

PRINCIPLES OF RECONCILIATION

By: Gary W. Summers

Some things ought to make us nervous, such as not doing what the Scriptures teach. Does it really matter what the disobedience is? It could be the refusal to repent of sins; it could be the neglecting of good works; it might be balking at baptism; perhaps it involves the reluctance to assemble with the saints on the first day of the week. Or it might be the refusal to reconcile a problem with one's brother. Jesus wanted to make certain that problems would not persist in the church; therefore, He provided various principles to resolve the conflicts which will always be occurring. The following Scriptures with appropriate applications are commended to all brethren everywhere who have suffered problems (in other words, most of us).

1. If you have been offended, go to the person responsible. Jesus, in Matthew 18:15-17, did not say to tell everyone else the problem; talk to the person involved. It just may be a miscommunication that can be settled easily. If not, however, every word can be established with witnesses. This approach does not leave matters lying around, not having been dealt with for years.

2. If you know that a brother has "something against you," go and resolve the situation immediately. You initiate contact. The Lord stressed that one leave his gift at the altar and get the matter straightened out—that is how urgent and important it is (Matthew 5:23-24). Silence between brethren is not an acceptable option.

3. Do not be a stumbling block to your brother. The apostle Paul preferred never to eat meat again if it made his brother stumble. Tolerance and humility go much further than arrogance and close-mindedness. Notice the fervency of Paul's plea: *"And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ"* (1 Corinthians 8:11-12).

4. "Love one another." Who does not know that Jesus taught His disciples to love one another, as He loved them? (John 13:34-35). Is something so familiar easily overlooked? Frequently when problems occur between brethren, people's feelings get hurt, and this commandment falls by the wayside. Some may even intentionally wish harm upon another, which may be a natural response, but it is not a spiritual one. John warns that the one who *"hateth his brother is in darkness even until now"* and *"walketh in darkness"* (1 John 2:9-11). One who does not love his brother *"knoweth not God, for God is love"* (4:8); furthermore, for this individual to insist that he loves God makes him a liar (4:20). One of the things people do who love others is to bear with them and forgive them their trespasses. Is it love to lash out at someone for whom there is no personal attachment because of certain actions when, if the same deed had been committed by a family member or close friend, the matter would have been resolved quickly and quietly? Making a distinction between how we

treat brethren (using a double standard) is indicative of losing one's partiality and objectivity. Certainly, such attitudes will stand in the way of reconciliation.

5. We must be willing to forgive if we expect to be forgiven. Most of the time, when a brother who has offended us humbly repents, everyone rejoices, and forgiveness is granted. Jesus, however, knew that it would be withheld by some. Therefore, He made our forgiveness from God contingent on our forgiveness of others (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:21-35). Unfortunately, in our day and time, it is uncommon for people to own up to their wrongs. Some immediately become defensive and rationalize or refuse to talk at all. Sins against brethren, however, need to be repented of like any other sin. It is neither right nor pleasing to God to say, "I'll just let that go."

6. Problems cannot be rationalized away. Paul did not say of Peter's wrong behavior in Galatians 2: "Oh, he's just having a bad day." He had to be confronted concerning it. Sinful behavior cannot be overlooked amongst friends or even fellow apostles. On another occasion Peter had to rebuke Simon the Sorcerer for his desire to have power not granted unto him. Whatever he may have done afterward, at least he deserves credit for his response in Acts 8:24: "*Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.*" Simon did not seek to justify or defend his actions. He did not blame someone else. On those occasions when we have said or done the wrong thing, we should admit it.

7. Problems can only be settled on the basis of truth. No one can be forgiven on the basis that he is another brother's friend or relative, has other fine attributes, possesses tremendous influence, or has a great deal of money. Problems resolved in those ways compromise the truth, which all gospel preachers are committed to defending. Only by continuing in the Word can we know and practice the truth (John 8:31-32). Unfortunately, many personal conflicts can be reduced to "he said . . . he said" situations. In the midst of conflicts, some begin to judge motives, which only compound the problem. As much debris as possible should be cleared away to concentrate on the main offense. We ought to be impressed with these and other principles of conflict resolution that our Lord placed within the Scriptures. How can we speak of unity and peace when unresolved situations continually confront us? All of us ought to be concerned about being peacemakers.

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