

among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears."

3. The basis in specific scriptural command and example

The classic passage in procedure is Matthew 18:15-18:

"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private ('between you and him alone'); if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And 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 as a Gentile and a taxgatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The sequence and procedure to be followed appears to be quite straightforward, with one or two problems to be resolved:

Step 1 -- A brother commits a sin. Is this a sin against the person who goes and reproves him, or is it a sin of which the person who reproves him has merely become aware? The words "against you" that appear in some versions are given a "C" rating in the United Bible Societies' text and placed in brackets (which means that the presence or position of the words is regarded as disputed). Does a brother have a responsibility to admonish or rebuke his brother only when that brother has sinned against him personally? Or does he have a responsibility, growing out of a loving concern for his brother's highest well-being, to admonish or rebuke his brother whenever he sees his brother sinning, whether or not the sin is against him personally? It would appear that the latter position is closer to the teaching of Scripture as a whole. In any case, the sin envisioned is a real one, not merely an action deemed sinful by a hypersensitive conscience, nor an action falsely judged sinful for ulterior reasons.

Step #2 -- You are to go and reprove your brother in private ("under four eyes"). Why this emphasis on private reproof? Taking the text of the passage into consideration, it would appear to make sense only if the sin were not known to the congregation at large. This stricture rules out grumbling, gossiping, complaining to a third party about the brother's sin. The one who reproves should keep his lips sealed to anyone other than the offender, and should open his lips to the offender alone (at this stage). If your brother listens to you (agrees with what you say and repents of his sin), you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, then you are to take step #3.