



# Light from the Word

## Biblical Approach to Conflict - Part 2

*“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the first part of this topic, we discussed the dangers of gossiping; the need for forbearance and self-examination. This second part will focus on our duties in approaching our brother or sister, and the role of the church vs. the individual in matters of serious conflict (the word *trespass* is from the same word also translated as *sin* and is not a matter of mild disagreement or conflict sometimes referred to as offense).

Seeking godly counsel is often advisable in such matters since *“every purpose is established by counsel and good advice.”<sup>2</sup>* Seeking advice could apply in cases where the matter is sensitive or for other reasons where we feel the need for guidance. But it should never be a cover for what is actually gossip and tale-bearing—such counsel should be sought from those who will provide grounded, biblical advice; perhaps a minister, elder, or other seasoned, mature believer who will hold the matter in confidence.

### Approaching our brother or sister alone

If, after humbly conducting a thorough self-examination,<sup>3</sup> we believe the Spirit's direction is to approach our brother or sister,<sup>4</sup> we should continue to be very prayerful. We can ask God to give us a genuine love in our heart for our brother or sister. When motivated by a true love, our attitude towards them will be such that we are acting out of concern for them, and not simply being critical. Ananias, when commanded by God to lay hands on Saul (Paul), protested, *“...I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.”<sup>5</sup>* However, God reads the

hearts, and He knew Saul was in sincere repentance, *“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”<sup>6</sup>*

Ananias was obedient and found that God had gone before him in the matter.

Likewise, we should remember that God is aware of the shortcomings of our brother and that He knows the true condition of their heart as well as He knew that of Saul. In other biblical examples, sincere prayer coupled with love and humility ultimately brought about reconciliation, not only between those involved in the conflict, but more importantly with God. Moses interceded many times for the children of Israel after they had not only wronged him, but had sinned against God.<sup>7</sup> Job prayed for his friends even though they had falsely accused him.<sup>8</sup>

Our choice of words should reflect this heart-felt love and a genuine desire to understand and help. The prophet Isaiah described it like this: *“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.”<sup>9</sup>* In this scripture, *“to speak a word in season”* literally means that our words will bring aid to those who are weary. Are our thoughts and words such that we are truly trying to help, or are we simply venting our feelings? To *“hear as the learned”* means to receive instruction. Do we really know all the facts about the situation? Are we interested in hearing the viewpoint of our brother or sister and honestly trying to see things from their perspective? Simply talking with a smile and not a frown is something that anyone can do, and will go a long ways in resolving conflict. Not everyone possesses a natural eloquence, nor is this necessary. People can readily detect sincerity and often remember their feelings much better than the exact choice of wording, long after a conversation is over.

— Please turn to pg. 61

# Continued Articles

## Biblical Approach to Conflict - Part 1

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### Taking one or two others

When, in spite of our best efforts, our brother or sister does not hearken to us; we have the obligation to approach them with one or two witnesses<sup>10</sup>—with one of the purposes being to establish truth with accountability for what is spoken.

Any perception (however erroneous) of pettiness or narrow-mindedness in our attitude will greatly hinder the Lord's work. The Samaritan woman at the well knew that Jesus was a Jew and was skeptical towards Him until she understood that He really did care about her and had her best interests at heart.<sup>11</sup> Whenever a small group approaches someone in such circumstances, we want to avoid giving the impression that we are combining forces to attack them. One way to avoid this is to have one person be the spokesperson while the others listen quietly, providing input only where necessary. Note that while the disciples had their own ideas concerning the Samaritan woman, they kept their silence while Jesus talked with her.<sup>12</sup> Our desire should be the restoration of the erring one and that our conversation is in *"the spirit of meekness"*.<sup>13</sup>

### Bringing the matter to the church

If during any of the previous steps we are able to come to find healing and renewed relationship in Christ, we have *"gained our brother"*.<sup>14</sup> This is truly a matter for rejoicing: *"verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray."*<sup>15</sup> However, in the event that the conflict remains unresolved, the matter becomes the responsibility of church leadership to administer further biblically based care and accountability for the brother or sister still struggling with sin.

It is clear from the context of Jesus' teaching that certain aspects of dealing with such matters are to be accomplished by the church and not individual believers.<sup>16</sup> That this authority does not apply to an individual member or even a subset of them becomes apparent when we note these verses apply to the "church" in Matthew's gospel and to the "disciples" (as a group of church leaders) in John's gospel. We must be careful not to misinterpret verses such as Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, *"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which*

*he received of us"*.<sup>17</sup> It may be tempting for us to take a verse such as this out of context and to avoid or ignore someone when we have strong feelings about them or even disagree with decisions that church leadership has made regarding them. To do so simply creates more conflict instead of resolving it. On the other hand, following the scriptural commands to resolve conflict by having love and respect for one another will bring us peace.

God gives great importance to peace between one another as brethren, *"Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all."*<sup>18</sup> Indeed, He who has reconciled us unto Himself has given us a ministry of reconciliation with each other.<sup>19</sup>

(Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:3

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 20:18

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 7:3-5

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 18:15

<sup>5</sup> Acts 9:13-14

<sup>6</sup> Psalms 34:18

<sup>7</sup> Deut. 9:18-20

<sup>8</sup> Job 42:8-10

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 50:4

<sup>10</sup> Matt. 18:16

<sup>11</sup> John 4:9

<sup>12</sup> John 4:27

<sup>13</sup> Gal. 6:1

<sup>14</sup> Matt. 18:15

<sup>15</sup> Matt. 18:13

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 18:18

<sup>17</sup> 2 Thess. 3:6

<sup>18</sup> 2 Thess. 3:15-16

<sup>19</sup> 2 Cor. 5:18