

**Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
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Detroit, Michigan 48208
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**“Be Ready for Reconciliation”
Scripture: Matthew 18: 10-22**

Goal: To embrace and fulfill the covenant relationship with God and one another.

Objective: To understand the importance of being ready for reconciliation.

Covenant Segment: “Be Ready for Reconciliation.”

*“If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. [16] But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. [17] If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right, but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.
[Matthew 18:15-17 NLT]*

Overview

The emphasis this month is on reconciliation. In this passage, a brother is offended as a result of someone's sin against them. The word *offense* translated in the Greek is derived from the word *skandalon* meaning a trap, stumbling block, and to cause to stumble and fall. It is the moveable trigger of a trap that causes one to stumble or fall. It always denotes an enticement to conduct, which could ruin the person in question.¹ The Matthew passage prescribes what to do when one has been sinned against in the church. Jesus had just spoken about humility and cautioned the disciples not to give offence. Now, He addresses what to do when, sin, a violation of God's law, has occurred against them. Jesus puts forth a three-step resolution process that will eventually lead to church discipline for an unrepentant person.

Jesus places this process within the same context of the parable of the lost sheep where the good shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep to bring back the lost one to the fold, emphasizing the principle of restoration. Are we quick to seek restoration or reconciliation if we are offended? What if we are the offender, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are we willing to be reconciled? Either way, will we submit to Jesus' plan?

While this three-step process seems easy, it may be an emotionally difficult thing to accomplish. The sin or offense often delivers a painful blow leaving one hurt and often angry. When a person has been hurt emotionally, the tendency for many is to strike back.

¹ Zodhiates, Spiros, The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament, Chattanooga: AMG International, 1993, 1292

Others may withdraw to nurse their wounds, or suffer in silence, unable to go forth to do the greater work of the church. Still others may spread venom about the person among the body of Christ. These become stumbling blocks; things we are not to do as followers of Christ for they cause us and others to stumble and commit more sin.

Question #1: Since we have been reconciled with Christ, how can we go about to reconcile with one another after a conflict or dispute?

Focus Statement: Our Church Covenant references Matthew 18 which gives us a three-step process on how to resolve conflict within the church body.

“If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” Matthew 18:15

“A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city.” Proverbs 18:19

Summary: Jesus states that we are to go to the person privately and show him his fault, suggesting that we are not to expose the situation or the person openly to others but to protectively seek resolution. To be effective as taught elsewhere in Scripture, Christians should always pray beforehand, during the situation, and afterwards. Ask for wisdom, self-control, courage and the strength to do what is required in a humble manner that would promote peace and reconciliation. If we are the offender or the offended, we must be willing to reconcile, admit our faults and seek forgiveness. If this happens, the mission is righteously accomplished. Are we willing to do it God’s way?

Question 2: In what ways does it make a difference when resolving a conflict to bring in a few others whose motives and judgments we trust?

Focus Statement: Jesus prescribes taking two or three witnesses for the stubborn and stout-hearted.

“One witness should not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits: by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter should be established. Deuteronomy 19:15

Summary: Step two may be necessary for the stubborn and stout of heart; Jesus prescribed taking two or three others. As a community of believers, our goal is not to gain comrades to fuel the fire, vindicate us, or nurses our pain, but to restore and win our sister or brother back to the ways of Christ. Are we truly ready to reconcile our relationships with others?

Question 3: When should the Church take disciplinary action for those whose behaviors and attitudes are causing constant disruption?

Focus Statement: The purpose of Church discipline is for restoration to fellowship, not vindication or retaliation.

“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 come and offer your gift. ”Matthew 5:23-24

Summary: If the person is still unrelenting, then we are to go to the church and the problem is open to the congregation. Offended people, sometimes, go openly before the church first to demean or point blame rather than approach the person privately. If the offender does not repent, then the church should institute discipline. He is to be treated as a pagan (outsider) or tax collector. Are we willing to practice the spirit of reconciliation as Christ has prescribed it?

Reflections:

1. What should our prayer be to God when seeking reconciliation?
2. Do you have a testimony about your experience in reconciling a relationship after you have been offended? Did you use the process Jesus gave in Matthew 18?

Where we are in the Church Covenant... *

HAVING BEEN LED, AS WE BELIEVE, BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to give it a place in our affections, prayers, and services above every organization of human origin; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, towards its expenses, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. In case of difference of opinion in the church, we will strive to avoid a contentious spirit, and if we cannot unanimously agree, we will cheerfully recognize the right of the majority to govern.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to study diligently the word of God; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be kind and just to those in our employ, and faithful in the service we promise others; endeavoring in the purity of heart and good will towards all men to exemplify and commend our holy faith.

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other's reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other's joys, and with tender sympathy bear one another's burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; to be slow to give or take offense, ***but always ready for reconciliation***, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and through life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we remove from this place, we engage as soon as possible to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

Each month we will include a copy of the Church Covenant and highlight the current lesson. It is our hope that this will give the larger context for the passage being studied.