

# Conflict Resolution for Christians

## Matthew 18:15-17

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# Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB 1995)

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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 tax collector.

# Parallel/related passages

Leviticus 6:2-7

I Thessalonians 4:6

I Corinthians 8:10-13

# Matthew 18:15-17 (NASB 1995)

This passage shares with Christians a two-step process for handling sin.

A. Reconciliation

B. Church Discipline

# Reconciliation

The **first step** in correcting an offending brother is to attempt reconciliation.

- a. Go to the brother alone and “show him his fault”.
- b. Go to the brother with witnesses (other brothers or sisters).
- c. Go before the church (assembly).

## Church Discipline

The **second step** in correcting an offending brother is to discipline the brother.

# Facts of the case

Brother

Sins

- Not every disagreement is sin

Against you

- You are an aggrieved party (along with God)
- “Witnesses” of sin do not thereby become an aggrieved party
- “Offended” is not the same as “caused to offend”

# Matthew 18:15

## Matt. 18:15

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.



# Resolution step 1

a. Go to the brother alone and “show him his fault”.

## You go and show him his fault

- Don't just “have nothing to do with him” or “consider him a Gentile and a tax collector” without “going and telling him his fault” (passive-aggressive conflict avoidance)

## Between you and him alone

- Before you speak to anyone else for any reason
- If approached by an aggrieved party who has not taken this step, don't listen to them (it's just gossip)

**If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.**

# Resolution step 1

**a. Go to the brother alone and “show him his fault”.**

## **1. Private Confrontation:**

- a. Approach him privately**
- b. Seek to restore the relationship**
- c. Gently point out his fault**
- d. Express your desire for reconciliation**

# Resolution step 1

**a. Go to the brother alone and “show him his fault”.**

**Luke 17:3-4**

**<sup>3</sup> Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.**

**<sup>4</sup> And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”**

# Resolution step 1

a. Go to the brother alone and “show him his fault”.

## Galatians 6:1-2

<sup>1</sup> Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

<sup>2</sup> Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

# Matthew 18:16

**Matt. 18:16**

<sup>16</sup> 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.

# Resolution step 1

**b. Go to the brother with witnesses.**

**if he does not listen,**

**take one or two others along with you,**

- *Perhaps this is the level at which elders are involved.*
- One or two loving and wise brothers or sisters.

**every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.**

- Witnesses to the step or the original sin?
  - They are described as “others” when they accompany you, and only after that do they become “witnesses” to establish truth.
  - One or two witnesses will strengthen your case and further encourage repentance.

# Resolution step 1

## **b. Go to the brother with witnesses.**

One or two loving and wise brothers or sisters taken to the offending brother does several things.

1. It shows the brother that there is deep concern and love for the individual. Brothers and sisters care and want to help.
2. It shows that the offense is known by more than one or two people.

# Resolution step 1

**b. Go to the brother with witnesses.**

3. It provides objective and wise counsel between the two differing parties.

4. It helps to prevent bias, selfish reaction, and partiality.



# Resolution step 1

**b. Go to the brother with witnesses.**

5. Witnesses may be able to help mediate so that the two parties can reconcile.

6. Witnesses can both confirm the sin and the sinner's refusal to repent.

# Matt. 18:17

**17 “If he refuses to  
listen to them, tell it to  
the church...”**

# Resolution step 1

## c. Go before the church (assembly)

If he refuses to listen to them,  
tell it to the church.

- The “whole” church is now brought in as the arbitrating body
- It does not say “tell it to the elders” though that is generally practiced

# Resolution step 1

**c. Go before the church (assembly)**

- 1. Reconciliation is the goal of Jesus' instruction.**
- 2. The entire assembly must try to bring the straying brother or sister back to the fold.**
- 3. The whole church is responsible to call the erring brother or sister back to holiness.**

# Resolution step 1

## c. Go before the church (assembly)

4. The offending brother or sister has already refused two humble and loving appeals:

- i. The first appeal of the offended person
- ii. The second appeal by one or two loving and wise witnesses.

5. The offending brother's or sister's refusal to be reconciled is a serious threat and danger to the church.

# Resolution step 1

## c. Go before the church (assembly)

6. Christ wants the two brothers or sisters to be reconciled with each other and with God. He wants the offending brother or sister to be restored into the care and fellowship of the church.
7. Christ wants to keep the sin, division and devastation from spreading and destroying His church. The unrepentant brother or sister may be lost forever.
8. Christ wants to prevent giving the world a reason for spreading rumors that damage the image and work of His church.

# Resolution step 1

## **c. Go before the church (assembly)**

9. Christ does not want any person to perish.

10. Christ wants differences and divisiveness settled among His people. He wants the church to decide and not the world's legal system.

# Resolution step 1

## c. Go before the church (assembly)

11. Christ wants every member to work and build the church.

i. They are not to destroy the church.

ii. The church exists for worship, fellowship, ministry, and witness.

iii. Harmony, peace, love, and purpose build the church.

iv. Sin and divisiveness destroy the church.



# Matt. 18:17

17 “...and if he refuses to  
listen even to the church,  
let him be to you as a  
Gentile and a tax  
collector.”

# Resolution step 2

## Church Discipline

if he refuses to listen even to the church

let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

### **2 Thess. 3:14-15**

<sup>14</sup> If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

<sup>15</sup> *Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

## Resolution step 2

**A. Church discipline focuses on addressing sin in the lives of members through a process of love, rebuke, correction and restoration.**

**B. The goal is to encourage repentance and bring the individual back into fellowship with the church and with God.**

# Resolution step 2

## Church Discipline

### 2 Thess. 3:6

<sup>6</sup> Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

# Resolution step 2

## Church Discipline

2 Tim. 3:16-17

<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

# Resolution step 2

## Church Discipline

2 Tim. 4:2

<sup>2</sup> preach the word; **be ready** in season *and* out of season; **reprove**, **rebuke**, **exhort**, with great patience and instruction.

Heb. 12:6

<sup>6</sup> **For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,**  
And **He scourges every son whom He receives.**”