

Courage to Confront

“²³Therefore if you are presenting your offering upon the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your offering there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering... “¹⁵Now if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault while you’re with him alone. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶But if he does not listen, take with you one or two more, so that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.’ ¹⁷But if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to Messiah’s community. And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah’s community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector” (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17).

There is reluctance in adults (young & old) to confront difficult issues because of the fear of potentially straining friendships and personal interaction. This occurs in marriage partners, courtship couples, and among deeper friendships. It seems OK to chance confrontations with those we have casual relationships with, but not with close friends or couples. If we are secure in our position in *Messiah* and within our family/congregation and we enter into a ***courageous conversation*** with the presupposition that breaking up is not an option, I know we can eliminate the greatest threat to building & maintaining fellowship – breached relationships (friendship).

Rabbi Hylan Slobodkin once wrote me: *“You’re stuck either way. If you have a problem with a brother... go. If you know your brother has a problem with you... go.”* But we do not go to one another in most cases. Why? The reason is that a loving confrontation is (optimistically) difficult and (pessimistically) impossible. What’s even more frustrating is: wanting to go and obey Scripture, but feeling either inadequate or ill prepared in dealing with others. Let’s face it; we are not trained in godly conflict resolution and doing so requires courage. So we do what comes most natural to us – nothing. I have observed that people either have confrontations that result in damaged relationships (a form of death) or they endure the pain hoping and coping until the day the Lord deals with the individual. We need to have ***courageous conversations*** – whether with our son or daughter, parents (our mom and dad), a best friend, or with a brother or sister in our congregation – with a spirit of humility.

“Now if your brother...” Both Adonai and the world expect Believers to demonstrate special loyalty toward each other. In fact, *“... we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16) and “¹⁰Therefore, whenever we have an opportunity, let us do good toward all—especially those who belong to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10).* Yeshua said the world would know whether we are genuine disciples or not *if* we have love for each other.

“Sins gainst you” comes from the Greek *hamartano*. The tense used normally indicates a specific act of sin. It means *to miss the mark or to cause one not to share in the prize*. Whenever a Believer sins, he not only damages the reputation of Adonai but also offends everyone else called by His Name: *“...you have made the enemies of Adonai greatly blaspheme...” (2 Sam. 12:14).* The immediate response when we see a brother sinning is to think: ***He hasn’t actually offended me; therefore, I’m not responsible.*** But Scripture makes it every Believer’s responsibility when someone stumbles because when one member of the body hurts so does the body (*Ro. 12:5*).

“Go (to him)...” Going to an offending brother to restore him has been and always will be ***Adonai’s greatest test of genuine love.*** It is easy to pass judgment in our mind and then forget it. It is also easy to tell someone else in a spirit of genuine concern and hope that he’ll do something about it. It is even easy for some to go boldly to him and tell him that he was wrong. But to go in gentleness [*“...restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness—looking closely at yourself so you are not tempted also” (Galatians 6: 1)*] requires some very painful preliminary steps. First, we must examine ourselves to see if we have failed in a similar area (*“... judging those practicing such things yet doing the same” (Romans 2:1-3)*), or if we have failed this person by lack of consistent prayer for them (*“...that I should sin against Adonai by ceasing to pray for you!” (1 Samuel 12:23)*) or if we have failed to be an example. We must guard against a spirit of pride or lack of love that if sensed, it is reacted against. Second, we must work out steps of correction. The very idea of restoring a brother presumes that we have steps of action for him so he can get from where he is to where he should be. Scripture states: *“you who are directed by the Ruach”* (e.g., the spiritual ones among you) should be the ones who have the maturity & exemplary life to teach others.

“Show him his fault...” The one who follows *Matt. 18* is now faced with an even more difficult question. ***What do I say when I approach him?*** What valid reason can I give him for talking about something he probably doesn’t

want to discuss? How can I avoid giving him the idea that I am intruding in his private business, especially if his offense was not directed against me? The answer is to approach him with the following statement: ***I always want to give a good report about you to anyone who asks. For this reason I wonder if you could explain something that I'm not sure I understand.*** This statement assures him that you are loyal to him, and that you are not condemning, but that you are coming as a learner and as a servant. If his offense was directed against you personally, you might say, ***is there something that I have done to cause you to react to me in this way?*** We are given precise instructions on how to take the splinter out of our brother's eye only after we first take the beam out of our own eye (*Matthew 7:3-5*). The most powerful way to tell someone else his fault is to point out our own fault in the same basic area. In fact, this is *Adonai's* way of doing things because it is the opposite of our natural inclinations. By humbling ourselves He is able to minister grace through our lives to others (*2 Cor. 4:1-2*).

WARNING! If there is even the slightest offense or attitude of neglect on our part, which has contributed to a brother's offense, we cannot follow the steps of Matthew 18. We must instead follow the steps of Matt. 5:23-24.

"While you're with him alone (privately)..." If we tell anyone else about an offending brother before talking to him, we create three problems. First, we prove to *Adonai* and the ones we tell that ***we don't love the offender*** and, in a deeper sense, we also prove that we don't love *Yeshua*, who said, *"if ye love me, keep my commandments"* (*John 14:15*). Second, ***we tempt the listener to take up an offense*** against him and may even destroy a strong friendship that might have existed between them. *"...a gossip separates close friends"* (*Proverbs 16:28*). Third, ***we destroy the sincerity of our approach*** to him and hinder the potential of restoring him. Scripture warns, *"Argue your case with your associate, without betraying another's confidence"* (*Proverbs 25:9*) To give a bad report about a brother is to speak evil of him: *"Do not speak evil against one another, brethren. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the Torah and judges the Torah...But who are you who judges your neighbor?"* (*Jas. 4:11-12*) Perhaps the most important reason to go to the offender first is to ***check out the facts***. When we hear a report and share it, it is almost impossible to be accurate with words and voice inflections.

"If he listens to you, you have won your brother..." The very structure of these words reinforces the spirit in which we should go to an offender. ***Adonai assumes that we want to win the brother rather than condemn him.*** If we go with the spirit and purpose of exposing rather than restoring, will fall into one of the temptations warned about in (*Gal. 6:1*). Perhaps the greatest offense comes through words and often the one who says them is not aware of what they mean to other people. By having an offender hear what his words meant to us in our frame of reference, we will help him expand his thinking and become more precise in his message to others. When we assume that a man meant what we heard him say and then attack him for it, we are using Satan's most effective method of dividing Believers within the Community and Congregation.

"¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take with you one or two more, so that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand.'" If it is difficult to go to an offender alone, it may be even more difficult to go a second time with the right witnesses. This is necessary in following the steps of (*Matt. 18*) to restore a brother who persists in his offense. If the offense was with words, it is important that two or three others ***confirm what he really meant by those*** words. If it were an offense of actions, then the ideal witnesses would be those who have conquered a similar problem in their own lives. They would first be witnesses ***to him*** before being witnesses ***against him***.

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to Messiah's community. And if he refuses to listen even to Messiah's community, let him be to you as a pagan and a tax collector." The purpose is not to expose but rather to ***enlist the members' help in the program of restoration.*** As more people know about the offense, it should be more humbling to the offender. This is *Adonai's* way of giving him more grace because *Adonai* gives grace to the humble (*James 4:6*). Since grace is the desire and power to do His Will, this is precisely what is needed to overcome his problem.

Even after an offender has been separated from congregational fellowship, ***the responsibility of Believers to restore is not ended.*** *Yeshua* gave the steps for congregational discipline but Paul illustrates its application. When the immoral man in the Corinthian congregation was filled with sorrow, they had the corporate responsibility of affirming the love they should have all along by forgiving him and receiving him as one of their own. ***If the congregation is not alert to do this, Satan will gain advantage in the congregation as well as in the life of the offender.***