

The Matthew 18 Principle for Solving School Problems

The “me generation” philosophy of “I’ll do it my way” sometimes spills over into the Christian community. For example, when differences develop between individuals, some Christians take matters into their “own hands” and bypass the biblical procedure of solving problems.

A Christian school is made up of people: parents, administrators, teachers, and students. Like any other collection of earthly mortals, the people associated with a Christian school have the potential for misunderstanding, disagreement and even wrongdoing. Nevertheless, it is God’s will that we live and work together in harmony. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” (John 13:34-35)

Because of our human nature, we may at times irritate others, resulting in misunderstandings or strong disagreements. In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives His formula for solving person-to-person problems. I call it “the Matthew 18 principle” for solving school problems. The following are the words of Jesus:

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”

There are several clear principles that Jesus taught in solving people-to-people problems:

1. **Keep the matter confidential.** The very pattern of sharing the problem only with those directly involved establishes the principle of confidentiality. The Bible has much to say about those who gossip or malign others with their words. “The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor: but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.” (Proverbs 11:9)
2. **Keep the circle small.** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone”. The first step, and most often the only step needed in solving a person-to-person problem, is for one of the two people involved to initiate face-to-face dialogue. Most problems are solved at the two-person level.
3. **Be straightforward.** “Tell him his fault.” Jesus tells us to be forthright and to love honestly. Sometimes it is difficult to be straightforward and tell someone the very heart of the matter. But restoration and improvement can only come when the issues are lovingly, yet clearly, presented. The Scripture says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend.” (Proverbs 27:6)
4. **Be Forgiving.** “If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” This implies that once the matter is resolved, we should whole-heartedly forgive and restore the person whose fault has offended us. Galatians 6:1 reads, “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.”

As mentioned earlier, most school problems are resolved at the two-person level. Forgiveness and restoration is the normal happy conclusion. But what is the Matthew 18 principle if the individual will not “hear” you or

openly disagrees with your version of the problem? Let's say you are a parent of a student in a Christian school. You are unhappy with a teacher because you believe your child is being treated unfairly in the classroom. The two of you have met and talked together, and you are not satisfied with the outcome of your discussion. What is the next step in the Matthew 18 principle?

5. The parent and teacher should agree to share the matter with the school principal. At this stage, the counsel of Jesus would be "...take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." Both parent and teacher should rehearse their versions of the issue or issues with the school's Administration. Each person should come to the meeting in a spirit of prayer and humility, willing to submit to the Lord's will in the matter and also willing to submit to reproof and correction if needed. Those of us who bear the name of Christ should joyfully conform to the will of Christ. An open and honest discussion among people who are sensitive to godly principles will most often reach an amiable solution.

I estimate that 80% of school problems are solved at the two-person level. Another 18% of school problems are solved at the three and four-person level, which includes the school's Administration. This leaves 2% to be resolved at the level of the PCS Board. The Board represents the church or church community. Let's say a problem now exists and is not solvable by the normal channels of communication and established school policy. What is the next step in the Matthew 18 principle?

6. The school principal should explain the problem to the chairman of the PCS Board. The chairman will decide how the matter should be presented to the Board.

Depending on the complexity of the problem, it may be appropriate for the Board chairman to request that all persons involved be present at a PCS Board meeting. The goal of such a high-level meeting is (1) a clear understanding of the problem; (2) solving the problem; (3) reproof and correction if necessary; and (4) forgiveness and whole-hearted restoration of those who have made amends.

In summary, the Matthew 18 principle requires that *parents talk to teachers about student problems before they talk to Administration*. If unresolved at the two-person level, the matter is prayerfully and in an orderly fashion moved upward in the school's organizational structure. This is the Lord's way of solving people-to-people problems.

A Christian school is a ministry in Christ's name. Everything that is done in the context of the school must be done Christ's way. The world's methods of solving school problems are inappropriate. The idea of suing the school or persons in the school is a secular idea that has no place in the Lord's work. The Bible is clear on this. "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?" (1 Corinthians 6:1)

Satan would like to destroy the normal flow of harmony and good fellowship in Christian school education. That is not possible if all of us follow the Matthew 18 principle of solving school problems.