



Shake Hands

Selected Articles
On
Reconciliation

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First Edition : May 2018

No. of Copies : 5000

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Available in Tamil also.

Acknowledgements

Page Setting : Bercy Jason

Cover Design : Saroj

Proof Reading : Thomas Kanthaiah, Jerisha Melbin

Printed by : SRM Printers, Vellore,
TamilNadu.

Dedicated to the
people of *God* who
would take the first
step of reconciliation

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Foreword

Blessing Youth Mission declared the year 2017 as the “Year of Reconciliation.” It was a time when God revealed several new thoughts regarding reconciliation to the lay leaders and missionaries of the Mission. When we started to meditate on this subject, we felt that God led us more in the direction of being reconciled with people. Throughout the same year we could publish many articles in the ‘Blessing’ magazine in the same year. The annual camp, “Blesso” was based on this theme. Hundreds testified that the truths were practical and that they could apply them in their own context of family and ministry.

Since God revealed different aspects of the truth with regard to being reconciled with people, we thought it is better to publish a book compiling the articles on this subject. These are articles with rich spiritual content and practical guidelines. I encourage you to use this content in your Bible Study Groups and Churches so that the children of God would be edified.

We pray that this book will minister to you in a special way. God bless you.

A. Lionel
General Overseer
Blessing Youth Mission

Introduction

It is easier to preach than to practice. Preaching about reconciliation is easy, but when our colleague lashes out against us, it becomes hard to forget. When our spouse shouts at us, we keep a record. When we feel the pangs of betrayal, back-biting, insult, it becomes even more difficult to accept and forgive. The Scripture encourages us to always look to Jesus who faced loads of hostility from men.

Heb 12:3 - "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."

In this spiritual journey of ours, we would face a lot of hatred, jealousy and betrayal. But we need to look to Jesus. He always forgave people. He always remembered that men were nothing but dust and ashes. He never harboured any bitterness. He was filled with the love of the Father. Oh! what a glory it is to be filled with the ever-forgiving love of the Father!

It is quite normal and natural to have misunderstanding within our families, friends and colleagues. But what is more important is how we get along with them after the spat. Are we withdrawing from them? Are we afraid to love them again? Are we afraid to forgive them again? As we turn on the pages, let us meditate on the various truths of reconciling with people.

CHAPTER ONE

First, Be Reconciled!

A. Lionel

The word reconciliation means that we have an attitude in living at peace with everyone. In the Bible we see that reconciliation is a two dimensional truth. The first is that we should be reconciled to God and the second truth is that we live in peace with all men. Both these aspects are equally important and cannot be ignored. Apostle Paul beautifully brings out how God reconciled us to Him.

Rom 5:10 - *“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”*

In this article, I want to focus on the second aspect of reconciliation i.e., being reconciled with people.

Being Reconciled With People

When we are reconciled with God, our personal life is set right with God. In a similar way, when we reconcile ourselves with people, our life is set right before everyone. The Bible gives equal importance to these two truths.

When Jesus walked on this earth, a teacher of law questioned Jesus regarding the greatest commandment in the Bible.

Note the reply that Jesus gives:

Mat 22:37- 40 *And he said to him, “You shall love the*

Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

This truth was later reinforced by Apostle John in his epistle.

1Jn 4:20, 21 - “If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

We find this truth of living at peace with brothers and sisters is expressed all through the Scriptures (Heb 12:14, 1 Cor 7:15b, Mat 5:9). Our God is not the source of division but of peace. So living at peace with people is a very important aspect of Christian living. I want to bring out six facets of Reconciliation and why they are so significant to us.

1. Reconciliation is God’s Priority

*Mat 5:23,24 - “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. **First** be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

Jesus taught that reconciliation with people should be done immediately. It should not be postponed. He considered it to be a serious requirement for a right worship. In the Old Testament times, altar was a place on which sacrifices were made. It is a place where we meet God. It is the presence of God. When we approach the altar and remember any wrong that we did to our brother or sister, we need to leave the offering right

there and be reconciled first. God here prioritizes our relationship with people as a precondition for worship. He says, "**First** be reconciled..."

Further, if your brother or sister has sinned against you, note what Jesus taught:

Mat 18:15 - *"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."*

Jesus taught that we need to do something about the brother who has sinned against us. We should gently point out the fault. We should not take it to heart. Many of us fail in this area miserably. We keep a lot of things in our heart and develop bitter feelings toward others.

Again, when someone accuses us of some wrong doing and goes to the court, note what Jesus admonishes:

Mat 5:25 - *"Come to terms **quickly with your accuser** while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison."*

Here again we find Jesus urging for action. Hence reconciliation is an act that should be done immediately.

Many of us have problems in relationships with others because of the careless words that we speak.

Mat 5:22 - *"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."*

Jesus here warned of three kinds of punishments – judgment, council and hell-fire. All these three judgments were due to the wrong words that were spoken toward others. If we have hurt others by our words, let us first be reconciled with them. If we want a closer walk with God and if we want our offerings to

be accepted in His sight, we need to, first be reconciled with people.

2.Reconciliation Brings Joy and Revival

We pray for revival and also hear many sermons about revival. Truly, we need revival in our personal lives, families and in our Fellowships and Churches. But revival seems to elude us. One of the reasons we don't see the mighty move of the Spirit is that we are still not right with people. We may argue that we are right before God, but we have not fulfilled our responsibility toward people.

We go to Church and pray for revival. But we do not want to see one another face-to-face. We have so much against so many people but still pray for revival. How can we expect revival when our life is not right with people? We all know the parable of the lost son. Note how he prayed:

Luke 15:21-24 - *“And the son said to him, ‘Father, **I have sinned** against heaven and **before you**. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”*

The prodigal son confessed that he not only sinned against God but also his father. Many a time we fail to see this truth. We think our sins affect only God. But our sins are not only against God but also against people. We cannot merely say that we have confessed all our sins to God. We should also set right the things before people. When the prodigal son returned to his father there was joy in the household (Lk 15:23). This is true revival. And the true revival brings joy!

“Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?” (Ps 85:6)

Today we worship God without joy. There is no joy in our families and Fellowships because we do not enjoy good and peaceful relationships with one another. ***Let us take the first step.*** Let us forget who we are and set aside our egos and bring peace to our families and Fellowships.

When we become right with God and also with people, God sends revival. On the day of Pentecost the people were with one mind and one heart (Acts 2:1). There was neither fighting nor jealousy. They were with one mind. And God the Holy Spirit was poured out on them abundantly.

Col 3:15 - “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

3) Reconciliation Makes Our Prayers Effective

Note the following verses:

Jam 5:16 “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

Mat 6:14 -15 - “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Eph 4:32 - “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

When we do not forgive the wrong doings of the people, God also will not forgive our sins. Hence we should not have anyone in our lives whom we have not yet forgiven. When we do not forgive a person, it develops bitterness in our hearts. The root of bitterness

slowly grows and starts to spread out into other areas of life. There is a possibility that we may fail to obtain grace from the Lord. How tragic and dangerous this state is! This is what we read in Hebrews 12:15, *“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.”*

Bitterness not only defiles oneself but also affects others. It affects our families and Fellowships. How many of our Fellowships and families suffer because of the bitterness of one person? Let us learn to forgive, so that our prayers will not be hindered.

4) Reconciliation Builds Relationships

Good relationships within the family is very important. Today we find many infightings within families - husband and wife; parents and children and among the in-laws. The Bible has a word for everyone – wives, husbands, children, servants and masters.

For Wives

Col 3:18 - *“Wives, **submit** to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”*

1Pe 3:1 - *“Likewise, wives, be **subject** to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.”*

For Husbands

Col 3:19 - *“Husbands, **love** your wives, and do not be harsh with them.”*

Eph 5:28,29 - *“In the same way husbands should **love** their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church.”*

In many instances the husband and wife live in the same house but do not talk to each other. Let us take steps to reconcile with each other. Let us humble ourselves and take the first step. Don't let your ego separate your family.

For Children

Col 3:20 - *“Children, **obey** your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”*

We find young people complaining about their parents and, similarly parents complaining about their children. Today children are not in a position to obey their parents. And the relationships are broken. Many children don't like their parents. They consider their parents to be their enemies. But the Bible encourages the children to obey their parents. The Bible has a word for the parents as well.

For Parents

Col 3:21 - *“Fathers, **do not provoke** your children, lest they become discouraged.”*

Parents should not always pester their children. Many parents act like spies. And many others compare their children with other children. In doing so they increase the burden on their children. Parents should try to understand the situation of the children and spend quality time with them. Only then relationships within a family will prosper. Jesus has warned that a house divided in itself will not stand.

For Servants

Col 3:22 - *“Bond servants, **obey** in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.”*

Wherever we are working and whatever business we do, we need to obey the earthly masters whom God has kept above us. We need to respect them and serve with sincerity. If we had been unfaithful to our master and have stolen anything from them, we must repay them back. Sometimes, people take things from the office and bring them home. We need to replace them. This is what Zacchaeus did. He said that he would repay four fold to people he had wronged. This is reconciliation.

For Masters

Col 4:1 - *“Masters, treat your bond servants **justly and fairly**, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”*

In a similar manner, masters or owners have to behave justly and fairly knowing that they have a Great Master in Heaven. Are we treating our servants like beggars? Or are we treating them with respect?

5) Reconciliation Qualifies Us For Ministry

When our relationships are right with one another, our testimony to the world would be strong. On the other hand, if we do not have the right relationship with one another, we would bring dishonor to the Lord’s Name. Note what Jesus said,

John 13:35 - *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

We read about love in First Corinthians 13th chapter elaborately. When we love one another with this kind of love, the world will know that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ. Once God sent a revival to a particular place. Because of this revival, many came to the Lord. When the unbelievers saw the transformed lives of the believers - the way they took care of the elderly, the way they behaved and talked,

the unbelievers themselves came to the Lord in large numbers. The loving fellowship among Christians drew the people to Christ like a magnet.

Apostle Paul writes about the qualifications for Christian ministers in 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7. He gives an elaborate list in which the relationship with people and good testimony play a vital part. Many of our ministers do not show these kind of fruits. We get angry easily and pick up a fight suddenly. All these fleshly manifestations will disqualify us from the ministry. But on the other hand, when we reconcile with people whom we have hurt by our actions, our ministry will be fruitful. It is no wonder, today, we do not experience the New Testament kind of revival in our Fellowships and Churches. We have become so critical of others. We are so careful in pointing out the faults of others. But we fail to see our own faults. We ourselves have a plank in our eyes, but we are concerned about the speck in our brother's eyes.

Note what the Bible says:

Rom 14:10 - *"Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God."*

6) Reconciliation Prepares Us For The Lord's Second Coming

Act 24:14-16 *"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. So I always take pains to have a **clear conscience toward both God and man.**"*

Here we find apostle Paul testifying that he had

taken pains to keep his conscience clear before God as well as men. We are living in the last days. The Lord is going to come very soon. We need to take part in the first resurrection. We cannot lead a lethargic lifestyle. We need to examine ourselves every day and be reconciled with people now and then.

1Thes 4:16-17 - "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord."

We do not know what would happen tomorrow. If we had hurt anyone, if we had angered anyone, we need to be reconciled to them immediately, today itself. Let us prepare ourselves for the Lord's Second Coming. He may come at any time. If the Lord would come today, will He find our conscience clear toward people?

Hence, let us be reconciled first.

CHAPTER TWO

Break up or Make up?

Dr. Mrs. Lilian Stanley

“I am sorry,” is probably the hardest sentence to pronounce. To get reconciled with God is very easy because we don’t see God and we know He is too loving not to forgive us. But reconciliation with another person churns our stomach because he is not God, he is a human being with human nature.

Jesus taught us that if we come to church and suddenly remember a grudge that a friend has against us, we must leave our offering right there at the altar, leave immediately, get right with the friend and then, and only then come and offer to God whatever we had brought for Him.

In other words, Jesus said that our relationship with man should come first before we ever try to get closer to God. This is exactly what the apostle John taught us too: *“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (1Jn 4:20-21). There is no glossing over the truth.

If there were two people in the world for whom it was impossible to love one another, it was the Gentiles and the Jews. But the Bible says, Christ made them shake hands. It was not a fake reconciliation but a

genuine oneness. Let's see a passage from the Bible that highlights the efforts taken by Christ to bring about these two parties, widely separated by centuries of enmity, to embrace one another.

"For He Himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in Himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit," (Eph 2:14-18).

There are many lessons for us in this passage. When two people are not able to make up, Christ is hurt at the lack of peace because He Himself is our peace. When we stubbornly refuse reconciliation we are wounding Him. He is Jehovah-Shalom, the God of peace (Jdg 6:24). *"Seek peace and pursue it,"* says the Bible (Psa 34:14).

When the Prince of peace was born on earth, peace on earth was proclaimed (Isa 9:6; Lk 2:14). But today we hardly see peace anywhere on earth. It is not because God has failed but because man has failed to play his role. There is no peace between countries; countries are torn apart by civil wars; there is hatred between States in India; community clashes are an everyday affair; the number of estranged couples has reached sky-rocketing proportions. In other words, man hates man. Sadly, the same state exists among believers too.

If both the parties are peace lovers, reconciliation becomes easy. Even if one party is not for it, then it

becomes difficult. *"I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war,"* laments David (Psa 120:7). Neither the Jews nor the Gentiles desired peace. So it seemed they were eternally at war with each other. Christ did not give up. What did He do? He came and preached peace to you who were far away (Gentiles) and peace to those who were near (Jews). He wanted so much to bring them together that He spoke peace to both of them individually.

If you are not at peace with someone, consider this: The Christ who spoke to them that day speaks to you today through His words: *"Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other"* (Mk 9:50). If the salt loses its saltiness, it is good for nothing (Mt 5:13). Are you good for nothing or a salty person? You be your judge. If you are the salt of the earth, if you are a believer, honour the words of Christ, your Master, whom you worship.

Heavenly wisdom is peace loving but a saint who ignores the peace that God promises, returns to his folly (Js 3:17,18; Psa 85:8). The author of Hebrews admonishes us to *"make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord,"* (Heb 12:14). Work at getting along with each other and with God. Otherwise you will never ever get even a glimpse of God.

We take the matter of reconciliation too lightly. We must make **every effort** to get right with the one whom we have wronged or who has wronged us (Rom 14:19). The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. A couple of abortive attempts doesn't mean you should close the case. Try again. Be mature enough to accept other people's immaturity.

Lack of peace may be eating away our family. We may have dinners, festivals and guests with much water flowing under the bridge. Give up your ego and go to your spouse or child to make peace. Are you in talking terms with your siblings? If not, it may be a good place to start. Like a gale of pure air driving out stagnant clouds of pollution, peace will replace bitterness (Prov 17:1). God has called us to peace (1 Cor 7:15).

You cannot settle a matter peacefully if there is some fault on either side. First rectify that matter on your part, apologize, and then extend your hand for a shake. *“Righteousness and peace kiss each other”* (Psa 85:10). Where we expect peace there should be righteousness. David was more than willing for reconciliation. Though Saul repented now and then, his attitude remained the same, making reconciliation impossible. It should not be a surface peace but a heart to heart settlement. If you lead a God-pleasing life, even your enemies will live in peace with you (Prov 16:7). If the fruit of the Spirit is peace, should we, who call ourselves Spirit-filled believers, fold our hands behind our backs and refuse to shake hands?

Christ made the two as one. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, only Christians. If the two can forget their differences and become one, is it impossible for us to give up whatever we need to give up and hold hands? When Christ has shattered the hostility between the Gentile and the Jew, is it a big thing for Him to abolish your enmity? Submit whatever hostility is there between you two and ask Him to burn it up. Cooperate with God and take the initiative to break the impasse. Let not your false ego make you dither. Let not fear hold you down. Perfect love casts out fear. If you go, the Lord

will come with you and make everything easy for you as He did for Esau and Jacob. This is my experience.

This peace-making was done by Christ through the cross in His flesh. It was not a cake-walk for Him. He suffered, shed His blood, hung in shame and agony, giving His back to be ploughed, whipped, spat upon, tortured, nailed alive to the cross. Today we will not even do it to an animal. But Christ bore the pain and ignominy to bring you together. Imagine the heart-breaking scenario of the cross.

If you have a derailed relationship, that means you are disrespecting the passions of Christ, counting it as nothing. All the sufferings He went through to bring about peace are made naught by your nonchalance. Whatever may be the barrier, ask God to break it down. He who broke down the middle wall of partition will easily remove your barricade too. Hate is a useless battle; it has to end sometime.

The purpose of Jesus was to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by forgiving their sins. When both were sinners then they became equals. Only in one place we find the Jews and Samaritans living together in peace—when they became lepers (Lk 17:12-18). Yet, on the cross, by His sufferings, He brought the archenemies together that they may have access to the Father.

Reconciliation opens the door for you to have access to the Father. The door is locked otherwise. The key is in your hand!

The greatest reconciliation that took place in the history of the planet earth is God reconciling Himself to mankind. We hurt God our Father disastrously by our sins against Him. God ought to have destroyed us. But He sent Jesus Christ to this wicked world to live among

dirty sinners and finally sacrificed Him on the cruel cross, thus making peace. He, on His part did everything to get reconciled to us. How much more we ought to get reconciled to one another! Is your offender worse than the sinner who hurt God? Are you holier than God not to take a step towards reconciliation? Is your situation worse than that, that happened between God and man? If God condescended to make up with man, it is only stubbornness and stiff-neckedness, if we do not take steps to embrace our enemy. *"...God who reconciled us to Himself through Christ... not counting men's sins against them"* (2 Cor 5:18,19).

When you hold a grudge against another, remember, you are as much a sinner as the other. We all were lepers before God. There is no clean leper and unclean leper. All of us are washed by the blood of the Lamb. Then why consider the other person less than you? He/she is your brother/sister. Go to them and iron out your differences. A careless word or action can ruin a relationship. If that happens we should immediately make amends and apologise, else it may haunt us for life.

Forgiveness is not passive; genuine forgiveness is a positive act requiring enormous spiritual strength. Reconciliation is a hop, skip and jump away from where you are sitting. Get up and go to your computer and send an email or write a letter. Easier still is to take your mobile and call the concerned and give him a big surprise. Better still, visit him in person, look into his eyes, hold his hands and say, "I am sorry." Bring yourself to say that most difficult sentence. You will discover beneath the gruff exterior of your enemy, one of the warmest human beings. If he charges you, do not defend yourself. Take the blame on your chin. Keep on apologizing with love in your eyes. Avoid justifying your

behaviour. Then you will find the other person melting down, creating a win-win situation. Your relationship will be back on solid ground. Even if the other person is stubborn, you have done your part and peace will flood your soul. Play your part and leave the result in God's hand. I guarantee that your apology will have a profound effect on him.

Don't allow the cold war to get even chillier. You two may not gel seamlessly but you would enjoy the peace of a genuine handshake. More than anything, the purpose for which Christ hung on the cross will be served. Let not the devil take the victory. Defeat the devil and may Christ be glorified. Your heart will feel as light as the clouds.

What happens when we make up instead of break up? There emerges a new man called Christian. The Gentile and the Jew are no more. This is what the world wants to see—Christians! Christ-like beings, loving and forgiving and one in spirit. *“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another,”* (Jn 13:34,35). If Joseph, the Governor of Egypt could stoop down to embrace his wicked, tribal brothers, who are we to say, “I cannot,”?

There was a poor man who had two sheep. His neighbour was a rich business man. Whenever the poor man's sheep littered, the rich man's two terriers would jump over the fence and tear the kids to pieces. The poor man would weep at the gory sight. He would request the rich man to keep his dogs tied, but his request always fell on deaf ears. When the pastor visited the poor man, he advised him to present the next yield to the rich man and the poor man did just that. The rich man's two children loved the two lambs dearly and told their father to keep

the dogs tethered. Now the problem was solved and the two families were reconciled.

This is what God did to us. We were wicked sinners hurting Him; but He gave us gifts and reconciled us to Himself (Psa 68:18). Should we not do it to others?

“You can tell what a man’s relationship with God is by looking at his relationship with other people. If a man is at variance with his fellow man and if he is quarrelsome, competitive, argumentative, trouble-making creature, he may be a diligent church attender, he may even be a church office-bearer, but he’s not a man of God. If a man is distant from his fellow man, it is a good proof that he is distant from God. If he is divided from his fellow man, he is divided from God.”

— William Barclay, Bible commentator.

Please, let us not break up; let us make up!

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CHAPTER THREE

TIT FOR TAT!

Mr. John Thomas, Retired Missionary, Vizianagram

When I help somebody, I expect a “Thank you” from that person. Is it wrong? When he or she does not reciprocate with a word of thanks, I get upset. Is that right? As I grew in the Lord, I learnt that I need not expect thanks. When I receive bad for the good, how do I respond? This is where the life and teachings of Jesus Christ come alive to me as an example to follow (Mat 5:44). Apostle Paul taught the same (Rom 12:21).

“He(Jesus) came for His own and they did not receive Him” (Jn 1:11). People who received from Him teaching, healing, miracle, food etc., not only were ungrateful but they outrightly rejected Him. But Jesus gave His life for those who forsook, those who denied, those who betrayed, and those who rejected Him and crucified Him! What a revolutionary love (Rom 5: 8,10)! This is divine love. If I am a follower of Jesus, I should not be disappointed over any adverse response, rather go a second mile to love them (Mat 5:40,41).

Master George Wishart, a Cambridge University professor was martyred in 16th Century declaring to be a heretic by John Winryme, the dean of the then Church. When he was about to be hanged and burnt alive on the stakes, his hangman knelt before him and said, “Sir, please forgive me. I am not guilty of your death”. “Come

here” Wishart replied. When the man went near him, Wishart kissed him and said, “This is the token of my forgiveness. Do your job”. As Wishart was hung and burned, the crowd mourned and complained that an innocent lamb has been slaughtered (Taken from the book FOX’S CHRISTIAN MARTYRS OF THE WORLD). Leave alone martyrdom. *“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”* (Phil 2:5).

How do we reciprocate even for a small mistreatment?

A simple check list...

- » Am I prepared to face hatred when I have shown love?
- » Am I prepared to accept ingratitude when I have shown kindness?
- » Am I prepared to lose when I have lent to others?
- » Am I prepared to be deserted when I have cared for others?
- » Though I am reproached, am I prepared to forgive unconditionally?
- » Though others humiliate me, do I give back respect?
- » Though I am trampled down, am I prepared to lift up others, above my level?
- » Though I am not appreciated, am I prepared to accept criticism?
- » When I have helped others, do I expect them to reciprocate?
- » When my advice is not accepted, am I prepared to accept others’ suggestions?
- » When my teaching is not accepted, am I prepared to learn?
- » When I esteem others better than me, do I expect to be respected?

- » Though my prayers are not acknowledged, do I continue to pray for others?
- » Though my feelings are hurt, do I try to heal others' wounds?
- » Though I am looked down upon, do I appreciate others?
- » Though I am disappointed, do I give back others glad surprises?
- » When I am envied over my blessings, do I rejoice over others' blessings?
- » When one is indebted to me, do I feel great about it?
- » When I am left to bear my own burden, am I prepared to share others' burden?
- » When I am deprived of legitimate rights, am I prepared to stand for others' rights?

“When He was reviled, did not revile in return; When He suffered, He did not threaten; But committed Himself to Him who judges righteously”.

- 1 Peter 2:23

CHAPTER FOUR

Pulling Down Or Pushing Up

Reasons For Disunity Among Those Who Minister

Missionary Guru Prasath, BYM

God has been raising several thousands of workers from varied backgrounds and has been placing them in different places for the extension of His Kingdom. Yet, the frontiers of the Kingdom have not expanded as much as we might have expected. In fact, rather than expanding, the boundaries seem to have stagnated, and even constricted in some areas.

One important reason for this is the disunity among the children of God. God desires that His children would be united in the task of extending His Kingdom. The Great Commission to “*Go and proclaim to all creation*” will be possible only when we obey the second greatest commandment i.e., “*to love your neighbour as yourself*”. Why has India been unable to taste God’s goodness even after 2000 years ? There is no other reason, except that God’s children have not been united.

Why is it that we have been unable to be of one accord with our fellow workers and fellow believers? Why are we unable to love them as we love ourselves?

I want to list out a few reasons why there is disunity among the brethren.

Jealousy

One reason for disunity is jealousy which raises its

ugly head. When we see another servant of God more talented and more efficient than us, jealous thoughts spring up and hatred creeps in. This is what happened to king Saul. When David returned after killing Goliath, the Philistine, people gathered around and showered praises on him saying, *“Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands.”* When Saul saw that David had abilities that seemed better than his, he was very angry and *“kept a jealous eye on David”* (1 Sam 18: 8,9).

Even today, many of us in ministry are divided because of jealousy and are unable to love those who minister alongside us. Thus, we fail to function as a unit. Envy rots the bones and becomes a stumbling block to those who should be marching forward and claiming new grounds for the Master. The chief priests in Jesus’ time exemplify this (Mt 27:17, Mk 15:9).

Fear

The second reason why we are unable to work together with our coworkers is the element of ‘fear’. This fear is no ordinary fear. It is a fear which is sometimes greater than the fear of death. This fear stems out of our insecurity. It is the fear that causes one to think, “Will I be forgotten by others?”, “Will they forsake me and join someone else?” This fear arises when we see the Lord using another person, just as he is using us, or when someone else is being used instead of us. Saul feared David because he knew that David was chosen to be the next king and he knew that David’s actions were acceptable to God (1Sam 18: 15). Saul was not afraid that David would kill him! Rather, he was afraid that people would respect and love David more than him! He also feared that he would be forgotten by the masses!(1Sam 18:16). This fear drove Saul to try and murder David. This is the same fear that controlled the

wisest man, Solomon. When he knew that Jeroboam was chosen to be king in his place, he could not take it and tried to kill his own friend (1 Kings 11:37,40). “Will I lose it?”, “Will I be forgotten?”- fear arising from these thoughts is stronger than the fear of death.

Bitterness

The third reason for our failure to work in unison is harbouring bitterness. When our co-worker errs or falls short of our expectation, we may be angry. But this should not lead to bitterness. When does bitterness arise? When we feel betrayed, we are bound to feel bitter. However, often it happens that we have misjudged or misunderstood the other person’s intentions or have looked at the issue from another perspective. Moreover, this does not happen overnight. When we use a hand pump to fill water in a pot, does it get filled at one go? No! We need to pump several times before the pot is filled to the brim. In the same way, the thoughts and feelings that we entertain about another person get accumulated in the heart and overflow when the heart is full! We cannot have genuine love if there is bitterness in the heart. Without love, there cannot be oneness. This not only affects the ministry, but also our relationship with God. This is why Saul lost the grace of God (1 Sam 18:12).

Our success in ministry does not come from our talents or the gifts of the Spirit. It comes only from oneness of mind. That is why our Lord said, *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another ”(Jn 13:35).*

We may have been placed in different spheres of ministry, in different places, by different organizations. It does not matter what kind of ministry we do. What

matters is why we do the ministry. The friends who brought the paralyzed man on a mat to Jesus had only one aim. They wanted their friend to be healed. For this end, they worked together (Mk 2:1-4). Our country, bound by bondages has been lying paralyzed for ages. God is looking for those people who would deny self, take the Gospel and bring our Nation to experience the healing that Jesus offers.

Why do we minister?

Is it for name, fame or pride? Isn't it to rescue the perishing? That must be the only aim of all the ministries. Once this is made clear, we will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, *"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry..... But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, out of false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this, I rejoice"* (Phil 1:15,18).

God is looking for those who truly understand the ultimate aim of ministry and work with oneness. Let us work together to bless India in our generation. Amen!

CHAPTER FIVE

Peaceful Living

Dr. I. Alfred Ebenezer, Coonoor, Tamil Nadu

The time in which we live is rife with tussles and fights. Even among families there are relationship problems between husband and wife, brothers and sisters, parents and children, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. One nation rises against another. There is the news of terrorism everywhere. Murder, violence, robbery are on the rise. Peace is found nowhere. People do not know how to peacefully coexist. Even though many steps have been taken to reduce tensions among the nations and communities, peace seems somehow to elude us.

The Bible encourages us to, “*Strive for peace with everyone*” (Heb 12:14). Jesus Christ, the “Prince of peace” came into this world with the message of peace. Just before He left the world, He told His disciples that He was leaving “His” peace with them. The peace that Jesus gives is the only solution in this chaotic world. Hence, let us meditate from the Scriptures as how we can obtain the peace that God gives us.

1. Forgive as Christ Forgave You

The main reason behind all of our relationship problems is the refusal to forgive people. Consider the life of Jesus. When He was living in this world, he healed many lepers and lame men. He did many good things (Acts 10:38). But the Jews mistreated Him and crucified

Him. Even while He was on the cross, he looked at the people who were mocking at Him and said, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”* (Luke 23:34).

Many a time we say that we have forgiven those who have offended us. But there is bitterness deep down in our hearts. We no more mingle with that person as before. We keep a safe distance. If we have forgiven like Christ has forgiven us, then we should have intimate relationship like before. We need to do good to them. Jesus gave His life for everyone and through His death, His love was revealed (Rom 5:8). He loved us even while we were yet sinners.

Joseph was betrayed by his own brothers (Gen 37:19,20, 42:21,22). But he forgave them and initiated the reconciliation process without a hint of vengeance (Gen 45:9-11).

Doing good to those who do good is easy. But Jesus taught that we should do good to those who do evil (Mat 5:44). Tooth for tooth, eye for eye is the way of the world. But as children of God, we need to do good to those who do evil.

After the Second World War, Germany was divided into East Germany and West Germany. Because of this partition, a wall was erected in Berlin dividing the two regions. Once people from East Germany dumped a load of rubbish into the West Germany area. The people in the West Germany could have done a similar thing, but they reciprocated by loading the other side with food items and other eatables. They also kept a slip which said, ‘Each gives what he has.’ How true! We can only give what we have. Later on, this paved a way for a creation of a goodwill which led to the unification of West Germany with the East.

What do we have inside of us? Love or hate; peace or war; life or death!

May God give us grace to overcome evil with good.

2. Control Your Tongue

For many of our problems in relationships, the root cause is the tongue. Words of anger, hate, backbiting, gossips, all originate from the tongue.

Jas 3:5,6 – *“So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.”*

Sometimes when we are blamed for things that we have not done, we use many unnecessary words and make the situation more complicated. How are we to respond in such situations?

Jesus Christ is our role model. When Jesus was falsely-charged with various accusations by the High Priest and the Teachers of the Law, He did not fight back. He did not even open His mouth in His defence, much to the amazement of His accusers (Mat 27: 13, 14). In a similar manner Joseph too did not fight back when he was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife. People may talk against us and may wrongly accuse us. But let us learn to be silent like Jesus. And peace will abound in us.

3. Don’t Be Quick-Tempered

There is no doubt that anger plays a vital role for the breakdown of relationships. Anger lodges in the heart of fools says the Bible (Ecc 7:9). Anger not only destroys the peace of the one who holds it but also affects the entire atmosphere. Jesus said, *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* (Mat 5:5).

Many a time we lose our patience and relationships are broken.

In Judges Chapter 8, we read about an incident when the people of Ephraim angrily reacted over Gideon for not inviting them for war. But Gideon's smooth reply pacified them. In our lives too, when faced with such situations, we should learn to react in a patient and mature manner. Doing so, we will save relationships. So never be quick-tempered.

4. Let It Go

Selfishness and not letting go often increase tensions and spoil peace. We should let go of things, positions or properties which might rightfully belong to us. In such situations giving-up will resolve issues and peace will prevail. But it is a tough decision to take. It might involve sacrifice.

In Genesis chapter 13 and verses 8 and 9, we read that there was a fight between the servants of Abraham and Lot. Though Abraham was elder, he let Lot decide. He was willing to go for the less fertile places. Similarly, when there was a fight between the servants of Isaac and Abimelech, Isaac left the watered wells and went to new places (Gene 26:15-22).

In our day-to-day life, we face so many problems because we do not let go of things. We fight and file court cases. This has resulted in confusion and strife among the people. Peace becomes an impossibility. Let us let go of things and strive for peace.

5. Honour Everyone

Romans 12:10 – *“Out do one another in showing honour.”*

The Bible instructs us to honour one another. But many a time we despise others and do not show

respect to them. We honour the rich but disregard the poor. Anyone can be courteous to the king but it takes a gentle man to be courteous to a beggar. If only we honour people, many of our relationship problems would vanish.

As God's people we should never differentiate between the rich and the poor, educated and the uneducated. Rather we should honour everyone.

6. Examine Your Ways

Proverbs 16:7 - *"When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him."*

Even though we may strive to live at peace with everyone, sometimes it becomes a distant reality. In such a case we must examine our ways. Is there a blatant sin in my life? Is there anything in my life that displeases the Lord? If there is any such thing, then we should confess our sins and be reconciled to God. When the Israelites sinned against the Lord and served Baal, the Lord gave them over to their enemies. There were constant wars and there was no peace (Jud 2:13-15). Only when they repented of their sins, peace came back to their territories. We need to do the same. We need to examine our ways and get back to God. When we do so, then even our enemies will live at peace with us.

7. Pray

1Tim 2:1,2 - *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way."*

It is God's will that we live in peace with everyone. It is for this reason we need to pray for everyone. Many of us pray only for our families and friends but the

Word of God teaches us to pray for everyone, especially for those who hate us (Mat 5:44). When we pray for those who hate us, God bestows upon us the peace that transcends all understanding. We should not forget that our prayer will accomplish things that are impossible to human eyes.

May God bless us with peace and joy. Amen!

CHAPTER SIX

Healing The Harbored Hurts Of Your Heart

Bill Elliff

Stockpiling hurts in our heart brings about the development of bitterness. Like a poisonous vine, bitterness can wrap itself around our emotions, penetrate our thoughts, and choke the life from our soul. Bitterness robs us of joy and peace. It hijacks us; taking us places we never wanted to go, doing things we never wanted to do, and making us people we never wanted to be.

Bitterness is subtle. I have rarely met a bitter man who realized his condition. No one wants to think of himself in this way. The very word “bitter” sounds appalling to our ears. It is a label none of us wants; yet by my own experience, I can tell you that many more of us are bitter than care to admit it. Passing through a bitter season in my life, I was oblivious to my condition. All the while I counseled people who were bitter, and even preached about bitterness. I could recognize it in others, but not in myself.

Sometimes bitterness is misdiagnosed because there has been no massive tragedy or great pain. We erroneously think that only those who have been gravely hurt become bitter. In reality, the smallest particle of harbored hurt carries deadly potency, just

as one cancer cell has the potential to fell the strongest of men. Are you also willing to look with indifference to the hurts of your heart? If Satan can keep you blinded to the presence of bitterness, however small and harmless it may seem, he has an open door.

Would you, before the Lord, keep a humble heart and mind as you read on? If you have been hurt at some point in your life, would you be honest enough to pause and sincerely pray...Lord, if there is any bitterness in my heart, would You reveal it to me today?

Although we often cannot see bitterness in ourselves, its effects disclose its presence to others. The writer of Hebrews uncovers for us three of the most damaging results of bitterness: *"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled..."* (Heb 12:15).

Bitterness Always Springs Up

Even if we are aware of some hurt brewing inside us and intentionally try to hold it in check, it will find a way to seep through our soul. Hurts have a life of their own; and true to their nature, will always break through the surface and manifest themselves in some form.

Several years ago a friend volunteered to mow my lawn while I was out of town. Before leaving, I forgot to mention to him that I had been nurturing a tiny sapling in our yard. When I returned, I discovered that he had accidentally stripped its tender bark with a power trimmer. The sapling appeared to be so badly damaged that I simply mowed it down. However, throughout the rest of the summer small sprouts continued to break through the soil. Even though I had cut away everything I could see above the ground, there was still life in its root system. The sapling kept trying to grow.

When hurts are not dealt with God's way, bitterness roots itself in our soul. Like the sapling that refused to die, bitterness will continually spring up.

Bitterness Always Causes Trouble

A bitter root in your heart will manifest itself in troublesome attitudes, such as depression and despair, anger and resentment, or fear and worry. Your reactions may become typified by criticism, slander, gossip, sulking, retaliation, or other caustic behavior.

Nobody likes to get hurt, especially for the second time. If a dog were to bite you, you would probably do your best to never meet that dog again! After being bitten by a painful experience, we sometimes develop strategies and adjust our behavior, thinking this will protect us from future hurt. Repeated often enough, this habitual behavior ingrains itself in our character. It becomes who we are and what we do.

Are you the type of person who has to control every situation? Do you frequently lash out in anger? Are you manipulative? Have you become so over-sensitive that others feel they must "walk on eggshells" whenever they approach you? Do you keep up a facade so others cannot really get close to you, or know who you really are?

All these behaviors, and others, are methods we sometimes develop to shield ourselves from further hurt. As you can see, they are brimming with destructive consequences. The very strategies we use to avoid hurt only multiply the pain to ourselves and others.

When we harbor hurt – perhaps for years – it has the capacity to drive our every decision, and sour our every relationship. It will always make its presence known. And we will regret it.

Bitterness Always Defiles Many

Bitterness cannot be quarantined. Like an epidemic, it spreads. One bitter person has the capacity to infect an entire classroom, corporation, or congregation. Hurting people hurt people. Entire families can be poisoned. Harbored hurts and bitterness can literally be passed from one generation to the next (Num 14:18). I once knew a very bitter man. Upon investigation I discovered a wound in his heart that was still festering after 40 years. His life manifested all the fruit of a bitter root. It did not surprise me when I witnessed his son and grandson also carrying a bitter spirit. Could there be any harsher judgment against the sin of bitterness than being guilty of infecting the ones we love the most?

Bitterness will always spring up, always cause trouble, and always defile many. You may think you can hold on to your hurts and not be adversely affected, but you are wrong. You cannot fathom how a root of bitterness will influence your thoughts and decisions, and your attitudes and actions.

Is it really worth holding on to your hurts? Is the pain worth the price? How much of your life are you willing to exchange simply to hold onto your hurt?

The Remedy for Harbored Hurt

So, where do you go from here? How do you overcome the hurts you have been harboring? What must you do to alleviate your bitterness and neutralize the acidic effects it has left in your soul?

God has a wonderful plan for complete freedom and healing. He can even give “beauty for ashes” by using the pains of your past as a springboard of ministry for the future. Not only can the hurts be overcome, they

can also be a means of ministering to others for their good and God's glory. Only God could do something like that!

The following principles can transform your life as they form God's path to bring deliverance and usefulness, even in the midst of great pain. You cannot take these steps on your own. They are only possible through God's enabling grace which He gladly gives as we humbly cry out to Him.

1. Recognize and admit your own sin

"Admit my sin?! Don't you know it was the other person who sinned against me? If anyone needs to admit their sin, it's them!"

You are right, they do. However, your healing does not depend on their response. You cannot change the offensive person or the hurtful situation; but you can, by the grace of God, change your attitude. If in the midst of being hurt you have become bitter, angry, resentful, retaliatory, or critical, you have sinned. You can hold onto this – all the while shouting words of self-justification – and never find relief. Not only will you continue to suffer the results of bitterness, you will increase your burden with the guilt that comes whenever you cover and hide your sin. You will do nothing more than add to your pain. Instead, you could turn to the Lord in genuine humility and cry out for His cleansing.

2. Embrace God's sovereignty

At some point you must release your rights over the situation, accept the circumstance, and embrace the fact that God has the right to do whatever He desires in your life.

If, in the economy of God, He desired to allow such

a hurtful experience, then He had also promised grace to survive... and to thrive. He is big enough to bring purpose in the midst of pain.

How are your fists... still clenched? Are you willing to believe that God is bigger than your problem and can work it out for your good and His glory?

3. Forgive – release the debt

If your bitterness has a face behind it, you will need to take the step of unconditionally forgiving the one who has offended you. There is no other way to remove the harbored hurt.

Paul tells us in First Corinthians 13:5 that genuine love *“does not take into account a wrong suffered.”* Here Paul uses an accounting term describing a merchant who keeps tally of what each customer owes him. He keeps these records because he fully intends to collect payment.

Many of us keep a ledger-book in our hearts. When someone hurts us, we enter their name in our ledger. We think they should not have treated us as they did (and we may be right), so we hold them accountable. “They owe me,” we reason, “and I will make them pay.” Then we set out to exact payment.

But listen to what God has to say about this practice. *“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone...never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord... do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom. 12:17-21).

When we are hurt, we have only two choices:

We can enter the hurt in our heart’s ledger and plan to get revenge. We are amazingly creative at how we collect our debts. We might withdraw from the

relationship, criticize or slander the one who hurt us, erupt in anger, plot ways to hurt them or ruin their reputation, attempt to thwart their success, question their motives, ignore them, spread rumors – our options are endless. We can even put a mask on our revenge with a closed mouth and pious smile. If our heart is angry though, we have already murdered our enemy (Mat 5:21-22).

The irony of record-keeping and revenge-seeking is that we end up hurting ourselves more than the one we hold liable. A vengeful attitude aborts the development of Christ-like character, shackles us with chains of bitterness and anger, and can ultimately destroy our lives. Furthermore, it can cause God to “stand down” from disciplining and correcting those who hurt us. When we attempt to seek our own justice, we may obstruct God’s. God does not need vigilantes.

Forgiveness is not an act of our emotions, but a choice of our will. Just as a merchant can cancel a debt from his ledger, you can erase every debt you are holding against those who have wronged you... regardless of how you feel.

Essentially, forgiveness is an act of faith. When we choose to abandon the role of judge, jury, and executioner, we are acknowledging that God is sufficient to handle those who have hurt us. We transfer all collection rights to Him. The case is no longer in our hands, but entirely in His.

If we choose this Biblical path, we will never be disappointed. God is good enough, just enough, and wise enough to deal with our offender in the proper manner. He always does it right! We seldom do.

To your amazement, you may discover God’s name recorded in your ledger. Are you angry with Him over

some injustice done to you? A good indicator would be to check your proximity to Him. Have you withdrawn from His fellowship? If so, it may be because you have wrongly concluded that He is not to be trusted. God could have prevented the hurt from coming your way, but for whatever reason He did not. Now He may be the one toward whom your bitterness is aimed. As you release your debts, you must fully repent of what you are holding in your heart against God.

As you review the ledger-book in your heart, what names are entered there? Perhaps there is one that appears many times, with several documented offenses. Their debt to you is great. How long do you plan to hold them in contempt?...Until they die?...Until you die?

Will you, by a choice of your will and as an act of faith, release every debt in your heart?

4. Ask God to fill your heart with His purifying love

We are clearly commanded to love everyone, even our enemies (Mat 5:38-48). You may think this is impossible, and it would be if God were not involved. If you have come into a genuine relationship with God through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit resides in your heart. All the love that He is, dwells within you (1 John 4:7-8). Therefore, if you are willing to fully surrender to Him, in addition to removing the hurt, God can miraculously pour out His love in your heart. Love is a “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22), and can replace the acid of bitterness with the sweetness of compassion. What an amazing and healing exchange!

Would you ask God to fill your heart with His love – particularly for the individual who hurt you? If you cooperate with God, you will discover an outpouring of His power in your life. You may find yourself looking and acting very much like the Christ who lives within you!

5. Thank God for the Experience

There is a difference between “thanking God” and “being thankful.” Thankfulness is an emotion that we sometimes feel and sometimes do not. We may not feel thankful about a situation that has come into our lives, but we are called by God to continually give thanks (1 Thes 5:18; Eph 5:20; Phil 4:4).

Why would God make such a seemingly impossible command?

Our Great Physician knows that thanksgiving has amazing remedial properties. Giving thanks reminds us of God’s might, and lifts us up to view the situation from His perspective. The obedient response of thanksgiving takes our mind off the pain and focuses our thoughts on God.

Such faith-based thanksgiving is able to say, “Lord, even though I do not understand it, and may not feel like it, I believe You are sufficient for this situation... and I thank You. You have not left Your throne. This did not take You by surprise. You have ample grace and sovereign purposes for me in the midst of my hurt.”

6. Keep continually and instantly forgiving

Do not think for a moment that your enemy, the devil, will take defeat lying down. You may encounter a multitude of additional opportunities to exercise faith and forgiveness – sometimes involving the same person. Satan may even parade the past hurt through your memory and try to revive your former emotions of anger and revenge.

When this happens, you could choose to relive the situation and pick up the hurt of the past. Or, you could realize that God is developing you into a godly man or woman, and that your character is strengthened

by every act of the common day. Each hurt that comes your way is a fresh opportunity to forgive and love like He forgives and loves.

The continued presence of difficulty is an indication that God has not given up on teaching you how to be like Him. And if you have any desire to be like God, you must learn to forgive.

(Taken from Forgiveness: Healing the Harbored Hurts of Your Heart by Bill Elliff with Tim Grissom. Copyright © 1998 by Dr. Bill R. Elliff. Used with permission)

CHAPTER SEVEN

S-H-A-R-E STRATEGY **For Maintaining Good Relationship**

Missionary Saravanan, BYM

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

It takes effort to maintain cordial relationship with everyone. Relationship are tender like a flower. It is like a bottle of glass which can be easily broken. It has to be handled carefully. Relationship needs to be built up carefully. Many a time it is not easy. Now and then, we end up misunderstanding each other. Let us meditate about five such incidents in which there was a relationship problem deriving eternal lessons for us.

1. Abraham and Lot - Genesis 13:5-15

Both Abraham and Lot had lot of livestock as well as a large number of servants. The Bible mentions about a quarrel between the servants of Abraham and Lot. Abraham(Abram) counselled Lot that they need to separate without a quarrel. Note what he says,

Gen 13:8 - “Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.”

Notice how Abraham puts an end to the quarrel among the servants. Though they decided to separate, they were at peace. This is what is needed in our families. Abraham also had a large heart to give the choice of

selecting the place to Lot (Gen 13:9). There was no selfishness in Abraham. And this made reconciliation possible. When we hold on to our own petty selfish agendas, peace is lost in families and institutions. Hence let us learn to be selfless.

Even after separating from Lot, Abraham helped him when he was captured by the enemies (Gen 14:12-16). Abraham did not develop any bitterness following the separation. He also interceded for Lot when God planned to punish Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:23-33).

Abraham selflessly served God and was blessed abundantly. He made him prosperous and promised him the whole land as an inheritance. In order to maintain good relationship with people, we need to develop this attitude of putting others first. Even in the New Testament we are commanded to consider others better than ourselves (Rom 14:5). Let us always consider the betterment of others before we think of ourselves. This will create an atmosphere of ease and comfort and peace will prevail. Let us maintain **SELFLESSNESS** in all our relationships.

2. Moses, Aaron and Miriam - Numbers 12:1-13

God commanded Moses to appoint elders and he just obeyed (Num 1:16,17). But immediately after this incident we find Aaron and Miriam speaking against Moses. Some Bible scholars think that it was so because they were not comfortable with the new set of leaders whom Moses had appointed. Though they accused Moses with regard to the Cushite wife, they had more things against Moses in their hearts. Whatever might be the reason, Moses did not retaliate. He was very humble.

Num 12:3 - "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth."

Humility is another important virtue that we need to have in order to maintain good relationship. No relationship can survive when there is pride and jealousy. When people accuse us without a reason, let us stay humble and not retaliate. God will fight for us as He did for Moses. Let **HUMBLENESS** mark every action of ours.

3) Disciples of Jesus - Mark 9:33-36

Jesus' disciples often had a quarrel among themselves as who would be the greatest among them. James and John asked for special positions (Mk 10:35-37). Before Pentecost, the disciples had quarrels among themselves. But after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they had oneness. They prayed together in the upper room. Peter and John went to the temple together (Acts 3:1,2). What brought this change? The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to understand their position and ministry in the Body of Christ.

The knowledge of our gifts and calling is of paramount importance so that there is no duplication in the Kingdom of God. When a team member in a team understands his roles and responsibilities, unhealthy comparison and competition can be avoided. Apostle Paul has very clearly brought out this truth in First Corinthians 12:14-27. Hence there must be an **AWARENESS** of our gifts and calling that God has endowed upon each of the team members.

4. David and Saul - 1 Samuel 18:7-9

God rejected Saul as the King of Israel due to his disobedience and chose David to be the next King of Israel. When David killed Goliath, he started to become popular. Due to David's popularity, Saul became jealous of David

and wanted to kill him. David understood that he was not accepted in the house of Saul and ran away from him. Even though Saul tried to kill David, he never fought against Saul. He spared Saul's life on two occasions (1 Sam 24:4-7, 26:7-12).

David respected Saul in spite of the fact that God had left Saul. Sometimes people might hate us without any reason. On such occasions let us continue to respect them. David waited for God's time. Though he had power to fight against Saul, he never fought with Saul. Hence, God honoured David by giving him the entire kingdom of Israel. Therefore, let us maintain **RESPECTFULNESS** in all our relationships.

5. John Mark and Paul - Acts 15:36-40

John Mark went with Paul and Barnabas as a helper in the first missionary journey. But in the middle of the journey, he returned home. This made Paul to reject him in the second missionary journey. But during the later days John Mark was able to win the confidence of Paul (2 Tim 4:11). Mark proved to be a worthy helper not only to Paul but also to Peter (Col 4:10, 1 Pet 5:13).

Sometimes, when leaders reject us, we should not be discouraged. We should strive sincerely and produce fruits in our ministry. The same people who once rejected us will accept and appreciate us. So let us increase in **EFFECTIVENESS**.

SHARE Strategy

S- SELFLESSNESS

H- HUMBLENESS

A- AWARENESS

R- RESPECTFULNESS

E- EFFECTIVENESS

CHAPTER EIGHT

BOUNDARIES OF RECONCILIATION

Missionary Jason, BYM

God calls us to live at peace with one another. The Kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). It is this peace which is the ‘hall-mark’ of Christian life. But as human beings, misunderstandings and misgivings are quite normal. We all face difficult situations when dealing with people. Every one of us face relationship problems in one way or the other. But how we approach them is a million dollar question.

In our efforts to live at peace with others, there are certain limits that we should be aware of. These are termed as the ‘Boundaries of Reconciliation.’

Hence we need to have a proper understanding of certain circumstances in which we cannot reconcile. Let us meditate from the Scripture on where to draw the boundaries for ‘Reconciliation.’

1) Reconciliation is not possible with unbelievers

2 Cor 6:14 - “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”

There cannot be any fellowship between light and darkness. When light comes, darkness automatically flies away. Similarly when the light is gone, darkness sets in. Hence there cannot be both light and darkness.

This can be applied to Marriage, Idol worship and all other pagan practices.

Jas 4:4 - "You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

When we make the 'world' as our friend, we make God Himself as our enemy.

When we meditate on the truth about 'reconciliation' we are just focusing within the Body of Christ. Christ is the Head of the Body (Eph 5:23). Anyone who denies Christ is an Anti-Christ (1 John 2:22). Any spirit which denies Christ is not from God (1 John 4:2).

Hence any Fellowship or Church which denies the headship of Christ cannot be called as 'Church' neither can they be called as 'Christ'-ians.

Jehovah Witnesses is one such group. Even the Roman Catholic Church has a 'Christ also' doctrine but not 'Christ Alone.' Against this the great reformer Martin Luther thundered, 'Sola Christo' (Latin equivalent of 'Through Christ Alone') 500 years ago.

When we say 'Christ Alone,' we mean to say that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son who gave His life on the Cross and was resurrected on the third day. He is the 'only mediator' to God (1 Tim 2:5). There can be no corner stone other than Christ (Eph 2:20) and no foundation other than Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11). Christ is all and in all (Col 3:11).

2) Reconciliation Is Not Possible When Sin Is Not Dealt

Reconciliation does not mean that we must compromise on sin. The Bible clearly says that there will be people who are bent on doing evil in the last days. Note what Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:1-5:

"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self,

*lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. **Avoid such people.***”

Jesus has given us a blueprint on how to deal with a brother who sins against us.

Mat 18:15-17 - “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

When a believer sins, ‘repentance’ must become the basis for reconciliation. Jesus here teaches us the various ways of convincing a brother of his wrong-doing. First we must go alone. If that fails, we must take one or two brothers along with us. Again if that fails, it must be dealt by the ‘church’ or ‘fellowship’ as a whole. But when all that fails, then reconciliation becomes an impossibility.

But if he says, ‘I have sinned. Forgive me.’ We must forgive him. Note what Jesus said:

Luk 17:3-4 “Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

The problem arises when the believer in question does not accept his sinful ways of living and starts to defend his sin. In which case, we are left with no option but to treat him like a Gentile.

Note the strong words that Jesus used:

“Let him be to you as a Gentile”

This is what the Apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian Church to do to a believer who failed morally.

1 Cor 5:13 - “Purge the evil person from among you.”

He also gives a reason for this excommunicative step. *“A little leaven leavens the whole lump”* (1 Cor 5:6). Hence in our fellowships and churches if such measures are not taken, then the whole body of Christ will be affected.

But the good news of Paul’s disciplinary measure was that the person repented and developed fruits of repentance. Hence Paul encourages again to take this man into fellowship in his second letter to the Corinthians (2:6-8). The repented man was once again reconciled to the Church.

While reconciling with a person, we do not overlook sin. On the other hand, brotherly love demands that we take careful steps in order to restore the erring believer.

But we should be careful not proceed in a hasty manner, thinking that we are right in every way. We should be careful before coming to a conclusion. We should not backbite or spread a gossip. We need to have the ‘Shepherd’s heart’ while dealing with such matters.

Jesus warned against such rash behavior and judging others:

Mat 7:3-5 - “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? 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? 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.”

1 Cor 10:12 – “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”

3) Reconciliation Is Not Possible With A Person Through Whom Temptations Come

Mar 9:42 -47 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.”

These are the people whom Apostle Paul named as the ‘false brothers’ (2 Cor 11:26, Gal 2:4). These are the ones who are not only self-condemned but also lead others astray.

Note the strong words of Jesus. We must ‘cut-off’ the hand or foot or even the eye if it becomes a stumbling block in the body of Christ. Living in sin is different from being a cause of temptation.

Apostle Paul tells us how we must deal with such people who stir up division:

Tit 3:10,11 – “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.”

Today we have lost so many people because ‘Christians’ have become stumbling blocks to the unbelievers.

Our Nation would have long back come to Christ if we, the so called ‘Christians’ would have lead our lives as ‘Real Christians.’ We say we are ‘Christians’ but there is no ‘Christ’ in our lives. We say we are Christians for several generations but there is not a glimpse of life of ‘Christ’ manifested in our lives.

Let us decide to lead a life which manifests Christ.

4) *Reconciliation Is Not Possible With Wrong Teachers*

Rev 2:14-16 - “ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth. ”

Rev 2:20 - “But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ”

Here we read that God is not pleased with the Churches of Pergamum and Thyathira who were putting up with the wrong teachers of the Word of God. May be they thought that they might offend them if they denied to provide an opportunity to preach. May be they thought that they can deal with them gently. But God was not pleased with their action.

Note what the Apostle of love says,

2 Jn 9-11 “ Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do

not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”

We can't even say 'Praise the Lord' to them! How much more is it to allow them into our houses. We need to bluntly say, "No" to such people who would not exalt Christ in their life and ministry. May God give us the grace and discernment in these last days.

When Convictions Differ

Act 15:36-39 - “And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other.”

Here we find the break-up of the first missionary team. The reason for this sharp disagreement was John Mark who had left them half-way in the first missionary journey. Perhaps, Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance. But Paul did not want to take any chance. Barnabas wanted to develop Mark while Paul had a cautious approach. It appears that both were right.

This is one such situation where we find it extremely difficult to reconcile with people who hold different spiritual convictions. In such cases it will be better to “agree to disagree” without disturbing peace. Sometimes God allows a ‘Short-Term Separation’ which will help us to mature so that we appreciate one another’s convictions.

Towards the end of his ministry, note how Apostle Paul remarked regarding John Mark:

2Ti 4:11 - “Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”

Hence finally we find Paul being reconciled to John Mark.

Even though we need to take a stand against sin and not compromise, it should not lead us to a ‘holier-than-thou’ attitude. We should stay humble and try our best to correct them.

Note what Apostle Paul says,

2Thes 3:14,15 – “ *If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.* ”

Let us stay humble but also assertive; let us be kind but also gently corrective; let us be friendly but at the same time firm.

May God grant us grace and wisdom to understand the boundaries of reconciliation.

Self-Examination Questionnaire

on Reconciliation

1. Am I taking the first step towards reconciling with others? Mat 5:22-26
2. Am I accusing others not knowing that accusing is the work of the devil? Rev 12:10
3. Am I growing in humility? 1 Peter 5:5
4. Am I talking directly to others if a glaring sin is found in his/her life? Mat 18:15
5. Am I finding fault with others when my own life is not right? Mat 7:3,4
6. Do I hate any believer in Christ not knowing that it amounts to murder? 1 John 3:15
7. Am I harbouring bitterness towards anyone? Eph 4:30
8. Am I angry with anyone? 1 Jn 2:9
9. Do I keep a record of wrongs done to me? 1 Cor 13:5
10. Is there any evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in my life? Gal 5:22-23
11. When evil triumphs, am I losing belief that God is in control? Gen 45:8, 50:20
12. Am I repaying good for evil? Mat 5:44-48
13. Have I forgiven all who sinned against me? Mat 6:14,15
14. Am I making every effort to live in peace with everyone? Heb 12:14
15. Am I loving others as Christ loved me? Jn 13:34,35
16. Am I mistaking reconciliation for compromise? 2 Cor 6:14
17. Am I quick to judge a person? Rom 14:10

18. Am I thinking that I am better than others? Phil 2:3
19. Am I gossiping about others' sins? Pro 10:12,
1 Pet 4:8
20. Am I postponing reconciliation? Mat 5:23,24

Prayer

Loving Heavenly Father, I come into Your presence in the Name of Your dear Son Jesus Christ. Today I forgive all the wrongs done by _____ name(s) as you always forgive my own sins. Help me to love him/her with all my heart as you have loved me. Purge away the roots of bitterness and hatred by the flames of your Divine love. There is only one life to live and let me live a life full of love, joy and abundant peace.

Amen!

Conclusion

In this short life of ours, we meet different kinds of people. Some of them we meet for a short time and others for a long time. Some remain friends, others treat us like foes. There are people who help us in our academic career. There are also people who help us come closer to the Lord. In this fleeting life of ours, let us not hold any grudge or hatred against anyone. Let us be kind to everyone even though they may be unkind to us. Let us be forgiving even though the fault is with them. This is the true mark of Christianity. This is what Jesus has taught us - the way of love and forgiveness.

As we have read various truths regarding reconciliation, let us take the first step to reconcile. There must not be anyone whom we cannot get along with. Send a special Christmas gift to the person with whom you have not talked for years. Say 'hello' to your friend with whom you have had misunderstanding years back. As a matured person, we need to take the first step. Let all these truths be applied in our life and ministry.

May God help us to lead a life full of love, peace and joy.

Amen!

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Preaching about reconciliation is easy, but when our colleague lashes out against us, it becomes hard to forget. When our spouse shouts at us, we keep a record.

When we feel the pangs of betrayal, back-biting, insult, it becomes even more difficult to accept and forgive.

The Scripture encourages us to always look to Jesus who faced loads of hostility from people.

This book is all about accepting and forgiving one another in the body of Christ.

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