

Biblical Counseling Center publishes **eCounselor's Weekly** guide, to encourage counselors and all believers in discipleship and daily growth.

How To Handle Offenses

By Dr Ron Allchin

When Jesus addressed how to deal with offenses in Mt 18 He instructed believers to "cut off" the hand or the foot that causes offenses to a little child or a young believer in the faith. However, when He addressed how to deal with a brother who offends you His instruction was not to "cut him off" but to seek to regain an offending brother by following specific guidelines listed in Mt 18:15.



"If your brother ..."

Many people miss this word "brother" and immediately go to "sins." The brother is a brother in the faith, part of the body of Christ. This is a brother whose burdens we are commanded to bear and with whom the ministry of every "one another" passage is to be exercised. Believers must be sure that "Love and Loyalty" are not modeled better by the humanistic social club than by the body of Christ.

"...sins against you..."

"Against you" is not found in some of the Bible's best texts, but it really doesn't matter. Because when a brother sins, it is against all who are part of the Body of Christ. If a little leaven affects the whole lump of dough, then any brother who sins affects us all. This brother has "missed the mark" and come short of God's objective standards and principles found in the Word of God.

"...go..."

To go is a great demonstration of genuine love toward the offending brother. Going to restore an offending brother is the way a fellow believer "fulfills the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) and bears with that brother in love (Eph 4:2). Going is probably the most difficult part, but you can't wait for him to come to you (Matt 5:23). Going is the first step in regaining a stumbling brother. If you truly love, you will go.

"...and tell him his fault..."

It is obvious that some brothers can't see their own faults. They need someone to show them from Scripture. Some, due to a seared conscience (1Tm 4:2), need to have their consciences awakened by the Word of God. Sin dulls the conscience and it needs to be reproved by the Spirit to bring that brother to repentance.

"...between you and him alone;"

Since at first, the sphere of the knowledge of an offense is only shared with those who are part of the problem and/or part of the solution, going alone to the offending brother shows the right desire for restoration. Let it be done in private, just the two of you. No whispering or gossip, just a private meeting between the offended and the offender, ALONE.

"...if he listens..."

To "listen" in Scripture means a whole lot more than just hearing sound and recognizing words. The writer of Proverbs defined listening as diligent, obedient listening. The proper response to listening means to repent over the sin, to hear and understand how it affected others, to have Godly sorrow about it, and to diligently work to never do it again.

"...you have gained your brother."

This is the whole aim—to gain a brother back. We are to forgive the brother who asks, and restore him back to fellowship. This practice is like setting the bone of an ailing member of the body so that everyone might share in their ministry and build the body up in love (Eph 4:16).

We must practice self-evaluation first to be sure our own attitude is humble before addressing the sin of another, always with the goal of bearing the burden with the transgressor until he can once again carry his own load (Gal 6:1-5). As believers and counselors, it is our prayer to never need to continue to the process of church discipline (:16-17) because he has been restored to effective service. When Christ's love motivates all involved, offenses between believers can be settled by diligent obedience to Mt 18:15.

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