

## **Malfunction Junctions: When Christians Collide**

### **Intro:**

1. Certain roadway junctions where traffic flow dangerous (speeds change, lanes merge, blind spots, etc). Chronic problems; expect trouble.
2. Likewise certain areas which cause trouble among brethren. Church comprised of *people*: differing attitudes, knowledge, abilities, spiritual maturity - clashes result.
3. Jesus in Mt 18 gives both *preventive* and *corrective* guidance in dealing with conflict.

### **1. “Woe to That Man by Whom the Offense Comes” (Mt 18:7)**

#### A. The problem of pride - Mt 18:1-5.

1. Historical background: // **Texts:** Mk 9:33-50; Lk 9:46-50. Returning from Caesarea Philippi; P/J/J separated at transfiguration; argument over greatness. Pride is biggest threat to their future work. Destroys peace, harmony, love.

“The spirit which proudly seeks to be first in place thereby consents to make itself last in character, for it reverses the graces of the soul, turning love into envy, humility into pride, generosity into selfishness” (Fourfold Gospel, p 430).

2. If pride will consider its own greatness in the presence of the Lord, Himself, what will it do in the presence of fallible, mistake-prone human beings? Unless *converted* they - and we - will not even **enter** the kingdom - v 3.
3. All must adopt the humble, subservient role of a child toward adult authority.

#### B. Our sinful influence - Mt 18:6-9.

1. Sometimes other Christians are bigger hindrances to our faith than unbelievers.
2. Note “causes ... **to sin**” (v 6, 8-9). The “offense” here is not merely a careless remark, differing personal tastes, an assumed social snub. This is behavior that leads to violation of conscience or precept.
3. v 8-9: Self-surgery. How *painful* to cut off one’s own limb. But a practice, attitude or personal characteristic which jeopardizes our or others’ salvation must be abandoned. **Ex:** Friendships; hypocrites in the church; prejudice (Gal 2:11-13). **Don’t let ANYTHING stand between you and heaven!**

#### C. Looking down on others - 18:10-14.

1. We usually attribute strength, knowledge, conviction to ourselves and see others as weak, deficient. Especially true of those who have not engaged in excessive immorality. This can lead to cliques, favoritism; blind us to the scriptural views of others.
2. *“Take heed that you do not despise ...”*. Three factors which establish value:
  - a. *“Their angels ...”* - 18:10. Angels are aware of us personally (15:10) and have always been deeply interested in the particulars of redemption (1 Pet 1:12). They are *“sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.”*
  - b. Jesus came to *“seek and save the lost”* - 18:11. *“Do not destroy ... the one for whom Christ died”* (Rom 14:15).
  - c. The repentance and return to God of a sinner is a cause of great joy in heaven - 18:12-13. We must not be the cause of grief by causing another to fall.

## **2. You Have Gained Your Brother (Mt 18:15)**

- A. Progressive steps to bring the offender to correction - Mt 18:15-17. Jesus does provide for authority, government, judgment in matters of wrongdoing. *“Turning the other cheek”* does not mean *do nothing*. It means seek correction, not retaliation.
  1. *“Go and tell ... between you and him alone”* - v 15. This would solve vast majority of cases. Instead, gossip, slander and bitterness are substituted.
  2. *“Take with you one or two more”* - v 16. The *expressed* reason for this is to establish the matter among others, preventing denial, subterfuge.
  3. *“Tell it to the church”* - v 17. Perhaps the offender will hear one united voice.
- B. *“Let him be to you like a heathen ...”* - v 17b. Amplified in 1 Cor 5 and 2 Th 3.
  1. The basic idea is expulsion from fellowship since his behavior indicates that fellowship with God has already been broken through persistent sin.
  2. **Concern:** This teaching has all but been ignored and neglected. Many have rationalized their way around implementing the teaching and *“withdrawal”* has withered into a pointless formality.
- C. The importance of forgiveness - Mt 18:21-35. *“Forgiveness, prayer and charity know no arithmetic”* (FG, p 437). Forgiveness must be *“from his heart”* else it will lead to bitterness, grudges and continual discord.

**3. Conclusion:** Conflict is inevitable. How will we handle it? How we do so will determine where we spend eternity.