

Title: SIN, CONFESSION, AND RECONCILIATION, MATTHEW 18:15-20  
(Chatham, NJ; 09/11/11, AM) [S-P, Topical]

Theme: Uncovering the truth is as important to reconciliation as is confrontation.

Purpose: To demonstrate that Matthew 18 reflects God's concern for reconciliation but only with a presumption of innocence and concern for the truth.

Introduction:

1. The process of confronting personal injustices must have some foundation in the concept of presumption of innocence and concern for the truth.
2. These are important in any legal setting but also in settings where we have been offended personally.
3. The goal among Christians is reconciliation not revenge.
4. Some of these are unspoken in Mt. 18 but lie in the background.
5. The cities of refuge in the OT allowed the judges to determine exactly what happened before anyone could bring about revenge. Justice could be served only when cooler heads prevailed and when the truth was uncovered.

#### I. The Process for the Church, Mt. 18

##### A. Don't thwart the process

1. From beginning to end this process requires logic and a search for the truth
2. The accused must be confronted directly using the facts about his/her behavior
3. The facts may need corroboration and the force of the community to get the accused to admit fault
4. But it must be demonstrated that the accuser was right

##### B. The purposes of all this

1. To get the guilty party to confess
2. To get to the bottom of the matter; to discover what really happened
3. To exchange forgiveness and bring about reconciliation
4. There is a reason why Peter raises the issue of forgiveness in the very next section; it was the whole point of the process and he knew it.

II. Violating the 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment with Impunity (Retraction: Sunday evening I said that stealing was not included in the Ten Commandments, but it is number eight. Lying is the one that is not there except as couched in legal terms: bearing false witness. Lev. 19:11 prohibits lying.)

##### A. The case of Jamie Leigh Jones

1. In Feb. 2008 a story appeared on the front page about a "troubling trend" of rape by American defense contractors in Iraq
2. Jamie Leigh Jones was the centerpiece of these allegations
3. Some politicians reacted immediately; she appeared before congressional committees and on numerous TV shows
4. However, she made the whole thing up
5. A jury looked at the facts, no DNA evidence that she was gang-raped
6. Furthermore she alleged that the attack was so violent it ruined some plastic surgery; however the doctor that examined her the next day contradicted this as did her surgeon who performed the original surgery
7. Many assumed guilt when the charges came out: they are guilty of violating the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment
8. The alleged offenders were prosecuted in the court of public opinion
9. The same paper that trumped up this story as if it were not only true but a "troubling trend" printed a retraction – one paragraph buried on p. 13 of a Saturday edition (!)

- B. Duke lacrosse players, Dominique Strauss-Kahn
  1. The Duke Lacrosse players were skewered by many of their own teachers as typical of their upbringings and an evil American society
  2. The problem was that they never committed what they were accused of; even the prosecutor of the case was disbarred for misconduct.
  3. I haven't heard any apologies from the Duke professors who presumed their guilt.
  4. You make think Dominique Strauss-Kahn was guilty (it fits his reputed lifestyle) but the case against him was not sustainable; the witness was not credible.
- C. Mob rule
  1. In Britain even if someone was harmed by the police, this was no justification for tearing apart cities, burning down innocent businesses, and stealing electronics and designer clothes.
  2. Most of the recent mobs have only caused destruction and chaos, they have not been peaceful demonstrations to get their point across.
  3. Rioting and anarchy is their preferred path to getting their way, not making proposals based on facts and logic
  4. When an injustice has been committed, the truth must prevail not mob rule or false witnesses.

### III. The process

- A. Go to the individual
  1. Most often we gripe to everyone else
  2. Or we gossip about what a terrible person so-and-so is
  3. Or we hold a grudge
  4. Most problems can and should be stopped by going to the person
  5. Sometimes we are needlessly offended, even touchy
- B. Bring witnesses to establish the facts
  1. This does not mean that we can stack the case with all our own witnesses (remember the case of Naboth who was accused of blasphemy by false witnesses)
  2. The point of this is to establish clearly that an offense has been committed
- C. Tell it to the church
  1. Or officials in the church trained to handle such things?
  2. Are personal problems something for public consumption?
  3. This step is reserved for the most serious infractions.

### Conclusion:

1. If you have something against someone, go to that person and work it out.
2. Most prefer to avoid conflict, and on many minor issues we probably should just let it go.
3. However, there are serious things that we should not let go.
4. However, the thrust is that Jesus wants forgiveness and reconciliation, not revenge and retribution. "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."
5. Your mercy must be as big and wide as God's.
6. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy," Mt. 6:7.
7. Seek the truth; offer reconciliation and forgiveness.
8. This is the nature of God.