

Jacob's Well

Lesson Title: Conflict—Treat Them Like a Pagan



Key Concept: Conflict is inevitable, but as disciples of Jesus, we are called to handle it differently. Healthy conflict, with real consequences, builds healthy community.



Scriptures:

¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, treat him like a Gentile or a tax collector. ¹⁸"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth will have been released in heaven. ¹⁹Again, I tell you the truth, if two of you on earth agree about whatever you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. ²⁰For where two or three are assembled in my name, I am there among them."
(Matthew 18:17–20 *New English Translation*)

Context Scriptures: Leviticus 19:17–18; Luke 17:3–4; 1 Corinthians 5



Lesson Thoughts:

The first-century church was born in a unique culture and time that sheds greater light on the Scriptures. The apostles were from a collectivist culture, where identity came from the group and was central to who you were. While we may be disturbed by this culture's strict practices of shaming and shunning, they encouraged correct behavior. To remain in good standing, everybody had to respect the group rules. This culture is evident in Jesus' description of conflict in Matthew 18.

The final step of conflict resolution, coming to the church, is equivalent to our Supreme Court. The governing body has the final verdict on difficult matters. This authority doesn't come from the people who are in the group; it comes from the Spirit. Scripture points out that whatever Spirit-led decision is made by the local congregation is binding on earth and in heaven. The church's decision is

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honored by God, and a person in opposition to the congregation is also in opposition to God.

If a person is in opposition to the local church, they are to be treated like a pagan or a corrupt tax collector. They are no longer treated as disciples, but as unbelievers who do not know God. In practice, they are removed from all positions in the church until they realize the error of their ways. During this time, they are not to be shunned, but they are to be given space and left alone. They should be treated as people Jesus loves, but not as Christian brothers and sisters.

This is unpleasant, but following this process builds safe, healthy community. If there are no consequences, then wrongs won't be addressed, resentment will build, and people will be hurt. Authentic community, filled with benefits and blessings, is achieved when we address conflict and follow God's Spirit among us. When we gather, he is in our midst, helping us make the right decisions and become an authentic community.

Jesus' model for conflict pushes us out of our comfort zones, disappoints others, and can leave us with negative consequences. However, if done correctly, we can find reconciliation and restoration of relationships with our brothers and sisters. Healthy conflict resolution transforms us to be more like Jesus, which is his ultimate goal.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) How does prioritizing the whole vs. the individual affect how we approach conflict?
- 2) What does conflict resolution look like in a healthy church?
- 3) What happens to members who leave rather than reconcile? Are they right with God?
- 4) Who does Matthew 18 apply to, Christians or non-Christians? Why?
- 5) What benefits are received from practicing Jesus' model of conflict?

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Notes and Reflections

- 1) How can you prepare yourself to be in submission to the body?
- 2) How can the body make sure it is aligned with the Spirit in resolving conflict?
- 3) Is there resentment in your spirit from a previous wound? Have you reflected on your past story? How have you moved towards reconciliation?
- 4) Are there people whom you have hurt from your past? Have you approached them and asked for forgiveness?
- 5) Do a slow read of Matthew 18:16–20.

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Notes and Reflections, cont.