

GO TO YOUR BROTHER

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Both Matthew 5:23-26 and Matthew 18:15-17 give instructions for solving problems and making peace between brethren. But Matthew 5:23-26 approaches the issue from the side of the one who is in the wrong, while Matthew 18:15-17 approaches the issue from the side of the one who has been wronged. When comparing these passages (1 Cor 2:13), God gives each Christian the responsibility to go to their brother with the proper attitude in order to make peace.

If our brother has something against us

In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus says, *“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother has ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”* This tells us how to make peace when our brother has something against us. This would cover circumstances when we are indeed guilty of wrongdoing against our brother, but also when our brother *thinks* we are guilty even though we might not be. Sometimes we might be guilty and not even realize it. But if we know that someone has something against us, whether we think we are guilty or not, we must go to our brother and be reconciled to him. In Matthew 5:23-24, the responsibility is placed upon the one who is in the wrong (or potentially so) to make the move and initiate making peace.

We must leave everything and immediately go be reconciled to our brother. Jesus says further, *“Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing”* (Matt 5:25-26). In this context, our “adversary” would be our brother. The context still pertains to when our brother has something against *us* (which is why *we* would be the one imprisoned for not agreeing with our adversary). In such a case, we must agree with him (i.e. be reconciled with him) quickly.

If we have something against our brother

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus says, *“Moreover if thy brother shall*

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(continued)

trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” Jesus gives these instructions right after telling us not to despise any of his “little ones,” speaking of our brethren in Christ (Matt 18:10). Jesus came to save the “lost” (Matt 18:11). In this context, he is speaking of a wayward child of God. We should leave the 99 sheep and go get the lost one (Matt 18:12-13), so that none of God’s children are lost (Matt 18:14). Matthew 18:15-17 gives us the specific way to regain our brother who is astray by being guilty of a personal trespass against us. Here, the responsibility is placed upon the one who is innocent to make the move and initiate making peace. Thus, between Matthew 5:23-26 and Matthew 18:15-17, there is never a situation in which two brethren are divided and each waits for the other to make the first move.

Both parties are obligated to initiate peacemaking efforts. This is in keeping with the Lord’s instructions to all Christians in Romans 12:18: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” It may be that when we do everything that lies within us to make peace, that someone else may be “for war” (Psa 120:7). Romans 14:19 says, *“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.”* Therefore, we need God’s wisdom instead of the Devil’s. James 3:13-18 says, *“Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”*