

HOW TO TALK TO PEOPLE

Navigating Conflict Within the Church Community

Matthew 18:15-17

The Church is a Community

- The church is more than a building, it's more than an organization, it is a *community* of believers *united* in Christ
- The church as a Christian community shares their faith, their lives, and their resources with one another
- The church in Acts 2 possessed specific traits that made them a community of believers
- The church in Acts 2:
 - *Shared faith and teaching* - The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching
 - *Fellowship and support* - The believers had everything in common and were willing to share what they had to meet the needs of others
 - *Gathering for worship and prayer* – The early church believers met together each day for worship and broke bread together in homes
 - *Evangelism and outreach* – the Lord added daily to the church those who were being saved
 - Through the preaching, teaching, and outreach of the church new souls were being added to the church
- When the church is a community, strong and lasting relationships are built, spiritual growth takes place, spiritual and physical needs are met, the gospel is spread, new souls are added to the church, and the church is a witness to the world
- What happens to the church community when these traits are absent?
 - Division and disunity
 - Isolation and burnout
 - Poor witness to the world
 - Spiritual and numerical decline
- This why the church, individually and collectively must strive to cultivate and maintain these essential traits within the church
- How can the church navigate conflict and maintain its community?

Take the Personal Approach

Matthew 18:15 (KJV) 15 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

- In the Christian community (the local church), a brother/sister in Christ may disturb, offend or sin against you
- When it happens, don't wait for them to come to you, go to them alone and *tell him/her their fault*
- Go tell them their fault suggests they *may not* even know they offended you
- If the person does know they have offended you, and you don't address only make the situation worse and deepens the division between you
- Also, if we don't go and tell the person their fault, it may affect us
- This is why we need to do all we can to resolve the matter
- Tell them and them alone, don't share the matter with anyone else and don't publicly rebuke them
- We're not griping and gossiping to other people about the matter, nor are we under guise of sharing a "prayer request" for the offending person

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- The issue is to be discussed between you and them alone suggests we approach them with humility
- Humility here is suggesting that *before* we come to them, we've examined our own heart, realizing you can offend them, too, it may not be all their fault
- If the offending person *hears* you, you have gained a brother/sister
- If the offending person hears you, you gained in two ways
 1. The problem has been cleared up
 2. You have not wronged the offending person by going to others with gossip and only your side of the issue
- What if the offending person refuses to hear you?

Seek Support of Others

16 *But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.*

- Sometimes the offending person after hearing their fault may be stubborn, they may be spiritually immature, or have sinful motives that keeps them from listening, admitting they're wrong, and wanting to reconcile with you
- You are to seek support from other believers to hopefully resolve the conflict
- You are not bringing in "sympathizers" that will be on your side of the disagreement
- The 2-3 witnesses you bring into this situation are mature and wise believers that will hear both sides of the issue
- Because they are independent and wise believers, they may assign responsibility differently than the offended person had thought
- When you bring in the support of independent, wise, and mature believers to provide support in a conflict, it does several things:
 - It shows the offending person that here is deep concern and they really want to help
 - It provides objective and wise counsel between the two parties; and agreement and reconciliation is more like to occur
 - It helps prevent bias, partial interest, or the offending person feeling like everyone is against them
- What if the offending person refuses to hear the 2-3 witnesses?

Church Community Support

17a *"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church..."*

- If the offending person refuses to be reconciled after being approached privately by the offended person, and the appeal of 2-3 believers, the matter is to be taken to the church
- Why would Jesus say we are to take our *personal offenses* before the church and make them *public*?
- There are several reasons:
 - The offending brother/sister has already refused two loving and humble appeals
 - The offending brother/sister's refusal to be reconciled is a serious threat to the church
 - The testimony of the church will be weakened and those considering salvation may stay out in the world

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- Jesus wants offending and offended persons reconciled with each other and with God
 - Jesus wants all parties restored into the care and fellowship of the church
 - Jesus wants to prevent the world from having a reason to spread rumors that damage the image and work of God's church
 - Jesus wants brothers/and sisters in Christ, their friends, and fellow church members build a strong witness, not a divisive witness Jesus doesn't want a single person to be **lost 2 Peter 3:9 (NLT) 9 The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.**
- Jesus wants every member to work and build; not destroy His church
 - For that reason alone, divisiveness must not be allowed to prevail in the church
 - When an offending person is brought before the church, it is a serious matter and there still must be care and concern for them, and the hope of reconciliation and restoration
 - What happens if the offending person refuses to hear the church?

Treat the Person as an Outsider

17b "...but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

- If the offending brother/sister refuses to be reconciled and restored, the church is to treat him/her exactly as they are acting, like a "heathen and a publican", *an outsider*
- *Heathen* – in biblical times, a heathen referred to a non-Jewish or Gentile person that did not worship God
- *Publican (Tax Collector)* – Publicans were Jesus who collected taxes for the Roman government and they were seen as traitors
- To treat someone as a heathen or publican meant viewing them as outside the faith community
- An outsider needed to be *evangelized* instead of being included in the *fellowship* of believers
- It means the church views the offending person as someone in need of the gospel and restoration, instead being involved fully active member of the church
- The goal of treating the person as an outsider is to bring the person to repentance and restore them to full fellowship in the church
- The action taken by the church is not out of anger or rejection, it is out of a desire to see the person recognize their sin, repent and be restored
- The church has a responsibility to maintain its integrity and witness
- The church should still provide the support and guidance needed to help the offending person understand the steps needed for reconciliation and restoration