

# Speaking to the soul



## Repairing relationships

**[Jesus said:] “If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won’t accept the church’s decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.” Matthew 18:17**

This might sound rather harsh, but Jesus has just given the best possible advice for how to handle the situation where someone has done you wrong. First, speak to them one to

one, and if that fails, take one or two people with you. The aim is to achieve restoration as quickly as possible. If that doesn't work, the matter needs to go to the Church, and if the person still refuses to listen, Jesus says that they should be treated like a complete outsider. As we hear these strong words, we need to remember that Jesus, of all people, was always reaching out in love to pagans and corrupt tax collectors, so he wasn't saying they were beyond hope. However, there may sadly come a time when a dispute cannot be resolved and you need to move on.

What I love about this teaching is that it shows that Jesus deeply understood normal human life. He understood that things can sometimes go wrong, even among his followers. Because he was perfect and the Son of God, you might have thought that that he wouldn't understand the rough and tumble of normal life. But he did! We should always give the best of our energies to living at peace with people and seeking to bring restoration wherever possible. Sadly, there are some occasions when we can do no more and need to move on. This was clearly the case with Paul and Barnabas. They had a deep disagreement over whether to take John Mark with them on their second missionary journey and they resolved the matter by parting company (see Acts 15:36-41). I always read that passage with sadness but it seems to have been the right decision for everyone concerned.

## **QUESTION**

Have you ever had to move on from a situation that couldn't be resolved? What did you learn from the experience?

## **PRAYER**

Loving God, thank you that you are with me as I face up to difficult situations and that your Spirit gives me the strength and wisdom that I need. Amen

*Photograph - near Slemish, County Antrim*

