

Matthew 7:1-5; James 4:1-3

Accountability & Discipline: It's Time To Get Real

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Hurricane Sally just hit the southeast—Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia. It toppled trees, flooded streets, and damaged houses. One news station reports, “More than 500,000 people have lost power.” Another estimates it will cause \$2-\$3 billion in damage.

But did you know that termites do approximately \$5 billion in damage to U.S. homes each year. Stephen Mansfield says, “Statistically termites do more damage in America than massive storms.” He adds, “Storms get the media. Termites quietly work away.” Apparently, “Termites damage approximately 600,000 homes in the U.S. each year.”

It's easy to see the damage a storm does. It's much harder to identify the work of termites. It's much easier to see someone else's sin. It's much harder to see my own. Their actions are like a storm. So obvious. So damaging. My actions are like termites, hard to see, invisible, but potentially much more destructive. Before we deal with the hurricane out there, we got to deal with the termites in here.

I need to get real with myself before I can get real with others.

I tried to become a Marine Corps officer when I was in college. During the vetting process I hid that I was getting allergy shots. They wouldn't have looked at me if I'd told them so I lied. It got to the point where I went down and took my medical tests, and when I finally went in to see the last doctor and sign all my paperwork, I confessed. I'd come to a point where I realized that if I couldn't lead myself, I couldn't lead others. The same is true for accountability and discipline. If we can't get real with ourselves first, we can't get real with others at all (*Resolving Everyday Conflict*). Jesus said it like this.

Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV)

3 Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Before we can ever help someone else with their sin, we need to recognize our own. It's not that I can't help them see their sin. I just need to see my own sin first. If I don't, it's like trying to give directions blindfolded. “Check yourself before you wreck yourself!” Back in the 1970s Nationwide had a break-check slogan encouraging their people to get their car's breaks checked out. Their sign said, “Check it before you wreck it.” Jesus said it first.

Matthew 7:1-2 (ESV)

“Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

In other words, judge yourself, before making a mess out of judging others. Elsewhere in the New Testament we're told to use discernment, hold others accountable, and even as a church body to judge others (Matt 18:15-20). Good and fair judgment is what church accountability and discipline are all about.

That's different than the kind of self-righteous judgment this passage is describing. We cannot be unfair hypocritical judges who call out the sin of others while not recognizing our own failings. We need to first confess our own sin, get right with the Lord, and then we can prepare to talk with another about their sin. Take your blinders off before you try and take someone else's off. King David prayed this Psalm as a way of asking God to deal with his heart.

Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!

If you're thinking about gently correcting someone else for their sins, I'd spend some time praying this Psalm and asking, "Lord, please open my eyes so I can see how I have contributed to this problem." (*Resolving Everyday Conflict* p. 57)¹. I see **two ways** I might contribute to the problem.

1) I might be too easily offended.

Maybe I was overly sensitive and easily offended. Have you ever heard this passage before? When's the most common time we hear it read?

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NIV)

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

We usually hear the "love passage" read at weddings but this is actually a text about church life. Church people are supposed to love each other patiently and we're not supposed to be easily offended or hold onto past sins. **Proverbs 19:11** says it's our "glory to overlook an offense." That doesn't mean we should sweep dirt under the rug. There will be things we need to address. But sometimes what others do is not really a sin, just different than how I would have done it. I might be too easily offended or...

2) I might be at fault.

I might need as much correction as the one caught in sin, especially if their sin is somehow connected to me and my relationship with them. When you point one finger at others, you point three at yourself.

James 4:1-3 (ESV)

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? 2 You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

This passage tells us that our passions cause problems. When my heart desires something, and I can't have it, I get angry and try to take it by force. Maybe it's not that obvious, but that's why it's so dangerous. We can disguise selfishness behind a veil of Christian virtue.

For example, when my son acts out, when he won't listen when I ask him to put his toys away or get's upset when I take away his favorite TV show, it's easy to get mad. Why won't he obey me?! Doesn't he know better?! But then I remember... he's two years old. And chances are other factors have contributed to the way he's acting. I might have kept him out too long, or not given him the nap he needed. Instead of parenting I might have handed him the iPad. The more I think about my role, the easier it is to see how I've contributed

to his acting out. That doesn't excuse his actions, but it does help me examine my part, and helps me determine if he really needs correction, or if we together need a reset.

Or how about when I come home and there is laundry everywhere, the kitchen floor is dirty, and there are dishes piled in the sink. It's easy to feel frustrated with my wife. "Doesn't she know how important a clean house is? It's so hard to come home to things being a mess. Why couldn't she have picked up a little bit more today?" But then it helps to take a step back and ask, "Why do I need that? Cleanliness is not next to godliness. What does my frustration tell me about my need for control?" Pretty soon I realize that because I can't control the world "out there" I want to come home and control the world "in here." It's not that clean floors aren't helpful; but our heart motivations might not be quite right.

I need to get real with myself before I can get real with others because I might be too easily offended or I might be at fault. But sometimes, after I've gone through this process of getting my heart right, and I still see someone else is caught in sin, I'm going to need to talk with them about it. But before we talk about what type of sin to correct, I really need to say this.

Getting real with others requires real relationship.

If you're going to talk with someone about their sin, you need to make sure that you have a relationship with them first. We can be totally right about someone's actions, but if they don't know we love them, then there's no way the correction is going to work (Prov 27:9). Correction, apart from relationship, falls short. Getting real about repentance requires real relationship. Getting real with others requires real relationship.

There will be times we need to get real with others.

The point of this sermon is not that we should never confront or correct someone we care about caught in sin, but that we should take the time to prayerfully examine our own hearts and discern what steps to take. We don't want to avoid confrontation when it's needed. I preached a lot of this in our Conflict & Peacemaking series, but it's worth reviewing. We can know we need to address a sin if it falls into any of these **four categories**, which comes from Ken Sande's books, *The Peace Maker* and *Resolving Everyday Conflict*:²

1. Their sin dishonors the name of Jesus.

Do the actions of a brother or sister in Christ, who publicly profess to be Christians, misrepresent Jesus? Do we identify as Christians to our friends and family, but then don't match that with our actions?

- When a Christian dad starts a fight with his kids referee in front of everyone because of a bad call.
- When a Christian mom argues with a store clerk over merchandise just to get a better deal.
- When a Christian business owner unfairly takes advantage of the tax system or their employees.
- When a Christian student talks about going to church then get's drunk or high with their roommates.

If the sin dishonor's Christ's reputation, it's probably worth going to them and saying, "You're a Christian. Do you see how this might confuse the non-Christians around you? You say you're saved from sin, but then you're still choosing sin." (Romans 6:15)

I want to be real careful here because I'm not talking about when a fellow Christian complains about another Christian's behavior. That can easily turn into self-righteousness, and the one complaining needs to be challenged for not talking directly with the one they were judging. However, if a Christian is doing

something that is obviously at odds with their identity in Christ, and it's not just a difference of preference, then we should talk with them about it. 1. We get real with them when their sin dishonors the name of Jesus.

2. Their sin damages your relationship with them.

I've had people come to me and say, "You did this thing, and I'm having a hard time letting it go. Did you know you hurt me?" I so appreciate! I don't want the root of bitterness ruining our relationship. The root of bitterness is when we don't deal with sin or conflict and become resentful.

Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)

15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

The root of bitterness is like termites. It can destroy homes and churches. 2. We get real with them when their sin has damaged our relationship with them.

3. Their sin is hurting others.

If you see their sin is hurting or has hurt others, and no one is saying anything, go and talk with them about it. How about the sin of rebellion and leading others to do the same?

Proverbs 10:17 (ESV)

Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life,
but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.

If someone is constantly rejecting correction, either by their boss, or parents, or a spiritual authority in their life, go talk with them about it. Or how about the sin of divisiveness? That can really hurt people.

Titus 3:10 (ESV)

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

Or how about other sins that hurt family members or friends? A mom that drinks too much? A dad that has fits of rage? A teenager that dates and dumps without any thought of others' feelings? #3 Sometimes we have to get real with others if their sin is hurting those around them.

4. Their sin is hurting them.

This is perhaps the one we think about the least because we live in a culture where we believe, "If it doesn't hurt anyone (but me), why does it matter?" or "It's my body, I can do whatever I want with it." Well, we're made in the image of God, our personhood, our bodies, and we can't do whatever we want (Gen 1:26-27). If their sin is hurting them, or their relationship with God, then we should talk with them about it (*The Peace Maker* p. 152). This is hard but rewarding.

James 5:19-20 (ESV)

19 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

When I've tried this, I can't say it has generally gone very well, usually because the person being negatively effected by their own sin doesn't see it that way. When that happens, there's not a whole lot we can do. We

can pray, pray real hard. And we can continue down the path of accountability and church discipline, which I'll talk about **next week**. We should get real with others about their sin when:

- (1) Their sin dishonors the name of Jesus.
- (2) Their sin damages your relationship with them.
- (3) Their sin is hurting others.
- (4) Their sin is hurting them.

I actually think it takes a great deal of love to do this. This isn't about proving I'm right and they're wrong. That's not loving or humble. But it is the kind of love that cares about a brother or sister in Christ being right with God, even at risk to their relationship. We risk ourselves when we gently tell others about their sin. That's like what Jesus did for us. He risked himself to rescue us.

Jesus got real with us to rescue us.

The Son of Man took on human flesh and came and had relationships among us. He humbled himself before the Father, who crushed him, so that you and I could not be crushed but forgiven and accepted. If you know Jesus, you don't need to be afraid to look inside yourself. Yes, you'll find ugly termites, sin that needs forgiveness, but as you turn to Jesus you'll find there's no condemnation, only love.

If we know Jesus, we don't need to be judgmental. If we deserve to die for our sins, and God spares us, then what can we possibly have against anyone else? Likewise, knowing that we're loved gives us the courage and strength to have those hard conversations. This isn't easy. It takes a lifetime to learn. But repentance and grace are possible because of what Jesus did for us.

Jesus got real with us. And now, it's our turn to get real with him. Tell him your sins. Let him gently correct you. He forgives you. He gives you eternal life. He rose from the grave and so will you. ***Jesus got real with us to rescue us.*** Let's pray.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to get real with yourself?
2. On a scale of 1-5 (1 low/5 high), how easily do you take offense? Explain your number.
3. How can our heart betray us? How can we address it?
4. When should we get real with others and talk with them about their sins?
5. What dishonors Jesus and what is petty criticism of another's behavior?

6. Have you ever had the root of bitterness spring up in you? What did you do?
7. Share a story of a time someone corrected you. How did it go?
8. How does the gospel give us courage to address sin in ourselves and others?

¹ Sande, Ken. *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (p. 57). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² Please review chapter 5, “G2: Get Real” of *Resolving Everyday Conflict* by Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson.