

What to Do When a Fellow Christian Wrongs You Matthew 18:15-35

by David Servant

Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18:15-35 provide a clear process for resolving conflict and restoring relationships within the Christian community.

Scripture: Luke 17:3

Topics: "Conflict Resolution", "Christian Forgiveness"

Description

David Servant preaches on Jesus' instructions for handling conflicts among believers, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness, reconciliation, and mercy. He highlights the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-17, starting with private confrontation and escalating to church involvement if necessary, all with the goal of restoring relationships. The sermon underscores the need for humility, self-examination, and a willingness to forgive as God forgives us, regardless of the number of times we are wronged.

Transcript

Jesus wants His followers to love one another as devoted friends. But sometimes, through thoughtlessness or misunderstanding, two followers of Christ are divided. What should you do if that happens to you? In most cases, you should simply overlook other people's thoughtlessness, knowing that if they knew better, they'd do better. But when a fellow believer sins against you so that your relationship with him is severely damaged, you should follow Jesus' instructions about how to work out your problem.

First, you should privately confront the believer who has offended you. It should be done gently and lovingly for several reasons. One, because you yourself are imperfect, and your imperfection gives you less of a right to be critical of others. Two, because upon confrontation, you may discover that you are the one to blame for the problem once you hear the other person's side of the story. Often people discover that their disagreement was nothing more than a misunderstanding.

If the other believer did actually sin against you, the large majority of the time he will ask for your forgiveness when he's confronted. Occasionally he won't, and there can only be two possible reasons. Either he is stubborn and unrepentant, or he really hasn't sinned against you as you think. So at that point, you need the help of a few other believers. Jesus said you should take one or two of them with you to confront the offender again. Of course, you'll have to convince those you want to take with you that you are right and the other person is wrong. They may, at that point, help you to see that the fault actually does

lie with you, and if they do, then you should be the one asking for forgiveness and seeking reconciliation.

But let's say that your one or two helpers agree that you've been wronged, and with you, confront the offender for the second time. Either one of two things will happen. Either the offender will acknowledge his guilt or maintain his innocence. Most times, under the influence of several others who agree with you, the person will admit his guilt and ask your forgiveness. You, of course, are obligated to forgive him according to what we read today in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant. And thus your relationship will be restored.

If the offender still refuses to admit guilt and ask for forgiveness, then the matter should be taken before the whole church. (Keep in mind that for the first three hundred years of Christianity, most churches met in homes and consisted of no more than twenty-five people.) This is the final way of making certain that you have truly been sinned against, as the church considers your story and the evidence. If they decide you are right, they should confront the offender one last time. When he realizes that the whole church agrees with you, he should be persuaded of his sin and ask your forgiveness, thus restoring your relationship as you in turn forgive him. However, if he still refuses to repent, then he should be put out of the church and treated like an unbeliever, because he is obviously not a true follower of Christ. Jesus said that the church has heaven-given authority to do such a thing (see Matthew 18:17).

Jesus' instructions provoked Peter to wonder how many times he was obligated to forgive a fellow believer, suggesting that seven times was a good limit. Jesus, however, said that there was no limit, and then He told a story that explained why God expects His children to be so merciful. We've been shown so much mercy from God that it would be wrong for us to refuse to give mercy to others. In fact, if we refuse to forgive a fellow Christian who asks for forgiveness, God will reinstate our formerly forgiven sins. That is serious!

We must keep in mind that God offers forgiveness only to those who admit their guilt. Those who don't admit their guilt aren't forgiven, although God mercifully and patiently waits for their confession because He wants to be reconciled to all who have sinned against Him. We should follow His example. God expects us to forgive anyone and everyone who asks for our forgiveness, and He expects us to be merciful to those who don't ask for our forgiveness. In the parable of the unforgiving servant, notice that the first man asked for forgiveness, and his fellow servant also asked for his forgiveness, but he refused to give what he had received. That is what made the king so angry. In a sense, forgiveness can't be given until it's first requested. Jesus once said, "If another believer sins, rebuke him; then if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3, emphasis added). Notice in what we read today that there is no forgiveness offered to the unrepentant man who was found guilty by the whole church.

Q. If a fellow Christian doesn't say hello to you in church, do you think you should begin the process Jesus outlined in Matthew 18:15-17?

A. No. You should work on becoming more like Christ yourself and less like a little baby who is offended so easily. Mature Christians overlook many things that offend others.

Q. How many times do you think God will forgive us when we ask for His forgiveness?

A. He will forgive us an unlimited amount of times, because that is what He expects of us. He certainly wouldn't expect more from us than He does from Himself!

Application: Is there any fellow Christian with whom your relationship is not right? In light of what we've read today, what can you do to begin to work toward reconciliation?

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