

## Matthew 18:15-17 & Going to the Source

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they 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 they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” - Jesus Christ, Mathew 18:15-17

The four-step approach from Matthew 18 is designed to prioritize reconciliation and privacy over public drama. According to the text, if a fellow believer sins against you, here is how you should handle it:

1. **The Private Conversation:** “Go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.” The goal is to resolve the issue quietly. If they listen, you’ve “won your brother over” and preserved the relationship without involving outsiders.
2. **The Small Group:** “If they will not listen, take one or two others along...” This isn't about ganging up; it's about having witnesses to ensure the conversation stays fair and grounded in facts. This follows the legal principle that “every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.”
3. **The Community:** “If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.” \* If private and small-group interventions fail, the wider community is brought in to encourage the person to change their ways. Generally speaking, this means the pastor, elders, or board.
4. **Setting Firm Boundaries:** If the person refuses even the community's guidance, Jesus says to “treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”\*

\*A Touch of Context: While this sounds harsh, remember how Jesus treated pagans and tax collectors—he didn't hate them, but he did recognize they were outside the community and in need of conversion. In a modern sense, it means setting a firm boundary and acknowledging that the fellowship has been broken.

### Key Principles at Play:

- Confidentiality: Don't gossip. Start small. Work towards truth.
- Direct conversation: Talk to the person, not about the person. Go to the source.
- Restoration: The goal isn't to be “right” or to punish, but to bring the person back into a healthy relationship.
- Accountability: We are responsible for how we treat one another within a community.