forgiveness of sins known and loved is not like God. Hell will be filled with those whom God did not forgive. Certainly, we should be slow to take offense and not

easily offended. However, offences do matter and can carry a price. *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* Romans 16:17. Jesus got offended. *"But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."* Matthew 16:23. I suppose there is a time when we can take offense and still be Christ like. Christians are not the spittoons.

Statement: Matthew 18 is to be used only by the elder of the church, or in the case where there is more than one elder, the elders of the church. **Response:** This book deals with my view on a board or body of elders running the church. I won't rehash that here. However, Matthew 18 does not state:

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against the elder, the elder should go and tell him his fault between thee and the elder alone: if he shall hear the elder, the elder hast gained his brother. But if he will not hear the elder, then the elder is to take with him one or two more elders, that in the mouth of two or three elders every word of the elder may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear the board of elders, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto the elder board as a heathen man and a publican.

However, I understand your thinking. You feel that when there is a board of elders that the board of elders, not the church body, has the right to excommunicate. Adding this presumption to your belief system along with your assumption that Matthew 18 is designed to end in excommunication if the sinful brother does not repent mandates you replace "thee" in Matthew 18:15-17 with "the elder." This is an example of one wrong leading to another wrong. Two wrongs never make a right. They are just two wrongs. Two wrongs, almost always, compounds any negative impact.

Comment: I am greatly concerned. Your view of Matthew 18 permits personal approach for sins committed against one. That is detrimental to the unity of the body, the reputation of Christ, and purity of His church. **Response:** It seems to me that a church that tolerates the constant abuse of its membership by other members without rebuke poses the formula for disunity, creates a church with a poor reputation, and is anything but "pure." My view is in line with "judgment begins in the house of God." Your view is in line with anarchy and is the cornerstone for abuse and molestation.

Comment: Matthew 18:15-17 is action reserved for church leadership not for individuals within the church. Your position that every church member is to confront other church members every time the first member feels offended is stupid.

Response: I no more believe nor teach that an individual is to "every time confront every church member that offends (sins

against) them” any more than you believe or teach that church leaders ought to confront every church member that sins.

Comment: Good scholarship requires that you recognize the possibility of the words “against thee” (as found in most translations of Matthew 18:15) are not in the original Greek manuscripts. Aleph B Sahidic does not have “against thee.” Your interpretation seems to put a lot of weight on those debatable words. By illustration and argument you keep the interpretation on a personal “against you” level. Some would argue that you are correct because some old manuscripts and the majority of modern texts include the “against thee” in Matthew 18:15, but as you say, “God is not swayed by the majority vote of churches.”

Response: First, we do not have the original manuscript of any writing. Neither did the church fathers. Every one that has ever written commentary or opinion about the scripture reference copies, not the original writing. When the majority of learned, professional linguists separated by time, space, culture, theological premise, and who able to take unlimited time to research all previous work come to a majority agreement there is always good reason. That good reason is that all of the manuscripts up to about 350AD include the words “against thee” in Matthew 18:15. To equate my distain for the majority vote of a church as a replacement for the role, call and divinely delegated authority of their Pastor, with a blanket/wholesale disregard for the majority

view of professional linguists is brazen of you. Alpha B is an Alexandrian Text (penned in Egypt 350 to 450AD); known to be heavily influenced by the Gnostics who habitually deleted scripture and then built much of their beliefs from the blank spaces they created; and, is missing much text throughout including more from Matthew 18:15 than two words. "Against thee" (as found in Matthew 18:15) appears in most, if not all, of the ancient manuscripts and was quoted often by the church fathers long before the existing copies of Aleph B. Thus, good scholarship deems the absence of "against thee" in Aleph B as insignificant. In addition, there is contextual argument such as "you have gained your brother" being a reference to a difficulty between two brothers not a church member and the entire church, the command of Matthew 18 to make the first approach private bears witness to a private matter between the two involved, and Peter's question on forgiveness immediately afterwards (Matthew 18:21). Also, Luke 17:3-4 tells us to confront and forgive personal sin against us if the person repents.

Statement: Your conclusion that Mt 18 is a scenario of one confronting one for a sin or sins committed against one is based on nothing more than "soi".

Response: My conclusion that Mt 18 is a scenario of one confronting one for a sin or sins committed against one is based on much more than "soi". It is based on Peter's reaction to Jesus' Matthew 18 teaching, the companion verse of Luke 17:3-4, "let

him be unto you (singular)" of Matthew 18:17, the traditional church fathers understanding of the verse, the "majority text" on which the King James is founded, that all (or near all) of the manuscripts dated prior to 300AD include the words "unto you" in Mt. 18:15, and the inference of "you have won your brother" speaking of one with one. It seems to me that the evidence bears out that any attempt to delete "against thee" from Mt. 18:15 would be the opposite of good scholarship. Still, my major point is not that Mt 18 is for private sins only, but that Mt 18 is not support for democratic rule of the church and this conclusion holds true no matter the width of application one would afford verse 15. Whether Mt 18:15 is for sins against the church body for which one would charge a brother on behalf of God, or for sins against one that the one sinned against would charge the sinning brother believing the sin also offends God, is not highly relevant to the purpose for which I bring the text to the forefront; that is, the verses do not justify excommunication by one, a majority or unanimous vote decision of any board by any title, or a majority or unanimous vote of the church. Not being able to get past verse 15 in our public discourse, I was not able to get to this conclusion which is based on verse 17, and getting to that conclusion was the purpose of my writing, which it seems failed too. In retrospect, I should have reproduced all of my written information on Mt 18.

(The remainder of the statement/response section concerns the debate between whether Matthew 18 does or does not support democratic rule as a viable form of church government.)

Them (Democratic Rule): If the offending brother is found guilty by the vote of the majority during church business meeting, then excommunication is mandatory.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): Matthew 18:15-20 does not call for a church vote. To support this the singular "you" (one person) is used, not "you all" (as in "the whole church") *"...let him be unto thee as a heathen...."* It is not "unto us" the church, or unto "them."

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): Matthew 18:15-20 is the method a church should use to get rid of church troublemakers. The pastor does not have the authority to deal with troublemakers himself.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): Sure he does. The job of an "overseer" is to deal with trouble and troublemakers just as the job of any shepherd is to protect the sheep from trouble and troublemakers, rather than ask for a majority vote to do so. Beyond that, the pastor has an obligation to deal with troublemakers.

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): The Bible mandates that the majority rule the church.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): Where?

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): The church is a democracy and in a democracy the majority rules.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): The church is an extension of the kingdom of God and in a kingdom the king rules.

Them: They had no response.

Them: (Democratic Rule) Do I think the pastor has a right to make a strong stand against a member making trouble in the church. ABSOLUTELY! He must. He must open the Word and make his case. But if the member refuses to follow, the pastor can do nothing. He is powerless. The pastor cannot expel him or her on his own. I have seen preachers expel members on their own authority, and while their motives were right, they were usurping the authority that rightly belongs to the church body. I reference 1 Corinthians 5:1-5:

[1] It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. [2] And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. [3] For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, [4] In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered

together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, [5] To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): I am not a powerless pastor. I do not ask the sheep if it is okay to throw out the wolf. I do not call a meeting and get the permission of the sheep to remove a wolf. To do so, I expose the sheep to unnecessary harm and stress, and relinquish my duties as a shepherd to the vote of the majority. Cowardly. Slothful. Your reference to 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 would be support for my position, not yours. In the Apostle Paul's physical absence he ordered the church to throw this guy out, and after the man repented, the Apostle Paul ordered the church to receive him back again. There is never an instance where Paul so orders a church to do such a thing in his presence. However, if you want to say that a church has the obligation to follow the lead of the pastor and throw out any individual as directed by the pastor, and use 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 as your biblical support, then that works. That is kingdom rule (theocracy), not democratic rule. There is no evidence that Paul called for such a vote from the church in any church where he was physically present. Even if did, this does not negate the fact that Paul established the agenda, chose the item on the agenda, and told the congregation how they were going to vote. What is the significance of those things? Huge!

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): The congregation has collective authority for the purpose of discipline and accountability.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): The church is not excluded from having such authority, as long as it is under the direction of the pastor. And, the pastor is not excluded from having such authority.

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): The church has a right to call a meeting without the knowledge or approval of the pastor as long as the subject is the church discipline of the pastor.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): If the church wants to include some method to "discipline" the pastor by corporate meeting where he is not the moderator, it should be spelled out in the constitution and by-laws. Jesus loves pastors also, and pastors are entitled to the same rights and privileges afforded all other church members.

Them: They had no response.

Them: (Democratic Rule) I wrestle with your conclusion that only a pastor can be the subject of Matthew 18:15-20.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): What? The pastor is not the subject of Matthew 18:15-20. I never said he was.

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): I think a pastor who ignores the role of the corporate voice of the church is usurping the authority of the church.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): A church that requires a democratic vote before their pastor can deal with a wolf is usurping the authority of the under-shepherd.

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): You have approached the passage with a bias.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): My bias is that the traditions of men are not to be taught as the Word of God.

Them: They had no response.

Them: As I see it, the deeper issue on Matthew 18 is that you perceive that it is appropriate for a believer to treat another believer as a heathen and publican which is a treatment Christ certainly does not approve of?

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): If you think that one man treating the offender like a heathen and a publican is unchristian, then how can you propose that the entire church doing it is Christian?

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): You are a fundamentalist.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): Thank you. I define my theological position as "conservative with fundamentalist tendencies." Liberals alter scripture to fit their whims.

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): The issue brought before the church by the offended brother has to be a major issue.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): I am afraid I will have to side with the text and against you. My Bible states that (15) "If you brother sins against you." It does not say "commits a major sin against you."

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): This is a person who refuses to repent. Rebellion is the sin.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): What does that have to do with calling for a vote for excommunication?

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): The text has a tacit understanding that the majority recognizes the person to be in complete intransigence and rebellion.

Me (Kingdom Based/Theocratic Rule): What does that have to do with calling for a vote for excommunication?

Them: They had no response.

Them (Democratic Rule): For a person to reject the will of the church body proves he is not nor has never been a Christian. Thus, treating him like a heathen is permissible.

Me: Moses disagreed with the majority at the entrance to the Promise Land. Jesus was, often, in disagreement with the majority of the religious leaders of his day. A person can disagree with the majority vote of the church and still be saved.

Them: They had no response.

Them: Most conservative scholars suggest that Matthew 18:15-18:

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. [16] But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. [17] And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. [18] Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”

is a broader application of Matthew 16:19 which reads:

“And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in

heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This means, they say, that the church has the keys to the kingdom, not the Apostles, and certainly not pastors of our day. The church, having the keys to the kingdom, is authorized to excommunicate. The Apostles, then, not having the keys to the kingdom could not excommunicate. Today, pastors cannot excommunicate.

Me: Matthew 18:15 is a broader application of Matthew 16:19. I agree. I think you misunderstand the concept of "having the keys to the kingdom of heaven." "Having the keys to the kingdom of heaven" simply means that we have the ability to interact with the Holy Spirit in a manner that runs the affairs of the kingdom in a confident and authoritative fashion; and this based upon the fact that we "have the mind of Christ" and function in line with His will. You state the Apostles did not have the "keys." I call your attention to Matthew 16:19. The "thee" of that verse is the Apostle Peter; therefore, if your position is that whoever has the "keys" can excommunicate, an Apostle would be so empowered. Because the "will of God" relative to Matthew 18:15-18 is not "excommunication" this conversation is not applicable.

Them: They had no response.

Them: You are standing almost alone on this one!

Me: I only care if I am standing "right." I have never felt uncomfortable standing alone with God or comfortable standing

with the majority against God. I have never been impressed with the errant majority. Matthew 18:15-18 is self-explanatory if one just reads it as it is. It is not a difficult passage. What makes it difficult are those who have added to the text, analyzed their additions as if what they added is the Word of God, and then passed their analysis off as Bible doctrine to others. Just read the text without consulting your commentaries and you will see how simple the text is.

Them: They had no response.

Them: There are two aspects in the text that you fail to reckon with: "Where two or three are gathered," and "Tell it to the church." These are not to be ignored!!!!!!!

Me: I am not ignoring those aspects; I am just not assuming that "two or three" constitutes an authoritative group over the pastor, or that "tell it to the church" mean "excommunication." To assume you are telling the church so they can do more than approve of the offended brother's treatment of the offending brother as a heathen and a publican goes beyond (adds to) the text. It is dangerous.

Them: They had no response.

Them: Your position that the apostles ALONE can excommunicate is the Roman Catholic position, basically. For them, the authority to excommunicate resides in the pope and the cardinals. The Episcopalians inherited the view from them and

place it with their Bishops. You place it with Apostles in the first-century and pastors thereafter.

Me: That the church can excommunicate by majority vote is not in question. They can. My position is that Matthew 18 is not the relevant text for such excommunication.

Them: They had no response.

Them: If Jesus did not want the congregation to have the sole authority to excommunicate, He would have never suggested that the person be approached by two witnesses.

Me: Sure he would.

Them: Unless the goal of Matthew 18:15-20 is the excommunication of the errant and unrepentant person, there would have been no need to take the matter to the congregation because the Apostles could have just used their blanket powers to dictate who was in and who was out.

Me: The "goal" of Matthew 18 is not excommunication, but restoration. Restoration failing then the next step is a church wide recognition of why the offended brother is treating the offending brother like a heathen and publican, not excommunication. Matthew 18 is not about excommunication but restoration and/or clarification.

Them: They had no response.

Them: Your application of Matthew 18:15-20 is too narrow.

Me: My application of Matthew 18:15-20 is limited, only, by the text. In order to apply this verse the following must be true:

1. Both individuals are men ("thy brother").
2. Both men must agree or it must be reasonably plausible that both men will appear before the church for judgment. Therefore, both men must be part of the same church.
3. The pastor must be willing to, or there must be a reasonable expectation that the pastor convene a court-type hearing for this matter.

These three limitations bring up some questions:

1. What if one or both of the persons involved are women?
2. What if one or both of the persons involved are church members but not Christians?
3. What if one or both will not stand before the church for the hearing?
4. What if the pastor will not approve of such a meeting?
5. What if the church will not approve of such a meeting?
6. What if one person is a member of your church, and the other person is not, but both are professing Christians?

Let us take a look at these situations one at a time.

1. What if one or both of the persons involved are women?

The word "brother" used in Matthew 18 is a common form of a first-century word for natural (birth) brother, fellow Jewish person

(as in brother in nationality), and even is used as a reference to the brotherhood of saints, which includes women. First-century writers were not prone to use concepts such as "the sisterhood of saints" or think in those terms.

In the first-century churchwomen were not prone to handle their problems in the manner so described in Matthew 18. In most cases, men and women did not interact much, and women were not much involved in the day to day life of the church. Not having much interaction with men, and not being involved in the day to day activities of the church there was precious little chance that a woman would offend a man to the point that he would even think of relying on Matthew 18 for resolution of difficulties. The idea that a man would have difficulties with a woman in the church was a foreign concept (or at least a remote concept) to first-century churchmen and first-century writers. I do not think Matthew foresaw it, expected it, or addressed it in his writing.

That leaves us with our question. How do we handle a situation where a man and a woman are at odds in the church? Gleaning from the habits of the first-century let me recommend to men that you stay away from close involvement with the women of the church that are not members of your immediate family. Second, and again gleaning from the customs of the first century, women were considered protected by their husbands (and fathers) so if there was an incident between a man and a women, the husband

and/or father of the woman would most likely become involved. I think that is a great idea. Then, if resolution cannot come, the men can speak on behalf of their women. The situation expands naturally using this technique.

If there is not a husband or father that can or will be involved, maybe there is a brother or close male friend. Or, I guess the pastor or a staff man can stand for and with the woman.

Or, the man can just let it pass, and socially not be close to the woman. It is more possible to do this than it would be possible between two men in the same church.

I do not think it works well if a man has something against a woman and based upon that, approaches her in private. However, I have seen Matthew 18 work well when it is the woman approaching a man in private. I recommend that. It has been my experience that hateful women are emboldened to bring their attack against a man to the public arena when they are permitted free attack in private. Handle it then. But, handle it in public and at the time of the offence. For example, let's say a woman makes fun of a fat man in private. Rather than the fat man approaching her in private with, "Don't make fun of my fat," I think it would be better for him to be prepared to say the same thing as an immediate and public response to her public ridicule of his weight.

In light of clear teaching on how to apply (or should we apply) Matthew 18:15-17 in a case where there is a man upset with a woman, I would say pray about it and do what you feel is right. Remember, we should do nothing that would bring shame to Christ or his Church. If a man, so offended, can endure the private offense, avoid the woman, or wait for a public opportunity to state his negative response to her offensive acts, I think he will fair better than approaching a hateful woman in private. I could be wrong. Let me give you an example. There was a hateful woman in one church who enjoyed making snide and curt remarks to me in private. I endured such comments for more than 4 years. This occurred, mostly, when she would be the first one to Sunday AM worship and find me on premises. I said nothing to her about her constant "digs." Then, one Sunday morning she came walking down the fellowship hallway completely unaware that others were in the building out of her sight, but not out of hearing range. She said, "Pastor, I got a bone to pick with you, buddy!" I saw my chance. I said, "Juanita, I don't have the time or the energy for your complaining right now. Plus, this is the wrong time. Wait until after I preach this morning to complain." She was livid. Then, those who were in a room stuck their heads out and she realized she had been "caught." She soon left the church for parts unknown. Had I approached her in private, I think she would have lied about what I said to her in private, and used those lies to try to destroy my ministry. It is always dangerous for a man to meet with women alone. The danger intensifies when the woman hates

you or despises authority. If the woman who has offended you is not hateful, then a private approach would be less dangerous. Still, I don't meet with women alone.

2. What if one or both of the persons involved are church members but not Christians?

This is a loaded question. It is loaded because the concept of "officially joining a church" is a modern concept and not a first-century concept. In the first-century you came to church or you did not come to church. You were known or you were not known. You were involved or you were not involved. Today, we have membership so those who do not come, are not involved, and are not well-known can feel better about being on the role. Also, Federal law requires a membership role in order to be a tax exempt corporation. In addition to this, many a lost person is on our church roles.

So, how do we handle the situation if one or both of the people involved are lost? My suggestion is to read the word "brother" in the broader application of "two men in the same church" rather than "two Christians in the same church." Matthew is Jewish and he is more inclined to use the word "brothers" in the broader sense. Therefore, it makes no functional difference whether the men are saved or lost. Any lost man that gets his name on the role is subject to the demands and commands of Matthew 18:15-17.

3. What if one or both will not stand before the church for the hearing?

The one bringing the charge, if he takes it to the concluding step, has to be willing to stand before the church for the hearing. The one being charged does not have to. However, if the one being charged does not appear then the church is more likely to be sympathetic with the one bringing the charge, and showing up for the hearing. There is always the chance that the one bringing the charge can be sued in a court of law for slander whether the accused is present or not. Think about it! Is it worth it?

4. What if the pastor will not approve of such a meeting?

If the pastor does not and will not approve of the meeting for such a hearing, then the whole thing is off. Churches have no right to assemble for any kind of business without the approval of their pastor. The one bringing the charge should be quite sure the pastor would be supportive before threatening to "take it to the church."

6. What if the one being charged is the pastor?

If the one being charged is the pastor, then the meeting is on as long as the meeting meets the criteria of Matthew 18:15-20 and a meeting like this (without the pastor's approval, or without him as the moderator) is authorized by the constitution and by-laws. Even if the meeting does not meet the criteria of Matthew 18:15-20 and is not authorized by the constitution and by-laws, if the

influential are against the pastor and show up, along with the church treasurer, the meeting will probably occur.

7. What if the church will not approve of such a meeting?

Usually, there will be enough people in the church who feel one or the other person has validity and needs support. In most cases, there are enough people. Some will show up for what they hope is an entertaining church fight, others out of curiosity, and others sincerely concerned about doing right. If the pastor approves of it and calls for the meeting, have the meeting with whoever shows up; a quorum is not needed because a vote for excommunication is not going to be taken. However, limit the attendance to church membership and do not have the hearing on a church night. Pick another night. This will discourage people who show up just out of habit. And (hopefully) it will decrease the number of people who show up to enjoy or create an old-fashioned-knock-down-drag-out-church-fight.

8. What if one person is a member of your church, and the other person is not, but both are professing Christians?

Unless both are members of the same church, it won't work.

Before I end, let me share with you my experience with Matthew 18 used in the traditional sense:

1. Offended brother brings charges to the church body.
2. Church is upset over the ordeal, and divided over what to do.

3. Minority refuses to excommunicate offending brother, and cannot keep the person off the property or out of services, even though he is excommunicated.
4. Church becomes hotbed of gossip, and discontent -- even fear.
5. Offending brother gleans followers from minority.
6. Church splits. The house divided begins to fall, and never really recovers.

This scenario caused me to look more closely at Matthew 18 and reject it as a text that can be used to support democratic vote for excommunication. The church does have a right to excommunicate. However, Matthew 18 is not intended by Matthew to be used as a tool of excommunication.

