

# Biblical Reconciliation: Going Beyond Peace-Making

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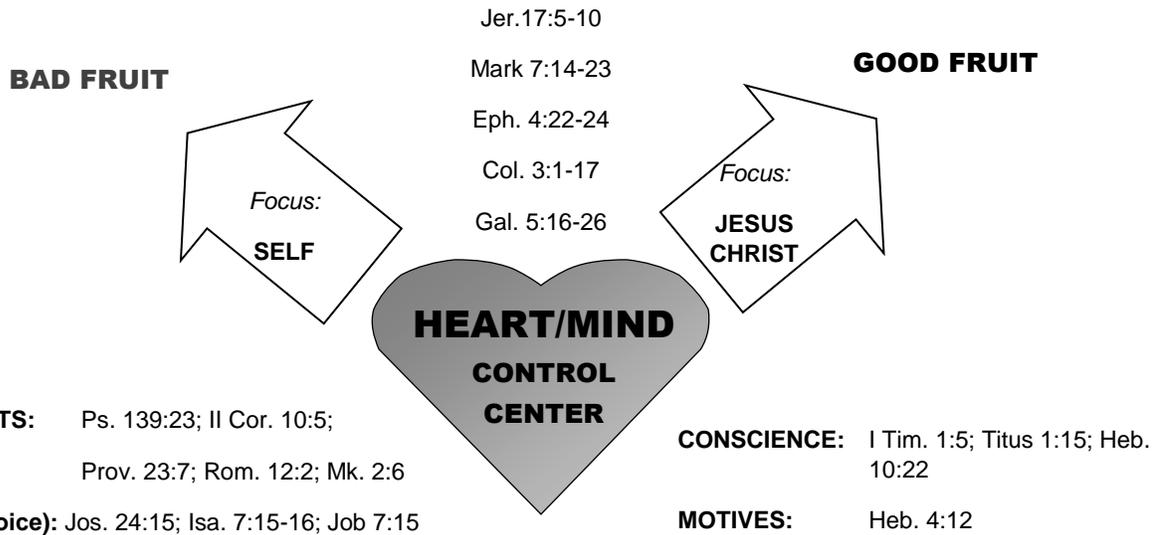
## 1 GETTING TO THE HEART OF CONFLICT

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Every conflict within the church presents the pastor with a great teaching opportunity. Because every conflict within the church is a reminder of how much Christ is needed. The source of all conflict begins in the heart (James 4:1-3) with its cravings and dominant desires which fuel anger, slander and violent reactions. It denies the truth and grace of gospel in the Christian life because it positions itself in pride.

### A. A Look at the Problem of Sin as It Affects Worship of the Heart in Conflict

1. The Location - The Heart (Gen.6:5; Matt.22:34-40; Prov.4:23; Mk.7:20-23; I Sam.16:7; Ps.111:1; Prov.23:7)



**Man's Control Center**

2. The Occupation – Worship (Ex.20:1-6; Rom.12:1; Jer.2:13; I Kings 18:21; Matt.12:34; Jos.24:14-20; Rom.6:16; Matt.6:21)
  
3. The Frustration – Idolatry / Lust (I Kings 11:4; Ezk.14:1-11; Rom.1:25; I Cor.10:1-14)
  - a) Wanting or desiring something that God does not want or desire
  
  - b) Wanting something that God wants or desires but wanting it so much that one becomes ungodly to get it or ungodly if they don't
  
  - c) Being controlled by expectations and becoming ungodly in thought, word, or deed when the expectation is not realized
  
  - d) Perceiving a deserved right and following through with ungodly thoughts, words, and actions to try to get it when that right is denied
  
  - e) Believing in something, a standard or rule, that is not of God and that leads to ungodly practices
  
  - f) Having a mindset that is against the truth of God's Word, that leads to ungodliness in thoughts, words, and actions
  
4. The Regeneration — versus Rehabilitation
  - a) The Gospel and its counterfeit, the psychologized gospel
  
  - b) Rom.10:8-10; Matt.7:21-23; Eph.3:17
  
5. The Transformation - The Renewing of the Mind / Heart
  - a) This is a battle (war) (Rom.12:2; Eph.4:22; II Cor.10:5) - into Christlikeness
  
  - b) Rom.8:28-29; II Cor.3:18; Gal.4:19, Eph.4:13-15; Col.1:17; 3:10

6. The Glorification - Christ's Return (Rom.8:18-25,30; I Cor.15:50-58)

7. Summary and Conclusion

- a) Pray daily (Psalm 139:23-24)
- b) Ask yourself:
  - (1) What are my goals, expectations, or intentions?
  - (2) What do I become anxious over or fearful over?
  - (3) What makes me happy?
  - (4) What motivates me?
  - (5) What would I like, possibly more than anything?
  - (6) In what situation do I respond in anger?
  - (7) What perceived right(s) has been denied?
  - (8) What biblical standard or principle permits that thought, word, or action?
- c) Write down how that particular idol/lust is worshipped in thought, word, and deed.
- d) Acknowledge what it is and confess it as a sin of idolatry.
- e) Ask forgiveness from God and whomever is a part of the worship process.
- f) Study God's character to examine how your view of God is skewed. Do an in-depth study on the character and attributes of God that are directly involved in this area of change.
- g) Be ready to learn how to replace idol/lust worship with the worship of God.

## 2 REPENTANCE TOWARD RECONCILIATION

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Resolution of conflict involves a careful understanding and practice of repentance. Confession of sin is proved genuine when it is followed by a thorough repentance. Repentance involves a change of mind that is so complete that it leads to a change of life. God is clear that He does not desire mere peace, He desires complete and full reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-26; cf. Romans 12:15-21).

The word "repent" basically means to turn or to change. It is best illustrated by the picture of someone who is walking one way but does a "180" and heads in the opposite direction.

Repentance is a necessary component of genuine conversion (Luke 3:3; II Cor.7:10). Unsaved people must turn from sin, which is the state of self-rule they have lived in as their own lord and master (Rom.10:9; I John 3:4).

Repentance also remains continually necessary after conversion (Psalm 51; Luke 17:3-4). Saved persons must turn from sins, which are the specific symptoms of the lingering disease called "the flesh" (Rom.7:14-25; Galatians 5:16-17).

All true human repentance has reference to a turning from the state or occurrence of sin and turning to God for forgiveness and renewal. Scripture often alludes to a false repentance that does not actually bring forgiveness (eg. Matt.3:7-8; II Cor.7:10b), so we must understand some elements, effects, and examples of repentance in order to practice it ourselves and help others do so as well.

### a) Elements of true repentance

#### (1) Comprehending

We must understand the truth relevant to our sin and our Savior before we can repent. The Greek word most often translated "repentance" is *metanoia*, which denotes "a change of mind."

#### (2) Confessing

The two-fold nature of inward confession is revealed in the meaning of the Greek verb *homologeō* ("to say the same thing"). We must acknowledge to God the fact of our sin and agree with God about the nature of our sin (Prov.28:13; I John 1:8-9).

#### (3) Choosing

True repentance always includes a willful resolve to not repeat the sin (cf. Isaiah 1:16-17; Luke 5:27-28).

b) Effects of true repentance

Although repentance itself is an inward turning that takes place in the heart and mind, it inevitably leads to change in other areas of a person's life. If it is not accompanied or followed by such effects when they are appropriate, it is not a real repentance but a false one that fails to bring forgiveness (cf. Matt.3:7-8; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20; II Cor.7:10b).

(1) Restitution

The word means "to set things right" - the repentant sinner must fulfill any obligations to the offended party (cf. Ex. 22:1; Lev.5:15; Luke 19:1-10). This includes both an outward confession when it is appropriate (James 5:16) and a willingness to accept the consequences of our sin (Ps. 51:3-4).

(2) Reconciliation

When our sin has resulted in a broken relationship with another, true repentance will cause us to do whatever we can to transform the conflict into a peaceful and edifying friendship (Matt.5:24; Rom.12:18; II Cor.2:7-8).

(3) Regret

True repentance may not always be accompanied by emotions (especially those that are visible to others), but in many cases a feeling of sorrow corroborates other evidences and points to a real change in thinking (Ps. 51; Job 42:6). Emotional responses alone, however, do not prove that repentance is genuine (cf. I Sam. 15:27; II Cor.7:10b).

(4) NOTE: We must remember that not every case of repentance requires all of the above changes, and we also must be very careful to allow the fruits of repentance to be defined by God rather than by man (Mark 7:6-13; I Corinthians 4:5-6).

c) Examples of true repentance:

(1) Psalm 51 (David)

(2) II Corinthians 7:9-11

### 3 FORGIVENESS AND HUMILITY (PART 1)

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Two essential qualities are necessary for complete reconciliation and restored unity in a conflict. The attitude and practice of Christ-like forgiveness and humility. When these two qualities are absent there will never be true reconciliation but only a truce. God desires more than a cessation of hostility. He wants His Body to be perfectly unified. This is possible, no matter what the disagreement may be, if there is a knowledge and desire to achieve Christlikeness in all the parties involved.

#### A. What is forgiveness?

The primary Greek verb translated "forgive" (*aphiemi*) means "to send away" or "to release." So in reference to sin it means "to pardon." But forgiveness has also rightly been described as a promise, because when God forgives, He promises that He will never hold our sins against us (Jeremiah 31:34).

So the best definition of forgiveness is a promise of pardon.

#### (1) God's forgiveness

Man needs forgiveness from God both before salvation and after salvation.

The forgiveness needed before salvation can be called judicial forgiveness, because God acts as a judge, declaring us righteous forever and delivering us from eternal condemnation (Romans 4:3-8; Colossians 2:13-14).

The forgiveness needed after salvation can be called parental forgiveness, because God is now our loving Father who wants to free us from the temporal discomfort of His chastening (Matthew 6:12; Hebrews 12:5-11).

#### (2) Our forgiveness

We are to forgive one another just as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13), so when we grant forgiveness to someone, we are promising that we will "not remember" their sins anymore (Jeremiah 31:34).

That means we will never use their sin against them, so practically we are saying the following to the one we forgive:

- (a) "I will not remind you of this sin (unless it would be absolutely necessary to do so for your good)."
- (b) "I will not mention it to anyone else (unless it would be absolutely necessary...)."
- (c) "I will not allow my mind to dwell on it."

We are commanded to forgive, so we are sinning if we refuse to make that promise. Therefore forgiveness is a matter of obedience rather than feeling.

It is also sin for us to break our promise after we make it, and we can keep it regardless of how we feel.

b) Whom should we forgive?

Some passages in Scripture clearly imply that we can only forgive those who ask for it (e.g. Luke 17:3-4), while others seem to imply that we should forgive everyone who sins against us, regardless of whether they ask for it or not (e.g. Mark 11:25). How can we understand this apparent discrepancy? Perhaps the best way is to make a distinction between the transaction of forgiveness and the attitude of being willing to forgive.

(1) The attitude of love: willing to forgive

Even though we may not be able to fully reconcile with everyone who sins against us, our attitude toward them should never be one of anger, bitterness, resentment, or any kind of ill will. We should also treat them very kindly and graciously (Romans 12:17-21). We are commanded to love everyone (Luke 6:27-35), so we must desire their best, which means we will do everything we can to bring them to repentance and we will always be ready to reconcile, as Psalm 86:5 says about God.

(a) Mark 11:25

(b) Luke 23:34

(c) Matthew 6:12-15 and Luke 11:4

We can conclude from those verses (and others concerning love and graciousness) that any time someone wrongs us, we should pray to God in this way: ("Father, you know what has happened between \_\_\_\_\_ and me. Help me to not be angry or bitter at him, nor to seek revenge in any way, but help me to love him and desire only his good. Please work in his heart and bring him to repentance so that we can have a reconciled relationship. Use me in any way You can to help him.") For a believer that help may involve a confrontation according to Matthew 18, and for an unbeliever it would involve witnessing to him if possible.)

(2) The transaction of forgiveness

Just as God does not make His promise of pardon to people unless they repent (Luke 3:3; Acts 2:38), we cannot actually say "I forgive you" to people unless they admit their sin and repent. Therefore the transaction of

forgiveness is conditional in that we can only be fully reconciled to those who repent. Those who refuse to repent of their sin are not forgiven by God (in the parental sense mentioned above) and so the consequences of a broken relationship with the offended person continue.

Luke 17:3 says that our part of responsibility to those who sin against us is to confront them, and if we have truly dealt with our own heart attitudes first (i.e. if we have a willingness to forgive heart attitude). Then, if they recognize their wrong and repent from it, we can be reconciled to them. Matthew 18:15-17 makes it clear that we cannot be fully reconciled to those who have not repented, because if we did we could not continue the process described in those verses.

(3) Other issues related to whom we forgive

- (a) Confronting vs. "covering"
- (b) Apologizing vs. asking for forgiveness
- (c) What about forgiving God?
- (d) What about forgiving unbelievers?
- (e) What about forgiving dead people?
- (f) What about forgiving ourselves?

c) How should we forgive?

- (1) Immediately (Luke 17:3)
- (2) Repeatedly (Luke 17:4)
- (3) Lavishly (II Corinthians 2:5-8)
- (4) Why should we forgive?

### 3. FORGIVENESS AND HUMILITY (PART 2)

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#### A. Biblical References (a sample)

1. Proverbs 29:23, "A man's pride will \_\_\_\_\_, but a humble spirit will obtain honor."
2. 1 Peter 5:5, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is \_\_\_\_\_ to the proud, but gives \_\_\_\_\_ to the humble."
3. Matthew 11:29, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

#### **GENTLENESS**

- ◆ Submissive to the will of God
- ◆ Mildness
- ◆ Sensitivity to others

#### **ANGER**

- ◆ Uncontrolled hostility toward people and things
- ◆ Harsh, hard response when expectations are not met
- ◆ Bad temper

#### **PATIENCE**

- ◆ Slow to anger, willingness to wait
- ◆ Perseverance in doing what is right
- ◆ longsuffering
- ◆ Don't need immediate results, not pushy

#### B. Biblical Comparison, con't (Ephesians 4:1-3)

##### 1. Pride

##### a. Defined

- 1) Mark 7:2, haughtiness, arrogance
- 2) 1John 2:16; James 4:16, boastfulness
- 3) 1 Timothy 3:6, "wrap in smoke" deluded, be puffed up

##### b. Described

- 1) Pride of position (Matthew 23:6ff; 1 Peter 5:3)
- 2) Pride of ability or achievement (1 Corinthians 4:6-7; 2 Chronicles 26:15-16)
- 3) Pride of possessions (1 Timothy 6:17)
- 4) Pride of knowledge (1 Corinthians 8:1; Isaiah 47:10; James 3:13-18)
- 5) Pride of spiritual attainment (Luke 22:24-30)
- 6) "The root of every vice"—Andrew Murray
- 7) "It is a "vice which cleaveth so fast unto the hearts of men, that if we were to strip ourselves of all faults one by one, we should undoubtedly find it the very last and hardest to put off."—Richard Hooker
- 8) "It is the root of all other sins..."—Brian Whitlow
- 9) "Many people wonder why they have no victory over their wounded pride, their touchiness, their greediness..."—L. E. Maxwell

d. Displayed

3) Outwardly

- a) Boasting
- b) Seeking praise
- c) Seeking and accepting honor/recognition
- d) Self-confidence
- e) False pride

4) Inwardly

- a) A godless attitude (Hosea 13:6; Psalm 10:4; James 3:13-18)
- b) An unteachable spirit (Nehemiah 9:16, 29; Proverbs 18:2)
- c) Self-deception (Jeremiah 49:16; Obadiah 1:3; James 1:21-27)
- d) Ultimately ends in destruction (Isaiah 14:3-22; Proverbs 16:18; 18:12; 29:23)

e. Demonstrated

- 1) Satan (Ezekiel 28:12-19; Isaiah 14:12-15)
- 2) King Saul (1 Samuel 14-28)
- 3) Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)

4) Diotrephes (3 John 9-10)

f. Denounced

- 1) God calls it sin (Proverbs 21:4)
- 2) God hates it (Proverbs 6:16-17; 16:5)
- 3) God removes it from His presence (Psalm 5:5; 138:6; Job 35:12)
- 4) God promises to judge it (Job 35:12; Psalm 31:23; 101:5; 119:21; Proverbs 15:25; Isaiah 2:12; James 4:6)

3. Humility

c. Defined

- 1) Philippians 2:3-11, “to make low, to humble”
- 2) James 4:6, “low, humble”
- 3) Matthew 11:29, “lowly, humble”

d. Described

- 1) “There are three great motives that urge us to humility...”—Andrew Murray
- 2) “The sense of entire nothingness...”—Andrew Murray
- 3) It is simply giving the honor and credit to God...”—Whitlow
- 4) “having a humble opinion of oneself, a deep sense of one’s littleness”—Thayer
- 5) (Greek, *tapeinos*) “groveling-servile attitude to the Greeks, was lifted up by Christ and used to represent the noblest virtue of all.”—Trench
- 6) “The root of every virtue”—Murray
- 7) “If we would learn humility, we must learn to love hiddenness, to live a life with Christ in God, to nourish an enclosed garden of the soul where men’s praise is neither sought nor necessary.”—Whitlow
- 8) Focus on the Lord Jesus (Romans 7 & 8), serve others (Matthew 20:26-27; Philippians 2:7), learn from others, encourage others, trust others, lay down their “rights” for others.
- 9) “Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all...”—C. S. Lewis

- e. Displayed
  - 3) Outwardly
    - a) Assumes the servant role
    - b) Serves others who are being selfish or inconsiderate
  - 4) Inwardly
    - a) Acknowledge reality (Philippians 2:3; Romans 12:3)
    - b) Concentrate on God (Romans 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ephesians 5:18-20)
    - c) Assume the servant role (1 Peter 5:6; Colossians 3:12; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:1-8)
    - d) Love deeply (1 Corinthians 13:4)
    - e) Accepts God's chastening (2 Corinthians 11:30; 12:5-10)
- f. Demonstrated
  - 1) Moses (Numbers 12:3)
  - 2) John the Baptist (John 1:27; 3:30; Luke 7:28)
  - 3) Mary (Luke 1:38, 46-55)
  - 4) Jesus (Matthew 11:28-30; 20:28; John 13:1-5; Philippians 2:1-11)
  - 5) The publican (Luke 18:9-14)
  - 6) Paul (Philippians 1:21; 1 Corinthians 4:7; Ephesians 3:8; 2 Corinthians 4:5)

### C. Biblical Principles

- 1. Love
  - a. A personal choice (John 3:16; Matthew 5:44)
  - b. Willing self-sacrificing service (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:4)
  - c. Initiatory (1 John 4:19)
  - d. Practical (1 John 3:18)
  - e. Humble (Philippians 2:3-11)
- 2. Joy
  - a. The sense of well-being that abides in the hearts of Christians who know all is well between them and the Lord, in spite of their circumstances.
  - b. God's gift to believers (Nehemiah 8:10)

3. Peace
  - a. God's gift to believers, achieved by Christ on the cross
  - b. The tranquility of mind that comes from a saving relationship with Christ (Romans 5:1)
  - c. Expresses itself in both peace of mind (Philippians 4:5-7) and peace with others (1 Thessalonians 5:13)
4. Patience
  - a. Inward and outward tolerance and longsuffering in the midst of trying circumstances
  - b. A calm willingness to accept irritating or painful situations
  - c. God is slow to anger (Psalm 86:15) and expects His children to be the same.
5. Kindness
  - a. A tender concern for others
  - b. Behaving toward others as God has behaved toward you (Ephesians 4:32; 2 Timothy 2:24)
6. Goodness
  - a. Moral plus spiritual excellence
  - b. Sweetness
  - c. Active kindness (Psalm 23:6; Galatians 6:10)
7. Faithfulness
  - a. Loyalty and trustworthiness
  - b. Being the type of person others can rely on (Proverbs 20:6; 1 Timothy 1:12; 2 Timothy 2:2)
8. Gentleness
  - a. Meekness
  - b. Submissiveness
  - c. A humble attitude that is patient when wronged, while being free of any desire for revenge or retribution (Number 12:3)
  - d. Used of three attitudes in the New Testament:
    - 1) Submissiveness to the will of God (Colossians 3:12)
    - 2) Teachableness (James 1:21)

3) Consideration of others (Ephesians 4:2)

9. Self-control

- a. Restraining passions and appetites
- b. “Self-control” is that great quality which comes to a man when Christ is in his heart, that quality which makes him able to live and walk in the world, and yet keep his garments unspotted from the world.” --Barclay

D. A Biblical Model for Change

1. Confess and forsake sinful attitudes (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:8-9)—e.g. resist the first hint of evil desire (James 1:15)
2. Know yourself—i.e. underestimate the seriousness of your sin (Romans 7:13; Jeremiah 17:9; 1 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:1)
3. Purpose in your heart not to sin (Psalm 119:106)
4. Walk by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-24)
5. Read and meditate on the Word of God (Psalm 119:9, 11; 37:30; Joshua 1:8)
6. Change your thinking (Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Philippians 4:8)
7. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; Matthew 26:41)
8. Cultivate your love of God (Psalm 119:97; Colossians 3:2; Psalm 19:12-14)
9. Make yourself accountable (Hebrews 10:24-25; Galatians 6:1)
10. Long for Heaven (Philippians 1:23; 1 John 3:2-3)