

# 5 Ways to Stop Strife in an Instant

That familiar sick feeling sank in my stomach. Actually, it felt more like someone had just punched me in the stomach and then sent an elephant to sit on my chest.

My shoulders sank under the weight that I had felt so many times before.

It seemed to me that the very moment I thought I had moved on from the hurt and disappointment, something would propel me back to square one where I was forced to work through it all over again.

Will this ever stop? Will this person ever stop hurting me?

To find answers we have to ask the right questions.

“Will this ever stop? Will this person ever stop hurting me?” aren’t questions that can be answered. However, we can answer the question “How many times do I have to forgive?”

Actually, this question has been both asked and answered before. Peter asked the question, and Jesus answered him in Matthew 18. Actually, the whole chapter is worth examining because the entire chapter deals with how we resolve conflicts.

Most people skip past verses 1-14, focusing only on verses 15-17 for biblical conflict resolution. But that is step 4. If you skip steps 1-3 and fail to do step 5, you will have the whole process out of balance!

## 5 Things Jesus Taught Us About Conflict Resolution

**1. We need humility.** Matthew 18 opens with the disciples asking Jesus about who will be greatest in the kingdom of

heaven. Jesus' answer likely surprised them—maybe even disappointed a little—when He told them that they had to have the humility of a little child.

Oftentimes, when people talk about this familiar passage, they stop there. But Jesus went on to say that if anyone causes a child to sin, it would be better for that they be drowned in the sea. What is He saying?

He is saying that the kingdom of heaven first of all requires humility. This is a basic requirement for living the Christian life! When we fail to walk in humility, many of our actions, choices and words will not only be offensive, they will cause us to stumble in our own walk with the Lord.

Proverbs warns, "Pride comes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." Pride is what caused Lucifer to be cast from heaven. It is dangerous to the believer!

**2. Offenses will come.** If we suppose we can walk through this life and never be offended, we are living in a fairy tale. The question isn't whether or not we'll ever be offended, but how will we deal with that offense. However, Jesus warned us that it is a serious and dangerous thing to offend someone. He said, "For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes."

While He was talking within the context of children, there is a broader context that we see in this whole chapter—and that context is the body of Christ. Believers.

Dear saints, we must remember two things:

a) **We will be offended.** It will happen. We shouldn't be surprised when it does.

b) **We must live our lives in a serious manner** because it is a serious thing to offend another believer or cause them to fall!

**3. Jesus still loves the believer who has fallen and we need to love them too.** The parable of the Great Shepherd who searches for the lost sheep is most often shared in context of Jesus searching for lost souls. But this is an incorrect context! The sheep *was already* part of the fold, but became lost.

Jesus shares this story in context of a believer who has fallen away!

The sheep wandered off and got lost, just as believers sometimes wander off into sin. It's painful to the whole body when a believer falls into sin! But what should our response be?

Many times the response is gossip thinly disguised as a "prayer request." Other times, for whatever reason, we fail to reach out them and try to restore them. Yet this is our responsibility as the body of Christ, to restore a fallen brother.

How do we do this?

**4. There is a biblical approach to offense and restoration.** One thing that often disturbs me is how often conflict is aired over the Internet, on blogs and social media. What is worse is Christians' response. It's like they grab a bowl of popcorn and enjoy the show. This is not only a bad testimony, it is a destructive to the body!

Jesus said that there is a 4-step process:

a) **Go to him alone and confront him.** Don't tell anyone else! Not disguised as a prayer request or in any other way. Jesus said, "go and tell him his fault *between you and him alone.*"

b) **If he wont listen, take with you one or two more.** Don't slander him. Don't write him off. Try again, and this time with one or two *trusted believers* who know how to keep a

confidence and intercede for a lost soul.

c) **If he still wont listen, tell it to the church.** Why should we tell it to the church? The body needs to know how they can intercede on behalf of one of their own to see healing and restoration. This isn't about shaming a member. It is about giving the whole body an opportunity to pray and intercede for a member who has fallen away. It is about *love and grace!*

d) **If he stubbornly refuses to listen to the church, he must be a heathen and tax collector.** This final step is a drastic measure that is taken in hope that by being cut off from the fellowship two things will happen. 1. The rebellious man in his sin will not infect and defile the body and 2. This separation will be a strong enough move to bring him to a place of broken repentance.

e) **The body continues to intercede.** Many times churches stop at the 4th step and never move on. But Jesus never gives up on looking for the lost sheep, so the body should not give up on interceding for the member who has fallen into sin!

**5. Forgiveness is bottomless, grace is endless.** We cannot neglect this final instruction by Jesus about conflict, but sadly we often do. A believer, or group of believers, fall into sin or initiate conflict in the body and the Matthew 18 principle is followed to resolve conflict, the offending member or members are removed from the body and those who are left are hurt and wounded because a part of the body has had to be cut off.

It's painful!

And many times that pain is felt over and over if the offending party continues in their sin, fights back, or if the body refuses to forgive and makes an example or subject of gossip of the fallen brother.

The only way to move past that pain is continue reading to the

end of the chapter.

Peter approaches Jesus with a question that most—if not all—have asked at one time or another. “But what if this person just keeps offending me over and over and over? At what point am I no longer obligated to forgive?”

Jesus’ answer is simple: “You’re always obligated to forgive ... *from the heart.*”

He goes on to share a sobering story about the servant who had been forgiven an amount that he would never be able to repay in a whole lifetime, but in turn refused to forgive someone else a paltry sum of money.

The master who had forgiven him said these important words that Jesus says to us today: “Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant [fellow man], just as I had pity on you?”

Dear saints, we must, must, must forgive fully.

We must, must, must forgive every time.

We must allow the grace of Christ to come and so fill our hearts with love for those in the body who have offended us that the pain, judgment, negativity and condemnation toward them are removed ... and in place of that is a deep, deep supernatural love and compassion!

If we have not come to this place, we have not yet forgiven.

And if we fail to complete step 5, we are in violation of step 1.

We are walking in pride. Our pride will lead us to violate step 2. We will become an offense to the body! Our pride will lead us to fall ...

... and the judgment with which we judged when we failed to

forgive fully and from the heart will be turned against us.

This is why full and complete forgiveness is so important to the body!

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