

RESOLVING CONFLICT GOD'S WAY

A sermon for Sunday, September 10, 2017, by the Rev. Dr. James Mutayoba

Gospel: **Matthew 18:15-20** [Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

I begin with words from Romans 13:8 “***Owe no one anything except love...***”

I read a story from some publication of a Pastor who didn't get along with his Church Musician. Their disagreements spilled over into the worship service. The 1st Sunday the Pastor preached on Personal Commitment to God, the Church musician countered the message with the Hymn, “***I Shall Not Be Moved.***” The 2nd Sunday the Pastor preached on Giving gladly to God. The Music Director opposed the message with the Hymn “***Jesus Paid it All.***” The 3rd Sunday, the Pastor preached on Controlling the Tongue, the Music director hit the message with the hymn, “***I Love to Tell the Story.***” The pastor was frustrated and decided to resign. On the last Sunday before his departure the Church musician chose “***What a Friend We Have in Jesus***” as the Hymn of the Day.

We can create hell for each other if we choose to. The question is, *are we really a Church? Are we the communion of Saints?* Are we citizens of the Kingdom whose purpose is to worship God? Who are we?

Surely, the Church is made up of people called from all walks of life. We are not of one culture, or one race, or one language but we are a chosen people in whom the Holy Spirit resides. Our membership is marked by our separation from the world.

More often than not, brothers and sisters in Christ bring into the Church their old selves. On the one hand, we are of the Household of God. On the other hand, we are still stuck in our old nature. We can't resolve our differences amicably. We boldly offend fellow members of the Body of Christ and won't repent of our sin. Out of pride we cause divisions in the Church.

Knowing the nature of all human beings including Christians, the Lord Jesus put in place the means of resolving disagreements the Christian way. He commanded us to resolve our differences by **TALKING. We must TALK. We need to TALK** it out.

Why talk ?

1. **To protect God's reputation.** God's reputation is at state when believers tear each other apart.

2. The **Unity of the Church is at stake**. When **brothers and sisters in Christ** offend each other and fail to repent and reconcile, the community suffers.

Clearly God is not part of offensive **wayward members**.

The Lord suggests three ways of dealing with **wayward offenders**.

1. If a Christian brother/sister offends you, you are to tell the offender of his/her offense in **private**, *“just between the two of you.”* **Word** cannot be spread. No spilling beans. No leaking the word. We must AVOID GOSSIP NETWORKS!!! They SPREAD unwanted STORIES; and add EXTRA SEASONING beyond what originally happened!!! Be it a moral issue or doctrinal issue, PRIVACY IS RECOMMENDED to RESOLVE & RESTORE the Christian family.

2. If the offender is hard to deal with, Jesus recommends taking ONE or TWO WITNESSES to talk it over. Prayerful Trusted Christian Counselors would be ideal. The goal is to **restore**, not to shame. If the offender asks for forgiveness, it must be given. The offender does well if he/she seeks forgiveness. Remember, the person that **refuses to forgive** continues to suffer.

3. If however, the offender refuses to listen, the Church council must be the last resort. Prayerful Council members might help. However, some people may refuse to be reconciled due to pride, or hardness of the heart; Jesus allows for such people to be excommunicated.

4. Above all, we are encouraged to speak honestly and directly with each other; not in anger, not by spreading gossip and not by ruining people’s reputations. We can NOT hide the hurt that has been done. There is no winner and no loser. All that Jesus wants is **reconciliation of both parties**. Both should get back to a place of shared care and concern; of forgiveness and understanding.

Prayer is the best remedy. Jesus promises that *“**where two or three are gathered in his name** (he will) **there with them**.”* Jesus will be the unseen listener during prayer and the unseen counselor. Jesus will guide us thru to true reconciliation & victory.

- a) Thru prayer, Jesus has given us the power to unbind or forgive the sins of any.

Forgiveness and reconciliation is what Jesus is seeking for.

- b) Thru prayer, Jesus has also given us the power to bind or retain the sins of any that refuses to repent. But we can’t abuse this power.

It is the responsibility of Pastors, Church Council members and faithful Christians to “Keep watch over the flock.” Our job is not to disband the flock, by expelling members. That must be the last resort. Even then, all Council members must prayerfully agree with that conclusion.

Why? Because, the Church ceases to be a people. Indeed, the Church ceases to be a church when it fails to forgive.

Friends, forgiveness is hard to do, and yet it is the core of Church membership. If we can’t forgive those who have wronged us, how can we be God’s agents of reconciliation in the world? Amen!!