



## SESSION 7

# JESUS CORRECTS

### ► ***The Point***

Jesus calls us to a higher standard.

### ► ***The Passage***

Mark 7:5-15

### ► ***The Bible Meets Life***

Oil plays an important part in our lives and our economy. In fact, 92 percent of our transportation is fueled by petroleum.<sup>3</sup> While oil serves us well, it can also be the source of great problems. The worst accidental oil spill in the world occurred in 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico at Deepwater Horizon. Over 200 million gallons of oil coated 572 miles of beaches and wildlife. Marine life was killed, and hundreds of birds became coated with the thick oil and died.<sup>4</sup>

Traditions are like oil. Both are good, but we don't want them coating things they have no business coating. Sometimes we can let traditions and social customs coat and choke out other areas of life. Many religious traditions have value, but when they cover up and hide the commands and the grace of God, it's like an oil spill in our hearts. Just as clean up crews work swiftly to clean up an environmental disaster, Jesus stepped in with the gospel to solve a sticky situation. He rebuked and corrected the thinking of religious leaders whose traditions had created a spiritual disaster.

### ► ***The Setting***

After feeding the multitude, Jesus sent His disciples back across the Sea of Galilee while He stayed behind to pray. Jesus again demonstrated His authority over nature by walking on water. (See Mark 6:45-52.) Mark recorded that Jesus continued His ministry of teaching and healing in the region of Gennesaret. (See vv. 53-56.) During this time, a conflict arose between Jesus and some of Israel's religious leaders concerning ceremonial purification.

## *What does the Bible say?*

### **Tradition of the elders**

(v. 5)—These were rules and regulations developed in order to interpret commands from God's law. As Jesus pointed out in verse 8, these traditions were the work of people, not of God.

**Corban** (v. 11)—A rabbinic custom (part of the "tradition of the elders") that allowed a person to dedicate his or her material possessions to the Lord.

### ***Mark 7:5-15***

<sup>5</sup> **And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"**

<sup>6</sup> **And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;**

<sup>7</sup> **in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'**

<sup>8</sup> **You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."**

<sup>9</sup> **And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!**

<sup>10</sup> **For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'**

<sup>11</sup> **But you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, "Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban"' (that is, given to God)—**

<sup>12</sup> **then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,**

<sup>13</sup> **thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do."**

<sup>14</sup> **And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand:**

<sup>15</sup> **There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."**

## GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes



**DISCUSS:** Question #1 on page 61 of the PSG: **“What are some social customs or traditions you were taught to follow?”**

**Note:** One common example of a social custom from previous generations would be the idea that children should be seen, but not heard.

**GUIDE:** Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 62 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of Jesus’ correction

by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

**GUIDE:** Call attention to “The Point” on page 62 of the PSG: **“Jesus calls us to a higher standard.”**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Piggyback on the idea of a “standard” by bringing a tape measure or yardstick to your group gathering. Challenge group members to guess the measurement of specific objects in your meeting space. (This could be the length of a chair, the width of a wall, the height of a person, and so on.) Then, measure those items with the measuring tape (the standard) to find the exact numbers. Be sure to ask for volunteers to help you measure the larger objects when necessary.

**Note:** It’s a good idea to lead activities that get group members up and out of their chairs on a regular basis—especially for the hands-on learners within your community. For this activity, you could ask group members to walk around and identify specific objects for you to measure.

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by confessing that you and your group members have all missed the mark of God’s standard. Pray that Jesus would correct you through the work of the Holy Spirit even as you engage His Word in this session.

Notes



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### Mark 7:5-8

<sup>5</sup> *And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?”*

<sup>6</sup> *And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;*

*<sup>7</sup> in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’<sup>8</sup> You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”*

**READ:** Mark 7:5-8 on page 63 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to read the first two paragraphs on page 63 of the PSG in order to learn about the central conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees—and to explore an example of how that conflict played out in connection with the Sabbath.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Encourage your group members to address the question, “What is work?” Write the following list of examples on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and ask the group to identify which ones should be considered “work”: 1) mowing the lawn, 2) cleaning the house, 3) balancing a checkbook, 4) writing a story, 5) jogging a mile, and 6) planting a garden.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 63 of the PSG: **“What are some factors that cause modern Christians to neglect God’s commands?”**

**RECAP:** Read aloud the second paragraph on page 64 of the PSG:

Traditions aren’t necessarily bad, but they cannot and must not transcend God’s Word. As Christians, it’s crucial that we examine not just *what* we do, but *why* we do it. To forsake the commands of God in order to keep the law of man is dangerous and in direct opposition to what God truly wants: sincere, humble obedience that is motivated by love.

**TRANSITION:** As we move to verses 9-13, we’ll see Jesus get both specific and stern with His rebuke.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*Where do you see man-made rules adversely influencing the church today?*

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## Mark 7:5-8 Commentary

**[Verse 5]** Throughout His ministry, Jesus had an ongoing series of debates and conflicts with the religious leaders of His day. In this particular instance, His dispute was with **the Pharisees** and **scribes**. The Pharisees “were the developers of the oral tradition, the teachers of the two-fold law: written and oral. They saw the way to God as being through obedience to the law. ... The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He refused to accept their interpretations of the oral law.”\* The scribes were considered to be experts in the law.

In this case, the Pharisees and scribes challenged Jesus over His disciples’ failure to keep part of the **tradition of the elders**, which was the oral interpretation of the written, Mosaic law. One “tradition of the elders” was a hand-washing ceremony that took place before meals. (See 7:1-4.) The Pharisees viewed this practice not just as a matter of hygiene, but as a matter of holiness. They prescribed the exact manner in which this was to be done—and accused Jesus’ disciples of failing to keep this tradition. In questioning the behavior of His disciples, the scribes and Pharisees were attempting to raise doubts about Jesus’ authority and credibility as a religious teacher.

**[Verses 6-7]** Jesus challenged the religious leaders’ interpretation of what the law was really all about. In fact, He labeled them as **hypocrites**. Jesus accused them of having a veneer of piety (honoring God **with their lips**), but lacking true devotion to God (**their heart is far from me**).

Jesus quoted Isaiah 29:13, in which God condemned the people of Judah for their false worship. During Isaiah’s time, the people of Judah had viewed their participation in the formal rituals of the temple in Jerusalem as acts of worship. However, these outward practices were merely superficial. Similarly, the **worship** of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day was also **in vain**. Their external piety did not reflect the true condition of their hearts, which were far from God.

In their zeal to protect the law of Moses, the scribes and Pharisees had compiled a vast numbers of oral laws to ensure that the written law was kept. While their original intentions may have been noble, in the process the scribes and Pharisees had fallen in love with the idea of keeping the law (both oral and written), rather than with the One who gave them the written law to begin with. In their teaching, they elevated their oral laws (**the commandments of men**) to the same level of authority as God’s written law.

**[Verse 8]** The scribes and Pharisees certainly fell into the category of holding on to **the tradition of men**. As was noted above, in their initial zeal to protect **the commandment of God** (the written law of the Old Testament), they created the body of oral interpretations of and teachings about the written law. However, in the process, they abandoned God’s law in favor of their traditions. This elevation of the traditions of their oral law over time eventually placed the oral law in a higher position of authority than the Word of God!

\* Clayton Harrop and Charles W. Draper, “Jewish Parties in the New Testament” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, and Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 917.



10 minutes

# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### Mark 7:9-13

<sup>9</sup> And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!” <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>11</sup> But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)— <sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, <sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

**DO:** Direct group members to complete the activity “Tradition!” on page 65 of the PSG. If time permits, encourage volunteers to share their responses.



Use the lines below to record specific traditions you have encountered in the church or in other areas of the Christian life. (An example has been provided.) In the box to the left of each line, add a check mark for each tradition that is helpful or life-giving. Add an X for each tradition that is unhelpful or life-draining.

[Don't wear hats in the church sanctuary.]

What's a tradition or practice in your current church that helps promote the gospel?

**READ:** Mark 7:9-13 on page 64 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Encourage group members to read the last paragraph on page 64 of the PSG and the first paragraph on page 66 in order to learn more about the Pharisees' abuse of *Corban*.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 64 of the PSG: “Why are we often tempted to twist God's commands?”

**TRANSITION:** We'll finish this story with verses 14-15.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

**What steps can we take to identify and honor the intent of God's commands?**

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## Mark 7:9-13 Commentary

**[Verse 9]** Jesus continued His scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees. **“You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!”** By giving the traditions of the elders precedence over the Word of God, the religious leaders had invalidated the Scriptures. They had robbed them of their power and credibility. The people no longer turned to God for answers. They were too busy trying to keep all the rules they had been given by the scribes and Pharisees.

**[Verse 10]** Jesus backed up His accusation with a concrete example from God’s Word. The first quote comes from the Ten Commandments (see Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), where God requires respect for parents. The second is from Exodus 21:17, which detailed what was to happen to those who ignored the commandment to honor their parents. Rather than enjoying a blessing, those who spoke evil of their parents were to be put to death. (See also Lev. 20:9; and Prov. 20:20.)

**[Verses 11-12]** The Word of God clearly stated that those who honored their parents were blessed and those who did not were cursed. After quoting Scripture, Jesus set up a comparison between God’s Word and the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees (**“But you say...”**) to point out the contradiction between the two. Jesus showed how the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees not only violated the Word of God, but encouraged people to show contempt for their parents.

The practice of declaring something as **Corban** meant the item (either money or property) was dedicated to God’s use and could not be used for secular purposes. Some people apparently used this vow to avoid providing assistance to their parents. These individuals had found a “loophole” in the *Corban* vow that allowed them to keep the property or money they vowed as Corban instead of giving it to the temple. While the money or property was supposedly dedicated to God, the person who made the vow could still use the item(s) dedicated by the vow for his own personal use. However, the item(s) could not be given to someone else—including his parents. At the person’s death, the remaining portion of the property or money would be given to God (via donation to the temple).

According to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, the Corban vow was irrevocable. If at some future point, the person decided he would like to use the money or items he had dedicated to God to help his parents, the religious leaders would refuse to annul his vow. The Pharisees and scribes used the passage of Numbers 30:1-10 as the basis for their refusal, holding that vows to God overruled any other obligation or commitment, including to one’s parents.

**[Verse 13]** Jesus summarized His argument by returning to His original point: **“thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down.”** Jesus rejected the practice of using one biblical text to negate another. He showed why it’s critical to focus on the spirit and purpose of the law, rather than the letter of the law. Jesus’ words, **“And many such things you do,”** indicates that His one example of the religious leaders’ distortion of Scripture was not an isolated occurrence, but part of an ongoing practice.





15 minutes

# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### Mark 7:14-15

<sup>14</sup> And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: <sup>15</sup> There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him."

**READ:** Mark 7:14-15 on page 67 of the PSG.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 67 of the PSG: **"What are the implications of Jesus' declaration in verse 15 for those who follow Him?"**

**Note:** In other words, how does verse 15 apply to those who are following Jesus today?

**SUMMARIZE:** Help group members work through the main points from page 67 of the PSG:

1. "This whole conversation began when the religious leaders confronted Jesus because His disciples had dirty hands. But Jesus turned it around and showed that these same Pharisees and scribes had dirty hearts."
2. "Jesus calls us to a higher standard than mere human or religious practices."
3. "God alone makes us righteous, through Christ: 'he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21)."

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 67 of the PSG: **"When have you felt the weight of God's call to a higher standard?"**

**Note:** You may want to begin by asking, "When did you first become aware of God's standard for your life?" As group members think through their earliest encounters with God, you can then ask them to consider specific moments from their lives when they felt more keenly the weight of God's call to a higher standard.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to "The Point" for this session: **"Jesus calls us to a higher standard."** If time permits, encourage volunteers to share any final thoughts and questions.

#### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

*What have you liked most about this study of Jesus' life?*



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## Mark 7:14-15 Commentary

**[Verse 14]** Having dealt with the scribes and Pharisees—at least for the time being—Jesus turned His attention back to **the people**. He challenged them to **hear** and to **understand**. These two commands are parallel to one another. As noted in an earlier session (see Session 2 Commentary on Mark 4:2b), Jesus often encouraged His audience to listen, but He was never really talking about just using their ears to hear. He was focused on their hearts, which is where understanding that leads to spiritual transformation begins.

Jesus also indicated He was speaking to everyone in the crowd with the phrase **all of you**. No one was exempt from the basic lesson He was about to teach. Everyone present needed to hear it, and they all needed to understand it. Jesus was about to correct some misconceptions related to the scribes and Pharisees' original question. (See Mark 7:5.) He was going to educate the crowd concerning the true nature of purity and righteousness.

**[Verse 15]** In their initial attack, the scribes and Pharisees had questioned Jesus about the actions of His disciples—and, by inference, Jesus Himself—regarding their failure to keep the ritual law about washing one's hands before a meal. According to the religious ideas of the day, everything an unclean person touched became unclean. So, a person who didn't observe the ceremonial cleansing law tainted everything (and everyone) around him. Therefore, such an individual should not have been allowed to take part in the meal.

But Jesus provided a different—and correct—take on what defiles a person and what makes a person clean. The key to purity rests in the condition of a person's heart. The things that go into us—the things we eat—have no moral power over us. Later, in private, Jesus told His disciples: "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person" (vv. 20-23). What originates in our hearts is the true measure of our spiritual condition. Evil thoughts, actions, and words are born and bred inside of us. Years later, James told his readers that sin occurs when people fall into temptation, then allow it to grow in their hearts until it turns into action. (See Jas. 1:14-15.)

The prophet Jeremiah called the human heart "deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9). We have nothing perfectly good and pure in ourselves, but Christ gives us His righteousness when we trust in Him as our Savior. (See Rom. 5:15-21; Phil. 3:8-9.) The only way we can cultivate such goodness in our daily lives is through the work of Christ in our hearts and minds. (See Rom. 8:1-13; Gal. 5:16-25.) God expects His children to live godly lives. But we don't strive to live godly lives in order *to be saved*—we are saved through grace by faith in Jesus alone. (See Eph. 2:8-9.) Rather, we strive to live godly lives because we *have been saved*—it is the "fruit" of our salvation. (See Gal. 5:22-25; Eph. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:5-11.)



## Notes

- ▶ **Dig.** Identify some of the “church traditions” you grew up with or currently practice. Divide them into three groups: rituals, preferences, and Bible-centered practices.
- ▶ **Bury.** Stand strong for Christ-centered practices, but let go of those things that are only tied to your preferences. Determine not to expect others to live according to your preferences.
- ▶ **Plant.** Take someone out for coffee this week who struggles with Christianity because of the practices or customs they experienced in a particular church. Share your story. Help them see that a relationship with God is not tied to these practices, but only to faith in Christ.

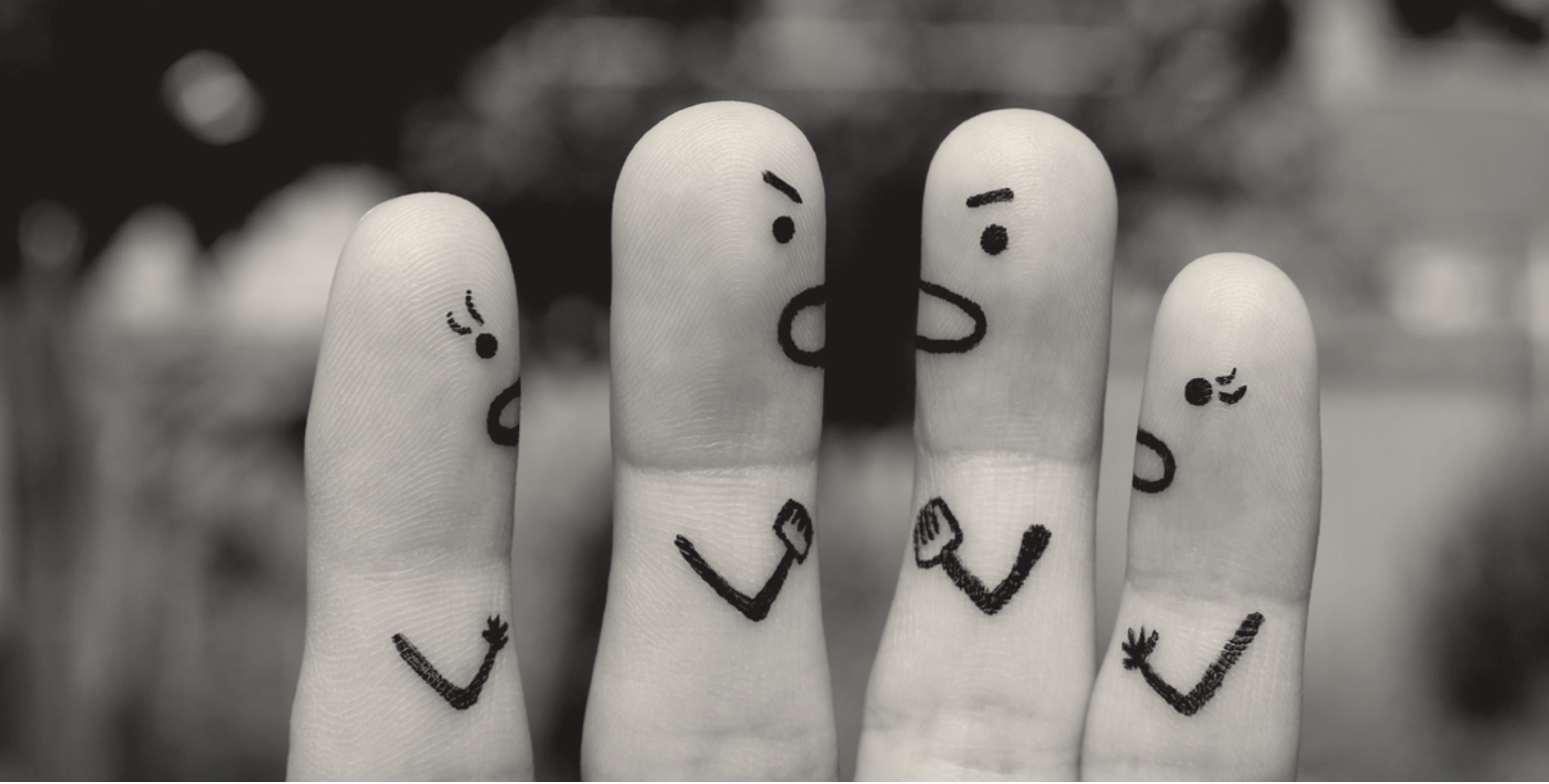
**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 68 of the PSG:

I hope you'll never have to clean up after an oil spill. But I hope very much that you'll identify and expel any human traditions or rituals getting between you and Christ.

**PRAY:** Conclude by praising God for His grace demonstrated in your life. Pray that His Spirit would strengthen each person in your group as you respond to Jesus' higher standard in the week to come.



**Free additional ideas for your group are available at**  
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra



# CONFLICT! NOW WHAT?

BY CAROLINE CASE

You find yourself really enjoying your group. The snacks are the perfect blend of salty and sweet, the lessons encourage you to go beneath the surface, and your fellow group members feel just like family.

But what happens when one of those “family members” wrongs you? What happens when harmony and “one accord” melt into bitterness and willfulness? What happens when you’re too afraid to go to small group because you’ve been deeply hurt, and the tension is high?

The ability to manage conflict in your small group is a unique skill set that one must always keep in his or her back pocket. Even though we’re the body of Christ, we’re human—we mess up, we have our own motives, we want our own way, we offend people. And when two humans gather together in His name, conflict is just waiting to happen.

Here are a few guidelines to managing conflict within your small group:

## 1. Go to the Person

First, go to the person who has wronged you. We call this the Matthew 18 Principle: “If your brother sins against you, go and rebuke him in private. If he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matt. 18:15, CSB).

Notice that the first step Jesus calls you to is to directly tell the person—not to tell everyone else but the person, not to gossip behind their back, not to hold it in your heart so long that bitterness and rage grow. Go to the person, and go in private.

## 2. Go in Peace

The second principle is a necessary addendum to the first: How you go to the person is just as important as your going to them. How you approach the person who has wronged you is critical, for this is the part of personal responsibility.

Marshall Rosenberg developed a communication process in the '60s he coined "Nonviolent Communication" (NVC). This is a prevalent formula that is used in communication and psychology groups alike.

Nonviolent Communication combines Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests in a simple formula for you to express your needs to others. It goes something like this: "When you \_\_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_\_, because I need \_\_\_\_\_."

When using NVC, make sure you focus on your feelings and needs, and not on how wrong the other person was. By doing this, you're taking personal responsibility for how you feel, communicating effectively your basic human needs, and also speaking to the person in a way that is not accusatory. You're not there to blame or criticize; you are there to make peace.

This isn't a one-size-fits-all formula, but it's a way to get the ball rolling.

## 3. Go with Others When Necessary

If your fellow group member doesn't heed or respond to what you tell them, feel free to carry out verses 16-17 of The Matthew 18 principle: "But if he won't listen, take one or two others with you, so that by the testimony of two or three witnesses every fact may be established. If he doesn't pay attention to them, tell the church. If he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you" (CSB).

This is the part where other people get involved—and by other people, I don't mean your best friends or your Twitter feed—I mean people who are directly involved in the situation, specific deacons or church leaders, or your pastor.

**NOTICE THAT  
THE FIRST  
STEP JESUS  
CALLS YOU  
TO IS TO  
DIRECTLY TELL  
THE PERSON—  
NOT TO TELL  
EVERYONE  
ELSE BUT THE  
PERSON.**



#### 4. Choose to Forgive

Whether you get an apology or not, you must forgive the person who has wronged you. If anyone has been wrong in this world, it's been you. And it's been me.

Jesus' Word is higher than my own, and Jesus' Word tells me He's forgiven me from so much that I have no rights—no rights to my own desires, no rights to my will, no rights to hold a grudge.

"Bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive" (Col. 3:13, *CSB*).

#### 5. Remember Your Calling

Last but not least, remember your calling.

Jesus states pretty clearly His intended outcome for conflict management. Notice Matthew 18:15b: "you have won your brother" (*CSB*). Jesus didn't say, "Then your brother will see that you are right," or, "Then you will be made the group leader," or, "Then you will bask in the glory of your rightness." Jesus' goal is reconciliation, not "rightness."

Oswald Chambers put it this way: "We must keep ourselves in touch, not with theories, but with people, and never get out of touch with human beings, if we are going to use the word of God skillfully amongst them."<sup>5</sup>

When your speech is filled with truth and your attitude is full of grace, then you have won your brother over.

The goal of conflict management is exactly that—management. It's to win your brother over. It's to establish harmony for, as Jesus said: "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:19-20, *CSB*).

Where two or more are gathered in a small group, let there be peace.

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