

Conflict Resolution 4

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.”

The duty of the offender to come to the offended - **Matthew 5:21-26**

21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old [in ancient times], ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ [Lit., in Aram., Empty head] shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ [Gr. More (root of moron)] shall be in danger of hell fire [Gr. Gehenna pyr]. 23 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. 26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

¹ TR removes assuredly

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.

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 - a messy situation that has been mishandled or a child or new believer that is unsure or unfirm in how to proceed is an obvious example.
 - (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.
- 9) Children under 20 years old may approach parents about issues outside of the household without worry about this,
- 10) Spouses may talk to each other about issue inside or outside of the home without worry to each other,
- 11) Employers/managers may discuss issues freely about the business,
- 12) Officers of State or Church can consult with each other freely to help with the burden of government, this includes in the presence of officer wives since they are also qualified and are responsible to work with their husbands.
- 13) Step 1 is the individual or parties involved in the dispute meeting with no witnesses.
- a) Instead if any persons are present their purpose is for:
 - i) decency (talking to another person's wife or child or servant in private),
 - ii) safety (persons present for protection),
 - iii) order (swift action to prevent worse disorder in or across jurisdictions),
 - iv) weakness, lack of skill, or difficulty (these last three are basically all the same)

Westminster Directory of Private (Family) Worship² - underline added for emphasis

XII. Seeing the word of God requireth that we should consider one another, to provoke unto love and good works; therefore, at all times, and specially in this time, wherein profanity abounds, and mockers, walking after their own lusts, think it strange that others run not with them to the same excess of riot; every member of this kirk ought to stir up themselves, and one another, to the duties of mutual edification, by instruction, admonition, rebuke; exhorting one another to manifest the grace of God in denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and in living godly, soberly and righteously in this present world; by comforting the feeble-minded, and praying with or for one another. Which duties respectively are to be performed upon special occasions offered by Divine Providence; as, namely, when under any calamity, cross, or great difficulty, counsel or comfort is sought; or when an offender is to be reclaimed by private admonition, and if that be not effectual, by joining one or two more in the admonition, according to the rule of Christ, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

XIII. And, because it is not given to every one to speak a word in season to a wearied or distressed conscience, it is expedient, that a person (in that case,) finding no ease, after the use of all ordinary means, private and publick, have their address to their own pastor, or some experienced Christian: but if the person troubled in conscience be of that condition, or of that sex, that discretion, modesty, or fear of scandal, requireth a godly, grave, and secret friend to be present with them in their said address, it is expedient that such a friend be present.

² In the large teal “Westminster Confession” Book or Accessed on 2023/11/18 @ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/westminster-standards/directory-of-family-worship/>

Church of Scotland First Book of Discipline - Ch 7 - Drafted by John Knox - AD 1560 -
underlining added for emphasis

First, if the offence be secret or known to few men, and rather stands in suspicion than in manifest probation, the offender ought to be privately admonished, to absteyne from all appearance of evill, which if he promise to doe, and declare himselfe sober, honest, and one that feares God, and feares to offend his brethren, then may the secret admonition suffice for his correction. But if he either contemne the admonition, or after promise made do shew himselfe no more circumspect then he was before, then must the Minister admonish him, to whom if he be found inobedient they must proceed according to the rule of Christ, as after shall be declared. If the crime be publick, and such as is heynous, as fornication, drunkennesse, fighting, common swearing, or execration, then ought the offender to be called in presence of the Minister, Elders and Deacons, where his sinne and trepasse ought to be declared and aggregated [aggravated, emphasized] so that his conscience may feele how farre he hath offended God, and what slander he hath raised in the Kirk. If signes of unfaigned repentance appeare in him, and if he require to be admitted to publick repentance, the Minister may appoint unto him a day when the whole kirk convenes together, that in presence of all he may testifie his repentance, which before he professed. Which if he accept, and with reverence confesse his sinne, doing the same, and earnestly desiring the Congregation to pray to God with him for mercy, and to accept him in their societie notwithstanding the former offence: Then the Kirk may and ought to receive him as a penitent. For the Kirk ought to be no more severe, then God declares himselfe to be, who witnesses that in whatsoever houre a sinner unfainedly repents, and turnes from his wicked way, that he will not remember one of his iniquities. And therefore ought the Kirk diligently to advert that it excommunicate not those whom God absolves.³

³ Accessed 2023/11/18

https://www.truecovenant.com/kirkgovt/scotland_kirk_books_of_discipline_1621.phtml#scotland_kirk_books_of_discipline_1621_book1_head7

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

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.'

14) this is more formal than the step 1 conversation

15) 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.

16) 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.

17) 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).

18) 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.

19) **Mediation** with or without other witnesses - when the witness is of higher or equal station, gifting, and/or age - The witness is seeking to help to understand, and keep order, and push for resolution - Good mediators & Judges know the 10 commandments, the Law of Moses, and Proverbs well.

- a) The mediator seeks to use tools like the 4 G's to guide the conversation.
- b) Make sure charges / problems are lined up and clear - make the participants do the work - if they will not, then charge them with being lazy and not being peacemakers.
- c) Fact finding and organization
 - i) What happened? Both sides
 - ii) Objections / Cross Ex - Both sides
 - iii) Know who the parties are and who already knows about the situation.
- d) Resolution by Agreement or Judgement / Assessment
 - i) Help to Admit Wrongs to all of the parties involved and to avoid weasel words - Who did what wrong/right? 10 commandments
 - ii) Help to Acknowledge Harms - What were the harms of wrong actions/neglect?
 - iii) Help to Commit to Alter future attitudes, words, behaviors - What ought to have been done differently? How?
 - iv) Help them to see lawful consequences for actions and to accept them - What can be done to restore harms now? By whom? - this relates to sentencing more than who is guilty of what. Harms are used here. The Law of Moses is the main thing to study for this - Exodus through Deuteronomy.
 - v) Help to make sure forgiveness is given just as powerfully as Repentance

4 Promises of Forgiveness

- 1) I will restore our fellowship as brothers in Christ (and other relationships if appropriate) and I will not allow this issue to prevent us from doing our duties to each other.
- 2) I will not dwell on this incident without a duty to do so.
- 3) I will not bring this up again to you without a duty to do so.
- 4) I will not bring this up again to others without a duty to do so.

- vi) Help to make sure an acceptable end is reached

Acceptable Conclusions on any point of offense:

- 1) Choosing to **interpret** ambiguities charitably.
 - 2) Choosing to **overlook** things that you think are clear but minor offenses.
 - 3) Choosing to Accept a **Just defense** resulting in charitable interpretation.
 - 4) Choosing to Accept **external repentance**.
 - 5) Choosing to **escalate** to the next level of Matthew 18 until resolution by either (a) **reconciliation** or (b) **removal** from the fellowship ends the friendship unless and until the guilty party repents.
- 20) **Active Witness** who participates in the discussion - When the witness is basically a peer and has not been asked to mediate - the prosecuting party then takes the lead and the defendant manages their own rights but there is a collaborative effort to come to a conclusion
- a) Weird and wasteful when the witness is less mature than the parties (should be passive) or when the witness is way more mature (should be mediating)
 - b) Cultural norm - we pretend we are all peers
 - c) 10 Commandments, Law of Moses, Proverbs
- 21) **Passive Witness** who gives opinion when asked - the prosecuting party then takes the lead and the defendant manages their own rights
- a) Weird and off putting unless the active parties are obviously the higher in rank, gifting, and/or age
 - b) Passivity may not be continued if one side is abusing the other in the conflict. Intervention is necessary when participants are domineering or being overly passive or are immature and unskilled.

From Westminster Fellowship (Surrendra Gangadean):

- “i) In step 2, one or two more persons are included in the process of resolution. This adds weight of more witnesses to the truth of scripture and to the truth of the response of the parties involved. It makes it clear that the concern is in step 2, and is a grave matter being taken seriously.
- ii) Focus of discussion should be on what does scripture teach and how does it apply.
- iii) Discussion of the issue as defined from step 1 can go on until resolution or, if there is no resolution, until it is appropriate to go to step 3.
- iv) Three attempts at resolution are reasonable. If there is no resolution at step 2, witness to this should be sent up to step 3, in writing. If there is resolution, there should be a stated agreement of both parties to avoid having to revisit the issue in the future.”