

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION *AND THE LAW OF LOVE* IN THE CHURCH

## Video Lecture Series

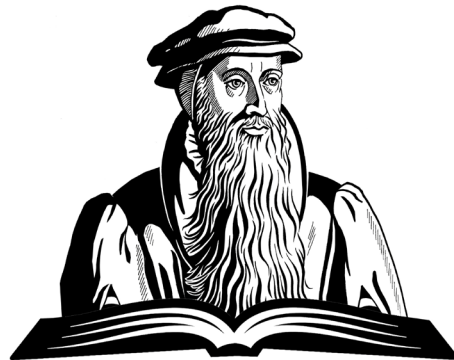
by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

*Module 1*

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE CHURCH

*Lecture 2*

## Jesus' Instructions for Confrontation



**The John Knox Institute**  
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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# **CONFLICT RESOLUTION *AND* THE LAW OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH**

## **Video Lecture Series**

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

*Module 1 ~*

## **Conflict Resolution in the Church**

1. Introduction
- 2. Jesus' Instructions for Confrontation**
3. Confession, Repentance, Forgiveness
4. Surrounded with Prayer and Love
5. Excommunication and Restoration

# CONFLICT RESOLUTION *AND* THE LAW OF LOVE IN THE CHURCH

by Rev. A. T. Vergunst

## *Module 1 ~ Lecture 2* **Jesus' Instructions for Confrontation**

Dear friends, welcome again to the studies on The Conflict Resolution Among Believers. To warm up our hearts to this calling of the King, just for a moment consider these three scriptures on this similar subject. In Psalm 141, verse 5: “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.” In Proverbs, chapter 9, verse 8: “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.” Also in Proverbs 27, verses 5 and 6: “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

Now, as we consider these mandates of the Lord, we notice the unity of the scriptures on this subject. Sin needs confrontation—gentle, loving, clear, decisive, and wise. And in Matthew 18, the Lord has outlined the process how to do this. Experience has proven that following his orders brings blessings. And therefore, each church fellowship, or each local household of God should strive to follow Jesus’ instructions.

As we will see in detail, there are four levels, in which we are to deal with the sin issue. First, it always begins on the personal level—examine yourself. This is followed, in the second place, with a private level, between you and the other person. Third, if that is not successful, it moves into the extended level—we are to add a witness to the process. And lastly, it comes to the congregational level, where the whole church is to get involved. Now, after the review of these four levels, I will conclude with a brief study on the desired and the undesired outcome. Obviously, the desired outcome is repentance, which should be followed with the exercise of genuine forgiveness. Now, the undesired outcome is the refusal to repent and reconcile, which, sadly, leads to the excommunication. Well, what is to be our relationship and our responsibility after excommunication? We will look at that in conclusion of our studies.

So now, the first level of confrontation begins with a personal confrontation, or, perhaps better put, a personal examination. Now notice an aspect that is not directly stated in Matthew 18, it is clearly taught in Matthew 7, verses 1 through 5, as well as in Galatians 6, verse 1. In the Matthew 7 passage, the Lord teaches us that we are not to judge others in unfavorable and condemnatory

judgment. In the Galatians passage, he directs us to deal with fallen brothers or sisters “in the spirit of meekness.” So first then, the passage in Matthew 7, verses 1 and 2, Jesus says, “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” Now Jesus does not mean we cannot judge someone’s actions to be wrong or right according to his divine standard. But, the Lord lays his finger at the spirit in which we are to do this. It must never be in the spirit of “I am better than you,” but instead, in the spirit of, “I am no different than you, for I am also a sinner. And if there is a difference between you and me and my walk, it is because of the grace of God which kept me and guided me.”

Now to get this point across, the Lord makes a remarkable and visual statement, that we first are to consider the beam in our own eye before we deal with the mote in our brother’s eye. The original word “mote” is like a piece of sawdust, while the beam, in the original, refers to the rafter that is used in the building—a beam, or rafter in your own eye; a mote in the other’s eye. Now the message Jesus pictures is powerful. To remove a piece of sawdust from your brother’s eye is a delicate job. Not only do you need gentle hands, proper tools, but you also need clear eyes. But friends, if there is a rafter-like beam stuck in your eye, you would end of doing an amputation of the eye instead of a delicate surgery removing dust. And how often this happens when we confront brothers and sisters within the church family of their trespass against us or the body of the church. Instead of saving their soul and restoring the fellowship, we end up losing him or her altogether.

But how will we then approach the delicate eye surgery of our brother or sister in the proper spirit? How will we become the right tool in the hand of the Master? We become it by following our Lord’s direction with looking at ourselves first. The first direction is that we need to pray to see ourselves in the light of God’s Word. In the Psalms, we find very fitting petitions to help us in those prayers, as we examine our relationship to the subject. Take, for example, David’s petition in Psalm 139, verses 23 and 24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Now another such petition is found in Psalm 19, verses 12 and 13. David prayed, “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.” How does God answer these petitions, as we lay them before him? How will I be examined?

Well, that leads us to the second direction, in preparing ourselves for confrontation. God answers these petitions through his Word and Spirit. And when Jesus prayed in John 17:17, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” So, in his truth that God uses, he sanctifies us. God’s Word is the mirror by which we learn to see ourselves more and more in coming short ourselves in every aspect. And it’s there for no accident that the petitions in Psalm 19, verses 12 and 13, are preceded by a description of the Word of God and the effect upon the believer. Hear these words: “The law of the LORD is perfect”—and what does it do?—“converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure”—what does it do?—“making wise the simple” (verse 7). “The statutes of the LORD are right”—and what do they do?—“rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure”—and again, what does that do?—“enlightening the eyes” (verse 8). So, the same point is made in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17, where we read: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” So, therefore, all Christians are to prayerfully place themselves before the searching of the scriptures, for it is through the Word of God that we personally are confronted with our own sins and backsliding, our own weaknesses, our own infirmities. His Word will open our eyes for the areas in our personal life, where spiritual

correction or spiritual growth is needed. And friends, seeing our own sins, that will prepare us to face a brother or sister with his or her sins, for what does it do? It makes us meek, by the blessing of God.

And so, the third direction that will prepare us personally to confront a brother or sister in the church family is the teachings of Hebrews 10, verses 24 and 25. We read there: “And let us consider one another to provoke”—or to stir up one another—“unto love and to good works: . . . exhorting one another.” Now any time you share with fellow saints is an exercise of confrontation, for your example exhorts, or convicts, or encourages others, and others do that to you. As iron sharpens iron, so the interaction of fellow saints with each other will sharpen us in the walk of life. It will also open our eyes for how we fall, as we see ourselves excel in love and good works. Now, seeing our own perpetual shortcomings is God’s tool to cultivate the meekness Galatians 6:1 instructs us about. And God says there, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” Now, the spirit of meekness is one of the most essential characteristics needed to effectively confront a fellow believer on his or her sin. We are to prayerfully seek God’s ministry to make us meek. Meekness is always the fruit of getting to know God. It is the fruit of being in his Word. It is also a fruit of the fellowship with other saints, ministered by the Holy Spirit in us.

Now besides this personal benefit of spending time with fellow members, there is also a preparatory benefit to the exercise of confrontation. For good and positive interaction with others builds trust. You learn to know and you learn to appreciate each other—to trust each other. You learn that there is love and care in the heart of each other. And then, friends, if it then becomes necessary to confront your fellow believer on a sin issue, it will be easier to do so, as there is a basis of trust and respect, and there is a relationship of love. This may make confrontation much easier than having to confront a fellow member you have neglected or ignored, and therefore, have no relationship with.

So, let’s now move on and look at the second level of confrontation. This is to be done, first of all, in a personal setting. The Lord Jesus speaks, in Matthew 18, verse 15, his direction: “Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: and if he shall hear thee (then) thou has gained thy brother.” Now, there are four specific directions the Lord Jesus gives us in this order.

First, who is to confront the erring brother or sister. We learn that the Lord expects the offended to confront the offending sinner. Listen again, as the Lord Jesus says, If he shall trespass against you, go and tell him. In Luke 17:3, this is reinforced: “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him.” So each Christian is responsible to be involved in preserving the unity within the body of Christ. Now, therefore, when we see sin, we don’t go and discuss it with others, or talk about it to our spiritual leaders, no, the Lord instructs you to act. You cannot leave it, or you cannot pass it on to others. You also cannot try to ignore it, or cover it with an hypocritical smile, as if no sin is done against you, or as if the sin never happened. The Lord commands you to become a part of the solution, by shouldering your responsibility for the well-being of his kingdom. If he sins against you, you go, and you tell him.

Secondly, whom should you confront? Well, Jesus calls the person “your brother,” and of course, that also includes your sister. So is it everyone who is a genuine Christian? Or is it only those I know personally as a Christian? Well, ideally, it’s everyone who belongs to the body of Christ by faith, yet it is clear that Jesus did not intend that you are to do this to every brother or sister in the worldwide church. It’s clear that brothers you don’t know or you don’t meet cannot

directly sin against you. Jesus is, therefore, instructing us to deal with brethren within our own local church family. It is from them we experience the ill effects of their sins.

So thirdly, what should we confront the brother or sister with? Jesus specifies that we are to confront them about their trespass against us. A trespass is a violation of God's law. It's a sinful act—something that is forbidden, or something that is commanded by God. Notice the Lord doesn't specify the sin in this passage, but all and each sin that is public and damaging to us and to our relationship is to be confronted. How far do we define "us" can be debatable. Now, is an unforgiving attitude that someone has against another member, a sin against us? Is a fellow member living in the sin of drunkenness, a sin against us? Now these are not easy questions to answer. But the point is, if such sins affect the body, then it could be argued that they are against us, and therefore, need to be confronted, even if they were not directly against us personally.

The Lord used the word "trespass." Clearly, he is pointing to an action, rather than an attitude or a motive. Attitudes and motives are impossible for us to evaluate in another person. Now, even though someone's words or actions may give us an indication about a sinful motive or attitude, we still are not able to judge the heart. Therefore, trespass is always an action that must be verifiable by facts, not based on feelings, or impressions, or second-guesses. A trespass is also something that is clearly forbidden, or commanded in the scripture, and identified as a transgression of God's moral law or doctrinal teaching. So, for example, a different view that a Christian has in the area of Christian liberty is not a trespass of God's law. And the use of our Christian liberty is not censurable.

Well, lastly, a trespass is also a sin that cannot be overlooked, or cannot be covered with love, as directed in Proverbs 19, verse 11, or 1 Peter 4, verse 8. In Proverbs 19:11, we are instructed this: "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger, and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." In 1 Peter 4, verse 8, the Lord commands, "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

Now examples of sins that may be overlooked or covered with love are, for example, when a brother or sister is unkind, or inconsiderate, or impatient, or they use a harsh tone of voice, or even acted immature. Now such mild trespasses, however, can eventually become a major force of division and destruction. So, love is to cover a multitude of sin, but there are some sins that throw off the cover. So how do I know what to overlook, and what not, in my brother's actions? Well, there are three questions you need to ask yourself.

First, is the trespass creating a tension in our relationship? That's the first question to ask. Does it begin to dominate my thinking? Is it making me turn negative or bitter towards the person? Is the impact of the sin causing friction and division among us as the household of God? That's the first question. Now, secondly, is the trespass I see in the person becoming a sinful habit? Is the person more and more entangled, or hardened to the deceitfulness of this sin, and is it leading in him or her to more sins? Now thirdly, is the impact of this sin doing damage to the cause of God's kingdom? Does his or her sin hinder, for example, the work of evangelism of the church? Is the name of God brought into disrepute among the unbelievers or the outsiders? Those are the questions to ask.

Well, next, how does the Lord instruct us to deal with the trespassing brother or sister? The direction is clear: "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." So, before we involve any other person, we need to deal with him on a private level. And what a blessing for the trespasser, if this sin can remain a private matter between you and him. Friends, the world thrives on the gossip of the failures and the faults of others, but Jesus wants his people to thrive on truth and on holiness. And therefore, what is a private sin needs to remain private as long as possible. This not



only will be safeguard the name of the sinner, but also the name of God. We all know the damage to God's glory when the sins of his people are broadcast abroad. Keeping trespasses private is therefore God's way of minimizing the negative effects of his own people's sins. Now earlier, we already learned that to tell him his fault needs to be done in love, and in the spirit of meekness, considering that we all are what Paul confessed in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 10, "By the grace of God I am what I am."

So in conclusion, let's review what we learned. The Lord taught us that willful trespasses need to be dealt with locally. They are kind of like the hair cracks in the structural frame of an airplane. Neglecting them will lead to disaster. And that's why we are to be warned not to give Satan any advantage, as his main strategy is to divide and conquer. Thank you.

In our next study, we will finalize Matthew 18, verse 15, and tie it in with Jesus' instructions in Matthew 18, verses 21 to 35, as well as Luke 17, verses 1 to 5, and it will be good for you to read those passages ahead of time.