

## *Resolving Conflicts*—Both Within and Outside the Church

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Let's begin, by asking a question: What *instruction* in the Bible, is the **least followed** by true Christians? The **least followed**? It's something that Jesus Christ *Himself* instructs us to do... but we *rarely* do it!

The *answer* to that question will come later in this article. But today, let's focus on a very important issue—an issue which affects *each and every one of us* from time to time. Today, let's consider the issue of “**offenses**.”

We will see that, as Christians, we should *avoid* offending others. We will also look at scriptures which show that we ourselves must avoid *being* “easily offended.” Then, we will see what God's Word tells us to do when we *are* offended.

### **Offenses**

Christians should avoid saying or doing things that offend others. “**Give no offense**, either to the Jews or to the Greeks **or to the church of God**” (I Cor. 10: 32 *NKJV*).

It is very true that—all too often—people “*take* offense” far *too easily*! As Christians, we must *not* be in that category! The Christian is forgiving... and must be able to **overlook** slights and insults. He (or she) has learned to *not be* “**easily** offended.”

Yes, we should **try** to *overlook* someone's offensive comments. “Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent **overlook an insult**” (Prov. 12: 16 *NIV*). “The discretion of a man makes him **slow to anger**, And his glory *is* to **overlook** a transgression” (Prov. 19: 11 *NKJV*). “[Love] is **not easily provoked**” (I Cor. 13: 5 *KJV*). “Great peace have they which love thy law: and **nothing shall offend them**” (Ps. 119: 165 *KJV*).

Yes, we should always **try** to *overlook* offenses—*especially* when the offense is not all that significant.

### **What Should We Do When We ARE Offended?**

Despite the fact that a Christian strives to avoid *being* offensive... and despite the fact that he tries to **overlook** offensive remarks and actions of others, it is inevitable that we **all**—even the most humble among us—*will*, from time, to time **be offended!**

The Apostle James stated the following: “But no man can tame the **tongue**. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8). Accordingly, in verse 2, James said, “For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble **in word**, he *is* a perfect man...” And, since there has never been any “perfect” man—other than Jesus Christ—James is saying that we **all**—from time to time—*stumble in word!*

Likewise, Jesus Christ stated that *offenses will inevitably happen*. “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses **must come**, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! (Matt.18:7 NKJV).

So, what should we **do** in those instances when we are offended? Well, the **first** thing to do is to *humbly pray* about it! Then, if the issue **continues** to bother you... if it **remains** in your mind—where you’re mulling it over from time to time—then that is a clear **sign** that you need to take **action!** Take action to **resolve** the conflict.

As we will see in the following scriptures, it is plain that **Jesus Christ does NOT want conflicts between Christians to go unresolved!!**

Christ said, “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. **FIRST be reconciled to your brother, and then** come and offer your gift” (Matt. 5: 23-24).

Thus, we see that Christ *commands* us **to DO something about the offense!** Offenses can *fester*... and **bitterness** can take root (Heb.12:15). So... if the hurt that you feel is **more** than a minor irritation, then we need to take action... and do so **quickly**. “...do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (Eph.4: 26).

Now... not only does God’s Word tell us to **resolve** conflicts... it *also* instructs us in **the proper procedure to follow!** And that brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this article: “What **instruction** in the Bible, is the **least followed by** true Christians?”

Notice the following instruction by Jesus Christ: “Moreover if your brother sins against you [‘wrongs you,’ says the *Phillips* translation], go and **TELL him his fault between you and him alone**. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.” (Matt.18:15 NKJV).

The fact is, probably 90% of all quarrels and *hard feelings* could be **cleared up**, by following this **one** instruction alone!

Yet, **instead**... what do most *all* of us tend to do? When someone offends us—when a conflict arises—we go to our **friends**, to our **relatives**, to our fellow **employees**... we go to everyone **EXCEPT** who Christ *instructs* us to go to!

Again, Christ tells us to go to the person “alone”—not to spread the issue around to others! Furthermore, if that individual discovers that you have been talking to others about the issue, then that, in itself, can “separate friends.” “He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who **repeats** a matter separates friends” (Prov.17:9).

Now, in the matter of going to our brother, consider two **keys** toward a successful reconciliation:

- (1) As already indicated, **KEEP the matter strictly between the two of you.**
- (2) Approach the person **in HUMILITY and love** (Col. 3:12-15; James 3:17-18). Do **NOT** go to the person in a vengeful manner... nor with the intent of “telling the person off” (Eph. 4:30-32).

*Instead*, we should **pray**, ahead of time, about our *approach* (Philip. 2:3-4). Pray *also* that you will be **received well** by the individual.

Then **humbly** go the person, and explain that you have been offended... and that you have *prayed* about the matter, and that you are following Christ’s **instruction** to “go to your brother” to *restore* your friendship. *Calmly* discuss the matter, and try to see the other person’s point of view.

Also, consider *this*: Whenever someone comes to *us* about some offense **we** have committed, then we should be careful to **not** accuse the other person of “being too sensitive.” After all, what is *minor* to one person, may be a *major* issue to another!

(The instruction in Matt. 18:15—discussed above—is directed at “one Christian dealing with another Christian.” Yet, this instruction is likewise extremely good advice when dealing with someone **outside** of the Church!)

In the case of a *very serious* breach between Christians, then *praying together*—perhaps even **fasting** together—might be necessary.

## What if Reconciliation is Not Attained?

What about those infrequent cases, where you “go to your brother,” but the conflict is **not** resolved? Well—depending on the situation—you *may* need to get together *more* than once!

However, if it becomes apparent that the situation is just not improving, **then** we go the **second** step of Christ’s instruction in Matt. 18—“But if he [the person you’re trying to reconcile with] will **not** hear, **take with you one or two more**, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established’” (verse 16).

Here, *the third party* should be chosen **carefully**. They need to possess the same **humble** and **prayerful** attitude as you. And, they should act as a **mediator**—**not** an accuser. A “third party” can oftentimes separate “fact” from “opinion.”

Consider also, that the conflict **still** should **NOT** be public knowledge! All parties should keep the matter in strict *confidence*!

*Finally*, what about those **rare** cases, when—even after implementing the second step—the matter is **still not** resolved? Christ instructs us what to do in verse 17—“And if he **refuses** to

hear them [the third-party who is brought with you], tell *it* [tell the matter] to the **church** [i.e., tell it **to the ministry**]. But if he **refuses** even to hear the **church** [the **ministry**], let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matt. 18: 17).

“Telling it to the church” does **not** mean to go around and tell everyone **in** the church! Instead, it simply means to tell the matter to the **ministry**.

*From that point on...* the matter is **out** of your hands... *except* that you should continue *praying* about it.

## Will YOU Obey Christ’s Instructions?

Even *true* Christians come up with *all kinds of rationalizations to NOT obey Christ’s instructions in Matt. 18:15-17!!*

Even if an offense is bothering them week after week, month after month, or everytime they see the other person... even if they are going around *talking to others* about the offense... they nevertheless rationalize that, “Oh, the matter isn’t *serious enough* to go to the person”... or, “God tells us to *overlook* things and to not be easily offended”... or, “It won’t do *any good* to go to the other person,”... or, “God tells me to go to *my brother*, but I don’t consider *this* person to *be* a brother (a true Christian)!”

Yet, despite all those rationalizations, the matter always comes down to **one** question: **Will you OBEY Christ’s instructions** in Matt. 18: 15-17?!

In conclusion, let’s all strive to *walk in humility* and not **be** offensive. And, let’s strive to not “take offense” *so easily*.

Yet, when a conflict **does** arise, let’s **OBEY** Christ’s command to **RESOLVE** the conflict. And, let’s resolve it in the **way** that Christ instructs us... in Matthew chapter 18!

**Also see:** “Principles to Peace” [*an article on this website*]