

# THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

04-74

Dear Reader,

Problems, Problems! Everybody has problems! Many we make ourselves; many come on us for no apparent reason. Some, we think, are our deepest secret; others are tightly kept within the family or between certain people at work or at school. Others are much more public, and some have various negative effects in the local assembly and beyond. One fact we often seem to ignore is that *God* knows all about our problems and we must give account to Him as to how we handle them. “All things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb.4:13). *And the postulate of this Assembly Messenger is that God wants problems that affect the assembly to be solved: indeed, He insists on it!*

In reality, many problems in the home or the job or school – even those in the mind – cause problems in the assembly, although it may not be obvious to most. A person preoccupied with problems is likely to miss more meetings, thus to a degree forsaking the assembling of himself or herself together with the brothers and sisters of the assembly (Heb.10:25). A person weighed down by problems is not going to be his or her pleasant, helpful, considerate “self.” There will be less study, less preparation, less use of one’s gift(s), less volunteering to do what needs to be done to further the Lord’s work and maintain a good testimony.

God may raise up those with a pastor’s (shepherd’s) gift to first see that something is wrong and then to quietly help the brother or sister to deal with the problems. When that happens it is wonderful and we would certainly encourage those with a shepherd’s heart to use their gift in such “behind-the-scenes” ways, but that is not the main theme of this issue, although we certainly will touch on it. We want to deal with problems more well known that have a detrimental effect on the assembly. We’ll entitle this issue as:

## PROBLEMS ..... SOLVED

### Matthew 18:15-17

These verses are key to problem solving. We covered them in detail in issue 98-14 and refer you back to that issue via our website, [www.assemblymessenger.com](http://www.assemblymessenger.com). We don’t want to repeat ourselves, but do wish to point out two things. First, although the *example* of Matthew 18 is a problem between two brothers, these verses

surely are *in principle* a general formula for the solution of most problems. It *could* involve two families, a family and an individual, an individual and an assembly, even two assemblies. Secondly, these verses don’t give the Lord’s *suggestions*. He is the speaker: He says “Go and tell him his fault” (v.15). Why is it that we so often are disobedient and won’t “go”? It is also *prima facie* evidence that the alleged sinning person – the one who allegedly caused the offense – is wrong if he, she, or them won’t receive the person coming to present the problem to them.

If positive results are not obtained in this quiet, behind-the-scenes manner, the Lord then commands us to “take with you one or two more” (v.16). I plainly use the word *command* to emphasize again that it is not a mere suggestion! Why do we so often fail to do this? *It is simply disobedience!* There simply isn’t any excuse. You may not want to cause trouble; you may think that staying home or sitting back or stewing about the issue is the better solution, but refusal of God’s method only *causes* more trouble down the road, not resolves trouble. The Lord will not allow you to be happy in disobedience! It equally would be disobedience, compounding the sin, for the person or persons not to receive the two or three coming to help resolve something that God says needs resolving.

Finally, if still not resolved, the problem that began contained, is no longer to be contained. It is to be brought before the Church (v.17). While in practice, that would normally be the local assembly, the verse doesn’t restrict it. God has given authority to the local assembly to act for Him as we also covered in the above-referenced issue of the *Assembly Messenger* and again mentioned in issue 03-65. Woe to the person or persons who refuse to listen to the assembly. One who still refuses to resolve the problem – obviously an action of the flesh, for it is against God’s plain Word – is to be treated as an unsaved person, one unfit for assembly fellowship. The “many” or “majority” (2 Cor.2:6) had to penalize the man in 1 Corinthians 5 in this manner (v.13).

### Matthew 5:23-24; 1 Corinthians 11:28-31

But what if no one comes to me, but I realize *I* may have caused an offense? The *principle* of Matthew 5:23-24 covers that case. “If you bring your gift to the

altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” Yes, it’s set in a Jewish or “kingdom” context, but the *principle* applies equally today. We as professed believers are as much in the Kingdom as in the Church! Regardless of the details, the plain thesis of the verse is that *God doesn’t want offenses to continue between Christians!* Applying it to Church-conditions, once I realize I may have caused someone to have an offense against me, I am to *hastily* go to the person and do all in my power to be reconciled.

I emphasize the word *hastily*, for there is no scriptural justification for “sitting back” from breaking bread. The Lord has said to “remember Him” and, frankly, not doing so because I don’t want to face and resolve a problem, is simply fleshly sin! The same principle of quick resolution is found in 1 Corinthians 11:28-31. Week by week I am to “approve” myself (JND) *and then continue to break bread*. That “approval” includes the “examination” of the KJV and NKJV, and that examination may show me I need to resolve an offense, which I do immediately and then continue to break bread without offense to the Lord and without His governmental judgment on me. I then am “approved.”

I remember fondly when a brother came to me and said he was afraid something he had said might have been offensive, and wanted to apologize. What a godly spirit! As it happened, there had been no offense whatsoever, but he did the right thing. Others have said really hateful and hurtful things and have never apologized. Instead of being offended I try to leave such things with the Lord. We don’t want to be overly “thin-skinned,” as the expression goes. But sometimes offenses are very real and long-term, and must be dealt with.

Each of us also needs to be a forgiving person. “How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him ... Jesus said ... up to 70 times 7” (Mt.18:21-22). Seven is the number of completeness or perfection.

### **1 Corinthians 6:1-8**

In these verses a matter, an offense, has occurred. It hasn’t been resolved one-on-one. It is now public knowledge. It would mesh with the third case of the above verses in Matthew 18. God says the *assembly*, not a court of this world, is to seek a resolution, and here He tells us how that is to take place.

“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?” (vv.1-3).

Again, the underlying *principle* is that problems between believers *are* to get resolved. Yet they are not to be resolved by the world, by the court system, so common in our litigious society, but by the brethren. If the saints (sanctified-ones: believers in general) are seen fit by God to judge the world and judge the fallen angels, then *God* says they are fit to judge earthly matters – to resolve problems! And the wording of verse 1 indicates God is *outraged* if other means are used.

“If then you have judgments as to things of this life, set those to judge who are little esteemed in the assembly ... Thus there is not a wise person among you, not even one, who shall be able to decide between his brethren?” (vv.4-5, JND).

Leslie M. Grant comments on these verses thus: “A striking principle is laid down in verse 4. It is evident that for spiritual matters the discernment of a spiritual person is necessary, but if merely matters of this life, those who are ‘least esteemed in the assembly’ should be expected to be competent for this. Not spirituality, but simple honesty is required for this. These matters are not of sufficient importance to take the time of those who engage themselves in the spiritual warfare of saints of God.” (*First and Second Corinthians*, LMG, page 34, Believers Bookshelf).

The contrast is between “wise” but otherwise not very prominent brethren, and those with prominent public gift who are devoting their lives to serving the Lord to further the spiritual growth of the saints, or in evangelism, etc. It doesn’t say those appointed to judge are to be *unspiritual* brothers as we will see in the next heading! Those given such responsibility by the assembly would also be expected to know or be wise enough to seek out any scriptural principles that might be involved in the decision. They are to “inquire, search out, and ask diligently” (Dt.13:14) as to the matter in question.

“Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?” (v.7). Why was the issue an issue in the first place? Was it just a fleshly action? Was pride hurt? “What would Jesus do” if He was the One to whom the alleged wrong had been done? But suppose it is a legitimate case and it is brought before the assembly. Suppose those appointed

didn't render what I think was a fair judgment (and if the flesh was involved at first, it probably will still be involved). What does God say? "Accept the wrong"! Wise, honest brethren have made their decision. Abide by it. That is divine order.

### **Galatians 6:1**

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." Vine defines "spiritual" here as "Men in Christ who walk so as to please God." That *should* apply to all: it *certainly* applies to more than to those whom God has given more prominent public roles in the assembly. Again, the overriding principle in this verse is that God expects problems that affect the assembly to be resolved! This was written to an assembly. The qualifications for those the assembly appoints are wise, God-honoring men. Paul, certainly a spiritual man, sought to solve a problem between two sisters he knew, via a public letter urging them to be of one mind in the Lord, for they were causing a disruption in the assembly. Brethren were to "assist them" in this needed resolution so the Lord's work by the sisters could continue unhindered.

### **John 7:51**

"Does our Law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing." These are the words of Nicodemus, probably a believer at that time, although still secretly. He stated the truth, and it is an abiding principle. We are not to make judgments (even in our minds) until we have heard *directly* from the persons involved. We so often – and so wrongly – operate on the basis of prejudice and/or hearsay. It may be a bit uncomfortable to go directly to the person about a matter, but that is God's way! We are a hindrance to problem-solving if we operate on partial or one-sided knowledge.

### **Deuteronomy 1:16-17; 2 Chronicles 19:6-7**

So what did the Law of Moses say? "Then I commanded your judges ... saying, Hear the cases between your brethren, and *judge righteously* between a man and his brother or the stranger who is with him. You shall *not show partiality* in judgment; you shall hear the small as well as the great: you shall not be afraid in any man's presence, for the judgment is God's. The case that is too hard for you, bring to me [Moses], and I will hear it."

Yes, we're not under the Law of Moses, but God's *principles* don't change. Then and today, there is to be "righteous judgment" without partiality, whether or not one person is highly esteemed and well known in the assembly and the other is, perhaps, newly saved, young, not very active, not well known at all. *It is what is right before God that counts!* See Leviticus 24:22. As in Israel many millenniums ago, God still wants problems heard and solved *by His people!*

2 Chronicles 19:6-7 says, speaking to the judges, "Take heed to what you are doing, for you do not judge for man, but for the LORD who is with you in the judgment. Now therefore let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes." What powerful and solemn verses. Problem-solving is done for our Lord and Savior! Why would we hesitate to please Him?

By the way, who were these judges? "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates ... and they shall judge the people with just judgment. You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality .... You shall follow what is altogether just" (Dt.16:18-20). So these were simply wise men of Israel.

If these are God's requirements, how sad and wrong it would be for one to refuse the help of the assembly because of lack of trust that those who judge or discern would judge according to God's mind!

I suppose the application today of Moses saying that if the case was too hard, to bring it to him, would be that those appointed by the assembly to resolve a matter between brethren would come to the assembly and ask for further help, along with much prayer. See Deuteronomy 17:8-13. For example, if the problem was found to be a financial matter, someone with more knowledge of financial dealings might be added to those seeking a resolution.

### **Deuteronomy 19:15-21**

Whether it's in a worldly court or in a matter that affects the well-being of an assembly, one often gets into a "he said, she said" response. In worldly courts the people often are lying to escape prosecution, often trying to make the other person appear to be at fault. Witnesses lie. And worldly attorneys often seem to foster this type of behavior. But when it comes to believers (although believers still have the sinful nature, the flesh, and thus certainly *can* lie or at least slant the truth to their favor), often the seemingly irreconcilable stories are seeing things from one's own perspective

which, however, may be based on fleshly or unbalanced motivations. We have seen that God will help wise and spiritual judges in the assembly to see through such motivations, to the strengthening of the assembly and the godly walk of His people going on together in happy fellowship. The ones involved, freed of the burden of the offense, are freed again to serve the Lord in happy fellowship together and with their brethren.

“One witness shall not arise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits: by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established .... And the judges shall make *careful inquiry* and indeed if the witness is a false witness ... then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother: so you shall put away the evil from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear ...”

These verses show two things. First, the importance of at least two witnesses. This was seen earlier in Matthew 18:16. People who do not, cannot, will not resolve their problems, their offenses, which are causing difficulties in the assembly, *must* bow to having [at least] two or three witnesses involved in the testimony and resolution! They *must* cooperate with the careful inquiry. Otherwise, the matter *cannot* be scripturally resolved. Secondly, we see how hateful it is to God to have false witnesses or false testimony. Woe to a believer who does not tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in such matters. The assembly would have to act in New Testament discipline in such matters and treat such an one as a wilfully-sinning person.

Ephesians 4:25 says, “putting away lying, let each one of you speak *truth* with his neighbor.” We are to speak the truth in love (v.15). Three important things – No lying; speaking (not silent); speaking only the truth, and that in love. It is so frustrating and sinful when one wants to resolve a problem, but the other party refuses even to talk about it. That’s not “speaking truth.” The above three things would go a long ways towards solving most problems that brethren face.

It is equally wrong to circulate a false report. “You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness” (Ex.23:1). How many of us are guilty of this ... even when we *think* we have the right story? It certainly isn’t speaking the truth in love! I’ve seen too much of it! Remember, a one-sided story may or may not be the right or complete story! Isn’t it a tendency we must all admit to, that we tend to say or emphasize that which puts *us* in the best possible light? So, how careful we must be in problem solving!

## Conclusions

We pray you have seen in the above verses how important it is to God and to our well-being, and to the assembly’s well-being, that problems that arise are resolved quickly and in God’s way. Untold distress, undoubtedly lives shortened, undoubtedly much illness and/or injury, and even divisions among God’s people have resulted over our refusal to solve problems in God’s way. Is it not true, dear brethren, that such refusal *must* be of our sinful nature? Is it not true that our new nature would always act according to God’s clear directions? Then, dear brethren, if there are any outstanding problems that need resolution or if any come up in the future, won’t we make haste to resolve them God’s way? What blessing will result!

## Future Assembly Messengers

In the Lord’s will we will shortly begin our ninth and final year of publication. We have covered many topics over the years, primarily having to do with the truth of God’s Assembly in many aspects. In this issue and others, we have looked at things involving individuals that make for a happier assembly, for the smallest pebble can make the normally most comfortable shoes very uncomfortable. We would have you be exercised to remove those little “irritations” that spoil the vine.

We would like to consider topics *you* would like considered. We can’t guarantee that what any individual suggests will become the topic for a future issue, but we would like to hear from you anyway regarding future topics. You can contact us by snail mail or preferably by the webmaster e-mail address on our website.

Also, we know that many of you have the ability to download from our website, and it would save us both time and money if those who could, would. Or we can email copies to you. We also are aware that many of you don’t have web or email access, so we will continue with mailing as long as the Lord indicates He wants this work to continue.

Our preferred mailing address is care of Dearborn Heights assembly, 24570 Ann Arbor Trail, Dearborn Heights, MI 48170-1780. Our website is [www.assemblymessenger.com](http://www.assemblymessenger.com). Also, please let us know of changes in your address. Returns are increasingly expensive. Yours in Him,

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