

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."



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There's More to Matthew 18 Than "The Offended"

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Matthew 18:15-17, "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. 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. 17 And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

We may have read this passage many times, or been taught throughout the years, that **Matthew 18** gives us instruction what we, as Christians, are to do if/when we have been offended by another Christian.

This passage was not given to "bash" or give a good lashing to another brother/sister-in-Christ, but rather it is God's desire for restoration of personal relationships and to keep peace. It is a way to keep us from becoming bitter and dishonoring our commitment to "love one another". **John 13:34-35, John 15:12**

We are told what the one who has been offended is to do... go privately to the person who has offended you – between you and them only and try to restore the peace and understanding. If you do, you have gained your brother/sister. Yet - there's more to that passage we must follow.

Let's create an example of two men.

One is Bill and the other is Jared. Bill feels he has been offended by Jared and is a situation where he is unable to just forgive and forget. What are the duties involved to help restore these two brothers-in-Christ as given by **Matthew 18**?

BILL (THE OFFENDED)

Bill is to go to Jared first, just between him and Jared and discuss privately and let him know why he felt offended. Bill is not to tell other friends or go to the leaders and have them handle the situation.

Bill would be sinning against Jared if he does not practice this first step and privately discuss the situation to resolve the conflict.

If Jared does not listen, Bill is to take two or three witnesses. If Jared repents, Bill has gained his brother and peace is restored.

JARED (THE ALLEGED OFFENDER)

Jared's duty is to allow Bill to discuss with him what the offense against him may be. Bill may have a valid reason for feeling offended or it could be a misunderstanding. This talk would allow both to discuss what occurred.

If Jared agrees he was in the wrong and says he is sorry, Bill has gained his brother and peace has been restored.

By not listening to Bill, or trying to work out the problem Jared will:

1. Cause Bill to become angry or bitter.
2. Dishonor God's command to help restore his relationship with Bill.
3. Put other Christians in situations they may not want to be in since they may be called to be a witness in the follow-up call.
4. Cause disunity in the rest of the body of Christ.
5. Cause his own broken relationship with God.

WITNESSES

Verse 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."

Should Bill not be able to resolve the problem, he is to take two or three witnesses with him. He may ask for your assistance to be one of his witnesses. The purpose is that "every word can be established".

With your help and the other witnesses, the problem is discussed towards resolution. There may be something you say that could assist either Bill or Jared in resolving the offense and peace can be restored. If not, you will have a testimony in the future of what was said or occurred in the meeting.

I've had some people refuse to go as witnesses for various reasons. Yet, it is our duty to assist in being a witness in these situations to help fulfill God's command.

We are responsible for helping to keep peace between a brother/sister in Christ. “Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they are called the children of God.” **Matthew 5:9**

THE CHURCH

Verse 17a, “And if he shall neglect to hear them, **tell it unto the church:....**”

If taking witnesses does not bring resolution, Bill must tell it to the Church. The Church leaders need to be aware, as well as the body of Christ, so they will know that Bill has tried to bring resolution and peace but to no avail. This helps to keep out gossip and campaigning which can bring damage to the body or to the one who is trying to restore the relationship and seeking Godly resolution.

By letting the Church know, will help the wrongdoer repent and turn to wanting to right their wrong.

The Church should back the leadership in their decision, as well as the offended brother or sister (who has desired to set a disagreement right). If we don't do this, then the Church is causing Jared to believe he was in the right.

It causes division if the Church does not stay together in this decision and can embolden Jared to spread lies or gossip to get people on his side.

THE LEADERS AND CHURCH BODY

Verse 17b, “but if he neglect to hear the church, **let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican**”

Jared is to be treated as a heathen and a publican. This follow-up is for the Church body, as well as the leaders of that congregation. Our responsibility is to treat Jared as a sinner who needs to be disciplined so he can be convicted in his conscience of his wrongdoing and not to let sin spread within the Church to others. **Galatians 5:9**, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.”

Leaders should remove Jared from any office he is holding, classes he is teaching, committee seats he may hold, etc. Heathens and non-Christians are not given these positions, neither should an unrepentant sinner be in a capacity where they have others following them or influential positions. Jared is to know that his actions, in not wanting restoration with Bill, is a sin and ungodly.

As the Church body – we should honor the leadership's decision for discipline should Jared refuse to be reconciled with Bill. Failure for either to let **Matthew 18** be practiced is rebellion to Christ.

THE UNSPOKEN PARTIES:

The passage in **Matthew 18** also shows one more category of people with a responsibility, should it occur even though it is not worded, but is just as important. This unspoken party would be the Christians outside of the offense. This could be Bill's friend, family member, or his Church leader(s).

Bill goes to a friend, family member, or Church leader in confidence and bares his burden of Jared's alleged offense. If you were not the offender, and Bill comes to you without first resolving the offense with Jared, don't be a “go-between” and try to handle the situation. This will cause further ill-will between the two men and leaves out the alleged offender (Jared) from the solution. Remember, Jared may be innocent.

Jared would have no idea that there was a problem and would be quite embarrassed or become angry if others knew about it without him being given the opportunity to make restoration with Bill.

Instruct Bill to follow the pattern set in **Matthew 18:15**; to first go to Jared and resolve it privately. Do not get involved any further and don't listen to Bill's words of frustration or discontent. At this point you are aware that Bill has a concern. Pray with him and encourage him to honor God's plan. God may use the “unspoken parties” as a means to help restore Bill and Jared's relationship.

If Bill is new in the body of Christ, or does not wish to confront Jared in person, instruct Bill to write a confidential letter to be given to Jared. It will give written proof of what Bill's words were to Jared and of his attempt to restore their relationship.

Again, this helps to keep gossip and campaigning from spreading and any unnecessary ill-will in the family of God.

It takes teamwork and family love to help one another follow **Matthew 18**. If we don't, we are sinning against Jared in not helping Bill follow God's plan for restoration.

FINAL WORDS:

This is just a sample scenario for how **Matthew 18** should be practiced. It reveals that all the responsibility does not lie with just the offended Christian. The whole body of Christ may have to be involved to help bring peace and restoration.

Put yourself in each one of the categories above and understand how you would feel or wish to be treated, should that be you.

Of course, there are some in the body of Christ who have a very difficult time dis-fellowshipping another, especially if their nature is to be an encourager and are soft-hearted. Yet it is NOT love if we do not follow God's method of restoration – we are not in full understanding of God's true love.

Many have a difficult time with confrontations or even discipline. This is understandable, but we all must trust in God on how He wants His children disciplined. After all,

He knows more than we do because He is the author of peace.

I've often witnessed that the one who was offended (Bill), and only wanting to reconcile in peace with the offender (Jared), is the one whom other Christians look down upon and sided with the one who was the offender (Jared). Many times this is because the offender (Jared) tells others to get people on "their side" or "feel sorry for them" when they know they have done wrong. This is unscriptural and causes unnecessary divisions, heartaches, and Church splits.

The offended (Bill) should not be considered "the culprit" if wishing to restore relationships. It's to help keep him (Bill) from becoming bitter by setting things right and prevents the offender (Jared) from hurting others.

So, as you see, there is more to **Matthew 18:15-17** than the one who was offended. There's the offender, the Church, the Leaders and the Church body, the unspoken parties, as well as the offended.

God has set each of us with a duty to be aware of the order in this passage and how our actions are just as important on what we do to remain in the Will of God in bringing restoration and peace in the Body of Christ.

Remember **Romans 12:10**, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;"

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