

# When Another Person Offends

The story of Joseph in the book of Genesis is like a Hollywood movie with colored robes, twelve sons, wealth and intrigue. In Genesis 37 we are told Joseph had two dreams. The interpretation of both is that his father and brothers would eventually bow down and pay homage to him. His brothers were offended and ultimately sold him to some Midianites who later sold him to someone in Egypt. It was a horrible act motivated by his brothers' pride and hatred. One wonders how Joseph felt towards his brothers in those early years. I suspect that he reacted as many of us would have. Genesis tells us that eventually Joseph became the second in command in Egypt after he interpreted the pharaoh's dream about a coming famine.

The famine occurred seven years later, reaching up into the land of Palestine. Joseph's father, Jacob, heard that Egypt had food and eventually sent most of his sons to buy some. When they arrived they spoke with Joseph; however, they did not know that the man they spoke with was their brother. They returned home with food but without their brother, Simeon. They returned to Egypt sometime later in order to buy more food. Genesis 45:1-8a tells us that upon their return Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and told them,

*Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God . . .*  
(Gen. 45:8 (NASB))

How did Joseph respond? He did not display anger but acknowledged that God was in control. After his father died,

Joseph's brothers were afraid that Joseph would punish them (Gen. 45:15). So Joseph's brothers sent the following message,

*Your father charged before he died, saying, Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong." And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father."*  
Gen. 50:16-17 (NASB)

These verses and the ones that follow in Genesis 50 reveal that Joseph had never confronted his brothers about their offensive behavior against him. In fact, it is clear that Joseph had forgiven them. Joseph had independently and unconditionally forgiven them (Gen. 45:14-15; 50:17-21).

**RESPONSE TO OFFENSE.** How would you respond if someone

had offended you? How do you respond? One way people respond to an offense is illustrated in the life of Samson who took revenge upon the Philistines and slaughtered many because his wife had been burned and her father killed. In Judges 15:7 Samson is quoted as saying, "I won't stop until I get revenge on you." This is the typical behavior of many. You do me wrong and I will get even. We seek revenge after being hurt. But Romans 12:17-19 tells us to never seek revenge,

*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be*



at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. Rom. 12:17-19 (NASB)

Another way we respond to an offense is to insult the offender. It is a more acceptable way to get revenge than to kill someone. But 1 Peter 3:8-9 warns us to not take that approach,

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 1 Peter 3:8-9 (NASB)

We should respond with a blessing instead of insults and anger.

A third way we respond is less confrontational. It is called gossip. We don't speak to the offender. Instead, we gossip about them behind their back to others. What is gossip? Gossip is easy to identify. Ask yourself three questions: 1) Is what I am going to share negative? 2) It is necessary? and 3) Why I am doing this? What is my motivation? Proverbs 20:19 tells us to avoid people who gossip and 2 Cor. 12:20 calls gossip a sin. So gossip is not an acceptable, God honoring way to deal with offenders.

A fourth way we treat offenders is to avoid them. This method is even less confrontational and it avoids gossip. But Proverbs 18:1 says this,

He who separates himself seeks his own desire,  
He quarrels against all sound wisdom. Prov. 18:1 (NASB)

That is, avoidance is wrong too! Such a person is self-centered. The New International Version says that he is an “unfriendly person who pursues selfish ends.” In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus adds this,

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in

heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Matt. 5:44-47 (NASB)

Jesus spoke this to a large group of people who were Jews. They hated Gentiles. So when He asked, “What more are you doing than others?” He was telling them that they weren't any better than the people they hated. The message was don't avoid people for personal reasons!

**THE “SPIRITUAL WAY” TO DEAL WITH OFFENSE.** We have just looked at four ways in which we deal with offenders. But there is one more that we want to examine. It sounds spiritual. It is very common among believers. It is found in the unique translations of the King James Version (KJV), New King James Version (NKJV) and the English Standard Version (ESV) of Matthew 18:15. Here is the passage,

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Matt. 18:15 (KJV)

The wording of the first line of this verse in the KJV says that if your brother offends you, go and tell him how he offended you - confront him. Unfortunately, the phrase “against thee” should not be in the translation. Consequently, many have confronted those that have offended them. They think it is biblical. Some have said that their Christian counselors have even encouraged them to take such action. But there are three reasons why a believer should not confront their offender.

*Good Principles of Biblical Interpretation.* The first reason we should not confront our offenders is that a careful evaluation of Matthew 18:15 reveals that the phrase “against thee” or “against you” is not in the better Greek manuscripts. That is, the best Greek manuscripts do not include the phrase “against thee.” I do not mean the Nestles or Majority texts but the ancient copies upon which even the Nestles or Majority texts are based. One of the fundamental principles

of biblical interpretation is that one never bases a doctrine on an uncertain passage. This phrase should be ignored. That is, we should not determine a course of action based upon the phrase “against you.” Or, put another way we should not confront an offender based upon Matthew 18:15.

*Luke 17:3-4 Clarifies Matthew 18:15-22.* The second reason we should not confront someone who has personally offended us is that Matthew 18:15-18, 21-22 is parallel to Luke 17:3-4. Here is Luke 17:3-4,

**Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”**  
**Luke 17:3-4 (NASB)**

Verse 3, “Be on guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him . . .” corresponds to Matthew 18:15-18. Matthew 18:15 says, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private . . .” Both passages tell us to rebuke a sinning brother. That is, a brother who is caught in a pattern of sin.

Verse 4 is a summary version of Matthew 18:21-22 in which Peter asks Jesus how often should we forgive someone who has offended us? Jesus responded with “up to seventy times seven.” What does Luke 17:4 say? Jesus phrases the principle differently, but it has the same idea - forgive and keep forgiving!

Therefore, Matthew 18:15-18, 21-22 is parallel to Luke 17:3-4 but if we accepted the uncertain reading “against you,” they would not be parallel passages.

*Biblical Examples Indicate Otherwise.* The third reason a believer should not confront their offender is that many biblical examples indicate that our forgiveness should be unconditional and unilateral. Before we look at these examples, consider the disaster that would occur in a church if we obediently confronted every person who offended us. John MacArthur summarizes the impact on the church with this,

**If you had a friend who scrupulously tried to confront you every time you committed a petty offense, wouldn't the friendship grow tedious pretty quickly? And if marriage partners saw it as their solemn duty to confront each other for every offense, wouldn't**

**such a mind-set make the marriage relationship practically impossible to endure?**

**It is a mistake to assume that verses like Luke 17:3 (If your brother sins, rebuke him”) and Matthew 18:15 (“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault,” NIV) are absolute prescriptions for every kind of transgression. If we were obligated to confront one another for every paltry misdeed, we would be doing little else.<sup>1</sup>**

**BIBLICAL EXAMPLES FOR FORGIVENESS.** Forgiveness needs to be unconditional and unilateral when we are offended, except in very special circumstances which we will explain later. We will now look at four reasons why forgiveness should be unconditional and unilateral.

*First - The Offended Is Not Spiritual Enough.* The first passage is Galatians 6:1-2 which tells us how to deal with an offense when church discipline is required. Even though it is about church discipline, it will reveal an important truth about dealing with offenses.

**Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. Gal, 6:1-2 (NASB)**

There are three important truths here. The first one is that any confrontation should be for the benefit of the offender. This passage is not concerned with the offended. The goal of any confrontation is to restore an offender and not to condemn. The Greek word that is translated as “restore” actually means “to mend, or to put in order.” That means the goal is to bring an offending believer back to a right relationship with God.

The second important truth is that the confrontation must be done by spiritual persons. If we are honest, most of the time the offended is hardly spiritual, hardly humble or truly gentle enough to qualify as the one to be speaking with one who has been caught in a sin. They are still strugg-

1. John MacArthur. *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*. Crossway Books. 1998., p. 120.

gling and emotional due to the offense. This means that the offended should not confront the offender since he or she is not spiritual enough. It will be difficult for them to satisfy the requirements of Gal. 6:1-2.

*Second - The Examples of Godly Saints.* We have already seen that Joseph did not confront his brothers about their offense of selling him into slavery. Joseph's forgiveness was unconditional and unilateral.

A second example of unconditional and unilateral forgiveness is found in Luke 23:34 when Jesus forgave those who were crucifying Him. The folks on the ground were insulting and mocking Him. They complained that Pilate had written a sign which stated that He was king of the Jews. The thieves on the cross were ridiculing Him. The leaders wanted His death. Yet, what did Jesus do? He forgave unconditionally and unilaterally,

**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”  
Luke 23:34 (NASB)**

The crowd did not ask for this. Jesus volunteered this.

Consider a third example, that of Stephen when he was being stoned to death in Acts 7:59-60. The crowd wanted his death. Saul was there, before he become Paul. Yet, Stephen prayed this,

**They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep. Acts 7:59-60 (NASB)**

*Third - The Teaching of Jesus.* Maybe the strongest reason why forgiveness by the offended should be unconditional and unilateral is that Jesus' teaching strongly indicates that should be the norm. Here is a statement from our Lord.

**You have heard that it was said, “AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.” But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Matt. 5:38-40 (NASB)**

In verse 38 Jesus tells us what the religious leaders taught. They said if someone hurts your eye, then you should do likewise to their eye - eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth or an offense for an offense. The leaders had taken the Mosaic civil law and applied it to any personal offense. Jesus disagreed and said, “But I say” and then proceeded to tell them to not take personal revenge. What did Jesus mean? Jesus did not teach that we should practice “an eye for an eye” or a “tooth for a tooth.” He did not say slap them on the cheek if they slap your cheek! He did not say that if they hit your left ear, let them hit your right ear? Or if they hit your nose, let them hit your other nose or your other chin. I am being silly for a moment to make a point. That was not His message. Instead, He was saying do not take personal revenge. If someone offends you, do not get even.

Then Jesus reinforces His point by adding that we should not fight a lawsuit. In Matt. 5:41 He says that if someone makes you go with him one mile, volunteer to go another mile. Again, He tells us not seek to revenge.

*Fourth - The Teaching of Paul.* The fourth final reason that forgiveness should be unconditional and unilateral is that we should be humble, seeking unity and peace.

**Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Eph. 4:1-3 (NASB)**

**WHEN DO WE CONFRONT SOMEONE?** If forgiveness is to be one sided and not conditioned upon the response of another, is there ever a time when we should confront someone? The answer is found in Matthew 18:15-18. This passage is commonly referred to as the instructions for church discipline. Here is the passage,

**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. Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Matt. 18:15-18 (NASB)

In this passage Jesus teaches that we should confront someone one-on-one when we see them commit a sin. Jesus does not mean that we are to confront fellow believers over every petty sin. Otherwise, we will be confronting everyone all the time. He is talking about a single major sin or a pattern of sin. If the person responds, then he or she has been rescued from their sin. But if the person does not listen and repent, then two or three individuals should go to the person and confront them. The goal is not to condemn them but to rescue them from their sin - to restore them to a right relationship with God. Then Jesus adds that if the person will not respond to the two or three, then the church needs to get involved and encourage the person to stop sinning. I believe that the church leadership must be involved at this step.

There is an example of church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5 that involved a son and his step mother. Verse 6 reveals that the church was indifferent to their sin and did nothing. In response, the apostle Paul rebuked them in verses 6-13. Paul commands them to remove them from the church. The church had sinned in addition to the son and his step mother. The apostle had to correct them. What a sad event!

Even today there are folks in churches who view church discipline as barbaric, unkind, intrusive and unloving. Individuals who hold such a view are either ignoring the clear teaching of scripture, do not understand the biblical teaching, or they are deceived and do not view scripture as authoritative. Such individuals are in sin themselves.

Another example of church discipline is found in 1 Timothy 1:20,

Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme. 1 Tim. 1:20 (NASB)

These two men were disciplined for blasphemy. This is an

example of a flagrant sin.

Philippians 4:2-3 illustrates church discipline when two individuals are in sin. The individuals were two women, Euodia and Syntyche. They were in conflict and the entire church knew it.

**HOW SHALL WE CONFRONT?** Galatians 6:1 gives us the principles to follow.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Gal. 6:1 (NASB)

First, when we need to confront someone, it is for the purpose of restoring and not condemnation. Second, when the confrontation occurs, it should be done in gentleness and kindness. Remember the goal is restoration and not alienation. This is another reason why the offended party cannot be the confronter. Rarely is the offended one warm, loving and impartial. In contrast, they are almost always emotional, hurt, and have an underlying desire to get revenge. In short, the offended party is not the right person to do this. Therefore, the offended party should never confront the one who has offended them. They need to forgive without condition. Remember confrontation over sin is to be done with the goal to restore and not alienate.

**SUMMARY - HOW SHALL WE RESPOND?** First, if you are the offended party, you need to forgive unconditionally and unilaterally. If you see someone commit a sin against themselves or they commit a sin against another person, then you are to confront them with the guidelines given in Galatians 6:1. Confrontation should only occur if the sin is flagrant or may damage the church. May God bless each one of us as we seek to be at peace with each other and please our Lord.