

# Resolving offenses God's way

Matthew 18:15-17



By Philip Shields

When something bad is done to you, or said about you or against you, and it upsets and offends you, what does Jesus say you and I should do?

Or if, instead of you being the one offended, YOU offend or sin against someone else who is now upset with you, what should you do, according to Jesus the Christ?

Hello everyone, I'm Philip Shields, host and founder of Light on the Rock. This topic is actually a huge topic that needs to be learned and practiced in God's church far, far more than it is. It's about handling times when we have CAUSED offense – OR when someone has sinned against US. We must not just try to ignore and forget those situations.

There's a procedure our Master tells us to follow in each case. But I believe very few brethren really ever follow this.

I've come to realize where I myself have had to reevaluate what I do and what I've done in the past. And I find myself repeating this process in Matthew 18 in so many situations where sin occurred against me, or where people were offended by me or by a brother or sister in Messiah.

It's very important to the living God that we all get along and love one another in word and deed. This first case we'll examine is where a brother in the body of Christ has something against YOU. He feels YOU offended him or sinned against him. Here are the clear instructions of and from the very Son of God himself for us.

## **When YOU have offended someone**

### **Matthew 5:23-24**

“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.”

God's saying don't even do religious things – maybe you're getting your tithes ready to mail, or preparing to fast for someone's healing – God is saying, “Hey, your gifts don't impress Me until you take care of this problem. Someone's upset with you.” *God doesn't want us leaving that alone or thinking it's unimportant.* To God it's very important. Go fix the strained relationship. Make amends. If you can. Some people don't let us repair strained relationships. But if we pray about the mess we're in, on our way to the person, we may see answered prayer. Set your heart to restore peace and joy.

If they're angry, it's vitally important that we have a soft approach as you seek peace and reconciliation.

### **Proverbs 15:1**

“A **SOFT** answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.”

How can we truly love one another when one is really upset with the other one? We can't just leave it, or claim “that's *their* problem.” No, we have to go find out what upset them. **LISTEN** intently. Make sure you understand what's upsetting him. **Seek first to understand – before you seek to be understood.**

Let the offended person do more of the talking. Even a fool is thought to be wise if he remains silent more than talking when you're asking the offended brother to explain how he sees things and why he's upset.

### **Proverbs 10:19 --**

**“In the multitude of words sin is not lacking,  
But he who restrains his lips is wise.”**

Many of us – instead of really listening why and **HOW** we offended someone – will immediately explain how the offended one has it all wrong. Be willing instead to humble yourself and to “esteem the others **BETTER** than yourself” (**Philippians 2:3**). Apologize from your heart. But we carnally will tend to

justify ourselves instead. Too many find it so hard to say the powerful words, “I’m sorry.” It starts with “lowliness of mind,” humility.

**Philippians 2:3**

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but ***in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.***”

Be watching for my sermon on Phil.2:3 about esteeming others better than ourselves.

But so many times, we try instead to explain that they misunderstood our perfectly pure intentions. It’s hard for us to admit we really goofed up badly. But this is a very self-righteous, self-justifying approach that won’t help to heal the situation. If you don’t watch it, you’ll just make matters worse. Especially with God.

So apologize for the hurt feelings and quietly ask what you can do to make everything right, without explaining or justifying why you had to do what you did. If money or recompensing any loss is necessary, do it as best you can. Do everything in your power to help the other person to no longer be upset with you if you can. So **Matthew 5:23-24** is about when you remember someone else is offended by YOU.

An excellent example of restoring a ruined relationship is the story of Jacob when he returned home, after grossly offending his brother Esau, who wanted to kill Jacob for stealing his birthright and his blessing. God would have worked it out so Jacob could have had the birthright and blessings without having to lie and sin. But Jacob and his mother Rebekah couldn’t wait for God so they sinned.

**Read the story of how Jacob reconciled with Esau. Jacob humbled himself and sent large gifts for Esau (Gen 32:9-21) who had stated he wanted to kill Jacob before meeting him.** And I’m sure God softened Esau’s heart too, plus apparently God sent many visible angels all around too, – I believe – to also meet Esau and his 400 men (Gen 32:1-2) and to let him know that Jacob was under God’s protection. Then the story of the meeting is in **Genesis 33**, and how Jacob and all his family bowed down in humility to Esau and gave him a huge gift. *Jacob did not try to justify why he took the birthright*

*and blessing.* He just humbled himself, left a huge gift, and made peace. A great pattern for us to follow when we go to someone we know WE have offended.

Pause the audio for a minute and ponder: who is upset with you right now that you know about? Determine to obey the Son of God and with his help, fix it. Don't let it fester like an infected sore.

### **WHEN Your brother sins against you**

In this next example, we are the one offended because someone sinned against US. The other person sinned against you.

#### **Matthew 18:15-17**

*"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, then 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."

Jesus is not denying that a sin happened or that the one sinning was at fault. But how do we deal with it?

What are some typical carnal reactions when someone hurts us or sins against us?

- **We gossip about what they said or did to us.** But that's a terrible sin by itself. We tell others about what was said or done and how wrong it was, especially if the other person hurt us badly. But if we do this, we're gossiping and we become sinners ourselves by our gossip. We might even immediately tell the pastor at the same time. Some get very effective at spreading gossip, especially with modern social media and internet. Within seconds, a matter can go around the world, and we become a human manure spreader of this gossip to everyone we can.

- Or some who are familiar with Matthew 18:15-17, *may try to look like or act like they're practicing this teaching* by going to the person who caused offense – but we immediately take some witnesses or friends with us, whom we claim will be impartial. This approach breaks the process given in Matthew 18.

What we're supposed to do is so hard to perfectly obey. Sometimes the one who caused the sin or offence may not even want to meet with you, and you'll have to assure them you need to talk, and it will be very private and quiet. In the beginning, keep this one-on-one. No witnesses to bolster your position. Let's read again, directly from the Son of God, what we're supposed to do.

### **Matthew 18:15-16**

*"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.'

**The first meeting or discussion is supposed to be just between the offender and the offended one, you. You and he ALONE. NO. ONE.**

**ELSE. Except God.** Yes, please definitely pray about it and pray that God keep you gentle, humble, and seeking peace. *And yes, I'm preaching at myself here too, as I see I need this so much too. You don't talk about it ahead of time with the pastor or anyone else on the phone or by email. That is disobeying Jesus if you share this juicy gossipy tidbit with any others.* This should be just two people trying to iron out some offense, privately, alone, quietly.

**The "alone" part is so hard to obey, but we all MUST obey this.** We MUST learn to follow instructions, to obey God's word. These are words directly from the Living Word of God. So we are NOT to tell our wife about your brother's fault or sin. You don't tell your husband. Admit it. That's hard, isn't it? You don't first tell your spouse, or your family, or your neighbor, or anyone else in the church. You don't even first tell your pastor, even though too many do so under the pretense of "I'm just making sure I'm doing this right" – as we then disobey Jesus and not just go and talk to our brother who sinned – ALONE.

It says we are to go and tell HIM his fault. ALONE. MANY of us would rather not go, but just leave it alone. So neither should we, of course, even think of putting any of this on social media or letters or notes. Just go and talk to the offender. Tell HIM. Or her. Alone. First. No one else.

This ‘alone’ task seems to be the hardest step to obey. To go to that person – but just you and he, nobody else. Even going to the person is hard for many.

**If God’s spirit is present** in you both (we hope), the result should be peace. If the offender is humble and apologetic to you, forgive. Don’t explode in anger. Yes, I am preaching at myself here too. The wrath of man does not result in peace or righteousness of God. We must not get angry. **THIS** is a very corrective verse to us all.

**James 1:19-20**

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be **swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath**; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Hopefully your one-on-one meeting will solve the problem, apologies accepted, and peace ensues. Don’t bring up the sin again if there’s been repentance. Leave a blessing for the one you’re forgiving, as God does for us when we repent. Read the entire chapter of Joel 2 – a splendid example. God not only tells us to repent, but also tells us that if we do repent, he’ll send us lots of blessings. That is our example. Bless the one who repents to you and asks your forgiveness.

**What if the person does it again and sins and offends against you again?** And again? You’ll probably be told by someone, or you’ll decide on your own, that behavior like that must mean he could not possibly have really repented. But here’s what our Savior – who has had to forgive you and me over and over and over again – has to say about that:

**Luke 17:3-4**

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. **And if he sins against you seven times in a DAY**, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' **you shall forgive him.**"

Even if he “does it” seven times in a single day, and says he’s sorry and repentant, “YOU SHALL FORGIVE HIM.” In **Matthew 18:21-22** Jesus says 70x7 times – an expression of never stopping your forgiveness; it’s for forever.

Not forgiving him would just make us bitter. We become like a container holding a very toxic and powerful chemical that will just destroy its container. You and I are the “container.” Forgive and leave the judgment to God to handle.

Remember if you don’t forgive anyone for anything, then you’re setting the standard for your own judgment by God (**Matthew 7:1-4**). If we’re tough on forgiving, God will be tough on us too. If we don’t forgive others their sin, then God won’t forgive us either. It’s that serious.

I say forgive them even if they don’t fully repent in your view. Let God be their judge. Did Jesus wait to forgive others only if or when they’d repent? On the cross, what did He say, even with the people spitting on him, hurting him, cursing him – “Father, *forgive them* for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34). Had they repented when he said this? No. He said it anyway.

### **Matthew 6:14-15**

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Jesus – Yeshua – gave us further instructions. If the problem is not solved in the first round of events, then at that point take one or two others who will be seen as fair and impartial with you to be your witnesses. That’s **Matthew 18:16**. Then if even that doesn’t work, at that point take it to the church of called out ones – possibly at this point get the pastor involved, as the one coordinating the flock. It will then be up to him if he will keep the offending brother as part of the flock, as verse 17 says.

In the meantime, forgive from the heart. Love from the heart. Pray for those who hurt you and sinned against you. Bless those who curse you. IF you’re having a tough time forgiving, ask God to help you get there. We need God’s LOVE for others to be able to forgive terrible things they did to us. And realize

how much you've had to be forgiven by God and others too. **Be sure to read Matthew 18:21-35**, about recognizing how much God has forgiven you and me and so we should be quick to always forgive others.

Also read Luke 7, about the very sinful woman who wept in repentance right on Jesus' feet. Frankly, we should all relate to this woman, since we all also have been forgiven so much, and so should forgive others also.

### **Luke 7:36-48**

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you."

So he said, "Teacher, say it."

41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

44 Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.

**47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."**



48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

Our work is clearly presented to us. Let's obey our Master and practice this difficult new covenant teaching by Yeshua, the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

For sure, if someone has sinned against US, let's not become a gossip and a slanderer, telling everyone else what he did.

Do you know what "Devil" means? It means "slanderer." So when we slander a brother or sister, or anyone, we have become a "Devil" – a slanderer. When you slander, you have come into the employment of the Adversary, Satan the slanderer.

INSTEAD, remember godly love does not keep a record of the wrongs others do – with date, time and details. If you have such a thing, get rid of it unless you're planning to sue the person. Try to stop mulling over the offenses of others, over and over. Don't even keep rehearsing your own offenses. We have to move on.

#### **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NIV**

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, **it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.** 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 **It always protects, *always trusts*, always hopes, always perseveres.**"

Let's read this part of 1 Cor 13 again, and this time we'll replace "love" or "it" with your name. I'll say "Philip." You use your own name. How well will you do?

SOW PEACE. Be a peace maker even if you don't feel you got your full opportunity to release and vent all your anger. The peacemakers are the ones who are called God's children (Matthew 5:9).

#### **Matthew 5:5-9**

"Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
For they shall be filled.

**7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.**

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

**9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.**

**But my main point today is really focused on the sequence: start small. Talk to the perceived offender first, only him, nobody else. So we do not gossip about it. Do so ALONE, all by yourself. Privately.** No one else should be around.

After all, that's the way you'd like to be treated, isn't it, if you had been the offender? You truly don't want your own sins gossiped about to everyone. And surely you'd like to be forgiven and keep the details private. The second greatest commandment, after all is: "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

Matthew 18:15-17 gives us good guidelines on how to love our neighbor when things have gone badly for them and to us. It's wise, it's the right thing to do, and it works! But only if we practice it carefully. Sometimes it has to go to the next stages of v 16-17, but this is the way we are told to handle disputes and offences.

Closing prayer.