

# Three-Kick Rule

Acts 2: 42-47 with Matthew 5:21-24 NIV

In my first message on Acts 2:42-47, I asked you to consider what the first church devoted themselves to: teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer as a combination of vertical and horizontal relationship – vertical being the relationship with God and horizontal with brothers and sisters.

I also asked you to read Matthew 18, where Jesus is asked two questions: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”

Jesus used the example of a little child to answer the first question. The second question may have been prompted by what Jesus said in verses 15-17:

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup> But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

Some manuscripts do not include ‘against you’ in verse 15. But this does not change what Jesus is teaching: go reconcile.

In my second message, I addressed the casual and even rebellious attitude some professed Christians have in their devotion to a local body of believers.

This morning, I want to take you back to a mountainside near Capernaum, to where a crowd has gathered around to hear Jesus. I will let one of the listeners tell you his story – a story that could have happened.

“I had the honor of hearing the Messiah give an amazing message on the side of a mountain last year near my hometown of Capernaum. I was very moved by His words and at the same time was troubled by what He taught. Actually that’s what a sermon should do in our lives – it should comfort and convict us. I liked how he gave it to the hypocrites, but when Jesus described how being angry with someone is the same as an act of violence against them, I was troubled.

He said, “‘You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ <sup>22</sup> But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” (Matthew 5:21-22)

And, if this wasn’t enough, Jesus added these words: “Therefore, if you are offering

your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24) I immediately thought of some people who are mad at me but then I just shook it off. I mean, if they’re mad, it’s their problem, right? Well, not really. Let me tell you what happened.

It was expected that men would make the journey to Jerusalem three different times a year. I took a trip a short while ago so I could be there on the Day of Atonement. This was not easy to do since I live up north in Capernaum and the capital is down south.

This trip took several days but I was pretty pumped to go worship, especially since my heart was so full after hearing Jesus preach. I was hoping that I might run into Him again.

Other years I just purchased a sacrifice outside the Temple but this time I brought a lamb with me. I really wanted to offer my best to the Lord. Jerusalem was very congested when I arrived and I knew I had a long wait in front of me before I could enter the Temple with my offering. After walking for three long days, I was fine with standing in line because it gave me a chance to rest and to prepare myself for worship.

I've heard that in your culture some people don't bring anything to church with them. I don't really get this because we were expected to bring something of value as a way to show how much we value God. Listen to what God says in Exodus 25:2: **"Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give."** (Exodus 25:2) May I encourage you to come with something to offer? You don't have to bring a lamb but God is pleased when His people give their very best. This is not a burden but actually a blessing.

The words of Psalm 66:13-15 were ringing in my ears as I eagerly anticipated approaching the Almighty: **"I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you -- vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble. I will sacrifice fat animals to you and an offering of rams; I will offer bulls and goats."** (Psalm 66:13-15)

Finally, after waiting so long, it was my turn to worship! Just as I'm about to offer my little lamb to the priest, for some reason, my former friend Levi comes to mind. I try to shake it off but I can't do it. Why is this coming up now? I'm ready to make my offering! The people behind me are getting impatient and some are beginning to sigh. The priest is looking at me with a quizzical look. I take another step forward but I can't seem to take another one. Then the words of Jesus come back to me and I know what I'm supposed to do and yet I begin to bargain with God.

Have you ever done that? "God, why can't I just offer my sacrifice now since I'm here and I'll make it right with Levi when I get back home? Do I really have to do this? I don't have a problem with him; he's got a problem with me. He should be the one to seek me out since he has the grudge."

Realizing that this is my opportunity to live out the words of my Lord, I picked up my lamb and put it on layaway, asking the priest to hold it until I returned. I then turned around, made my way out of the Temple, going against the flow of people coming to worship, and headed back on the road to Capernaum. Because I loved the Lord so much I wanted to do what He said, irregardless of the cost and the inconvenience. As I made my way back home, I remembered that Levi must really have been upset with me because he had basically unplugged from corporate worship and had stopped fellowshiping with others.

When I arrived three days later, I owned up for what I had done and asked for forgiveness. By granting me grace, he set both of us free and we then traveled together to the Temple where I was able to come and offer my gift, and he his. As we walked together we worshipped together, quoting Psalm 42:4: **"These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng."** (Psalm 42:4)

The man in the story did what he heard Jesus teach, reconciled with his brother, and

the relationship was healed. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work out that way.

After the following illustration, I'm going let another person tell you her story.

A man from Illinois decided to travel to Wisconsin to go duck hunting. He shot and dropped a bird, but it fell into a farmer's field on the other side of the fence. As the flatlander climbed over the fence, a dairy farmer drove up on his tractor and asked what was going on. The hunter said, "I shot a duck and I'm retrieving it." The old farmer replied, "This is my property and you're not coming over here!"

Well, this made the hunter mad. So he said, "If you don't let me come over the fence I'll call my Chicago lawyer and I'll sue you." The farmer smiled and said, "Apparently you don't know how we do things up here. We settle disagreements with the Wisconsin three-kick rule. I'll kick you three times, and then you kick me three times, and so on, back and forth, until someone gives up."

The hunter liked this challenge because he thought he could easily take the old farmer. The Wisconsin Badger climbed down from the tractor and planted the steel toe of his heavy work boot into the man's shin. The man fell to his knees. His second kick went directly to his stomach, knocking the wind out of him. The farmer then landed his third kick to the side of the hunter's head. The disoriented man slowly got up and said, "Okay, you old codger, now it's my turn!" To which the farmer responded, "Nah, I give up. You can have the duck."

Now for our second story of reconciliation:

A woman was hired to join our team. I knew at the interview that her personality could possibly drive me nuts. I was right; she was very emotional, moody, had no sense of personal space, hyper, was passive-aggressive and controlling in a sneaky way...I had very little patience for her and treated her rudely for many years. If she asked if I wanted to go out for dinner, I said no. Did I want to work together on a project? No. Did I want to get our kids together for a play date? No. I participated in social events with other staff and never included her. Why did I care if her feelings were hurt? She drove me crazy and she deserved to suffer a bit.

As I grew in my faith, and learned what the true meaning of loving one another meant, I started to second guess how I had been treating her. I tried to befriend her a bit, but she had already moved on to new friends on staff, and she made sure to organize many events with her new friends, and to not include me. I tried complimenting her. Didn't work. I invited her to lunch. She said no. I gave her chocolate. It didn't matter.

This sat heavy on my heart for years and years. I knew it was time to confess to her what I had done and to ask her for her forgiveness. I prayed and asked for courage for three years!

Finally, late in the summer of this year, a peace came over me and I knew it was time. I called her and asked to meet her...so

I could share what was on my heart. She agreed. We met and I apologized for everything I had done and asked if she could ever trust me again and if she could forgive me.

That's when she pulled out the 'knife'!! She went through a laundry list of reasons why I am a bad person, how I have no social skills, and how she is afraid to be in the same room with me. She told me she had no respect for me as a person and would never consider doing anything social with me...EVER. I asked her again if she would forgive me. She said nothing.

When I walked out...that night, I felt like I had been punched in the gut. She had kicked me when I was down. I felt worthless and alone. However, despite all of these feelings, I knew I had done the right thing, and although I wept for two days after we talked, I felt a burden had been lifted. I did what I needed to do. I said my apologies with love, and if I had to do it over again, I would change nothing.

How is it now? She says hello to me when she wants to. She continues to hold a grudge and she clearly doesn't like me. It bothers me and I wish it would go away, but when I'm silent and I reflect, that same peace comes to me again. I did what God wanted me to do, and although I can't change her feelings, I can change how I treat the next person who comes into my life who is emotional, moody, and hyper. Actually, many people have come into my life that drives me nuts. I am patient, kind, and try to speak to them with love. When I simply can't take them anymore, I walk

away in silence, knowing that I don't ever again want to hurt anyone like I hurt her.

Two situations that needed reconciled. Both did what they knew Jesus wanted them to do. But that is where the similarities end. The two in the first story reconciled and worshiped together. The two in the second story did not reconcile. However, the one who made the effort in the second story, even though she felt like she had been punched in the gut and kicked when she was down, received peace with God.

You may have to deal with individuals who would rather apply the Wisconsin three-kick rule than reconcile.

Here is the passage again-notice Jesus' priority: ... **if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.**" (Matthew 5:23-24)

Leave the gift; go; reconcile; then come.

The gift, what ever it may be, is not as important to God as your relationship with your brother or sister- your horizontal relationship. Jesus said that the priority is to be reconciled.

**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.** (Matthew 5:9)

Peacemaking can be a messy business. We are not guaranteed positive outcomes. But, we are held accountable for our reconciliation responsibility.

The believers devoted themselves to the Lord and to each other. And the church grew – 5,000 plus. As the numbers grew, they were not without their problems, as with any group, large or small.

These words from Romans 12:18 are both convicting and comforting: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18) We must make sure we’ve done everything that depends on us to do and yet we cannot control how the other person may respond. Have you done everything you can do to be at peace; to reconcile? Maybe there’s still something that you need to do.