

The Christian and the Church: Living With the Saints

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not” (1 John 3:1).

“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16–17).

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

When you were born again, you became a child of God in the most literal sense. So much so, in fact, that you became an heir to the very throne of God. The fact that you are in line behind a host of others including Christ Himself does not change anything. You and your Lord are joint-heirs together. This is also true of every other saved person (all the saints of God). Although we may have the most humble of positions in this world, we will all be royalty in the world to come. This knowledge should dramatically change your approach to fellow Christians. When you have dealings with them, you are dealing not only with a brother or sister, but also with royalty. Therefore, we should all love one another as family and honor one another as royalty. The Bible is very clear on this subject.

I. Love One Another

“Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”
(Matthew 22:35–40).

According to the Lord Jesus Christ, the second greatest commandment is that we love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. To review just how much we love ourselves, refer to Lesson 15, pages 6–7. Our neighbors include both lost and saved people. However, the scriptures go one step further when it comes to other Christians. We are supposed to have an even greater love for our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

*John 13:34–35; John 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8;
1 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:9;
1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11–12*

A. Love the brethren

Our Lord and the apostles repeatedly exhort Christians to love one another in a special way throughout the New Testament. This is stressed over and over because sometimes it is very hard to love certain people. We nevertheless have our marching orders as the following verses will bear out.

1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 1 John 3:14–18

B. In honor preferring one another

*“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love;
in honour preferring one another”* (Romans 12:10).

Galatians 5:13–14

C. Esteem others better than ourselves

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3).

1 Thessalonians 5:12–13; Ephesians 4:2

D. Confess your faults one to another

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

Other Bible versions substitute “sins” for “faults” which leads to wrong doctrines such as the Roman Catholic tradition of confession to a priest. This is not the spirit of this passage. The idea is that we should be willing to admit our shortcomings to each other and not let them get in the way when it comes to effective service for the King. We should not insist on doing something that will bring us personal glory if we know someone else could do it better and is willing to do it.

E. Encourage one another

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Hebrews 10:24).

*Romans 11:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 4:2;
Hebrews 3:12; Jude 1:3*

II. The Saints Are Only Sinners Saved By Grace

If you haven't already, you will eventually find that Christians can let you down or hurt you just as badly as any unsaved person might. This may be in part because your expectations of them are so much higher than your expectations of the world. Nevertheless, in most cases, you must forgive them just as Christ forgave you.

A. Forgive minor offenses

Most of the problems that come between Christians are of a minor or petty nature. Scriptures indicate that we are to forgive one another over and over and not allow ourselves to grow weary of doing right (Romans 2:7; Galatians 6:9).

Matthew 18:21–22; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8

B. Biblical steps for dealing with major offenses

Sometimes Christians will do things that simply cannot be ignored. For such cases our Lord has given specific steps to try and resolve the issue.

1. Meet with the offender privately

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matthew 18:15).

2. If meeting privately fails, meet with witnesses

“But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established” (Matthew 18:16).

3. Finally, make it public before the Church

“And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican” (Matthew 18:17).

C. If you're still not satisfied. . . .

In certain civil matters, especially where the well-being of your family may be at stake, it may be proper to take another Christian to court. However, you must never take something to court that could be dealt with within the Church. Unfortunately, sometimes the only correct solution for a Christian may be forgive and forget a terrible wrong. A typical example might be a case where you believe another Christian has cheated you in a business deal. You must never give the world an opportunity to point to Christians and proclaim that they are no different than anybody else. One thing you must not do is turn to the world for justice in any matter that might bring reproach upon the Church or upon our Lord. 1 Corinthians 6:1–7 provides the most definitive treatise on this issue. Verse 7 concludes with the solution to most such disagreements.

“Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (1 Corinthians 6:7).

III. Denominational Differences

Another problem you will meet up with as a Christian will be found in the area of denominational differences. There are many doctrinal variations among Christians. Many of the major protestant denominations will at least conform to the majority of the doctrines found in lesson 4. One notable exception will be found in the sharp split over the issue of the security of the believer. This, however, cannot prevent a person from being saved or getting to heaven. It is therefore an acceptable variation in most cases.

A. Don't be drawn into useless arguments

“But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Timothy 2:23).

1. Arguments over doctrine

Many Christians love to argue over doctrine. Most of these people are not interested in the truth. They are only interested in proving themselves to be right to their own satisfaction. When you meet someone like that, it is OK to state your position and give proof verses, but it rarely serves any purpose to argue. Many of these people have made up their mind to believe what they want to believe regardless of the facts.

*Romans 14:1–5; 1 Corinthians 3:1–3; 2 Corinthians 12:20;
1 Timothy 6:3–5*

2. Arguments in front of lost people

This is a very serious mistake that many weak Christians make. Lost people will get the impression that doctrine is a gray area rather than an absolute. Remember, doctrinal division comes primarily from Christians who no longer believe that there even is an absolute. They have been deluded by incorrect wording in false versions of the Bible.

When these people want to argue with you over established, major doctrinal issues, simply inform them in a kindly manner that your Bible gives the absolute truth on the position and allows for no discussion. Then withdraw from the situation. If they want to argue over minor doctrinal issues, point out that the issue isn't worth arguing about and withdraw from the situation.

You must never allow yourself to be drawn into a loud or acrimonious discussion in front of unsaved people. This will either bring ridicule on the Church and our Savior from those that are watching, or it will convince those who may be wondering that there is nothing about Christianity that is any different from any other philosophy of life.

B. When circumstances of life put you together. . . .

It can be a great blessing to work or go to school together with a Christian of another denomination. Many people, in many denominations, truly love the Lord and His Kingdom work. These mature Christians can provide wonderful fellowship and encouragement. It is usually easy to find common grounds over which to fellowship and on which to concentrate. It is also much easier to respect another person's viewpoint on doctrinal differences if they have enough sense to not make an issue of it. It is important (and usually easy) to establish a strong relationship with such people without compromising your beliefs.

1. Work together to win others to Christ

It is often much easier to put doctrinal differences aside if you are channeling your energies into a common, important goal. The number one area of cooperation with members of other denominations should be to win others to our Lord. Other areas in which it is proper to cooperate with people of different denominations would be in various areas of community service. People in need are the responsibility of all Christians and our service to them often opens a door to present the gospel to them.

Matthew 22:39; Ephesians 2:10; 1 Timothy 6:17–18; Titus 3:8; James 2:17–18

2. Present a united front before the world

Some Christians get drawn into silly competitions to be the one to win someone who is ready to make a decision for Christ. This is a terrible mistake as it just may cause that person to turn away from the Lord. This is often a result of one Christian undermining the witness and testimony of the other. You must take the issue of who will ultimately win that person to the Lord in prayer and then wait on Him to make the final decision. The important thing, after all, is that the person in question becomes the recipient of eternal life, not that he or she becomes a notch in your Christian gunbelt.

Furthermore, it is a mistake to ever believe that anybody actually wins a person to Christ. We are only tools that GOD uses to bring others to Himself. Never forget the following teaching:

*“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building”
(1 Corinthians 3:6–9).*

According to these verses, each person will get credit for what he does to win that person to Christ, but neither will actually win him or her. Only God can do that. The person cannot be saved because of anything you did. Christ the Lord did everything that was necessary through His atoning death, burial, and resurrection. You will not lose any reward because you did not happen to be present at the time the final decision was made.

John 6:44; John 14:6

C. We are all part of the Church

While we may be of different denominations and attend different churches (with a small 'c'), all Christians are part of the same Church (with a capital 'C'). That is we are all part of the body of Christ.

Romans 12:4–5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Colossians 3:15
“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:3–6).

IV. Issues to Break Fellowship Over

There are certain issues which require you to consciously and purposely avoid any kind of fellowship with other Christians. If it is just a matter of differences of opinion, we have pointed out that arguing may not be a good idea. However, you can still have some form of fellowship with argumentative people. We are speaking here of people who are into open and known sins of a major nature.

A. The specifically stated issues over which to break fellowship

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (1 Corinthians 5:11).

The stated cases here are as follows:

1. Fornication
2. Covetousness
3. Idolatry
4. Railing (loud arguing or brawling)
5. Drunkenness
6. Extortion

B. Other issues to consider

This is probably not meant to be a complete listing as you can probably imagine other gross sins that should get the same treatment such as murder or grand theft. Verse 13 of that chapter gives instructions regarding Church discipline for such an individual.

*“But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person”
(1 Corinthians 5:13).*

C. When to resume fellowship

First Corinthians chapter 5 tells the story of a man who was involved in a gross sin that would qualify for the list above. He was involved in fornication with his father’s wife. Paul told the Corinthians in this letter to put that man out of the church.

In his next letter to that church (2 Corinthians 2:4–8), Paul instructed the membership to restore the man back to fellowship because he had been sufficiently punished by his lack of fellowship. Evidently the man had resolved his sin issue and gotten back into fellowship with the Lord. From this we can conclude that there is a time to forgive the person who sinned just as God has forgiven him. When he has recognized his loss and his need for close fellowship with the Lord and His Church, and has sought reconciliation with God, then he should be restored to fellowship with the Church.