

## Conflict: I Need to Deal With This – Matthew 18:10-20

I went to graduate school or Seminary from 2005 to 2009. The degree I got is a master's degree but it's 96 hours so it's a lot of school. Since they are training pastors, one of the capstone classes is the preaching class you take your last year. You preach in front of a group of students and several different professors throughout the semester and they evaluate how you do. It's a little nerve wracking since it's near the end of your education and you really want to be at least decent at this whole preaching thing.

The first time I preached in class was in front of a younger professor and he listened to my 30-minute sermon and then proceeded to tell me that I repeated myself way to often and because of that I sounded like George W. Bush who was President at the time. Bush wasn't exactly known for his clear communication skills. The professor told me several things I needed to do differently for the next time I preached.

Now, this obviously wasn't a sin issue in my life, but it was a form of confrontation and certainly correction. And it ended up being one of the more helpful things for me regarding preaching. As I thought back over times where someone has confronted me or corrected me, those are often moments where I have grown the most. No one likes to be confronted all the time and almost none of us want to be the one giving correction. And yet, this is something that needs to be a part of our lives from time to time. We are sinners, we make mistakes, we don't see circumstances accurately and we need others to help us.

Last week I told you that there are only two biblical responses to sin, offense, or conflict with another person. You can either cover it or confront it. We talked about what it means to cover last week and this week we want to introduce you to confrontation. Here's what we will see: **3 Principles to Guide You When You Need to Confront.**

### **1. Confront in Love to Restore**

This is really the guiding principle to consider that will keep you on track. If something else is motivating you to deal with sin, offense, or conflict, you will

handle it in the wrong way. For example, if you just want to prove you were right, the manner in which you handle the conversation will tilt toward self-righteousness and self-justification.

The goal of having a tough conversation is to help the other person. It's to do them good. My seminary professor didn't critique me to be a jerk. He did it to fix a problem and to make me better. Sin, by definition, is harmful, corrupting, and leads to death and destruction. There are moments when you and I are self-deceived and cannot see our own sin and therefore need another believer to help us out. *"This restoration theme is echoed throughout Scripture, as we are urged to 'help,' 'restore,' 'save,' and 'forgive' those who are caught in sin.* -Ken Sande

Listen to a sampling of this logic from Scripture. Proverbs 27:6. Psalm 141:5. Proverbs 25:12. Proverbs 19:25. Proverbs 9:8. Now listen to a couple of very clear New Testament passages. Galatians 6:1. We'll talk about this more in detail later, but notice the language of someone being caught in a transgression. And notice the goal, to restore or bring them back to full health. They are shattered and broken by sin and my goal is wholeness.

Now listen to Matthew 18:15. In Matthew 18 Jesus lays out the steps of how to handle sin and conflict within the local church. Again we will get into this a bit more later but notice the first step here. Go have a private conversation and notice the goal. To gain a brother. To restore the relationship.

It's easy to jump into Matthew 18 with verse 15 because this begins the process of confrontation, but the first part of the chapter lays the motivational groundwork for this process. Just go back a few verses to verse 10 and let's read to verse 14. The obvious point is that when you go and have a tough conversation with a person who is caught in sin, you are pursuing the lost sheep and reflecting the heart of God.

We confront in love and care, but when we are dealing with conflict the goal is restoration. We want to heal the relationship. We'll spend the entire time next week talking about reconciliation and how to bring this about, but for now it's

enough to know that love for the other person leads us to deal with issues with the goal of restoration.

## **2. Confront the Right Issues**

We pretty much covered this last week, but I want to briefly draw your attention to it again. Most of the time we cover, but there are certain issues and conflicts that need to be dealt with. One author put it like this:

*"A major offense is any offense in which a person's action dishonors God, damages your relationship, hurts others, hurts the offender, or disrupts unity. These actions call for a restoration process."* – Tony Merida

We have to be honest about whether or not our situation fits these categories. Far too often we fail to deal with an issue that should be handled because of fear. When you combine the first principle with this it provides help and guidance. When love motivates you, it's easier to see if the sin or conflict requires a conversation.

## **3. Confront with Wisdom**

We've been using the word confront this entire time, and I don't think it's a wrong word. However, you probably have a particular image in your head when you think of confrontation. You probably think of something like those videos you see online of two people getting into it on an airplane over whether or not a person should recline his or her seat. It's a clash, a fight, and doesn't involve a lot of reason and careful explanation.

Scripture doesn't use the word "confront" much at all. Again, the goal is restoration, but there are a number of ways to get there. Something needs to be said and the issue needs to be dealt with, but HOW we go about it varies greatly. This is where biblical wisdom comes in. Handling these situations and working toward restoration requires skill. It means understanding the circumstances, the person, and the issues. Let me show you this. Listen to 1 Thess. 5:14.

Notice there are 3 different types of people given in this verse along with three different ways to handle them. You do not admonish the weak. To admonish is a

much stronger way of handling someone. If you admonish the weak you will crush them. But you also don't encourage the idle. They don't need encouragement in this. They need a strongly worded admonition.

To rightly apply this verse means being able to discern what sort of person you are dealing with and then be able to match up the right approach. We've never forgotten the way the youth pastor we worked with in California described this. He had two interns working for him and both were heading toward pastoral ministry. He said one of them was more sensitive and he had to verbally massage him and be careful with him. The other one, he had to take a 2x4 to his head to get the point across. The one could handle very direct confrontation and the other wilted under it.

The author Ken Sande put it like this: *"In fact, Scripture rarely uses words we would translate as 'confront' to describe the process of talking to others about their faults. Instead, it calls us to use a wide spectrum of activities to minister to others, including confessing, teaching, instructing, reasoning with, showing, encouraging, correcting, warning, admonishing, or rebuking (Matt 5:23-24; Luke 17:3; Acts 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:24; 4:2). God wants us to adjust the intensity of our communication to fit the other person's position and the urgency of the situation (1 Tim. 5:1; Titus 1:13)." – Ken Sande*

How can we be sure we are adjusting our intensity correctly to match the situation? Well, we clearly keep the first principle in mind and love the other person toward restoration. But Galatians 6:1 also gives us some attitudes to keep us operating in wisdom as we handle sin and conflict. Look there again with me.

First, the one restoring must be spiritual. You might be thinking, oh well, I'm hardly a spiritual person so I don't ever have to have tough conversations. How do we define who is spiritual? Well, if you look back into chapter 5 you see the massive difference between possessing the Spirit and living by the flesh or unredeemed sinful nature. Look at 5:16-24. All believers have the Spirit and are in the process of putting on the fruit of the Spirit. So, to be spiritual means you have the Spirit and are growing in these qualities. And it means that these qualities are incredibly beneficial for helping another believer caught in sin.

But second, one quality stands out above the rest and it's one we've already mentioned in this series. Look at 6:1. And here's what that means. "*Gentleness is not feebleness; it is strength under control. In the same way, loving confrontation looks for the least forceful way to help someone turn from a destructive path.*" – Alasdair Groves

Notice that gentleness uses the least forceful means necessary to accomplish the goal of restoration.

Third, keep watch on yourself. Don't go in pride or arrogance and always be aware of your own weakness and sin. This is all necessary to confront with skill and wisdom and Scripture leaves this process pretty wide open for us to handle in a variety of ways. If you go back to Matthew 18 the restoration process here is clearly laid out, but these are only the major steps and not how we go about these conversations. And, this isn't always a straightforward linear process. You may have multiple one on one conversations before bringing others into it. Step 2 may take a year of meetings and pleading and questions and rebuke. The goal is not efficiency, it's restoration in love.

As you think about confronting in wisdom and the variety of ways to do this, I'll mention some of them to you. One author, Alasdair Groves, lays out 9 ways to confront and he does this in order from least forceful to most forceful. The point is that confrontation doesn't have to mean saying, "I saw you sin, you were wrong, you need to repent, and if you don't there will be consequences."

You may ask them questions to draw out their thinking and motivations. "*Honest Questions have great potential to help people consciously articulate their motives and actions in ways they may have never done before. It also protects you from arrogantly confronting before you know the whole story. Asking questions will be the right starting place in the vast majority of loving confrontations.*" – Alasdair Groves

You may encourage them. Pointing out the good and challenging them to pursue a good path forward. You may express concern. Tell them what you see and express concern and wait for their explanation. You are putting the issue on the table for

discussion. You can plead with a person based on your relationship with him or her. You may need to rebuke and there are times when actually pulling back from the relationship may be necessary for them to see the wrong they have done.

The point is that confrontation is not a one size fits all thing. It takes wisdom, care, and skill, but that wisdom is available to us through the Bible. But above all, if you can always keep the first principle in mind, and truly love the other person in Christ, that will guide you and keep you from a mountain of trouble. Love them and be patient with them because Christ has loved you and been patient with you. You were that lost sheep that God found by His grace. Let's pray.

## Sermon Reflection Questions – 1/25/26

### Matthew 18:10-20

- Describe a situation in your life where someone “confronted” you and it ended up being very beneficial to you.
- Other than love, what are some possible motivations behind confrontation?
- How does the context of Matthew 18:15-20 help us recognize the goal of confrontation?
- What are the types of issues we confront and cannot cover?
- What do we do if we aren’t sure whether or not an issue requires confrontation?
- How would you describe the 3 types of people given in 1 Thess. 5:14 and the 3 ways to address them? Give an example of what each would look like.
- What does it mean to be “spiritual” according to Galatians 6:1?
- Explain “gentleness” in Galatians 6:1 and what this looks like when dealing with a conflict.
- What are some ways to handle confrontation other than open rebuke?

- How do you determine which of these to utilize?