

## ~ Resolving Interpersonal Conflict ~

**Text:** Hebrews 12:14-15 & Mathew 18:15-17 & 21-35

**Theme:** Be not bitter, but rather, forgive and seek restoration.

**Intro:**

1. Whether at home, at work, or in the church there will arise times of conflict between yourself and others who you are called of God to work with, since God is the one who places us in the family, workplace, and church he desires us to serve him in.  
The question is, "What do I do when interpersonal conflicts arise and does the Bible have anything to say about it?"
2. I want to look at the Bible's instructions on handling these situations and what our response ought to be when they arise. For our study we will address this topic under three headings:
  - I. Beware of Bitterness - Hebrews 12:14-15 (Often the result of interpersonal conflict that goes unresolved)
  - II. Be Ready for Restoration – Matt 18:15-17 (The patter for resolving interpersonal conflict)
  - III. Be Quick to Forgive – Matt 18:21-35 (The spirit in resolving interpersonal conflict.)

**Main:**

- I. **Beware of Bitterness** (Hebrews 12:14-15)
  - A. The source of bitterness
    1. Bitterness often comes as a result of unresolved interpersonal conflicts.
      - a. Even mature believers in Scripture experienced interpersonal tensions
        - i. Paul the Apostle and Barnabas disagreed sharply (Acts 15:36-41).
        - ii. Euodia and Syntyche needed reconciliation (Philippians 4:2-3).
        - iii. The Corinthian church struggled with divisions and strife. (I Corinthians 1:11)
      - b. Conflict is not necessarily the evidence of spiritual failure, but unresolved conflict often becomes a spiritual danger which can lead to long-term bitterness.

- i. The problem isn't necessarily that there is a point of conflict, as there will always be differences of opinion between diverse people, but the problem arises when conflict isn't dealt with in a spiritual and scriptural manner and that leads to many other spiritual dangers.
- ii. Examples:
  - Bitterness (Hebrews 12:14-15)
  - Lack of love (I John 4:20)
  - Schism in the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:25)
  - Prayerlessness. (Mark 11:25-26)
- c. Most church problems do not begin with something said from the pulpit but in the heart of the person sitting in the pew.
  - i. When the heart of the hearer is wrong, they will quickly find fault with the preacher, even if they have to intentionally misconstrue what he has said.

#### B. The poison of bitterness

1. Bitterness is described as a root, which means it sits under the surface, but it is feeding the outward expression.
  - a. Bitterness is not always evident since it sits below the surface and poisons the fruit on the outside.
    - i. This root troubles you, which means to taint like a poison, and then it spreads to others, infecting them also.
    - ii. If there is poison in the root of a tree you can't expect to get good fruit from that tree, neither can you expect the fruit of spiritual growth from a person who has been poisoned with bitterness.
2. Bitterness defiles both the individual and those who are infected with it.
  - a. Bitter people often become good at sharing their bitterness with others.
    - i. They go round spreading tales about the person that they are bitter with in the hopes of making others bitter with that person also.
    - ii. They see this work as their own revenge, but it is actually wickedness and the work of the Devil.

## II. **Be Ready for Restoration** (Matt 18:15-17)

### A. The application of personal restoration

1. The pattern for restoration laid out in this passage needs to be applied correctly to personal disputes between brethren.
  - a. Many people have misapplied this verse to a situation where a brother has a different doctrinal view to the Pastor and has decided that this is a personal issue between him and the Pastor. That is not a faithful application of this passage.

- i. If your doctrine differs with the church's statement of faith then your issue isn't a personal one but an ecclesiological one, meaning you need instruction, and if you are not teachable, then the Galatians 2:4-5 category would apply, which is to remove the false teacher from the church.
    - ii. Mathew 18:15-17 deals with problems of a personal nature, especially those that affect the unity of the brethren.
  - b. While we need to have a spirit of love and compassion toward others, this passage has been misapplied and used against Pastors who are simply seeking to protect the flock from false teachers and that is wrong.
- B. The pattern for personal restoration
  - 1. The goal in this is restoration, not victory.
    - a. The goal is stated to be "thou hast gained thy brother," which means the intention is to put the problem to rest and move on.
      - i. If your attitude in approaching your brother is the intention to establish your innocence and his guilt and thereby win an argument, then you are seeking the wrong outcome.
      - ii. When you prioritise the right outcome, restoration, it will help you to align your approach with the spirit of restoration.
    - b. Make sure your heart motive is right before you proceed with the following steps.
  - 2. There is a progression seen here:
    - a. Private conversation is where it starts.
      - i. Go and tell him his fault.
        - You can't seek restoration unless the offence is made clear. If you tell your brother that he has offended you, but you refuse to explain how, then you aren't being genuine in your dealings.
        - Tell him the point of offence so that he can avoid offending you again, but more importantly, he needs to know the offence before the Holy Spirit can bring him to the point of repentance and seeking restoration.
      - ii. If you are both spiritually minded about this then restoration is sure to come about, since you will both put the other before yourself and seek to show Christ's love through personal humility and genuine forgiveness.
    - b. One or two witnesses are called in if private conversation does not achieve restoration.
      - i. The quality of the witnesses is of great importance.

- Don't bring "witnesses" who you have pre-pumped full of your perspective on the situation. Bring witnesses who are not connected with the situation and who can look on with objectivity and provide godly counsel as necessary.
- ii. The goal in bringing witnesses is twofold.
  - First, the company of witnesses will hopefully compel you both to act and speak in a Christ-honouring manner which will lend itself to restoration.
  - Second, your attempts at seeking restoration can be verified by others your brother's refusal to be reconciled can be testified of.
- c. Church involvement is the final step for those who refuse to seek restoration and prioritise the unity of the brethren above personal grievances.
  - i. This step provides the individual with a final chance to be restored to fellowship before they are removed from the fellowship for the protection and unity of the church.
  - ii. Refusal to be reconciled at this point in time will result in the church discipline and the individual will no-longer be seen as being a part of the church but as a lost man, or heathen.
- d. This process ensures:
  - i. Patience in our dealings with fellow Christians
  - ii. Fairness in bringing in objective counsellors or witnesses
  - iii. Carefulness in protecting the testimony of the brethren
  - iv. Genuine desire for reconciliation over point scoring

By the way, just because you aren't on the membership doesn't mean that you aren't part of this local spiritual body of Christ and therefore aren't having an effect on the spiritual growth of this body.

### III. **Be Quick to Forgive** (Matt 18:21-35)

#### A. Forgiveness stems out of thankfulness

1. The forgiveness we show is not supposed to be measured in numbers. It is supposed to be in equal measure to how much Christ has forgiven us, which is a level of forgiveness that is unsurpassable.
  - a. The unjust servant failed to extend forgiveness to others.
    - i. The unjust servant was forgiven his debt of 10,000 talents by his master, which is 60 million denarii. One denarius was about one day's wage.

- ii. By comparison, he was owed 100 pence, which was the same as 100 denarii. So, he was owed about 100 days wages.
- iii. The unjust servant was rebuked by his Lord, not because he hadn't paid his own debt but because, having been forgiven his HUGE debt, he refused to forgive another for his little debt.
- b. When we realize how much God has forgiven us it becomes much harder to harbour an unforgiving spirit toward others.
  - i. Our debt to God far exceeded what we could ever hope to pay and yet God chose to forgive our debt through Christ and to restore us to fellowship with himself.
  - ii. Having been forgiven such a huge debt, shouldn't we be quick to forgive others and seek restoration with them?
  - iii. **Colossians 3:13-14** *"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."*
- 2. Lack of forgiveness toward others produces a breakdown in fellowship with God.
  - a. When we refuse to forgive others, as we have been commanded by God, it results in our own transgressions against God remaining an obstacle to fellowship with Him.
    - i. **Mark 11:25-26** *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."*
    - ii. The Lord Jesus said that the two greatest commandments were to love the Lord thy God and they neighbour as thyself. This reveals to us that God is very interested in the way we conduct ourselves toward our fellowman, to the extent that, our poor relationships with men can hinder our fellowship with God.
  - b. Our relationships with others affect our worship of God.
    - i. **Mathew 5:23-24** *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."*

- ii. Before we try and bring our gift of worship to God we are told to go and be reconciled to our brother, "*and then come and offer thy gift.*"

Conclusion:

1. Unresolved interpersonal conflict can result in a number of spiritual downsides from bitterness to unacceptable worship, to ineffectual prayers.
2. The Bible pattern for resolving such personal grievances is clear and should not be neglected.

**1 John 4:7-11** *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."*