

Confronting Sin

Key Verse

"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." Matthew 18:15–17

Basic Biblical Understanding

Prior to reading this article, first read the article entitled "[Confrontation](#)" which shares foundational principles from Scripture for framing out all confrontational conversations. Now, let's address the uncomfortable topic of confronting sin.

Sin is "missing the mark" or falling short of God's standard (Romans 3:23). All sin is an offense against God, and eventually all sin disrupts the fellowship of believers. The word "brother" in Matthew 18:15 is used of any fellow believer (whether male or female). If another believer sins, we're told to go to that person and "show him his fault in private." The word "show" means bring to light or expose. This believer is to be shown his sin so that he recognizes it for what it is.

If the believer recognizes and repents of the sin, no further confrontation is needed. The issue is addressed, the fellowship of believers is restored, and God is glorified in the process.

If repentance does not occur in private, take one or two witnesses and go back to that person. This second step is to confirm the facts while still encouraging repentance. The procedure of confirming facts by several witnesses was established by Moses (Deuteronomy 19:15). It was to guard against a person being slandered or falsely accused of a sin or a crime. In the New Testament, it also protected church leaders from abusive or unjust accusations (1 Timothy 5:19–20). If repentance happens before the 2 or 3 witnesses, no further confrontation is needed.

However, if repentance does not happen at this stage, that person's sin is to be shared with the church; and the church is to encourage repentance. If the person refuses to listen to the church, they are to be removed from the fellowship of the church. Jesus said, "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector." The idea being conveyed is the unrepentant person is to have no part in the community of believers while remaining unrepentant. This final step is not optional.

When sin becomes known, and when multiple attempts have been made to encourage repentance, and when that individual chooses to cling to his sin—he is to be left alone with his sin and his shame. If that person is truly a Christian, God will not cast him away but will allow the unrepentant one to taste the fullness of sinful choices.

Verses (ask God to show you how they apply to your life)

- "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." Proverbs 27:17
- "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spiritual of gentleness..." Galatians 6:1a

Helpful Questions and Application

1. Confronting sin (church discipline) is not just the responsibility of elders and pastors; it is the responsibility of every believer. It's part of being the Church. What is holding you back from doing what God desires? Whom can you talk to for help with regard to a disciplining situation?
2. When should sin be confronted? Answer: As soon as possible while adhering to Scriptural precedents. The longer sin is allowed to fester, the more damage, division, and destruction it will do. Pray, follow biblical precedent, and then address the sin by acting in love.

Additional Resources

Scripture references: 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10

WordTruth article: "[Church Discipline and Restoration Process](#)"