

## **What Does The Bible Say About Christian Mediations?**

### **Mediation (Not Litigation) is Biblical**

The Bible gives clear guidance in Matthew 18 on how to resolve disputes within the church. Only as a last resort should a Christian resort to filing a lawsuit to resolve any dispute.

A number of Scriptures and parables of Jesus warn about filing lawsuits, for example:

1. The Apostle Paul instructs Christians not to “go to law” to resolve disputes and that they should rather “accept wrong” and “let yourselves be cheated” rather than file a lawsuit against another believer. (1 Corinthians 6:7.)
2. Jesus’ disciples are to be known for their love for one another (John 13:35) not by lawsuits!
3. Many Scriptures counsel Christians to love their enemies and give up rights for the good of another. (See Matt 5:40-43, 44; Luke 6:27; Luke 6:30, 35-36; Proverbs 25:8.)
4. Jesus discouraged lawsuits with the following remark: “If someone wants to sue you and take away your shirt let him have your coat as well”. (Matt 5:40-41.)

The primary problem with lawsuits is the poor witness it gives to the world. If Christians behave (and file lawsuits) the same as non-believers, then how is the world to see any difference in the way the church handles conflict versus how the world handles it.

### **The Meaning of Matthew 18**

For Christians, the Bible provides clear guidelines on how to resolve conflicts within the church. The operative Scriptures are Matthew 18:15-17. The relevant passages from Matthew 18 are as follows:

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (**Matthew 18:15-17**)

Basically, the Bible lays out a four step process for seeking reconciliation between believers:

1. Go directly to the other person and work it out.
2. If the matter is not resolved, then take one or two to act as mediators.
3. If the matter is still not resolved, go to the church leaders for a binding decision.
4. Only as a last resort, treat the person as a non-believer and look for other legal ways to resolve the matter.

### **Go to the Other Person**

The best, cheapest and most direct way to resolve a dispute is face-to-face with the other person. This is the way most disputes are resolved between rationale people on a daily basis. As Christians, we are called to overlook many minor offenses. Proverbs 19:11 puts it nicely, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Philippians 2:3 reads, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

In cases where the relationship is paramount (e.g., in marriage) and the offense is relatively minor, it is usually wise to simply overlook it. If the matter cannot be overlooked, then the first priority is to bring glory to God. Micah 6:8 explains what God requires from his people: "... to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Godly resolution has three parts: (i) justice, (ii) mercy and (iii) humility. Biblical conflict resolution requires all three of these to parts to be met. Assuming the matter is not resolved through direct intervention, even after approaching it from the correct point of view and attitude, then move to the next step.

### **Find a Trained Mediator**

A mediator is someone who intervenes between two or more parties to facilitate communication, clarify issues, and provide wise counsel to bring about resolution of an issue. Mediation is as old as the Bible. Over 3,000 years ago, Moses was a mediator between God and the Israelites. Jesus is described as a mediator between God and man. (1 Timothy 2:5)

Matthew 18:16 makes clear the second step of Biblical reconciliation is with the assistance of one or two neutral outside parties. The wisdom of this approach is apparent. The mediator has no personal stake in the outcome. Therefore, the mediator is truly a neutral party with nothing to gain or lose. The mediator is usually someone with specialized knowledge in the area of the dispute. Thus, the mediator serves as a wise counselor who objectively evaluates strengths and weaknesses of the parties' positions. The mediator's

training in communication skills and conflict resolution helps the parties to communicate more productively. Fourth, a mediator serves as a sounding board and reality agent to temper the expectations of the parties.

### **Go to Church Leaders**

If mediation fails and no negotiated resolution is possible, then the next step for a Christian is to submit to the church's authority and guidance. In the world, authority is vested in the police or courts. In the church, authority is vested with the elders and pastors. The church may convene a hearing similar to an arbitration hearing, listen to evidence by both sides, and render a binding decision. The parties are expected to abide by the decision and allow the matter to be closed.

### **Mediation Always Comes First**

The Bible gives clear guidance in Matthew 18 on how to resolve disputes within the church. Mediation is always the first step if the parties cannot resolve the dispute themselves. With God's help, mediators are able to accomplish seemingly impossible feats of peacemaking and bring healing to difficult situations. The Bible strongly discourages Christians from filing lawsuits to resolve disputes. Only if the process in Matthew 18 is followed should a Christian consider going outside the church to resolve their conflict in a lawsuit.

For more information or to schedule mediation, please feel free to [Contact Us](#).