

Make Every Effort to Live at Peace With Each Other

- Share about the responses to the Verseles: A majority voice has affirmed and the Shepherds all agree that the Verseles would be a blessing to the church—so the decision has been made to make them the offer. But at the same time, we have decided to hold off giving the final signal because of some unresolved issues within the congregation. We do not believe that it would be fair to the Verseles to move ahead without making some progress. For this very reason, we cancelled our congregational meeting last Friday so that a small group could meet together and discuss some of these issues. Please pray for our congregation!

Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV) –

¹ If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- Christ is our standard – to be united with him is become like him. And Paul's desire is that by having that individual unity with Jesus, we would then have unity with each other!
- It is no coincidence that three of the eight times that the phrase "make every effort" is found in the New Testament, there is a reference to work of building unity and making peace:
 - "Let us therefore *make every effort* to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (**Romans 14:19**);
 - "*Make every effort* to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (**Ephesians 4:3**);
 - "*Make every effort* to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (**Hebrews 12:14**);
 - Making peace requires great effort on our part in allowing the Spirit of God to work.

Philippians 2:5-11 (NIV) –

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

- ⁶ Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- ⁷ but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
- ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death –
even death on a cross!
- ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
- ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

- Amazing—almost too incredible to believe! Jesus gave up his divine rights (*equality with God*) and his human rights (*a fair trial, not to mention countless other sacrifices*) so that we could be saved. He did on of this simply because he wanted a relationship with us!
- At its very core 'grace' is God willing to give up his right to condemn and punish as demonstrated that on the cross—he is willing to deny 'legal justice' so that we might be forgiven. But sadly, although this sacrifice is for everyone (**1 John 2:2**), a person must accept full responsibility for that sacrifice for grace to save us—*as if we had hammered the nails into his hands and feet ourselves*.

GOD'S JUDGMENT AND OUR CONSCIENCES

- James describes this contrast of mercy and judgment very clearly...

James 2:8-13 (NIV) –

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

- *Justice* puts principle above person—right above relationship, whereas
 - *Grace* puts person above principle—relationship above right
- God has created us with capacity to develop consciences – the ability to discern right from wrong. If we see a situation in front of us that has a moral aspect (i.e., action due to choice), we either judge it right or wrong, or because of lack of internal clarity in our own consciences, we are not sure. Therefore, our moral judgment activates whether we like it or not—it is automatic.
 - Although we all have them, not all of our consciences are the same or necessarily result in the same reactions: ³For example, if someone suddenly stood up and slapped Keith Hanson, there would be different reactions in the room:
 1. Most would react immediately and indignantly—"That's wrong!";
 2. Some might want to strike back (including Keith) but not do anything;
 3. Some might even wonder what Keith had done to deserve the slap (even assuming that it was deserved);
 4. Some might just feel confused about the whole situation and shut down completely.
- Paul spoke about his own conscience in these terms...

1 Corinthians 4:4-5 (NIV) –

⁴ My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. ⁵ Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

- Fundamentally, having a clear conscience means that you believe that your motives are right! And that probably describes most of us most of the time. But I truly appreciate Paul's humility here; having a conviction about my motives doesn't prove my innocence—I leave that up to God.
 - Our consciences are different, and even the level of confidence we have in our consciences are different. Some people are just naturally more certain of their being innocent, than others—I fall into that category and that's why these verses are so important to me!

- ‘Judge nothing before the appointed time’ is interesting because in just the next chapter Paul seems to say exactly the opposite:

1 Corinthians 5:1-13 (NIV) –

5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. ²And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? ³Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. ⁴When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

⁶Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? ⁷Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

⁹I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—¹⁰not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

¹²What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? ¹³God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”¹

- Some very important observations:
 - The Corinthians were ‘proud’, not of the specific sin or sinner, but of their *tolerance*.
 - The disfellowshipment is also for the benefit of the congregation, not just a discipline for the person—‘a little yeast works its way through the whole batch.’
 - So how can we reconcile these two passages: *We are to judge those in the church based on their behaviour*, but at the same time only God truly knows their motives. Hopefully the Holy Spirit working together with their consciences will be able to bring them back to repentance. If they are willing, eventually the fellowship might again be able to help them, but they are going to have to want to repent and live righteously.
- Although sometimes such an outcome is inevitable, the Scriptures give us some specific teaching that can help reduce the possibilities of these going so far...

SEE TO IT BROTHERS

Hebrews 4:12-14 (NIV) –

¹²See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

- This is one of the important elements of human *disciplining*—to help each other stay faithful to God and not be deceived by sin.
- Jesus gave us another version of this when specifically dealing with sin against each other which can break down and destroy our relationships.

Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV) –

¹⁵“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. ¹⁶But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

- ‘If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault...’ – Before we explore this passage more closely, let's look at a case of someone not putting this into practice...
 - Read **1 Corinthians 6:1-8** – ‘... *The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*’
 - What was going on in this person's mind? Apparently a business deal between two disciples had gone sour and by using the legal system, one brother would be able to get what was rightfully his. It looks like he didn't even make an effort to use any of the God-given resources of the church, but just went ahead and did whatever it took to get his way. But at what cost?
 - A few years back, we had some problems in the church where some people posted all their issues on the Internet and others hosted open forums where anyone could say whatever they wanted—however they wanted. Although there were understandable reasons for upset and some had been treated unfairly, answering ‘wrong’ with ‘wrong’ did not help anyone—in fact, these actions actually damaged the faith of many innocent people.
- Going back to **Matthew 18:15-17** – ‘if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you’:
 - This is a God-ordained process – if someone offends us we should go to him or her first. To not do that is to disobey God's instruction... Our excuses to violate this teaching are many, but doing things the wrong way there will always be many negative consequences:
 - What if we have misunderstood what has happened to us therefore making our version of the story untrue? Then our words would be both *slander and deceitful*.
 - What if our negativity affects others and they become negative as a result? As in, ‘*The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him*’ (**Proverbs 18:17**). By sharing this judgment against another without following **Matthew 18:15ff**, the grace of God is missed and a ‘*bitter root*’ can grow up ‘*to cause trouble and defile many*’ (**Hebrews 12:15**).
 - What if we just don't think we have the strength to do the right thing? Then we need to pray and ask God for strength, and possibly even ask others for prayers while at the same time refusing to give away any information about the offense or offender.
 - What if our favorite confidante sees that we're distressed and really wants to know more details so they can sympathize and comfort us—even with the use of encouraging scriptures? Then this person is being a stumbling block and an unrighteous influence keeping us simply doing the right thing! God has created us to seek comfort from our pain, but by speaking to the wrong person (i.e., not the offender), we often feel comforted and no longer motivated to reconcile the situation. Consider **Jeremiah 6:14**: ‘*They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. “Peace, peace,” they say, when there is no peace.*’ Although we have received comfort, we have not resolved the issue...
 - If the person doesn't listen then we need to follow the rest of the process. Bring a faithful person to witness your discussion and hear your offence, so that they can help the both of you see what is right. (This wasn't meant to give us license to spread our judgment about the other person until we find someone to agree with us, and then take them as our witnesses).
- ‘Living at peace’ can sometimes be challenging because of our own personal sense of justice. And truly, it is only through the exercise of God's mercy and grace that we can see the right outcome...

Romans 12:17-21

¹⁷Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰On the contrary;

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”

²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.