



Dear Phil

RESPONDING TO OFFENSE

Dear Phil,

What do we do when someone offends us?

—Stacey

Dear Stacey,

Jesus answers this question in Matthew 18:15-17. He says, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault between him and you alone; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Jesus’ command was certainly not a new one. Fourteen hundred years before, God had Moses write, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart; you shall surely reprove your neighbor so that you will not incur sin because of him” (Lev. 19:17). What is striking about Lev. 19:17 is that the next verse contains the second most important commandment: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:18). Reproving our neighbor is an act of love.

God does not instruct us to confront our brother or sister if they sin against us because we are angry with them, to get even, or to straighten them out. We are to rebuke them because we love them (Luke 17:3). We love them too much to allow sin to go unchecked in their life. If a brother sins against us, he has damaged his relationship with God (Psa. 66:18). If unrepentant, he will be severed from Christ (John 15:2). If a brother sins against us, he has damaged his relationship with us (1 Cor. 8:12). That means the body of Christ suffers (1 Cor. 12:26).

When the members of a body are damaging one another, that body is in serious danger of self-destructing. Because of the damaging, destructive, and ultimately damning effects of sin, love for our brother must motivate us to rescue him from those effects and restore him to full usefulness in God’s kingdom. How would you feel if you overheard a physician saying that he wasn’t going to tell his patient that he had cancer because it might upset him or even damage their relationship? Yet how many Christians have refused to love their brother as Christ commanded lest he get upset with them or it damage their relationship? Anytime we think we are wiser than God, we are fools.

Obedience to Matthew 18:15-17 must be pre-prayed and pre-planned. This loving rebuke should not be done hastily or without careful thought. Notice the specific instructions Jesus gives. It should be done in person and in private

(“between him and you alone”). It requires verbal communication (“show him his fault”). Because love “thinks no evil” and “believes all things,” our approach to our brother should be tentative and questioning, wanting to believe the best (1 Cor. 13:5, 7).

When approaching a brother who we feel has sinned against us, we should recognize the limitations of our perspective and our potential for misunderstanding. Our language should be framed along these lines: “I always want to believe the best about you. The other day it seemed to me that you said (or did) _____. Did I misunderstand what you said?” By approaching him in this manner, we do two things: (1) we give him the benefit of the doubt and allow him to correct our perception, and (2) we communicate our love and concern for him in the manner of our confrontation.

I have only begun to unpack what the Scriptures have to say about this important issue. If you would like more information, you can visit my website and read the notes for my lecture “Loving Others When They Sin.” The web address is <http://pages.prodigy.net/apbrown2/>.

I trust you find this material helpful.

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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5. They have inquisitive minds that have been developed by constant learning.

They are well read in the Bible, theology, and history. They have read some of the great literature and the classics. They stay abreast of current Christian thought. Their reading has prepared them to speak forcefully to the issues of contemporary life and the current trends in theological thought. Richard Taylor, Dennis Kinlaw, Larry Smith, and Bobby French are examples of this.

6. They know how to tell a good story.

They understand the value of a good illustration and know how to tell it with great effect. Millard Downing, Stanley Kendall, Paul Lucas, and R.G. Flexon perfected this art. Richard Taylor uses illustrations with the most precision of any I have heard. His stories always enlighten and make the point well. Great preachers know (p19) ➡