

Daily Discipleship

(A) - Matthew 18:15-20

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Conflict*

Focus question: *How is it best to deal with conflict?*

word of life

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Matthew 18:21 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 18:15-20

The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the teachings of Jesus, especially for the disciples who will be called and commissioned to make disciples. This Gospel is concerned about church and how members of the church live their lives. In fact, it is the only Gospel to refer to “*the church*”. Take a moment to skim through Matthew. Try to identify those passages where Jesus gives helpful instruction for those who are involved with being the church.

1. *How does the Gospel of Matthew give instruction on being the church?*
2. *Would it have been helpful if Jesus had spent more time teaching about how churches are to be organized? Why or why not?*

Jesus knows he has called imperfect and sinful humans to gather as an extension of his body to continue his mission on this earth. Whenever there are humans, there will be conflict. Consequently, Jesus directly addresses conflict in the church. Such conflict is what Matthew 18:15-20 describes.

3. *Describe conflicts typical in the church.*
4. *What is usually the root of the conflict?*

Jesus does not ignore conflict in the church. It exists. Sin is real. Anyone who believes there will be no conflict within the church is naïve to the power of sin in the life of a Christian. Sometimes Christians hurt each other – intentionally or not. Jesus clearly describes the process of dealing with the situation when one member of the church sins against another. The goal is reconciliation and fellowship. Jesus does not address conflicts among non-Christians.

5. *When someone gets hurt by someone in the church, is reconciliation usually the goal? Why or why not?*
6. *What happens if the conflict or sin is ignored by others?*

Jesus instructs the person who has been sinned against to go directly to the person and discuss the wrongdoing alone. This is not the time to bring third parties into the conversation. Respect the person and go directly. If things are not resolved, take one or two others in the church with you. If that does not work, go to the church. If things cannot be resolved, the final step is to distance oneself and the church from that person who did the wrongdoing. The severance of someone from the body of Christ is a painful process. It is never the goal.

The person who has offended is to be treated like a tax-collector, such as tax-collector Matthew, the writer of the Gospel. Consider how he was embraced and welcomed by Jesus. Just when Jesus seems to be so clear, he brings in grace again and again. To learn more about forgiveness, continue reading Matthew 18. Throughout the process, when two or three are gathered in the name of Christ and with his power, he is present with them.

7. *How might the conversation change if the presence of Christ is acknowledged from the beginning?*

word *among us*

Several members of the church had been the victims of Jake's mean-spirited comments. Everyone in the church knew of the difficulties Jake had faced in his life, so they tried to be kind, loving, and forgiving. Sometimes Jake's comments were untrue and unfair. But not everyone was aware of Jake's tendency to misquote people and put the worst construction of the situation.

The church was suffering from Jake's presence among them. Harmony was eroding as mistrust and hurt feelings separated the body of Christ.

1. *How would you suggest dealing with Jake?*
2. *What does Jesus recommend as the first step in dealing with such a conflict?*

It sounds so easy. If someone has sinned against you, go directly to that person. But it is not that simple. First, you have to acknowledge the offense and name the wrongdoing. Then, you have to approach the person who has offended. There are risks involved with such a confrontation.

3. *What are the risks of confronting someone who has offended you?*
4. *What if the person disagrees with our perspective?*

Some people respond to conflict by fleeing the scene. They cannot imagine stirring any more controversy and so the offense is never confronted. Depending on the offense, it can be like having an elephant in the room, but no one mentions that big gray animal's presence. Other people tend to fight when they have been offended. Jesus challenges both approaches by instructing people to go directly and immediately to the person who has offended. There are no third parties involved. It is simply brothers and/or sisters in the body of Christ speaking the truth in love to each with the goal of reconciliation.

5. *Rate yourself on this process of dealing with conflict in the church.*
6. *What are your tendencies in dealing with conflict?*

Conflict can also help clarify our values, priorities, and relationships. Not all of the hurts in life are sins against us. Sometimes people hurt us unintentionally. A lot of good communication can happen when two people in the church take the time to sit down and talk – but also listen to each other.

It is extremely helpful for this passage of Scripture to end with the reminder of Jesus being present whenever two or three are gathered in the name of Christ. Knowing Christ is present as we confront those who have offended us can give us courage to proceed. We can trust the Spirit of Christ to fill us with words needed for such a situation.

7. *What can we learn from this process?*
8. *How do things change knowing Christ is present?*

Prayer

Christ, thank for being present when we gather in your name. Empower us to speak the truth in love to each other so small offenses do not grow to be walls. Keep us on the path of reconciliation with others in the church. Amen

Dig Deeper

Romans 13:8-14

last word

Encourage others to go directly to those who have offended them.