

Week 5 How Do I Treat My Relationships with Christians and Unbelievers without Getting Hurt?

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Can a Christian Say "No"?

Description

Even among Christians, we do not always get with the Bible says we should get out of our relationships. There are serious disagreements among Christians, and this isn't necessarily a bad thing. Have you ever met the Christian who shares way too much? Or maybe you are the type of Christian who likes to keep to yourself. We discuss Christian relationships and how we can have relationships with unbelievers.

Opening Prayer (10 Minutes)

Teaching and Discussion (70 Minutes)

The Sad Truth about Christian Relationships

It should never happen to us as believers in Jesus and those who study and put into practice His teachings. But it does. We get burned by spiritual family.

Whether it is personalities, differences of opinion, or people who think we are the antichrist, we can get burned by other Christians.

We have talked about reasons we should have differences with Christians and non-Christians, but it still happens. Perhaps it is because a person is not as disciplined, is the weaker brother, or clashes with you over other reasons, we need to know how to handle such relationships.

This session is about how to deal with those letdowns, knock down drag 'em out fights, and the underbelly of the Church.

Have you gotten burned by another Christian? What was that experience like? You do not have to share details, just general emotions and reactions.

Relationships with Christians

The Bible describes our relationships with other Christians. The letters of the New Testament are an especially helpful place to find out what a healthy Christian relationship looks like.

We have gone over many of them in this group. What we have not covered is how to deal with the relationships that should work a certain way but do not.

It is easy for us to get hurt in these relationships because we are often blindsided by fellow believers. TV shows teach us how to be dramatic and over-the-top.

People seek the compassion of others when they blow up publicly in our face. Of course, this goes against pictures like [Matthew 18:15-18](#) that teach us how to deal with our confrontations with one another.

We see examples of Christians having honest differences with one another. The wisdom there with Paul and Barnabas is to separate for a while.

We know they patched their relationship because Paul is asking for John Mark after this blowup. At some point in his ministry, he buried the hatchet with Barnabas.

Personality differences are more of a counseling issue. Sometimes time and distance can be our best friends. Have you ever known someone so well you needed a break?

When a Christian relationship does not work the way the Bible commands us to work with other Christians, we need a way to figure out how to deal with them.

Unhealthy Christian relationships need a solution. If we remain close to that person, we could continue to get hurt by them. As with forgiveness, they may not realize they are hurting us.

We can let them know that this relationship is not healthy. It is not biblical. But they may not see it that way or may react with a lot more drama than we expect when we tell them this.

How to Deal with Unhealthy Christian Relationships

Step 1: Address the Issue

Whatever the reason for your complaint or dispute, you will have to address the issue with a Christian you're having a problem with. This requires you to confront the person.

You should do this in a private setting. Do not do it in front of everyone. This is not a biblical practice.

Address the person with your concern. It could be a specific issue or a general one like a personality conflict, or a recurring behavior of that person that either offends you or causes you to have trouble with them.

Addressing the person one-on-one is following the conflict management strategy taught by Jesus in [Matthew 18:15-18](#). This is the first step of the process.

If you follow these steps and the person is unyielding or does not present any counter-arguments, you may move to addressing them in front of a mediator.

Step 2: Present Your Solution

It is not good relationship practice to only complain about an offense you have experienced by this person. You should think beforehand of possible solutions to the problem.

After addressing the issue, present your solution and listen carefully if the person has another solution or a better one.

Step 3: Try to Find Consensus

The solution must be acceptable to you and the other person. When you are thinking of a possible solution, remember to put that person's needs in your solution.

See if there is a counter-proposal by the other person that may work better. You and the other person must agree on the solution and must agree to actively pursue that solution so the problem does not arise again.

If none of the solutions work for both of you, this would be another opportunity to bring a mediator into the mix. The mediator may be able to put terms and practices into place that will satisfy both of you.

If you can still not reach consensus between you and the other person, consider other solutions, like terminating your contact with one another for a time.

If time and space heal the wounds, you can look to continue the relationship and perhaps put some boundaries in place.

Step 4: Resolve the Issue

Make your final decision on how you and the other person will proceed. If there is a separation time to reevaluate everything later, do that.

In most cases, two Christians who love Jesus and care about one another as fellow believers should be able to resolve the issue.

If this is not the case, agree on a duration of separation and then meeting again to discuss possible long-term solutions.

Step 5: Put It into Action

No matter what you and the other person have agreed to do, you must put the plan into action.

If you do not, the problem will persist. It will be even worse than it was before. You do not want that to happen, so you must agree on the terms and strictly follow them.

If the other person violates the terms, or if you do, a mediator will be required to resolve the issue. If you are the offender and not putting the plan into action yourself, it will be very embarrassing for you to admit this to the mediator.

Remember that Paul counsels us to live at peace with everyone so long as it depends on us ([Romans 12:18](#)).

How to Have and Maintain Healthy Christian Relationships

Healthy relationships begin with a healthy you. You must make the effort and do some “defensive driving” so you can rest assured you are not the problem.

If you are, you need to deal with the causes of your attitudes and behaviors before you can expect others to deal with theirs.

We’re all working toward healthy attitudes and behaviors. If everyone in the body of Christ is doing that, unhealthy things happening would be stopped sooner rather than later.

Of course, we do not always act the way we should as God's children and saved individuals. In such cases, address the person using the steps above.

You maintain healthy Christian relationships by good and positive communication, humility and genuineness, and realizing that the same Lord you have is the same Lord they have.

Don't let anything fester or for your anger to last beyond the day. Paul counsels us to not be angry past the evening ([Ephesians 4:26-27](#)), meaning that we resolve the situation quickly.

Address what needs to be addressed and don't neglect meeting together with other saints ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#)). We are spiritual family and if we don't like each other here, what will heaven be like?

How Much Sharing Is Too Much Sharing?

Occasionally you will find that person who talks your ear off every time they see you, seeks you out to talk your ear off even more, asks for more and more, or tells you their whole life story every time you see them.

If you can't think of anyone in your life that does that, you may be that person! I am joking of course, but it is possible.

Usually in our American culture, you do not find too many people that would give you so much information about themselves. They may not have a problem telling you about their family members or friends, though.

We typically have the other problem of people who should share more than they do. Even then, there should be a limit to what we share.

You must ask yourself, "Why am I telling someone that?" We must test our motives in whatever we share, and it should only be about us. Sharing about other people is gossip and it is forbidden by Scripture ([Romans 1:20](#); [2 Corinthians 12:20](#); [Ephesians 4:29](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:13](#)).

So, how much should you share? In a group setting, share as little as you must to give a general sense of the need or situation. Don't include people who go to the church.

In a one-on-one setting, you may feel free to expand the information you give. Do not include names because that would be gossip.

If you are discussing an issue you have with someone else and looking for a mediator, that might be the only reason you should mention names and give a brief description of the issue. Let them know that you are looking for their advice or help as a mediator or mentor/counselor.

The best advice for sharing too much or too little is to remember that there will be other opportunities for people to get to know you and for you to get to know them. You don't have to tell them everything up front.

After all, we don't like that in a class where we get fed so much information that we don't know what to do with any of it.

Your best principle or rule on sharing too much is to give what you must and then answer questions if there is further interest and if you can share more details under these guidelines.

Let us endeavor to not be "that person."

How to Find My Place in Christian Relationships

The best way to make friends is to be a friendly person. You will find people with the same likes and activities you enjoy doing. That's a good place to start. That way you already have some things in common besides being a Christian.

It also depends on what kind of Christian friends you want to make. There are different Christian relationships we will have within a community of faith.

- Discipling "weaker brothers and sisters"
- Being disciplined by mentors
- Relationship with pastors and elders

It's easy to connect with people through a Bible study or small group. You are learning the Bible and getting to know people. Depending on the size of your church, it could be easier (or harder) to find Christians you wish to get to know better.

Invite people to activities outside church settings to get to know them better. You could be a host in your home to them and grow in your friendships.

You could join teams and ministries in the church, such as the worship team, nursery workers, children's and youth workers, and whatever other ministries the church has that interest you.

The sky's the limit on how to find your place in the church and Christian relationships. Perhaps if you are creative you can think of other ways that would also help you find your place.

Relationships with Unbelievers

Every Christian should have Christian and non-Christian friends. You should always be looking for ways to let your light shine to those who don't know Christ. But this cannot be the only reason you make friends with unbelievers.

You must want to have genuine relationships with unbelievers with no strings attached. You cannot make friends by blasting them with your faith. Become a friend first, and if an opportunity to share Christ presents itself, you can step through that door.

Most unbelievers either do not care about your Christian faith or may be interested but don't know how to broach the subject. Be open to unbelievers but realize there are major differences between Christians and non-Christians.

1. **Different worldviews and perspectives.** Unbelievers do not have a Christian perspective on life. They may be focused on the same things people in the world are focused on: getting ahead socially or financially, enjoyment in this life for today, spirituality of a different sort than Christianity.
2. **Biblical illiteracy.** About the Bible or what is in it. They may if they have taken some religion classes somewhere but most are unconcerned with the Bible or what it teaches.
3. **Persecution.** It's possible even without realizing it that unbelievers will persecute Christians. They may make jokes about Christians, the Bible, or God and Jesus. They may want to go into answering a question only to smack you over the head with atheistic arguments.

There are other differences between Christians and unbelievers. This should color how you deal with unbelieving friends.

- Don't take persecution and insults personally. They probably don't know you are a Christian, or if they do, it may be just to poke fun. They might not mean much by it.
- Don't expect the same kindness and attention you give to the relationship from them.
- Don't expect the same level of fellowship you get from Christians.

- Take advantage of opportunities and open doors to share biblical wisdom if not Jesus.
- Receptivity to the gospel and biblical truth may not be easy to find. You live in the world that does not have Christ and they are subject to the world system ruled by Satan. He is a deceiver and has covered them in spiritual darkness. Don't try to share Christ until you make headway.

If they reject Jesus, continue to be their friend and do not bring the gospel up again unless they seem more receptive to it.

You must build your friendships with unbelievers on genuine respect and kindness.

You can let them know that Jesus is a big part of your life and bring Jesus into the picture in your relationship somewhere down the road.

The Importance of Not Being Your Own Stumbling Block

Some Christians have the tendency to become their own stumbling block. They make it harder for a person to ask about Jesus or hear about Him because of them.

It could be personality issues, over-emphasis on the Bible and God without building a relationship, rudeness about the unbeliever's interests and lifestyle, or a number of other factors.

Our goal is to not be that person they hate before they hear about Jesus. We can close the door by coming on too strong. We need to develop a relationship first.

Make your goal be getting to know the person and developing a good, friendly, and beneficial relationship. Genuinely care about the person, not just their soul.

Be like Jesus was to tax collectors and sinners. He was kind to them no matter how they treated Him. Sometimes you will lose a few battles, but you you can still win the war.

My Responsibilities As a Christian in This World

Here are a few responsibilities the Bible gives us as we are in this world but not of it. We are citizens of God's Kingdom, but we're still citizens of this world.

- **Government.** You are still responsible for paying taxes and submitting to the government of the nation you live in ([Matthew 22:21](#); [Mark 12:17](#); [Luke 20:25](#); [Matthew 17:24-27](#); [Romans 13:1-7](#)).
- **Opportunities.** Make the most of every opportunity to shine the light of the gospel and Jesus ([Galatians 6:10](#); [Ephesians 5:15-16](#); [Colossians 4:5](#)).
- **Stand up for Christ.** Despite persecution, you still have a responsibility to shine the light of Jesus and to stand up for Him and godly principles ([Matthew 5:10-12](#); [13-16](#)).
- **Partnerships.** The Bible counsels against partnering with unbelievers whether in business or marriage. Because you don't have the same views as they do, it would be hard to work with them ([1 Corinthians 15:33](#); [2 Corinthians 6:14-17](#); [Ephesians 5:7-8](#)).
- **Spiritual Warfare.** As a Christian, you must still fight spiritual battles either on your behalf or on behalf of of unbelievers ([2 Corinthians 10:3-5](#); [Ephesians 6:10-20](#)).

We have other responsibilities found in the pages of the New Testament, but these are a good starting point.

Application (10 Minutes)