

“Taking Restoration Seriously”

Matthew 18:15-20

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Take-Home Truth: Within a spiritual community, “having it out” is **the only option**.

Aspect #1: **WHEN SOMEONE OFFENDS YOU OR WILLINGLY PERSISTS IN SIN, DEAL WITH IT**.

“If another disciple sins against you,” Jesus continued, “go and have it out just between the two of you alone. If they listen to you, you’ve won back a brother or sister. But if they won’t listen, you should take with you one or two others, so that ‘everything may be established from the mouth of two or three witnesses.’ If they won’t listen to them, tell it to the assembly. And if they won’t listen to the assembly, you should treat such a person like you would a Gentile or a tax-collector.” Matthew 18:15-17 (Translated by N.T. Wright)

Luke 17:3-4 implies that this sin might affect one other believer and, in that case, **reconciliation** would be needed, or the unrepentant sin might concern the wider spiritual community, in which case **restoration** might be needed.

SEQUENCE OF ACTION STEPS FOR THE RESTORATION PROCESS

- Go directly to the person with whom you have the issue and **talk it through**.

SAFE STRATEGY

<u>Sins</u> – cover	“I know that . . .” or “I understand . . .”
<u>Actions</u> – describe	“But when you . . .”
<u>Feelings</u> – disclose	“I feel . . .” or “I’m feeling . . .”
<u>Expectations</u> – explain	“I would appreciate . . .”

- If this person doesn't demonstrate a listening ear, a willingness to look inward, and a heart of repentance, take one or two other believers along and **talk about the issue again**.

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 (English Standard Version)

- If there is still no response, take it to the appropriate **spiritual community** within the church.

ekklesia = Greek = "assembly" or "gathering"

"Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed, it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of . . . community. In confession, the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light . . . Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God and the cross of Jesus Christ . . ." (From *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

- If the person refuses to face his or her sin, then a **break in fellowship** may be necessary.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 (ESV)

Aspect #2: **SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES HAVE AUTHORITY TO DETERMINE WHETHER ONE OF ITS MEMBERS IS IN THE WRONG, AND TO PRAY TOGETHER IN JESUS' NAME FOR RESTORATION.**

"I'm telling you the truth: whatever you tie up on earth will be tied up in heaven; and whatever you untie on earth will be untied in heaven. Again, let me tell you the truth: if two of you come to an agreement on earth about any matter that you want to ask, it will be done for you by my father in heaven. Yes: where two or three come together in my name, I'll be there in the midst of them." Matthew 18:18-20 (Translated by N.T. Wright)

- *"tie up on earth"* was a common rabbinical expression which meant to discern what was morally right and wrong according to God's Word.
- So, in context, the terms *"tie up"* and *"untie"* mean that the Christian community has the authority to determine what is right and wrong for someone who is walking in sin, based on what God has already determined in His Word.
- *"where two or three come together in my name, I'll be there in the midst of them"*, in context might read: "If two or three of you witnesses are gathered in the process of restoration and you are there trying to determine whether this fellow believer has repented, you can be sure that I'm going to be present."

APPLICATION TIP

- Go to the people who comprise your spiritual community at Lighthouse—and give them permission to go through the restoration process with you, if needed.
- In return, pledge to them that you will love them enough to do the same.
- In the future, be alert to what is going on in each other's souls, and love each other enough to "have it out" when needed.