

Guiding Scripture for the Abuse Prevention and Education Committee Alberta & Northwest Conference, United Church of Canada

Prepared by Melanie Weaver – September 2016

Matthew 18:15-19

“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

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I. Silence and Secrecy

In this passage, Jesus’ advice for dealing with hurtful offenses is particularly relevant to issues of abuse. An abusive relationship relies on silence and secrecy. The first thing to do, therefore, is to bring the issue out of silence and secrecy to talk about it. This does not mean to make it fully public, but to bring in only as many people as are necessary to seek resolution.

II. Resolution or Reunification?

The goal is to seek resolution of the problem, signaled by agreement. Note that Jesus does not talk specifically about reunification. Because of the inherent power differential in abusive relationships, it is often not possible to bring the parties back together. Nevertheless, the task is to deal with all the hurts in a way that enables the community to recover with a renewed sense of equilibrium.

III. Universal Ramifications

In this very human set of circumstances, it may seem at first thought that we work it out simply according to human responses and abilities. But Jesus reminds us, and assures us, that in everything we do, we do it as participants in the realm of God. Our decisions and behaviours are not only supported by heaven, but have ramifications throughout the universe, throughout *All That Is*.

IV. Gift and Responsibility

Being so steeped in the divine involves both gift and responsibility. For example, it can be challenging to deal kindly with a person who may have been accused of abusing another and who seems uncooperative. Then, we are called to think of this person like a Gentile, who represents the stranger whom we are called to welcome, or a tax collector, who represents the enemy whom we are called to love. Jesus assures us that this is the Way; in God, this, too, is possible. This is the good news! Thanks be to God.