Question: Do I Have to Solve Every Single Conflict?

Michael Vogelsang · Matthew 18:15 · October 18, 2025



Matthew 18:15

> 15 But if your brother sin against you, go, reprove him between you and him alone. If he hear you, you have gained your brother.

Proverbs 10:12

> 12 Hatred stirs up strifes; but love covers all transgressions.

Proverbs 17:9

> 9 He that covers transgression seeks love; but he that brings a matter up again separates very friends.

1 Corinthians 6:7

> 7 Already indeed then it is altogether a fault in you that you have suits between yourselves. Why do you not rather suffer wrong? why are you

> not rather defrauded?

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Question:

Matthew 18:15: "*Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone*." My question is: Does this always apply? Do I have the task of convicting another believer every time he sins against me? Or do I not simply have to "swallow" some things (see 1 Cor. 6:7)? And to which of the two points can I apply Proverbs 10:12; 17:9 and 1 Peter 4:8? Quite apart from the fact that this "conviction" occurs far too rarely and is anything but easy.

Answer:

First of all, I would like to make this comment: Fellowship between brothers and sisters is an extremely important area, but also one that is not always easy. **God gives us some suggestions or principles in His Word, but certainly no templates.** Wisdom and dependence on the Lord are necessary in order to know how we should act in a specific situation.

But now, specifically in Matthew 18. Perhaps the comparison with Matthew 5:23 is of interest. ("*Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*") In this passage, the context shows that my brother rightly has something against me. It is a question of justice, so to speak that I go and be reconciled with him.

In Matthew 18 this is exactly the opposite. The brother (or sister) has sinned against me. Nevertheless, I go. W**hy do I go? If it's because I want my rights, because I want to get even with him, am angry, etc., then I'm not in the right frame of mind to do the ministry of Matthew 18. I have to be concerned with winning the brother.**

There is a "one-on-one conversation" in which the brother is made aware of his offense. If he recognizes his guilt and confesses it, reconciliation takes place, and the brother is won over. It would be nice to see this happen more often.

A side note at this point: you write that this "conviction" happens far too rarely. You're probably right about that. But I deliberately say "probably". If verse 15 is carried out as the Bible says and this leads to success, then no one should actually know about it (after all, it says "between you and him alone"). It would be desirable if there were more such "hidden" trials in which the brother is won than is known.

The question now was whether this procedure should be applied in every case of sin between brothers and sisters. I don't think we can take that from this passage. And not only because, as you write, there are also other biblical passages, but also from the context of the text. We are obviously dealing here with a sin of a serious nature. If the procedure, according to verse 15, does not succeed, there are further follow-up measures:

- a conversation involving other brothers and sisters (v. 16);
- you tell the congregation (v. 17);
- you break off contact with the person in question (v. 17);
- as the last resort, the congregation may take disciplinary action (v. 18).

Sometimes, it happens that someone is quite prepared to call brothers and sisters on their (real or supposed) sin. If this is "unsuccessful," the matter is over for him, as he thinks. However, this is not the situation of Matthew 18! So, the matter must already be so serious that I am prepared not only to take the first step but also – if necessary – to take further steps.

Now, thank the Lord, not all misconduct among brothers and sisters is so serious. So, how do I behave in other cases? The Scripture gives us various instructions.

- If a brother's actions are to my "disadvantage," I can allow myself to: "*let yourselves be cheated*" (1 Cor. 6:7). Example: Perhaps you were promised a certain task, and now someone else has been given it.

- You can follow the Lord's example and not "fight back" because He was the one here on earth "*who when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself over to Him who judges righteously*" (1 Pet. 2:23).
- If there is a danger of a "*root of bitterness*" developing, it certainly makes sense to have a discussion (Heb. 12:15).
- There may also be situations in which someone needs to be rebuked in meekness (2 Tim. 2:25).

Then there are the three passages quoted, where love covers a multitude of sins. On the one hand, this makes it clear that love should always be the motivation for our actions. The book of Proverbs shows what the opposite of "covering sins" is:

- Hatred that sows discord (10:12)
- dividing those you trust by "rehashing" a matter over and over again (17:9).

These passages and 1 Peter 4:8 also make it clear that "*covering sins*" is the opposite of "revealing sins." **The "fervent love" for the brother will never drag a brother's sin out into the open without good reason. If a matter can be settled personally between the parties involved, it does not need to be exposed to others.**

Covering sin also does not mean making light of sin. But if a matter has been settled, love will cover it and not bring it up again. We certainly still have some "catching up to do" on these two points.

Finally, let me give an example: Suppose I had hurt you with a remark ("*There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword*"; Prov. 12:18). Then you would now have various ways of reacting to this hurt:

- "Stupid guy, I'm not talking to him anymore."
- "I'll get out of his way."

- "I'll pay him back."
- "I hate him."

These are all unspiritual, carnal reactions. But you can also react differently:

- "I forgive him."
- "I'll tell the Lord and ask Him to take away my bitterness and negative feelings and leave it to Him."
- "I think I should talk to him about it. He probably doesn't realize what he's done. The relationship should be unclouded again."

All three reactions are spiritual and yet different. The Lord will show us all the right way to behave in each case if we live in fellowship with Him. Similar situations may well require different reactions.

We humans are also different. God gives us hints and guidelines in His Word (and I am sure I have not mentioned them all exhaustively), but He does not release us from our dependence.

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