Conflict, Reconciliation, and the Way of Jesus

Speaker:	Pastor Jesse Blaine	**Date:**	September 6, 2026
Location:	Christ the King Anglican Church, Denver	**Text:**	Matthew 18:15–20

Good evening, everyone. Would you pray together with me?

Lord, give us hearts to pursue unity, hearts to build each other up, hearts that are drawn to Your purposes and to Your ways. By the power of Your Holy Spirit, would You speak now to us through Your scriptures? Would You guide us into all truth, and would that truth lead us into full life together with You? So we pray all of this in Your great and holy name. Amen. Amen.

Well, this evening we are in Matthew chapter 18, and we are looking at the words of Jesus that show us how to respond to conflict—conflict that we have with each other in a way that honors Him and actually moves us to build the kind of community that He wants us to live in. A kind of community that shows His character to the whole world, the kind of community that preaches the truth of who God is and who God wants us to be without even saying words, by the way that we live together, by the way we interact with each other, and by the way that we actually walk through conflict together.

Now, you've all probably heard the phrase "death and taxes." They're the only two things that you can be sure about in this life, and neither are quite pleasant. I don't like paying taxes, of course, but I want to add something to that: death, taxes, and if you're a Christian in community, the reality that someone is going to sin against you is something that we can all depend on in this life, sadly.

And the truth is that all of us are on a journey to holiness. Because of that journey—because none of us have yet fully arrived at this holiness that God has for us—there will be times where we let each other down, where we disappoint each other, where we hurt each other, and even times where we sin against one another. When that happens—which it will—we have a whole host of ways that we can respond when somebody sins against us or hurts us. I have to admit to my shame that my knee-jerk reaction when somebody sins against me, even in the church, is often more in line with the ways of the world than the words of Jesus that we see here in the scriptures.

We all know the ways of the world and how the world around us deals with conflict, and we're probably so used to swimming in that current that maybe it feels natural to us. There's a menu of ways that we can respond to conflict—and you have to forgive me here, I rarely do this, it's going to sound a little lame, but I just couldn't help myself, these are all going to rhyme—the ways that we respond to conflict:

1. **Ghost:** The first way that we often see people respond to conflict, maybe you have yourself, is we *ghost*. That is, we cut someone off from our hearts and our minds. We might still see them and you do the, "Oh hey, how are you?" But really, in our hearts and our minds, we've cut them off. We no longer want deep and true and real fellowship with them; we completely want to ghost them 100%.

2. **Roast:** The second way that we deal with conflict is that we *roast* people. Stick with me, they're all going to rhyme here. That is where we talk negatively about someone. We go to maybe gossip about them, or we talk to our friend and we say, "You know, we really got to help out so-and-so because they have really fallen into sin," or "They've really sinned against me." Or I don't know if you've been in a Bible study where somebody sort of drops one of those sly prayer requests where they say something like, "I pray for Stephen, I just pray for his attitude—would he improve?" I'd never prayed that way, but we roast. We move to sort of crush people in other people's opinions, to diminish them as we talk about them to others. We just want to roast them because, after all, they've sinned against us.

3. **Toast:** This is where it gets really lame. The third way that we see the world deal with it is that we want to make them *toast*. We want to crush them. I saw some eye rolls and some head shakes; that was good! Well, we go for the jugular. We want to win at all costs. If somebody sins against me, well, I'm going to go in to win the argument. I'm going to make sure that they know that they have done wrong, and when I leave, they're going to know that they have truly messed up. I truly want to crush them. It's not about me gaining them; it's about me winning this situation.

4. **Post:** And the last one is, of course, we *post*. We post about it. We go online, we write about it, we write about others. We might leave a bad review or go on an area online where everybody already agrees with us and say, "Can you believe what this Christian did? Can you believe what this Christian said to me? Can you believe this?" And we might post about it.

Of course, there are other ways that we see the world deal with conflict, but none of that leads to building connection and creating community. None of that drives us to be one as Jesus and the Father are one. These paths often lead us not only to destroy community and connection, but leave us as angry and embittered people. We might feel that we're right, we might feel like a sense of vindication or vengeance or justice has happened, but we're often quite angry and quite bitter when we enter into conflict in this way.

Jesus, of course, gives us a different way. He gives us a different path for what conflict should look like inside the body of Christ, and He starts here in verse 15 by setting a different goal than the world would have us believe in. As we enter into conflict, here in verse 15, Jesus says:

> *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matthew 18:15)*

The goal, of course, is to gain your brother or your sister. Christ's goal for the church, for all of us as we walk in community—specifically in this body of Christ here at Christ the King, but more broadly as we are Christians, as we live in fellowship and life with other Christians—is that we would gain our brother or our sister, and that we would be one just as Jesus and the Father are one.

So if we look at the patterns of the flesh—I won't subject you to that rhyme again—but if we look at the patterns of the flesh, where we go into conflict just winning an argument, or crushing the other person, or embarrassing them, or ghosting them, none of these patterns seek to gain the brother or the sister to create this unity that God wants. Victory for Christ here is restoration and reconciliation—not proving that you were right, but gaining someone back into fellowship.

What this also means is that humble, rightly guided confrontation is actually loving. It's actually loving to go to somebody and say, "You have sinned against me; you have hurt me in this way," because that leads to connection if you pursue it in the right way. It's saying that you are worth pursuing; it's saying that our bond of love is something of value—this bond of love in Christ.

Now, it's interesting in Matthew chapter 18, if you look at the parable that comes just before this, it's about the shepherd that leaves the 99 sheep and goes out to get the one, searches and finds them, puts them on his shoulders, and brings them back into the herd. Right after that, Jesus says this is what it looks like to be one in community together: if someone sins against you, you go and seek them out, and you seek to gain a brother.

So you will find if you've been sinned against, if someone has hurt you and you go and speak to them, if this is how you set the table—the desire to restore and to reconcile together with them—that at least in your own heart, it can feel like all the air and the tension in the balloon can just go out, and you can enter into that conversation with a different sense of peace and security as you go in together. When we get this part right, when we go into any confrontation seeking to gain a brother or a sister, the rest of this passage sort of just unfolds before us and becomes so much easier as you live into this.

One of the ways that we do this in our church is that we pray for those who persecute us, we pray for those who sin against us, we pray for those people that we don't like—which is why Stephen always prays for me! We pray for God's best in someone's life. Sorry Stephen, you're just sitting right here! We constantly pray for someone's best in their life, that God would bless them, because our desire is to turn our hearts to be people that seek to gain a brother or a sister and maintain a life together that is reconciled and at peace.

I remember having a friend who was sinned against in his church deeply—this is another priest, sinned against by another priest, ironically. He spoke to our bishop (and he told the story publicly, so it's okay that I tell this story). He spoke to our bishop and said, "This person has sinned against me, and I really want them to be punished. I need to see justice for the sin that happened against me."

And the wise bishop said to this person, "Why are you praying against God's will in their life? Do you know that it is God's will to bless all people who are called according to His name? Do you know that it's God's will to want the best for their lives—not necessarily the most comfortable, it's not to avoid justice—but it is God's will that they would be blessed, and you are here wanting God to curse them and to crush them? Do you know then, as you enter into this conflict, you are moving against God's very will for this person? So you need to repent, and you need to seek to gain this brother back in Christ so that we would be one, just as Christ and the Father are one."

This is our goal in all conflict: to seek to gain our brother and our sister.

Now, what does this look like more specifically for us? Jesus here in the rest of the passage offers us a process. Notice He says, *"If your brother sins against you,"* and there are two brackets here in that phrase.

1. **The First Bracket (Brother / Equal Standing):** The first bracket is this idea that it's a brother or a sister—somebody who is in the same faith family together with you. This is not somebody on the

outside, and also importantly, somebody who is on the same sort of power dynamic as you: your brother or your sister. What Jesus is *not* saying here is that if you've been abused, or if somebody with more power than you has hurt you, to go put yourself back in the place to be abused again. Jesus is not saying that; He's speaking about going to speak with somebody that you can safely speak with. If your brother sins against you, then go and seek them out. These are two people of equal standing.

2. **The Second Bracket (Actual Sin vs. Mere Preferences):** Secondly, He says, *"If your brother sins against you"*—not if your brother annoys you, not if you texted your brother and you wanted a text back in one hour and they took a day, or they're loud in a room where you want to be quiet, or they parent differently, or they spend differently than you, or they're just different than you, or they have a different choice of music than you! So much of church conflict is about things where people aren't actually sinning against each other. But if your brother sins against you—there are some differences in the world that can feel like sin. If you get in the car with me, I listen unapologetically to classical music—I'm sorry, for some people that can feel like a sin, but this is how I live! It's not a grave offense. Of course, much of the conflict in the church is based on differences of opinion or preference, but is not sin against you.

Jesus says if your brother sins against you, then you need to go and tell him his fault (or her fault) with a desire to seek to gain them.

So Jesus says when someone sins against you: ***Step 1: Go directly and privately.*** *Go and speak with them directly—not your friends, not other people who are not involved. When you do this in private, it protects their reputation; it's an act of charity. The church fathers call this* medicinal charity*. So go to that person, speak with them privately, desiring to protect their reputation. If that works, you have gained a brother. * **Step 2: Take one or two others.** If they do not listen, take two others. As you take two others, the goal here isn't to sort of muscle up on them, but it's this idea that if you take a brother and a sister, it helps to steady the ask and steady the desire to want to bring them together. It shows that the goal is of restoration and of gaining the brother and sister, increasing the chances that they come together. * **Step 3: Tell it to the church (the assembly).** If they still do not listen, you take it to the assembly. * **Step 4: Treat them as a tax collector or Gentile (with continued outreach).** If that does not work, you are to cast them out, again hoping for restoration. This is not judgment for judgment's sake, but it is a desire again for restoration.

And then Jesus says these words: you are to treat them as you cast them out like a tax collector or a Gentile. Now of course, what did Jesus do with tax collectors? He pursued them still! He called them to repentance; He called them to unity. There were boundaries around the community of faith and love, but Jesus still pursued tax collectors. In fact, this is the Gospel of Matthew, who was himself a tax collector that Jesus pursued! So even if someone sins against you to a great deal and they don't listen to anyone, you are to continue to pray and to seek their restoration—that they wouldn't be abandoned, that they would come back into life together with Christ and with His family.

So we see this movement here that Jesus calls us to: it's a movement of love. It's reluctant, it's restorative, it escalates slowly, it's always hoping, always praying for the best, always desiring peace and restoration. This is the path that Christ calls us to as we walk into conflict with each other.

Here are the words that the Apostle Paul uses: > *"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."* (Romans 12:9–10)

This is the desire of Christ: that we would be one, that our oneness would show out His goodness and His glory to the world around us.

Now, as we walk in this path that Jesus calls us into, there's also something much deeper going on than we often realize. This teaching that Jesus gives us is not just about us being friends and making sure that we all get along and us being a happy community—and of course that is good—but the reality is that if we engage in conflict in the way that Jesus calls us to, to seek someone out and to gain a brother or a sister, there's actually something much deeper going on in our own souls.

The early church saw this with great clarity. There are two North African church fathers that I want to quote: 1. **Cyprian:** Cyprian said that Jesus on the night that He was betrayed was not content just to redeem us with His blood, but He also prayed for us that we would be one, the way that He and the Father are one. 2. **Origen:** Origen goes even further. He says the whole story of the gospel and of the scriptures is heading towards one place, and that place is the world that is restored to its original unity, the way in which it was created. That prayer of Jesus, *"that they may be one,"* is the future the entire universe is bending towards!

So when you go to your brother or your sister, or someone who has sinned against you and has hurt you, it is good—you're humbling yourself, you're walking in the way of Jesus. But when you have that hard, awkward, and holy conversation, you're not just clearing the air and following the instructions of Jesus Christ; you are doing real kingdom work by pulling together that which was once fractured, inch by inch closer to the day when Christ will renew and remake all things in the unity of who He is.

When we seek unity, we're walking together with the *telos* of Christ—the one that will bring all things together. This is why Jesus says here in verses 18 to 20: > *"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven... If two of you on earth agree about anything ask for it, and it will be done... For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I with you."* (Matthew 18:18–20)

This is not just about conflict resolution; it's not just a flowchart for church discipline. It's about joining Christ in uniting all things under His name. This is the Christian goal in unity.

Now to end here, I want to ask us all: how is this even possible? This sounds good, sounds great to walk with Cyprian and Origen and Christ and the unity of all things, but how can we really live in this way? What if I've truly been hurt? Did you hear what they said to me? Did you see what they did to me? All this thing that you said about toast and post and roast—that's what they did to me! I have real church hurt. What does this mean? How can I actually live into this? If the goal is unity of all things, how can we actually do this?

The scriptures tell us that it comes from being transformed in our inner beings. Not only do we know that we're walking together with Christ and the reunification of all things, but we're actually being transformed internally as we walk in this path. It comes from having a brand-new identity through that transformation.

* **If our identity comes from being right:** If our identity, our sense of who we are, our well-being in our souls comes from the need to be right—the need for others to see myself as smart or intelligent or always to be right on all things—then I'm always going to enter any criticism with a need to crush my opponent. Any criticism about how I act or talk is a threat—it's not just an opinion, but an action that is meant to crush me. So in order to protect myself, I have to go and crush them. You have to win, you have to defend, you have to justify. * **If our identity comes from being liked:** If our whole identity is built around being liked—if I just have to have everybody look at me and say that I'm a good person, or I'm beautiful, or I'm successful, and I need people to look up to me, respect me, and like me—then every conflict is also a threat again. The response there can be to avoid, to cut out, and to ghost the person that I'm in conflict with.

Winning and avoiding come from the same place: a fragile heart that needs to protect itself, so it either lashes out or completely retracts.

But in Christ, you are fully seen, you are fully known, you are fully accepted, you are fully forgiven, you are fully humbled, and you are fully made new in Him at the cross.

So now you can hear words like, "You hurt me," and not be crushed, because your worth was never on trial in the first place. You can say things like, "You hurt me," to someone else and not enter into that conversation feeling self-righteous, because you know we have no righteousness in and of ourselves—we receive it from Christ. You can know you are a forgiven sinner talking to another person.

So this is the third road that Jesus calls us onto: not fleeing, not conquering, not roasting, posting, or toasting, but a path of grace and truth held together in the same hand—which is the very character of Christ, the one who shows us grace and truth in His life and in His forgiveness of us.

So every time we walk this road—if you can think of someone maybe you're in conflict with, or have been in conflict with—every time you don't avoid a hard conversation, every time you don't enter an argument just trying to win, but trying to gain someone, you are being formed. You are being shaped into the very likeness of Christ. Conflict done in Christ's way turns out to be one of the ways that He makes us like Himself, and His desire again is that we would be united in His name, to His glory, and to show the world what unity in Him looks like.

So let me pray for us as we continue in our worship:

Lord, would You give us hearts to know our new identity in You, that we don't need to gain it by other people's opinions or winning arguments or however we enter into the world? But Lord, we can stand under Your loving gaze, receiving Your grace and Your love.

Lord, help us to enter into conflict to get beyond our immediate reactions that often follow the patterns of the world, and to take on this life that You've given us—the way to enter conflict in a way that seeks to gain our brother and our sister for Your name's sake and for our unity.

Bless us, Lord, as a church. Lord, let us be people that are filled with Your Holy Spirit so that we seek to build each other up and to outdo each other in showing love. May this build up our church for Your glory. So we pray all of this in Your great and holy name. Amen.