

If you watch sports very much, you are probably familiar with those pre-game analysis shows. This is where experts discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing players, and eventually provide their opinion on who will win the game. Sometimes it seems so very lopsided that you wonder why they go through with it, but as they say, "That's why they play the game." From day to day players may not be up to their normal strength, or they may play way beyond themselves. There's much more to the game than just what is "on paper."

The church, "on paper," is absolutely perfect. It is a brotherhood of those who love each other as much as themselves. There is nothing that stands in the way of peace and harmony. But we all know that the real church is not like that at all. As I like to say, "The only thing wrong with the church is people."

Of course, I say that tongue in cheek, because the church is the people. You can't have an empty church. But due to our many weaknesses, we struggle with each other and many times do not get along very well. There may exist outright hostility in the congregation where we worship. Someone may appear perfect to all save the one sworn enemy that they have. The devil wreaks his havoc everywhere.

When people commit an offense against us, we must be strong enough to deal with it without becoming bitter and hateful. Jesus told us in Matthew 18:15,

*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony 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, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

It might be the case that the offending person has no remorse. I can imagine that David could not go to Saul about their problems with each other; Saul would have simply taken the opportunity and killed him.

But oftentimes in the fury of the struggle people are hurt to the point that they are not strong enough for this kind of confrontation. Try to put yourself in the place of David's daughter Tamar, after Amnon raped her. Immediately afterwards she pleaded with him to make it right by marrying her, but later I imagine that she could not bring herself to face him. The emotional conflict would have been too great.

Another case from the Bible where I can imagine the emotional incapacity of the victim is the story of the woman caught in adultery. True, she was guilty, but so was her partner. She sinned against in that she alone was brought up to face the music, but even then she was only a pawn in the scheme of the Pharisees to trap Jesus. They did not care for her in the slightest. She was a sinner, but those who dragged her before Jesus, most likely with little clothes on, were very arrogant in their treatment of her. I am sure that she was emotionally traumatized, and would not fare very well confronting her oppressors.

These are just a couple of examples of the weakness we have in dealing with each other. It would be great if we could do what Jesus asks, but usually we just slink into the background and hide. We slack off in our attendance, especially in proportion to the leadership role that our oppressor commands.

If we are a member of the sidelines, watching this go on, we should try to understand what it would be like for a person that has been crushed emotionally by someone to be in their presence. We need to give our support when we see people drifting away from the church, as it is a very good chance that they have been hurt in some way. We need to find a way to bring about reconciliation without intimidation. This may be as difficult as it is to change the very nature of people.

In Psalms 34:18 we read, *The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.* This is a great passage for those who are hurting. But we must remember that the Lord may intend for us to be that arm of support and comfort. Let us take on the mission to seek and save the brokenhearted so that the church can approach its true potential.

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