

Conflict Resolution 5

Key Texts

The Duty of the offended to come to the offender - **Matthew 18:15-20**

15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. **16** But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ **17** And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

18 “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19 “Again, assuredly,¹ I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

John 7:51

Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?

Proverbs 18:17

The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.

¹ TR removes assuredly

Process

- 1) Step 1 - Go 1 on 1 (exceptions to have more than 1 person have been explained)
 - a) This could be several meetings.
 - b) If this does not conclude swiftly people are tempted to cut it off.
 - c) If this is not resolved by 1 attempt to discuss the matter, consider if the other party is willing to engage seriously or not. If you think the conversation is fruitless, then go to step 2.

- 2) Step 2 - Go with 1 or 2 witnesses that are mutually agreed upon or each bring 1 witness.

- 3) Step 3 - Bring charges by your own mouth and the mouth of at least 1 other witness to the church court.

- 4) **Charges should remain at the level of publicity of the offense or lower unless difficulty, danger, or the severity/criminality of the situation calls for escalation.**
 - a) The resolution needs to be as public as the offense or as public as the awareness of the conflict - whichever is higher.

- 5) Talebearing / Gossip - A Trap for Disorder & Waste
 - a) Talking about a matter when (A1) it is not positively honoring the party being discussed, (A2) it is not your business, and (A3) you are not helping to solve the problem.
 - b) **Judgment of Act VS Revealing of Acts**
 - c) **Inquiring before Judgment or in the event of negative judgment**

6) Where to start the process:

a) We should always start at step 1, unless:

- i) the **original offense was more public** than just the parties involved in the dispute,
- ii) **Complexity** of the situation or **Weakness** of one of the parties - one or both parties may require help to go to the next step.
 - (1) This may result in the process being a modified step 1 with help or an immediate step 2.
 - (2) Both parties can agree to jump to step 2 if the matter is obviously difficult after a brief exchange.
 - (3) Either party can raise to step 2 if the matter seems beyond their ability to manage.
 - (4) No private matter may proceed to step 3 without 2 or 3 witnesses willing to bring charges and testify on a matter with a willingness to have punishment fall on them eye for eye tooth for tooth as what would fall on the charged.
- iii) **Decency** - if the conflict is with a person of the opposite sex or is with a person under special care like a child or person with mental disability, then others may need to be involved.
 - (1) This is a modified step 1 unless both parties agree to add another witness.
- iv) **Danger** - if the person fears for safety in private conflict
- v) **Severity** - if the grievousness / criminality of the offense obviously immediately requires involvement from others.

7) **How to deal with things being raised in publicity in a disorderly manner:**

- a) Unless it is to step 3, simply proceed and have the warning issued to amend behavior in the future.
- b) If a private party raises from step 1 to step 2 wrongly, then simply raise the concern. If the two parties do not agree, then proceed with step 2 and then the witnesses should also advise on whether the raising of the situation to step 2 was warranted or not.
- c) Deal with disorderly raising of the matter as with all sin.
- d) If the matter is raised to level 3 wrongly with insufficient witnesses, then the court must refuse to hear the matter and require a step 2 meeting.
- e) Unlawful spreading of information or slander can become the basis for some sort of recompense or consequence that involves duties of restoration in money or time by service along with equally public retraction.

Step 1 - Private Meeting - Discussion of the involved parties alone

15 “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

8) Summary

- a) Ordinary Order
 - i) Private Offense
 - ii) Immediate Questioning, Comment of Concern, or Rebuke
 - iii) Private Resolution
- b) Who can be involved?
 - i) Parties in conflict - Charged / Offended / Witnessed / People involved
 - (1) Wise counselor / Peacemaker
 - (2) Relevant Authority / Necessary person for propriety
 - (3) Already involved - orderly or disorderly
 - (a) If orderly no problem
 - (b) If disorderly, then resolve that as part of the dispute.
This is probably the last thing to be dealt with once another is involved.

Step 2 - Semi-Public Meeting - Mediation, Increased Pressure to have integrity, Evidentiary Meeting, Judgement

16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’

9) This is more formal than the step 1 conversation

10) Activities of witnesses

- a) Witnessing & Mediation - when one of the witnesses is a superior
- b) Witness with effort to move along the conflict - peers or inferiors or superiors who think they can help to resolve.
- c) Passive Witness only - when the witnesses are uncertain of how to proceed but are seeking to understand - consider at least asking questions. A totally inactive witness is probably failing to do duty.

11) A court that investigates a matter should never send less than 2 witnesses to investigate and give back a report or else the testimony of the parties would not be sufficient for court action.

12) If a witness or a person asked for counsel is too busy, then they may suggest an alternate (an elder might suggest a Deacon or a less busy Elder or some other mature Christian for the task).

13) If a witness or person asked for counsel finds the matter too complex or difficult, then it may be wise to bring in a person of similar or greater wisdom to help to resolve the matter. A mature Christian might involve an officer. A Deacon might involve an elder.

Step 3 - A Court of the Church - A Public Meeting

17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.

1) if the matter is so public that everyone already knows or has a lawful basis to know of the situation, then the matter is public and may proceed to step 3

Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 30 & 31 & Form of Presbyterial Government - <https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/>

Verses on 2-3 witnesses (NKJV):

Numbers 35:30: “Whoever kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the testimony of witnesses; but one witness is not *sufficient* testimony against a person for the death *penalty*.”

Deuteronomy 17:6: “Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness.”

Deuteronomy 19:15: “One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.”

Matthew 18:15-18

2 Cor 13:1: “This is the third time I am coming to you. Every charge must be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. I warned those who sinned before and all the others, and I warn them now while absent, as I did when present on my second visit, that if I come again I will not spare them— since you seek proof that Christ is speaking in me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.”,

John 8:17: “It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true.”

- Naboth’s Vineyard, reliable witnesses needed, and even then, not infallible

1 Tim 5:19-20: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. 20 Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.”

- Reaffirming the need for 2 witnesses so that the elders are not in petty court battles all the time. Same rule applies to all, but Elders are more likely to be the subject of foolish attacks.
- Reaffirming the importance of rebuking elders who fail in their office.

Hebrews 10:28: “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses.*”

Step 4 - Public Rebuke

Step 5 - 2nd Public Rebuke

Step 6 - Suspension from the Table

Sometimes a grievous sin must proceed to swift trial with suspension - OR - swift trial with suspension by the elders and a vote for excommunication by the men.

Step 7 - Vote of the Heads of House

Majority - Putting hand to the discipline - 2 Cor 2:6-7 - Matt 18:6-7a - **6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow.**

Step 8 - Excommunication

Matt 18:7b - **But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.**

Step 9 - Appeal

WCF - 30 & 31 Synods and councils

Westminster Presbyterian Form of Government

Exodus 18:13-27 & Acts 15:1-135 & Much Discussion

Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government

Of Church-Government, and the several sorts of Assemblies for the same. CHRIST hath instituted a government, and governors ecclesiastical in the church: to that purpose, the apostles did immediately receive the keys from the hand of Jesus Christ, and did use and exercise them in all the churches of the world upon all occasions.

And Christ hath since continually furnished some in his church with gifts of government, and with commission to execute the same, when called thereunto.

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the church be governed by several sorts of assemblies, which are congregational, classical, and synodical.

Of the power in common of all these Assemblies. It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that the several assemblies before mentioned have power to **convent, and call before them, any person within their several bounds, whom the ecclesiastical business which is before them doth concern.**

They have power to hear and determine such causes and differences as do orderly come before them.

It is lawful, and agreeable to the word of God, that all the said assemblies have some power to dispense church-censures.

Of Congregational Assemblies, that is, the Meeting of the ruling Officers of a particular Congregation, for the Government thereof. THE ruling officers of a particular congregation have power, authoritatively, to call before them any member of the congregation, as they shall see just occasion.

To inquire into the knowledge and spiritual estate of the several members of the congregation.

To admonish and rebuke.

Which three branches are proved by **Heb. xiii. 17;**² **1 Thess. v. 12, 13;**³ **Ezek. xxxiv.**⁴

Authoritative suspension from the Lord's table, of a person not yet cast out of the church, is agreeable to the scripture:

First, Because the ordinance itself must not be profaned.

Secondly, Because we are charged to withdraw from those that walk disorderly.

Thirdly, Because of the great sin and danger, both to him that comes unworthily, and also to the whole church. And there was power and authority, under the Old Testament, to keep unclean persons from holy things.

The like power and authority, by way of analogy, continues under the New Testament.

² Hebrews 13:17 - 17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 - 12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

⁴ Ezekiel 34:4 - 4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.

The ruling officers of a particular congregation have power authoritatively to suspend from the Lord's table a person not yet cast out of the church:

First, Because those who have authority to judge of, and admit, such as are fit to receive the sacrament, have authority to keep back such as shall be found unworthy.

Secondly, Because it is an ecclesiastical business of ordinary practice belonging to that congregation.

When congregations are divided and fixed, they need all mutual help one from another, both in regard of their intrinsic weaknesses and mutual dependence, as also in regard of enemies from without.