



JESUS RECONCILES US

Part 8 of Jesus Loves His Church

Pastor Mark Driscoll | August 12, 2012

A COUNSELING APPOINTMENT

So, who is it? That person that you're not reconciled to. That relationship that's the most awkward, frustrating, disappointing. The relationship that, perhaps, was strong, solid, good, encouraging, loving, hopeful, and now it's just obliterated, or confusing, or awkward, or strained, or over. I want you to go with the first person that the Holy Spirit brought to mind, and I know some of you are maybe saying, "No. I am going to think about someone else at this point." Think about them.

The psychologists say when we have conflict, we're prone toward fight, we're gonna escalate; flight, we're gonna avoid them; or fright, we just get paralyzed, we don't know what to say or do. How have you responded to their offenses against you? Have you added to their sin with your own sin? Have you involved other people to increase the drama and decrease the opportunity to reconcile the relationship?

As Christians, what do we do? Because here's what can happen, you come into the church with idealistic expectations that go unmet, you meet some people, you all belong to Jesus, and next thing you know, the relationships are not what Jesus intended. I'm your pastor. I love you very, very much. I can say that individually for every person who calls Mars Hill Church home and those who are visiting. And I love us as a church because Jesus loves this church. And the way we treat one another, especially in the most tenuous seasons, it says a lot about our relationship with Jesus, because that's the basis for a relationship with one another.

So, as we deal with the big subject today of "Jesus Reconciles," I don't want this just to be, for you, a theoretical, theological conversation, but a very personal and practical conversation. I want you to consider this almost like a counseling appointment, me and you, and you've got a story of hurt and you need counsel on what to do.

MATTHEW 18:15–20

Today we're going to be in Matthew 18:15–20. And as you find that place in your Bible or on your app, let me preface my sermon by saying I'm always worried to teach this text, because what some people do is they'll take this text and they'll apply it to every single potential kind of conflict in a church. I've got a whole chapter in *Vintage Church* that deals with lots of different cases, and variables, and scenarios.

This is not a process that fits every single situation. If somebody's a heretic, leading people astray, and they're a wolf, you don't deal with them in this process. If a man sexually assaults a woman, you don't quote Matthew 18 and say, "Well, you need to go meet with them one on one privately." So, this doesn't apply to all people, times, circumstances. This is about a particular series of situations where two people have an interpersonal conflict and they're struggling because they're not living in reconciliation.

So, let's reduce it down to the intended scope. Two people have an interpersonal conflict. This can be in your family, this can be in your business, this can be in our ministry. And the Lord Jesus gives us a process by which to deal with these interpersonal conflicts.

So, you need to look at it in three ways. Number one, some of you are the offender, you've done something that has harmed, damaged a relationship with another person. Some of you are the offended, someone has sinned against you, and as a result, the relationship is unreconciled; and some of you are the middle man or the middle woman, you know the story between these two people who are in conflict, and you're a bit of a confidant or a counselor, and you're the person in the middle. And what Jesus has to say for us fits all three people: the offended, the offender, and the person in the middle.

And so, read it with me, and then I'm going to ask you eight painful questions. Here's the day you wish you hadn't come to church, because I'm going to ask you to deal with the thing you don't want to deal with, with the person you don't want to deal with.

"If your brother sins against you," here's Jesus, "go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you," not so that one can hold him and the other can punch them while you mock them, but "that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses." That's an Old Testament requirement for justice.

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name,

there am I among them.”

Sadly, some take this as the definition of the church, “where two or three are gathered.” That’s not the context. The church is far more than just two or three people getting together. What he’s talking about here is two or three people being witnesses to sinful activities so that there could be justice in the church. What he’s talking about here, basically, is the size of the proverbial jury.

EIGHT QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED FOR RECONCILIATION

So, what do we do when we have these conflicts? We’re the one who has offended someone, been offended by someone, or we’re the person in the middle, seeking to give counsel. Eight questions Jesus has for reconciliation.

You ready? Take a deep breath. Ready? This is hard, right? If you’re really going to be honest, if you have an unreconciled relationship, it’s heartbreaking. You wake up in the morning, thinking about them. You go to bed at night, thinking about them. Sometimes, you’re concerned for them. Other times, you’re frustrated with them. If you happen to see them, you get that knot in your stomach.

Their name shows up, text, e-mail, call on your phone. You have that hard decision: “Do I answer it? Do I ignore it? If I ignore it and I see them or they follow up with me, am I going to lie and say, ‘Oh, I don’t know. I didn’t get it.’ If I ignore them, will they just leave me alone? Can we just pretend like we don’t know each other?” But then there are friends and sometimes family members or coworkers implicated, and, “Hey, have you talked to so-and-so? How’s it going? Where you guys at?” And it just bleeds for a long time. Eight questions Jesus asked.

1. ARE YOU BOTH CHRISTIANS?

Number one: are you both Christians? That’s his first question. Here’s how he says it: “If a brother sins against you.” He’s using the language of “brother” here, so we’re talking about two Christians. So, we’re not talking about a process for a Christian and a non-Christian, or two non-Christians. Christian, Christian. Two professing, practicing Christians. Are they a Christian?

And he uses the language of “brother,” which probably was very controversial in that day. In that day, inheritance rights were tied to the family line, so legally, you were not allowed to call anyone a close relative unless they actually were, because it could confuse inheritance and property rights, which was very important. But when Jesus came as our big brother and he died and rose to take away our sin, he reconciled us to the Father.

That means, according to the Bible, God’s our Father, we’re adopted into the family called the church, and our relationships with one another can be as close or sometimes even closer than relatives of birth, because we’re related now, through the new birth that the Holy Spirit brings. So, we’re to treat one another like family.

Now, how many of you have a family that you fight with? You ever had a fight with your family? If you don’t have a fight with your family, it’s because you’ve moved so far away you can no longer fight with your family. Family members fight, but we fight with our family differently than we fight with our enemy. Somebody breaks into my home, the fight will be far different than if I were a kid wrestling with one of my brothers. There’s a threshold that’s different with a family.

So, the first thing is, as we’re dealing with one another, we need to recognize we’re not enemy, we’re family, if we’re adopted by God the Father and Jesus is our big brother. And the question is: are you both Christians? That’s the question. If you’re both Christians, then the rest of the process applies to you.

Now, if the person you’re dealing with is not a Christian, rather than trying to deal with their reconciliation with you, the first thing you want to work on is their reconciliation with God. Right? They may be reconciled to you and still not reconciled to God, and if they become reconciled to God through repenting of sin, and faith in Jesus Christ, getting a new nature, becoming a new person as a Christian, reconciled to God the Father through the work of God the Son by the power of God the Spirit, after that reconciliation, then the two of you can work on your reconciliation with the Holy Spirit’s power, and Jesus’ forgiveness, and the Father’s oversight.

So, first thing is, if somebody’s offended you or you have a strained, unreconciled relationship, but they’re not a Christian, the hope and goal is evangelism. Talk to them about Jesus. Talk to them about being reconciled to Jesus. Pray for them to be reconciled to Jesus.

And for those of you who are parents, let me say that this language of brother and family, though it’s speaking spiritually, it’s intensely practical for how we parent. I’ve got five kids, and every once in awhile, they have a little conflict. You ever seen that with kids? They’re sinners too. And what can happen is they don’t know how to resolve their conflict, so what we do as parents is we set in motion biblical patterns.

So, the first thing is we need to teach them to follow this same process that I’m going to share with you. “Have you guys talked about it?” “No.” Because sometimes what can happen is the kids have a conflict, they immediately call the parents in, and they don’t learn how to even do Matthew 18 as children, sometimes because they’re fearful and they don’t like the conflict that comes through looking at one another and saying, “That was wrong, and you sinned against me, and I need you to apologize.” They struggle sometimes with timidity and not working through this kind of process. But let me say, as parents, this applies to even how we raise our children.

The first question, then, is: are you both Christians? If yes, then you move on to the second question.

2. DID SOMEONE SIN?

Did someone sin? How many of you have had a conflict, but it wasn’t a sin? “They’re just annoying!” Or that’s what we think. See, they think they’re

eccentric, or clever, or cute, or humorous, or unique, all synonyms for annoying. Okay? You ever had a relationship conflict with someone? They're just annoying you, but they're not sinning. It may just be their personality.

I know someone who snorts when they laugh. It's very annoying, because they snort very, very, very loud, to where if you're in public, everyone stops and looks for the wild beast that's been released in the restaurant. Right? Like, it's very loud. But that's not a sin. It's not like, "Well, we need to get the elders involved." You know? It's like, "Well, that's just your thing." You know? Someone just laughed so hard they snorted. That's awesome. Thank you for the illustration. Okay? What we will not do is get two or three witnesses, since we already have them.

But there are certain things that are not sinful, they're just frustrating, annoying, eccentric, or odd. And in those occasions, that's where Proverbs 19:11 comes into play. "Good sense makes one slow to anger." So, the Bible says, in the most popular verse that's quoted more than any other verse in the Bible, that God is, quote, "Slow to anger," that God has a very long wick, and that God's people should have a very long wick.

Some of you are short wick people, okay? I was raised in a home where I had a very short wick, and the neighborhood I grew up in was very violent and dangerous. And the oldest of five kids, sometimes you'd need to escalate and defend, or get in a fight. The Bible says, "Slow to anger." Long wick. It's been a learning process and a growing process for me.

"And it is his glory to overlook an offense." Sometimes you overlook an offense, and here's sometimes why: extenuating circumstances that are reasonable. Let's say a mom just gave birth to a kid, and she's exhausted because the kid's not sleeping, and kid has allergies, and let's say mom's now got postpartum depression, and, you know, her body's readjusting, and she's grumpy with her husband. You know what he should do? Overlook.

Say, "You know what? I understand. The kid is screaming and you've got postpartum depression, and, you know, it's hard. Neither of us has slept since the last presidential election. We're both a little tired. So, I'm going to overlook that." Right? Sometimes you look at someone and instead of just judging them, you have a little compassion, a little empathy. "Sorry it's a hard season. Sorry it was a rough day. I'm sorry for the circumstances you're in."

And sometimes in those moments, the best thing is to approach the person in love and just say, "I'm sorry. It seems like you're having a rough day." And usually what happens in that moment, the person melts. "Oh yes, thank you! I'm so frustrated." "Yeah, I know. We could tell." Like, "This was not a secret that you let us in on, but I know you're frustrated and I know you blew up, but I know you've had a hard day and I know there's a lot going on," or, "I know it's a rough season and I'm so sorry you're frustrated. Let me just pray for you." "Oh, thank you." That's how you overlook an offense, and sometimes we have to overlook an offense.

Now, some of you overlook every offense, and that means that you're a coward, so this verse isn't for every single moment of your life, but it's when there's extenuating circumstances that make some degree of sense.

Did someone actually sin? And by sin, what we're talking about is violating the Word of God, which is a reflection of the character of God. Is it a sin? Does God say it's a sin? Because if God says it's a sin and you don't deal with it, then you are disagreeing with God, and you're enabling sin rather than calling people to repent of sin, which frankly means you really don't love them because sin leads to what? Well, it leads to death. And if you see somebody who's rebelling, and sinning, and they're on a path toward destruction and to harm themselves, addressing that is really an act of love. It's saying, "You're going a direction that does not lead to life. It leads to death. And I want to point that out because I love you and I'm concerned for you."

Let me say this as well: there's a difference between a sin and a crime. A sin is something that Christians are supposed to handle with the presence of God. A crime is something that we need to report to the authorities. One of the saddest things that's happened in recent years is, regarding Christianity, certain churches or traditions of Christianity have decided that when a crime is committed, they don't report it and they hide it.

We don't hide crimes. Romans 13 says to obey the governing authority. So, if someone sexually assaults you, call the police. If you're working for a company and you're a believer, and someone claims to be a believer, and you find that they're stealing, I mean, it's real and it's real bad, you need to notify the proper authorities in your company and see what their policies are. There are times when crimes are committed, and sometimes as Christians, we can misapply Scripture, especially things like Matthew 18, and take a situation that's only regarding a personal offense, an interpersonal conflict, and apply it, one size fits all, paint-by-numbers kit, for every conceivable situation. It's not. It's not.

I mean, I know one pastor, someone came in and they thought it was confessional time, and they're talking about how angry they are, and "I think I'm going to escalate, and I'm thinking about killing this person." Call the police. Don't just try to deal with it as a church issue, because now it's a legal issue. You understand the difference?

I've seen women, whose husbands were abusing their children, not call the police because they didn't think that it was okay to get the officials involved. That's not the case. We're to obey the governing authorities, and where laws are broken, then the appropriate authorities need to be notified.

But the question is: has an actual sin been committed? Did a fellow Christian gossip about you? Did they lie about you? Did they misrepresent you? What did they do to you? It's not a crime. You couldn't call the police. But it's a sin.

I'll give you an example. Adultery is a sin, but it's not a crime. Like, if you call 9-1-1, "Hello, 9-1-1. What are you reporting?" "Adultery." You will not see them leap to action. They will say, "It's not a crime." So, something like that is not a crime, it's a sin. It's something that the government doesn't see as wrong, but God does. See the difference? Same with someone who's drinking too much, and maybe you're married to them or they're your roommate, and they're an alcoholic, they're drunk all the time. You can't call the police. "They're drunk again." They'll tell you, "Well, good luck with

that.” That’s a sin, not a crime. Those kinds of things are what the Scripture is referring to.

3. ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THEM OR TO THEM FIRST?

Third question: Are you talking about them or to them first? Right? Are they a brother? Are they sinning? That’s what Jesus says, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him,” what? “Alone.” Are you talking to them or about them?

If you’re talking about them, it’s gossip. Some of you say, “But I’m really hurt.” Okay, it’s still gossip. “But they really did a bad thing.” It’s still gossip. “But they sinned first, don’t I get a freebie?” No, it’s gossip. “Well, what if I say it’s a prayer request?” Then it’s a prayerful gossip request. “What if we’re in women’s ministry and we’re all talking about our husbands?” Then you’re all gossiping!

“Well, what about if I put it on my Facebook wall?” Then you’re gossiping openly and publicly. “What if I Twitter it?” Well, then you’re inviting everybody else into it. You see how it works? In the age of social media, we are encouraged to talk about people, not to them, and to invite others to take offense for us so that we can amass a bit of an army to march against them.

And sometimes, in the church, it does pass itself as prayer request. “Please pray for me.” “Oh, well of course! Who’s against prayer? Of course I will. What can I pray for you about?” “My husband is a jackalope.” “Oh yeah, I will. How is he a jackalope? I’d like to pray specifically.” “Well, let me tell you.” And then he’s at work, “Pray for me!” “Oh, why?” “Well, my wife is a horrendous former human being. She’s morphed into something far less. She’s gone two people back on the evolutionary chart. She’s very difficult to live with.” “Oh yes, I will. Well, what in particular would you like me to pray for?”

See, when someone comes to you and they start leaking—because when you’re hurt, you leak. Right? Emotionally you start leaking. It comes out. And you can see it on people’s face. “What’s wrong?” “Oh, well,” then here we go. What you need to tell them is, “Wait, wait, wait. Have you talked to them? Have you talked to them?” “No, not yet.”

And then what people will do—because there’s a small, evil attorney that lives in each of us, right? And when needed, rises to our defense with an airtight case for our sin. Right? So then, the small attorney arises and says, “Well, they’ll never listen, so I’m not going to talk to them,” or, “I talked to them about this last year,” or, “They do this all the time,” or “Someone has already confronted them,” or, you know, “Pastor Mark just preached on this and they didn’t even pay attention,” or—there are a lot of answers. Have you talked to them? “Well, they’ll just get mad. It’ll make things worse. They’ll escalate. They’ll get other people.” “Have you talked to them?” “No.” Then talk to them, don’t talk about them.

Now, let me give you some practical, practical counsel. When you’re really frustrated, somebody is driving you crazy, and you’ve got a strained relationship, you may need a lightning rod. You know what a lightning rod is? If you were growing up where there’s lightning, there are lightning rods. Without lightning rods, people die, so lightning rods are very important. What a lightning rod does, it takes all the energy and it grounds it out so nobody dies.

When you’re really frustrated, alright, you been there? You’re going to need a lightning rod. You’re going to need somebody, just, “Gosh! I’m so frustrated! I’m so angry! I’m so hurt!” Whatever it is to ground out your storm before you go talk to that person. Let that be God. Pray. Read the Psalms.

If you’ve not read the Psalms, the Psalms are a lot of prayers. Some of them are lightning rod prayers. “God, it’s a dark day. I’m depressed. I want all my enemies to die.” Some of you are like, “That’s in there? What a great book. I’m going to start reading it.” Yes, that’s the Psalms, and what that is, that’s allowing God to be your lightning rod, because you know what? God is big enough to handle it. The God of the Bible can ground out your storm.

So, you don’t accuse God or yell at God. I’m not saying that, but you’re like, “Lord, I’m so—” And this is where you get alone with God and you carve out some time for silence, and solitude, and prayer. “God, I’m so frustrated. I’m so hurt. Man, I’m just so disappointed in them. I’m so worried for them.” Let God be your lightning rod, ground out your storm so that then you can go talk to them in a way that is not to defeat them, but to invite them to put their sin to death so that your relationship can be reconciled. Does that make sense? You will need somebody to talk to. Talk to the Lord, and then go talk to the person.

Now, here’s what it says in Proverbs 26:20, the New Living Translation, “Fire goes out without wood.” Any campers in the house confirm this as fact? You run out of wood, eventually your fire goes out. “And quarrels disappear when gossip stops.” You need to look at interpersonal conflict like a fire, and the more you gossip about it, the more logs you’re throwing on that fire.

“I’m going to go talk to that person.” Another log on the fire. “I’m going to post it on Twitter.” Another log on the fire. “I’m going to put it on Facebook.” Another log on the fire. “I’m going to make this the topic for Community Group this week.” Another log on the fire. Next thing you know, it’s an inferno, and it’s going to burn hot for a long time. The goal, when there’s conflict, is to not be the one throwing more logs on the fire, because that’s not a godly thing to do.

And the way we put water on the fire instead of logs on the fire is we go talk to them. When we go talk to someone, we’re trying to put water on the fire. When we talk about someone, we’re throwing logs on the fire. How many of you have done this? Recently? And you’re like, “Oh, that’s why it went . . .” Yeah, because now other people take offense for you, and they take your side, and they all show up for the bonfire with their wood.

4. CAN YOU RECONCILE SIMPLY AND PRIVATELY?

Number four, what do you do? Can you reconcile simply and privately? All right, here's what the Lord Jesus Christ says: "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." So, what he says is, "If you've been sinned against, go talk to them. See if you can agree with them. See if the two of you can work this out, and if so, then it's over." Just a deep breath, praise God, give me a hug, glad that's over, our friendship's back. That's the goal: reconciliation.

The confronting of the sin is never to crush somebody, but to invite them to turn away from the sin that Jesus was crushed for. Since Jesus already died for our sin, if we're two Christians, we don't want to punish someone for their sin because Jesus was already punished, but we want to invite them to walk away from their sin and to walk with us and to walk with Jesus. That's the goal. Can you work it out between the two of you? That's the big question.

And here, the reason, when we're talking about reconciliation, for picking this text is, there are a lot of other case scenarios and variables, but most of the time, in a church, this is where the bulk of the conflict lies: interpersonal conflict. And if we don't have a process by which to resolve it and work toward reconciliation, then what we end up with is anarchy and division.

This is where people's feelings get hurt, they leave the church, they're frustrated. This is where friends are no longer friends. This is where businesses sever because the partners can't work it out. This is where families are strained, and tempers are flared, and voices are raised, and holidays are awkward.

This could even be in your own marriage, to where there's a series of issues in your marriage that are like grenades. Don't talk about that, don't get into that, don't go near that, it'll explode. And our life becomes managing instead of reconciling.

Can you reconcile simply and privately? The two of you work it out, a whole bunch of people don't need to get involved, and a lot of water goes on that fire, not a lot of logs. As I've said, don't use Twitter, don't use your blog, don't use Facebook, because that's not private. Don't use a mass group e-mail, don't couch it in terms of a prayer request for a large number of people. Go talk to them.

Talk to the Lord and talk to them, and do it, as often as is possible, face-to-face. And I think Jesus is going that direction here. He says, "Go tell him his faults." So, you're going to them for a face-to-face conversation. Grace and I unpacked this in *Real Marriage*, but there are relationships that are back-to-back, you've really become enemies; there are relationships that are shoulder-to-shoulder, you've sort of learned to coexist somewhat peaceably, but you're not really close; and then there are relationships that are face-to-face, and that's the Bible's language for friendship. That's why it says in 1 Corinthians 13 that one day we'll see the Lord Jesus how? Face-to-face. That's what friends do.

The best way to reconcile a strained relationship is two people—and don't do this in a public place, because one of you may need to be honest, or the other one may get tearful. Somewhere safe, somewhere neutral, somewhere private. And again, we're not talking about a dangerous person who has assaulted you or sexually assaulted you. You call the police for that. You don't meet one-on-one, privately, under those kinds of circumstances.

But where you're offended and hurt and there needs to be reconciliation, the two of you sitting down—because you know as well as I do, you get more information face-to-face than any other form of communication. Right? Body language, facial expressions, tone says a lot. How many of you have gotten an e-mail and completely misinterpreted it because you didn't get all that non-verbal information? You read something online and you completely misinterpreted, or perhaps you've been misinterpreted because you don't get all that non-verbal communication. Someone sits down, their shoulders are slumped. You say, "You know, you sinned against me." And they look at you and there are tears in their eyes, and they say, "You're right, and I have felt terrible, and I'm really sorry." Well, that sort of settles it right there. "Will you please forgive me?" "Yeah."

And see, what can happen is when we become bitter, we interpret everything through the lens of bitterness, meaning someone might even be apologizing, but we hear it in a way that's not even hopeful. The face-to-face takes that away.

This is why, back to the parenting illustration, with our kids, one of the things I like to do—because some of my kids are a little more timid, and so they'll be sinned against and they'll want to get me involved immediately, right? "Dad, you need to get involved." "Okay, what happened?" "Well, they da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da." "Okay, well, wait, wait, wait. Have you talked to them?" "No, I have not talked to them. That's why I'm bringing you in. I'm looking for the big gun." "Well, okay, now wait. You need to be brave. You need to go ask them to talk to you. You need to pull them aside so that everybody else isn't watching. You need to tell them exactly what sin they committed against you, you need to tell them how that made you feel, and you need to ask them to apologize, and then you need to forgive them."

So, for our kids, you know, the process is the offended party will go to the offender, and I tell them, "Look one another in the eye." Right? One of them is playing video games, put the joystick or controller down. I just revealed my age, which is elderly. And, you know, no phone, no TV, no distraction. Look one another in the eye. And what happens is most of the time, what do you think the kids do? They get teared up. "Hey, when you said that, when you did that, that was a sin and it really hurt me, and here's how I feel, and I need you to apologize."

Then I ask the offended party, "Well, you need to repent not just of sin, you need to repent of this specific sin." "I'm sorry that I said or did 'blank,'" not just, "Sorry!" How many of you were those kids? Right? Like, you're basically a very small terrorist, right, is what you are as a child, just walking around hitting children indiscriminately, throwing things, blowing things up. You're just a very small terrorist.

And so one of your victims gets hurt, and so they run to their parents or your joint parent and say, you know, "Tommy hit me with a Tonka truck. He waylaid me," or "Jenny pulled all my hair. You can see it's missing." Okay? And then the parent says, "Tell them you're sorry!" And the small terrorist just is like, "Sorry!" "Okay, well that's over."

No, it's not, because that's not reconciliation and that's not the person apologizing or repenting. They don't have a change of heart, mind, or attitude.

“You sinned against me. You said or did this. Here’s how I feel. I need you to acknowledge that and apologize.” “You’re right, I’m sorry, I did.”

Then I have the child ask this question: “Will you please forgive me?” And then the other child has to forgive them. Now, I’ll be honest. Sometimes this kid says, “No.” Now we go to Ephesians 4 and we deal with bitterness, but I’ve had some of my kids say, “I need to think and pray about that,” and they’ll go think about it and come back and say, “Yes, I do forgive you.” And then what I make them do, I make them hug each other, okay, and pray together.

Now, my hope is that my children grow up to have Christian friendship with one another and to have some life skills and some habits in place based upon Matthew 18 that carry into their marriage, their parenting, their ministry, and their business. That’s the hope.

Can you resolve it or reconcile it simply and privately? Now, let me give you a pastoral, practical tip. Before you go meet with them face-to-face, you may need to spend some time fasting and praying, even for a few days, to prepare your heart, alright, so that you can do Galatians 6, which is to be gentle, to be godly.

Here’s another tip, because some of you are more timid. You don’t like conflict, you’ve got fear of man issues. Write down the big points of what you want to say, so that when you meet, and you’re emotional, and you’re looking at them, you have your thoughts organized so that you can hit everything, because there’s nothing worse than meeting with someone, working it out, walking away, and realizing, “Oh, I forgot to get into that. Let’s do it again.” Ideally, you’d do it at once. So, organize your thoughts.

When you meet, open in prayer. Invite the Lord Jesus to be in your midst, as he promises a bit later in this text that he is, and acknowledge his presence. And then tell them, “You know, I have some things written down and I’d like to present those to you, and while I present those, I’d appreciate if you didn’t get defensive or argue at every point. Hear me out, and then let’s talk about this, and then let’s see. Let’s see if we can’t work toward reconciliation.”

5. IF YOU CANNOT RECONCILE, WHAT GODLY NEUTRAL MEDIATORS WOULD HELP?

Number five: if you cannot reconcile, what godly neutral mediators would help? So, let’s say you meet with them, you say, “Okay, here’s the issue,” and they say, “I disagree. You’re wrong. I’m justified. I will not apologize,” or, “What I’ve said or done, I’m not going to change. I won’t be repenting, changing my direction. It’s going to continue like this because this is how I am.”

Well, here’s what the Lord Jesus says under those circumstances. “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” So, now we’re talking about a charge, not just a concern, but a charge. Now it’s getting a little more formal.

What he’s talking about here is—some would call it, in the secular world, a bit of an intervention. This is where two or three people—you bring along a few other people. The Lord Jesus leaves it a bit flexible so that we can ascertain what would be best in each circumstance. He says, “Bring along two or three witnesses,” and these are mediators. These are counselors. These are neutral third parties.

Don’t bring along everybody who agrees with you, okay, because that’s a gang initiation. Okay? That’s what that is. We’re all here to jump you. Okay? How many of you have felt set up that way? You show up to meet with somebody and they bring everybody who agrees with them. This is not neutral or objective, right?

These people are taking the position, to some degree, like a judge. They’re going to look at all the evidence and help these conflicted parties come to some resolution and reconciliation. This could be a Community Group leader, this could be a Redemption Group leader, this could be a godly person or a godly couple that the two of you really admire, and trust, and look up to, and they have innate spiritual authority. This could be a biblical counselor, this could be a Christian conciliation service or a peacemaker ministry. You know? There’s different ways that this could play out.

This could be their family members. Maybe there’s self-destructive behavior of gambling, or alcohol, or drugs, or something like that, and you say, “Man, their parents love them and they respect their parents, and maybe involving godly, loving people who are not against them but care for them would be helpful in this moment.”

Here’s what you don’t do: you don’t just bring in everybody who agrees with you. You try to, in as much as you’re able, bring in somebody that’s neutral. And sometimes you can even negotiate this with the person who has offended or you think has offended. Say, “Okay, look. We don’t agree. Let’s let somebody else play umpire, referee on this. Who can we mutually agree to sit down with that we both submit to, and have them help us?”

And sometimes you can even negotiate and say, “Well, so-and-so’s godly,” or, “That couple’s really godly, and I’d be happy to meet with them, and let’s let them help us sort this out.” “Okay, so we both agree who’s going to help us here,” and sometimes that takes away the conflict over who the mediator even is.

But, at this point too, you’ve got to ask, “Is it that big of a deal? Do I want to continue to pursue this?” Or back to the previous proverb, “Is this where I overlook the offense? You know, it’s not that big of a deal. I’m going to let it go at this point because this is where it starts to transition from informal to formal, with that language of ‘a charge.’”

Now, for those of you who are brought in as the mediator, the umpire, the third party, Proverbs 18:17 is for you: “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes along and examines him.” Here’s what he’s saying: “The first guy to say it sounds like he’s right.” Have you ever had

that situation?

Let me say this: oftentimes the guilty party speaks loudest and first, because they're trying to establish the story. I can tell you this: just because they're your friend, family member, coworker, don't immediately take their side. Don't play devil's advocate, but say, "I'm very sorry you feel that way. That sounds horrible. I don't know all the facts, however, and I don't want to rush to a premature conclusion." When people are very emotional and they're inviting you in to take their side and take offense for them, you need to be godly and work toward reconciliation, not just enabling your friend.

I'll give you an example. Early on in ministry, there was a gal engaged to a guy. They both said they were Christian, showed up at Mars Hill, and she broke off the engagement a few weeks before the wedding, okay? And she didn't really say anything because she was humiliated, embarrassed, and didn't want everybody in her business.

And so he just told everybody, "Yeah, she dumped me. She dumped me right before the wedding. We got all these plans made, and invitations sent out, and she just dumped me." Well, then, everybody's talking about it because the church was small at that point. "Oh, what a horrible woman. She did such a terrible thing."

What he didn't say was that he had been sleeping with her best friend and got her pregnant. Would you agree, yes or no, those are variables that factor in to the marriage? He didn't say that. He didn't say, "I was sleeping with her best friend, got her pregnant." What he said was, "She dumped me." "Oh, I'm so sorry. That's so sad. You're going to lose money, and people had flights booked, and that's horrible." A lot of people rushed to his side.

But she's in this hard position because if she tells the whole story, she feels a little embarrassed and awkward about it, and she doesn't know if it's her position to expose this other woman who's now pregnant with his baby. I mean, it's a little complicated, right? We've got ourselves a Jerry Springer episode.

Over time, those people who ran to his defense, and, "She's horrible. I can't believe she did that," they had to come back to her and what? Apologize. "I'm sorry. I didn't know the whole story." Let me say this: rarely do you know the whole story. Rarely do you know the whole story.

So, those godly, neutral mediators, if you're invited in, make sure to hear both sides. And in the day of technology where people get to present their case first, Proverbs 18:17 is more true than ever. They seem right. And sometimes people want to present the rest of the information and sometimes they don't for personal reasons. See, we've got a church, friends, where if you just took all the women who were sexually assaulted, we'd still have a megachurch, and so sometimes they don't want to tell the whole story because they don't want the whole world in their business, and just because their offender gives his side of the story first, don't automatically and immediately think that that's the whole story. You get the picture?

6. HAS YOUR CONFLICT ESCALATED TO A FORMAL PROCESS?

Number six: has your conflict escalated to a formal process? So, you've realized it is a big deal, we have to deal with it. It is a sin, not just an annoyance. I have talked to them, it didn't go anywhere. I brought in some godly people and we didn't make any progress. It's still going. They're still doing it. It's a problem. It's become an issue. Yes, we need to pick it up.

Here's what the Lord Jesus says: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." What he's talking about here is bringing in some godly spiritual authority. This is where it officially transitions from informal to formal. This is where the wife says, "You can't be married to me and have a girlfriend." Right? This is where the wife says, "You can't say you're a Christian dad who hits our kids." Right? This is where the man says, "You can't be the Christian mother of our children running around on me. You can't be the Christian mother of our children gambling away all of our money while I'm at work. This has to stop. We can't just keep doing this. I love you, but this has to stop."

This is where it becomes formal. What he's talking about here is godly spiritual leadership. Biblical counselor, again, maybe a Christian conciliation service, a Christian peacemaker ministry, maybe leaders in the church, and someone else coming in and saying, "Please, we love you, we want to help you. What you're doing is just not right. It's an offense against God, it's breaking people's hearts, it's causing so much trouble. We want to help you. Please, would you let us help you? Would you acknowledge that this is a problem? Would you invite us in? Don't get hard-hearted. Don't get stiff-necked. Don't get self-defensive." Right? "We're family, we love you, we're here to help." That's the tone of it.

And it is an act of love, right? It's an act of love for the glory of God. If they profess to be a Christian and they're violating God's will and Word, it's an act of love to the glory of God to address it. It's an act of love for the person who's sinning because they're destroying their life. Hebrews quotes Proverbs and says, "No discipline at the time seems pleasant."

You ever disciplined a kid, and they looked at you, and their first response was, "Thank you"? No, "Thank you" usually comes later. They're harming themselves and you're trying to help them, and at first they may feel a little defensive, but over time, they'll come back and say, "Thanks. I was going a bad direction and you helped me with a course correction."

It's loving for the glory of God. It's loving for the offender. It's loving for the offended, the person who keeps being hurt and sinned against. "It needs to stop. You're hurting them." And it's also loving for those who are implicated. The family and friends who are Christian or even non-Christian are looking at it, and they're implicated in it, it's loving for them as well.

Has it escalated to a formal process? Hopefully, at that point, the person says, "Okay, I need help." Great, then there's reconciliation. "Let me hug you. Let me pray for you. It's hard, it's awkward, but how can we help? What do we need to do? We're family."

Sometimes they say, "No. I won't. I'm going to keep committing adultery. I'm going to keep getting drunk and destroying my family. I'm going to keep

gambling away all our money. I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing. I want Jesus and porn."

7. IS IT TIME TO PART WAYS?

Number seven: is it time to part ways? Here's what the Lord Jesus says, "And if he refuses to listen to even the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." Now, for us, a bit historically removed, we hear Gentile and tax collector, we say, "Okay, what do we do with that?" What he's giving here is a range of people. The Gentile was the one who had rejected Jesus. The tax collector was the one who was an enemy of Jesus. So, there's a range.

What we're not doing in this moment is saying whether or not someone is a true Christian, because the fact is—I John says it perfectly, "Only the Lord truly knows whose are his." Okay? If they are a Christian who's in sin, they may continue, and then eventually, they'll come to repentance and come back. That's what I John says. He says, "They were never a part of us because they departed from us and never returned."

Sometimes a Christian will choose a sinful path and then eventually, through the Holy Spirit's conviction, they come to their senses and they turn around and they return home, kind of like the prodigal son. He went far from home, he got in a lot of trouble, but he came back to his dad. Others that are non-Christians, they just keep going. They don't come back to God the Father. They don't come back to the Lord Jesus Christ. They just keep going.

Now, it's hard in those moments when someone says they're a Christian and they're walking away from Jesus and holiness. Are they a Christian or a non-Christian? How many of you have had that difficult situation? "I don't know, because they're going the direction of non-Christians. They're thinking and acting like non-Christians. They're walking away from not only Jesus, but Christians." We're not judging their eternal soul. Pray, be worried, be concerned. Maybe they'll come to repentance, and maybe they'll come back to Jesus, and maybe they'll come back to their Christian community. Maybe not.

So, we're not rendering a verdict, Christian or non-Christian. Jesus says it in John 5. He says, "The Father has entrusted all judgment to me." So, Jesus ultimately knows who is and is not a Christian, and Jesus ultimately knows who is a non-Christian, so we leave it to him. But, what we're saying is, because they're acting like unbelievers, we have to treat them like unbelievers until they repent, turn around, and come back to Jesus and his people and want to start living like believers.

So, Gentiles were those who weren't allowed in the private meetings of the church. They were not ones who received Jesus. They're not taking Communion. They're not in church leadership. The goal with the Gentile is to evangelize them, like, "You don't know Jesus, so—" With certain people, you're like, "I don't know if they're a Christian or not, so I'm just going to talk to them about Jesus, and sin, and his death, burial, resurrection, and see if they'll turn from sin and trust in him, because I'm not sure where they're at with Jesus. They say they're a Christian, but I don't know."

The tax collectors were even worse. These were Jews who said they believed in and worshiped the God of the Bible, but when Roman occupation happened and the Roman government took over Israel, what the Romans wanted to do was tax God's people as much as they could to fund their godless government and their dictatorship, essentially. So, they would hire certain Jews to be their tax collectors. So, Jews would betray other Jews to go raise money for the government.

The way it worked was they would have to generate a certain amount of revenue per resident and business, anything beyond that was their personal income. What that means is these are crooked criminals. They are giving money to godless government and they are extorting money for their own personal gain. These are people who are, to the believers, like Judas was to Jesus.

Just think, when you hear "tax collector," in the first century, it would have sounded like "Judas Iscariot," the one who stole, betrayed, and destroyed the Lord Jesus. Like, that's the attitude. They're like a bunch of Judases. Well, you wouldn't go into business with Judas. Probably wouldn't have Judas in your weekly Community Group. Probably wouldn't have Judas leading worship on Sunday. With Judas, he's real dangerous, violent, greedy, selfish. To use the language of the Bible, not a shepherd, not a sheep, but a wolf. They were more in that category.

So he says, "Treat certain people on this range from 'let's evangelize, talk to them about Jesus, but not pretend they're believers in fellowship,' all the way to 'they are really dangerous people.'" There are people who are sexual predators that will say that they are Christians so that they can get access to church and children's ministry. That's why we have security. That's why we do background checks. That's why we're vigilant for the well-being of our people, because some people are very dangerous and very destructive, and we want them to repent, we want them to change, we want them to get help, but if they don't, we need to be careful for our well-being and the well-being of the church.

Sad, isn't it? As a pastor who's been, since core group phase, honored with the great privilege of leading Mars Hill Church for sixteen years, I don't have a lot of these cases, but every one absolutely breaks my heart. There's a short list of people that I literally pray for every single morning because I'm worried about them, because I love them, because this kind of process has been undertaken and they're just plowing forward toward destruction. I don't want that for anybody.

And sometimes, people come back. There's also a list of great stories of people who have walked away from Jesus and his people, and sometimes it's weeks, or months, or years, and I've been in it long enough, sometimes it's a decade. They turn around, which is repentance. They acknowledge their sin. They reconcile with God through faith in Jesus Christ and they reconcile with others. Since Jesus was punished for them, their friends don't need to punish them but welcome them because the price has been paid by Jesus. So, having been in ministry awhile, these are the most concerning and sometimes encouraging circumstances.

Here's an exhortation from the Apostle Paul. Romans 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Let me give you a

pastoral counsel. Your goal is reconciliation, but if you can't have reconciliation, peace. You see that? It may come to a point where you just say, "We just disagree, and unless one of us has a change of mind, we're going to keep disagreeing, so let's not fight and argue about this. Let's just live in peace. You don't attack me, I don't attack you. You don't seek vengeance on me, I don't seek vengeance on you. We just sort of part company. You go do your thing, I go do my thing. We both pray to guard our hearts against bitterness. If either of us ever has a change of mind and wants to apologize to the other one, let's agree to do that, but let's live at peace." The goal is reconciliation, and when you can't get reconciliation, the next best thing is probably just peace.

This is where you say, "You know what? We can't do business together anymore. We just can't," or "You know what? We just can't do ministry together anymore," or "You know, our families used to be super duper close and it's not going to be that way, and we're not going to attack you, but there's going to be a little distance now. Things are going to change, and we're just going to have peace." Not reconciliation. Peace. You understand that? Otherwise, it bleeds for years, and it implicates lots of other people, and it leads to bitterness, and Satan gets a foothold, and horrible things happen.

8. WHAT DOES JESUS THINK ABOUT YOUR BEHAVIOR?

Last question: what does Jesus think about your behavior? See, in the middle of it, what can happen is, especially when we're the offended party, we have strong opinions. Maybe we're the offender. We have strong opinions as well. "Well, it's not as bad," or "That's not how it went down," or "I didn't say it like that," or "You misinterpreted my words," or "You took that out of context." And what can happen is we have our own version of the facts. Above it all is the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived without sin, God among us, died on a cross in our place for our sins, conquered sin and death, rose, ascended into heaven. He now sees and knows all perfectly. When he looks at the situation, what does he see?

Here's what Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." He's talking about when the process has been undertaken and a decision has been rendered, it's not just an earthly decision, it's a heavenly decision as well.

"Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." When there's an interpersonal conflict, and it gets to the point where they haven't been able to resolve it privately, and good godly people have come in, and they have obeyed the Scriptures, and they've fasted and prayed, and they've been filled with the Holy Spirit, and they've rendered a verdict saying "This was wrong," or "This was right," or "Here's how we see it," Jesus says, "I'm there too. I'm present with them, particularly through the Holy Spirit, and I am involved in the process. I see and know all, and it's not just the people in the room, it's my presence as well."

That's how much Jesus loves his church, to be involved even in the interpersonal conflict between two professing believers. Jesus loves the whole church, and sometimes what hurts and harms the whole church is a conflict between two believers in the church.

You see this, for example, I'm reminded of the Book of Philippians, where Paul mentions two women, Euodia and Syntyche. Apparently they had some conflict. There was no heresy or charge of sin on Paul's behalf. They just weren't getting along. We don't know what happened, but they had a bit of a scrap, and the whole church knew about it and the whole church was involved in it, so Paul addresses it. And what he says is, "Work it out." And you know what? Jesus honors those who try to work it out. Jesus shows up when people try to work it out. Now, Satan shows up when they don't, but Jesus shows up when they do.

How about you? Have you tried? Have you tried to reconcile with that person that the Holy Spirit brought to mind at the beginning of the sermon? Have you tried to reconcile according to Jesus' process? Some of you say, "Well, I tried." Did you try it like this? Then try it like this, because Jesus says, "Here's how I want you to do it, and if you do it the way I'm asking you to do it, I'm going to go with you and I'll be involved."

And what that means is, friends, sometimes, even after all of this, because we're sinners and imperfect, it's not all right. But the trust is, one day, we'll all stand before the white throne of Jesus, his great judgment seat, and ultimately Jesus will be the one who sorts it all out, renders the verdict, reconciles the relationship. And sometimes a little patience is all we need.

Now, here's what I'd like to say as well. If you're here and you're not a Christian, you're thinking, "Man, I really want to try Christianity because it seems like it helps you live a better life, and it produces better families and better relationships." That's all secondary. What's primary is, before you think about being reconciled to others, you've got to be reconciled to God. And when we sin, it doesn't just affect others. We tend to see our sin affecting our relationship with others, but our sin also affects our relationship with God.

We see this in Genesis 3. Our first parents sin and they're separated from God and one another. So, we're all sinners by nature and choice. We all sin, and when we do, it separates us from God and one another. So, before we can reconcile with one another, we have to be reconciled to God in Christ. This is what Paul tells the Corinthians. He says, "Therefore, be reconciled to God in Christ and then you'll receive this ministry of reconciliation."

So, let me ask you, are you really a Christian? Are you reconciled to God the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, that you are a sinner, and that sin has separated you from God, and Jesus has come to live without sin, to die for sin, to be the mediator, the God-man, who comes as God as a man to reconcile men and women to God? That's why the Bible says, "There's only one mediator between us and God, the man Christ Jesus." You can't be reconciled to God apart from Christ Jesus, and once you are reconciled to God through Christ Jesus, you now can be reconciled to your brothers and sisters in Christ through Christ Jesus. Isn't that wonderful?

I know for some of you this sounds very painful, but let me say, when reconciled to God and others, it's incredibly joyful. And so the hope is not in you, and it's not in me, and it's not in them, but it's in him, that if he could reconcile us to God, he could reconcile us to one another. Amen?

And so, on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, I invite you in faith to turn from sin, trust in him, and to obey his commands as a believer to reconcile those relationships that are strained according to his instructions.

Father God, I pray against the enemy, his servants, their works, and effects. And Lord Jesus, I know that for you, this is not just theoretical. It's emotional and practical. You did have strained relationships with a guy like Peter, and you looked him in the face. You talked to him, not about him, and he repented, and you were reconciled. And Lord Jesus, you had a strained relationship with a guy named Judas, and you looked him in the eye as well, and he decided to turn his back on you, and to walk away from you, and to walk away from your people, your disciples. And he walked toward destruction and death, and he ruined his own life. Lord Jesus, you know what it's like to experience the grief of unreconciled relationships and the joy of reconciled relationships. I pray for Mars Hill Church, that we would be reconciled to you and that you would help us to reconcile to one another. And Jesus, I thank you that you promise us that if we're willing, you're willing to be present, and so we invite you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.