

TEXT: Matthew 18:15-17 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. **16** But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' **17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

TITLE: The Art of Resolving Conflict – Part 2

INTRO:

1. Last week in the first part of a two-part series about conflict resolution we learned a couple of essential facts about conflict.
2. The first thing we learned is that **conflict is a normal and natural part of life**. One of the reasons it is so normal is that each of us carry with us our own internal conflicts.
3. We all carry inside of us battles and struggles and disappointments and hurts that often times don't have anything to do with anybody else.
4. The truth is we can be alone and away from everybody else and still face conflict.
5. But then when you put one person together in a room with other people who are straining under the weight of their own internal conflicts what we find is that the environment is ripe for conflicts between everyone in that situation.
6. Those conflicts can present themselves in a work environment, a family environment, a school setting, in the church and even in our causal environments where we are just trying to take a break.
7. So, what we find is that conflict is just a normal, natural part of the world in which we live.
8. However, even though conflict is normal and natural, **possessing the ability and skill to resolve conflict effectively does not come normally or naturally**.
9. The truth is not all of us are good at resolving conflict. Now that's the bad news.
10. The good news is that Jesus knew we were not naturally good at resolving conflict, so he gave us the recipe for conflict resolution in Matthew 18.
11. The simplified version of that recipe looks like this.
 - a. **Talk to the person one on one**. If that doesn't work.
 - b. **Bring in an impartial third party**. If that doesn't work.
 - c. **Seek a higher authority**.

12. Now on the surface that seems like a pretty simple plan to follow. This recipe for conflict resolution doesn't present itself as being all that complicated, but the truth is it is easier said than done.
13. Last week I gave you **three reasons why we often times have such difficulty in utilizing God's plan.**
 - a. **Fear of failure.** We convince ourselves that since we are not good at resolving conflict, we just won't try.
 1. Rather than try we avoid. We quit the job, or we end the friendship, or we terminate the marriage, or we disconnect emotionally rather than seek the resolution that we so desperately need and desire.
 2. But we asked the question. What kind of people would we be if we gave up on everything we weren't good at the first time we tried?
 3. We wouldn't be able to walk, feed ourselves, tie our shoes or even dress ourselves.
 4. Don't let your past failure or fear of inadequacy keep you from following God's plan for conflict resolution, let the fear of damaging that relationship motivate you to continue improving your conflict resolution skills.
 - b. **Some people like conflict.** They are comfortable with it. They are more at ease with conflict than with peace and harmony.
 1. Some people are hurting so they in turn hurt others which creates conflict.
 2. Others use external conflict as a way to try and mask the severity of their own internal conflict.
 3. They use that external conflict as a way to keep everybody at arm's length. They don't like themselves and can't imagine how anybody else could like them, so they create conflict.
 4. Some people just like conflict. But that doesn't let them or us off the hook.
 - c. **Following God's plan for conflict resolution reveals the truth and the truth can be scary.**
 1. The truth is often times, not all the time, but often times we add to the conflict or at least have a part in it. Remember because of our own internal conflicts our judgment can become a little bit clouded.

2. The truth is we may have contributed to that conflict in a small way but following God's plan for resolving conflict will uncover that painful truth.
3. Let's be honest. It hurts to think that we might be partially responsible for the loss of or damage to a relationship or friendship. Because it forces us to be honest with ourselves.
14. I asked you last week to be honest with yourself. I asked you how many like me would confess that you aren't very good at conflict resolution.
15. I asked you how many felt the need to be better at resolving conflict God's way, and probably 85% of the congregation raised their hand.
16. Are you still committed to developing the art of conflict resolution? Are you still committed to doing it God's way rather than our way? If so, let's dig into the meat of how to be better at resolving conflict.
17. Matthew 18:15 If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.
18. The first thing we need to do is identify what is the purpose in resolving conflict God's way. What is the outcome we hope to achieve by following God's plan for conflict resolution?
19. I am going to give you a hint. Our purpose for using God's plan is not so that we can say or prove we are right, and the other person is wrong. It is not so we can present undisputable evidence that our way of thinking is superior to that of the other person.
20. The purpose for using God's plan for conflict resolution is to bring restoration to a relationship or a situation that has been damaged or affected by conflict. The purpose of conflict resolution is not so we can stick our chest out and say look at me, the purpose is so that we can reach out a hand and say I want to be in right relationship with you because I care about you.
21. We will never be effective at resolving the conflict in our lives if we don't value relationships over being right or being heard. When Jesus says here in the last part of Matthew 18:15 If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. The word "won" doesn't mean that you have conquered him. The purpose of resolving conflict God's way is not so that we can conquer or dominate over the people in our relationships. That word "won" means that we will have been successful in bringing restoration to that relationship.
22. Having healthy relationships with the people we work with, with our families, with our spouse, with our children, with our church family must be one of the highest priorities we have in life and if it is not then we can be

assured that we will live neck deep in conflict all of our days here on this earth.

23. God's plan for resolving conflict places higher value on the relationship than on who is right or wrong. **It's not about who's right but what's right.**
24. But let's assume that someone actually has done something wrong. We said last week that in **Mathew 18:15** **If your brother sins against you**, that word sin means if your brother hurts or injures you. What are ways we can hurt or injure someone? Beyond just physically hurting someone we can hurt or injure by what we say about another person or the way we treat another person.
25. So, you are minding your own business not trying to create any waves and you feel that another person says or does something to hurt you. What that person has done obviously is serious enough that it hurts the relationship, what does the bible say you ought to do to bring resolution to this hurtful or offensive situation?
26. I want to give you four steps to bringing resolution to that conflict.

Forgive that person without their asking for forgiveness.

1. I recognize that this is not a step that is mentioned here in this verse of scripture, however it is a step that is mentioned just a few verses below.
2. **Matthew 18:21-22** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" **22** Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.
3. Some translations say seventy times seven. 490 times.
4. **Colossians 3:13** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
5. The first and most effective way to resolve conflict is to simply forgive what that person did without them asking for forgiveness.
6. Release them from that offense. Refuse to be offended, refuse to be affected by what they did or what you think they did.
7. Think the best of them. Assume that maybe they were having a bad day when they did or said what they said and that they really didn't mean it.
8. Reason to yourself, they don't normally act that way, that is out of character for them, so I am just going to let it go.
9. Reason that maybe you misunderstood what they said or how they acted and that it wasn't personal.
10. If you learned of the offense from a third party, tell yourself that maybe the meaning of what that person said or did got lost in the translation. Whatever you need to do just let it go and forgive whatever it is.

11. Now maybe you're here this morning and you're thinking to yourself well pastor that sure sounds awfully gushy and mushy. What kind of person are you? Are you just a wimpy guy who doesn't know how to stand up for himself?
12. No. I know how to stand up for myself, but I have also learned something very important about offenses and conflicts in life. They have the tendency to weigh a lot, and they have the tendency to be heavy.
13. When somebody does something to offend you, if you pick it up and carry it around with you, that offense has the ability to become more than you can handle and bear in a very short time.
14. I have also found that those offenses have the ability to become like a cancer on the inside of us. And if we let it, that offense can begin to eat away at our insides, and it can begin to affect every part of our life.
15. Some people say that forgiving easily is a sign of weakness, I tend to believe however that forgiving easily is a sign of power. Because by simply releasing that person from that offense we have exercised the power to be free of the weight that can so easily weigh us down.
16. So, the first option that we have available to us to resolve that conflict is to simply let it go and forgive before it has a chance to start to grow.
17. The second thing we are commanded to do is...

Talk to the person one on one about the conflict.

1. Now I recognize that all offenses are not so small that they can be forgotten about and just dismissed. Sometimes people do things to us that require action on our part.
2. What does Jesus say should be our first step if the offense can't just be forgotten about?
3. Talk to that person one on one. Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."
4. The absolute quickest way to bring resolution to a conflict with another person is to just simply talk to them about the conflict. But for some reason often times talking to the person is the last thing we do to resolve the conflict.
5. Often times we try every other method except talking to them, but I can tell you from experience that nothing will bring resolution more quickly than to just talk to them about it.
6. Now before I tell you why talking to the person works so well let's lay down some ground rules.

- a. **Don't accuse.** Don't make accusations. Don't try, convict, and pass sentence on the person before they have ever had a chance to say one word, just talk to them.
 - b. A good rule of thumb is to simply say to the person, I want to share with you my feelings about something. You did such and such and that hurt me.
 - c. Another method for talking to them is to simply ask a question. Have I done something to offend you because I felt like you might be upset with me about something because of what you said or did?
 - d. Remember your goal in talking to them is not to determine who is right and who is wrong; your goal should be to bring restoration to the relationship.
7. Second rule of thumb. **Talk to them alone.** By themselves with nobody else around. Jesus said talk to the person just between the two of you.
 8. Don't catch them in the break room at work and talk to them in front of several other employees.
 9. Don't talk to your spouse about a conflict in the car with the kids in the back seat or in the living room with others around.
 10. Don't talk to that friend about the conflict in the presence of other friends. Talk to them one on one.
 11. Why is it so important to talk to them one on one? Because talking to the person one on one takes the threat out of the equation. They won't feel like you are ganging up on them if you do it alone.
 12. I don't have hard facts to back up this next statement, but I would venture to say that talking to the person one on one will resolve the conflict 70-80% of the time. The vast majority of the time that first step will resolve the conflict and no other action will be required.
 13. **Why is talking to the person one on one so effective?**
 - a. **By talking to the person about the offense you give them a chance to explain their behavior.** And 9 times out of 10 the whole matter can be resolved quickly because it was just a mis-understanding. Talking to them puts the whole ordeal in a different light.
 - b. **Talking to the person allows them a chance to acknowledge their wrong doing and make it right.** The person may have not even known that they did anything to offend or hurt you, and by simply knowing how you feel they are willing to make it right. They are willing to apologize.

- c. The third reason why talking to them is so powerful. **Maybe they have a habit of acting in an offensive way towards people, but no one has ever talked to them about it.** Just your talking to them about the issue could open up their eyes to how they are acting and cause them to make a change in their behavior.
14. Now maybe that sounds too good to be true, but I can assure you it isn't. It works. Following God's plan for resolving conflict works if we will just follow the plan.
15. The problem is we have convinced ourselves that it couldn't be that effective, so we just don't try. I can tell you right now that I am certain that avoiding the conflict or being overcome by it isn't effective so why not try God's way?
16. The third step to resolving conflict...

Bring in an impartial third party.

1. Now I am not naive enough to believe that all conflicts can be resolved that easily and neither is the bible. Sometimes the offense is so great that it can't be forgotten about, and sometimes talking to the person one on one with the right attitude and in the right place just doesn't resolve the issue.
2. In that case there is another step. **Matthew 18:16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.**
3. The next step is to bring in an impartial third party who can be a witness to the conflict.
4. What is this impartial third party a witness to? They are a witness to the fact that the other person has in fact done something wrong or hurtful and the fact that they are unwilling to help be a part of resolving the conflict.
5. In some cases, this third party may have even witnessed the offense firsthand. On the job this may be a co-worker who can verify the hurtful behavior. In a friendship it may be a mutual friend who cares for both parties equally. In a school setting it may be a classmate who knows the truth of the situation.
6. In a marriage it might be a friend of the offending spouse who is able to say hey I love you, but I see some behavior that scares me.
7. Remember again, the purpose of bringing in an impartial third party is not to gang up on the person; it is a stronger attempt to bring restoration to the conflict. The ultimate goal is the salvation of the relationship.
8. Now this step is often times very useful in helping resolve the conflict, as long as it is used in the proper place and in the proper order.

9. But so often we try and skip step number one and move on to step number two. Someone does something to hurt us and we immediately search out somebody we can tell all about it.
10. The problem is we are not searching out somebody impartial; we look for somebody who will sympathize with us. As a matter of fact, we don't want them to be impartial. We want them to take our side. Sometimes if we don't get the response we want we will keep searching until we find somebody to agree with us.
11. Let me share with you some truth about misusing God's plan for conflict resolution.
 - a. Many times, when we go to a third party before going to the person it is a sign that we are unsure about that person's guilt and our innocence. Because if we were sure then going to them one on one wouldn't be a risk.
 - b. Seeking out a third party before talking to the person one on one is a sign that being right is more important to us than salvaging the relationship. If we really wanted the relationship restored, we would respect the person enough to go to them first.
 - c. Talking to a third party before talking to the person one on one is like pouring gas on a fire. It will explode. Because if that person finds out you were talking behind their back you can rest assured that any chance you had of clearing up the mis-understanding went right out the window.
12. So often we complain that God's plan for conflict resolution doesn't work, the problem is we haven't allowed it to work because we have manipulated the plan and gotten it out of the order that God intended.
13. So, you talk to the person one on one, that doesn't work. You take an impartial third party and that doesn't work. What next?

Seek a higher authority.

1. Matthew 18:17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
2. The next step is to take it to a higher authority. In the case of scripture, it says take the person to the church. In a job situation it would probably require going to the boss. In a school setting it would require going to the teacher or the principal. In a family setting it might require going to a counselor who can judge in a fair manner.

3. The point is that all efforts to resolve the matter have failed so now we need someone with some authority who can decide the matter.
4. I will say it one more time. The purpose of using this last step is not to embarrass the person but rather to get them to see the error of their ways and to turn around so there can be restoration.
5. And if that doesn't work, then consider the relationship beyond repair.

Conclusion:

1. The point I want to make is that considering the relationship beyond repair is a last resort. And it will normally not be necessary to resort to this last step if the previous steps are followed according to God's plan.
2. Now I understand that we don't live in a perfect world. But I do know that we have been given instruction by a perfect God. **God wants us to experience the joy and the pleasure and the satisfaction that comes from having relationships** with co-workers, and friends, and family and church family.
3. But we will mess those relationships up greatly if we fail to follow God's plan.
4. Now you may have damaged a relationship with someone, and that relationship may be beyond repair, but that doesn't mean you can't start over in your life, right now, and begin to resolve conflict in a biblical, healthy way from this point forward.
5. Sometimes relationships are beyond repair in a natural sense. But from a spiritual sense, nothing is too hard for God. (Pause)
6. I want you to know there is one relationship that is never beyond repair. That is between you and God. God is always willing to restore you to himself. Call for salvation.
7. I am facing a conflict that I need help with.
8. There is a relationship I am believing God to restore.
9. I am willing to follow God's plan for restoration.
10. Come forward for prayer.