

Just because we are not to judge others does not mean we are not to acknowledge and resolve problems. What is the difference between judging someone and acknowledging a problem that exists between people?

Judging implies that I am setting myself above the other person as their judge and have the authority to hand out a consequence for their behaviour. In so doing, I am putting myself in place of God as judge and I become proud, unloving, and blind to my own inadequacies.

However, that does not mean we do not see issues as they arise that create tensions between us and others. One can be **discerning** of what is going on without judging the other person. **Discernment** sees there is a problem and **love** compels us to resolve tensions that divide relationships.

The goal of this study is to look at a biblical approach to resolving conflicts as they potentially occur within the family of God. Though the focus here is within God's family, many of the principles will be applicable to life outside the church as well.

People you have wronged

Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Why does Jesus say to make things right with another believer before you come to worship God?

What is the role of the altar?

The altar is the place where our relationship with God is restored and it is symbolic of the ultimate sacrifice Jesus would pay to make that happen. Jesus took the first step towards reconciliation even when he had done absolutely nothing wrong. We sinned, yet he sacrificially did everything in his power to make things right with us.

If we have wronged someone else, or at least know that someone feels we have wronged them, we need to be responsible, take initiative and go to them to make things right. How can we receive forgiveness from God at his expense if we are not willing to assume responsibility for the way we have wronged others?

Once we have done everything within our ability to bring about reconciliation and peace, then we can return to God and receive the peace he is offering us.

People who have wronged you

Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

What is the four stage process for reconciliation when a believer has wronged you?

(Though this focuses on another believer, the principle is applicable with everyone.)

- 1) Talk to the other person alone
- 2) Take one or two other witnesses with you
- 3) Take it to the church
- 4) View him as an unbeliever

Why should we always approach the person on a one to one basis first?

If you can handle a relationship tension in private, that is the best process. The more people you involve, the bigger the issue becomes and the more pride the person will have to overcome in admitting his fault.

How would you prefer someone to handle a situation with you if they felt you had wronged them?

All of us would prefer the person to just come and talk with us personally in a calm, loving way. That is what Jesus is calling us to do with others; treat them as we would like to be treated.

Why are we inclined to talk to others about a person who has wronged as opposed to talking to the person?

We often gossip about another person as opposed to talking to them for a variety of reasons.

- We have already judged them and feel they should be condemned by us and others.
- We want others to take our side on the issue and make us feel justified by their agreement with us.
- We are not comfortable confronting conflict.
- We feel the other person should be the one to make things right
- Etc.

What is wrong with this approach?

- This approach does not solve the relationship tension, rather it spreads it.
- The others we have communicated to have only received one side of the story – the side that supports our perspective. It is always an incomplete perspective.
- Even if we resolve the conflict, everyone else we have talked to is still left with the initial tension and bias against the other person.
- It works against the unity of the church.
- It does not express the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.
- It places us in the position of judge and executioner.

What should we do if someone starts to vent to us about another person?

If someone starts to talk to us about another person, we need to make sure we are not being the recipient of gossip. We need to lovingly tell the person that they need to go personally and talk to the offender before mentioning it to anyone else. If they are spiritually immature and feel they are incapable of confronting the person, we may need to suggest that we go with them. But the priority is that they first try to resolve the conflict one on one with the other believer.

If people have built a habit of coming to you with their problems, it may be an indication that you have already established an unhealthy pattern of "listening". It sometimes makes us feel good to know others want to come to us for advice, but sometimes in so doing, we are actually enabling the other person to sin. We enable them to gossip without first following Jesus' directions on how to lovingly resolve conflict. Sometimes we need to tell people we cannot listen to their frustration until they have followed Jesus' commands.

Who is always the one who should initiate reconciliation?

You! Always! Even when the other person is at fault!

Why is it beneficial to take a witness along if the first approach doesn't work?**What are the witnesses witnessing to?**

The witnesses are not people who are coming along to give support, wisdom and to watch the proceedings. The witnesses in this scenario are people who have first hand knowledge of the offense and can give testimony that a wrong has been done against the plaintiff. It is no longer just "my word" against "their word" or my perspective versus their perspective. They are witnesses in a judicial sense.

Witnesses indicate the severity of the offense. We are not talking about a mere little tiff, but a significant offense that is in complete contrast to the character of God which, if not resolved, will result in the offender being asked to separate themselves from the church and the name of Christ.

The role of witness is very critical here. If the offender refuses to repent, the witnesses are to testify before the church as a whole. If the church is unsuccessful in bringing about repentance and reconciliation, they are to ask the offender to leave their community of faith.

NOTE: In relationship tensions of lesser significance, it may still be wise to bring others along, not as witnesses, but to provide extra wisdom and advice in situations where it is difficult for two people to get on the same page. Whereas the offender may not take you seriously, they may be willing to listen when others are present giving their input.

It is usually wise to bring along someone the offender already respects. Having additional people tends to lower the intensity of the emotions, but keep in mind, the person may have a tendency to feel ganged-up on.

Why should an unresolved issue between two believers be taken to the church?

John 17:20-23 (NIV)

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one; ²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Unity among the body of Christ is paramount. In John 17, Jesus prays that the church would be unified so that the world would know who Jesus was. Love within the family of God was to be the pronouncement to the world that God's kingdom was present in their lives.

John 13:34-35 (NIV)

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

What is the problem with holding on to grudges?

To hold on to rights or grudges, continuing to hurt someone else, or to resist reconciliation is inconsistent with being a follower of Jesus Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit. **Every relationship tension should be resolved within the family of God.**

This does not mean that we will always agree, but we will be united if the Holy Spirit is central to our lives.

Every significant issue in the life of the church requires unity of the Spirit. The role of the church is to ensure that the Holy Spirit is guiding the situation and that all relevant scriptures are effectively considered in the issue. The ultimate goal is to receive the Holy Spirit's leading, discernment, and wisdom to lead the two believers back to a peaceful relationship with one another and the church family.

We will discuss the meaning of the last step during the next session and what happens if the offender refuses to submit to the church.

Resolving conflict is a significant aspect of learning to submit to one another.

Other believers who are wronging God**Galatians 6:1-5 (NIV)**

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, ⁵ for each one should carry his own load.

Why would we ever confront someone else about their sin? Isn't that being judgmental?

It's not about being judgmental, it's about love. If we truly care about someone, we will speak into their lives about things that are destructive to them in their relationship with God and others. To not speak into one another's life in such a way is to NOT love them.

Judgment is about our pride and condemnation of others

Confronting Sin is about loving the other person and the concern about how the name of Christ is represented.

Keep in mind, Paul is writing here to believers about their interactions with other believers. We are not expected to hold non-believers accountable to living the Christ-life.

What are some reasons we might not feel comfortable approaching another person regarding their sin?

We might not feel worthy because of our own sin.

We might be concerned people would think we are being self-righteous and judgmental.

We might be afraid the person will not respond well and a bigger tension will be created.

We fear confrontation of any kind.

Etc.

Why are all these reasons insufficient?

All of them ignore what is best for the other person. They are rooted in a deeper concern for self preservation than in caring about the spiritual well-being of the other person. God never calls us to avoid doing the hard thing of loving others, but rather to speak the truth in love – "in love" being the operative words.

When confronting sin, what should be our basis for our perspective?

The Bible always has to be the basis for confronting sin. If it is not clear in scripture that this behaviour is a sin, you may be arguing on the basis of your own perspective or traditions handed down to you as opposed to God's truth. The other person should be able to clearly see from scripture that their behaviour is indeed sin and as a result be convicted by God and turn away from that sin.

Why does Paul stress that we should restore others gently and to watch ourselves so that we won't be tempted?

The temptation when confronting sin in another believer is to not do so in love. In those moments we need to question our motives. If we are not responding to the person with gentleness, then our motives are more rooted in pride and arrogance and we forget that we too have struggled with sin. When we start comparing ourselves to others, we tend to look down on the other person and in so doing raise ourselves up in our own eyes in pride.

Our goal for the person is not that they start living up to some "righteous standard", but are restored to a healthy relationship with God and his family.

Even if the other person does not change their behaviour, they should know from your approach that you love and value them.

Romans 12:14-21 (NIV)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another.*

Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.

Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil.*

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

²⁰ *On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Dying to self and submitting to others is an all-encompassing commitment.

Which of the above phrases in Romans 12 do you find the most difficult?

Time for personal reflection:

Pray for the group that God would reveal to them any relationship where there is an unresolved tension that he wants them to address. Then give them a few minutes to allow the Spirit to speak if there is any relationship restoring or building they need to initiate.

Write down any names that come to your mind that you believe the Holy Spirit is prompting you to talk to.

Make a commitment to connect with that person within the next week or at the earliest time possible.

Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.