

What Leads To Peace?

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The New York Times reported a little while ago that of the past three thousand four hundred years, approximately since the time of the Exodus, guess how many years humans have been entirely at peace, where they could go for a year with no war on the face of the earth. They reported that there had only been two hundred and sixty-eight years where there was no major war on the face of the earth. That's eight percent of recorded history. The United States has existed for two hundred and forty-one years. Guess how many years we have been entirely at peace. It is only nineteen years. Can you imagine? That's only seven percent of the time that this country has existed. That reinforces the fact that God says man does not know the way of peace. In Isaiah 58:9 in the Old Testament and Romans 3:17 in the New Testament are references that God says man just doesn't know the way. It's not in him. It's not part of his nature.

Yet the Bible tells us there is a way that leads to peace. It also tells us that we have a personal responsibility in finding peace, that is leading to peace. I want to emphasize that today. Remember, one of the very first things Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:9:

Matthew 5:9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. (KJV)

Making peace, having peace is very important to God.

In the last month or so I have had four people come to me regarding this subject of peace, so I thought it might be good to talk about that today. What we want to do is look into what leads to peace, which is the title of this sermon.

Point 1: Peace Takes Work.

Peace doesn't come by itself. Peace for sure isn't part of human nature. If we're going to have peace, it takes work. Ambrose Bierce was a United States writer and journalist. He died in 1914. He was making a sharp point about this whole subject of peace. He couched it as you would in a dictionary. He said "peace, noun, in international affairs a period of cheating between two periods of fighting." That's the way it is in the world today.

Peace is more than just not fighting. You cannot fight and still not have peace. Making peace takes work on all of our parts. Let's go to Isaiah 32:17. The prophet Isaiah under God's inspiration tells us this very thing. To have peace it takes effort.

Isaiah 32:17. *And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect [end result] of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. (KJV)*

This tells us that if we as individuals behave righteously, we can have peace inside ourselves. Also, it tells us that we collectively as a church group will have peace if we as a church group behave righteously, following God's laws and God's commandments. Let's turn to a New Testament reference in 1 Peter 3:11 from the New King James Version. He is encouraging all of us.

1 Peter 3:11. *Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. (NKJV)*

To seek and pursue peace takes work. "Seeking" means *to go after* and "pursuing" means *to run after*. In an effort to find peace that means it takes work. Let's see what the apostle James has to say in James 3:18 from the New Living Translation, because I believe it's clearer in this context.

James 3:18. *And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness [goodness]. (NLT)*

Planting takes work and we know that when you plant something you gather fruit at a later point in time. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us what the fruits of the spirit are.

Galatians 5:22. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23) Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (KJV)*

We see here that if we want these fruits, one of which is peace, we have to put in the effort beforehand, the planting so to speak of seeds of peace that will allow us to reap that fruit. You see, peace is not a result of human nature. If you put people together, they will fight, frankly most of the time as history has shown.

All of the scriptures that we've read so far tell us that peace comes as a result of hard work on the individual's part. To make peace we have to control our human nature that wants to fight, wants to get even, wants to get back and we have to resist the provocations of Satan who is the prince of the power of the air. He puts thoughts and emotions, suspicions and fear into our minds as we're going to cover later. We have to resist all of that.

We have to understand that peace is not something natural. Peace takes work.

Point 2: Personally, Individually Growing in Humility Leads to Peace.

If we can personally and as a church group grow in humility that leads to peace. There is a great tendency among all of us, part of our human nature, to focus on the faults and

sins of others, not our own. This is one of the big issues that Christ had to deal with. In the Sermon on the Mount, His very first recorded sermon, He tells us that you better remove the beam, the two by four out of our own eye before we look and evaluate and judge the speck in our brother's eye. That is in Matthew 7:1-5.

Matthew 7:1. *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

2) *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

3) *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?*

4) *Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?*

5) *Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (KJV)*

Christ knew that was a problem with human nature. He brought it out in His very first sermon. Around Passover time we cover the very familiar scripture of 2 Corinthians 13:5.

2 Corinthians 13:5. *Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (KJV)*

It tells us to examine ourselves. It doesn't say to examine others. With that in mind let's turn to Galatians 6:1. This is addressing a situation where if somebody has a fault or a shortcoming or even a sin. What do you do about it?

Galatians 6:1. *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ... (KJV)*

This is not going to them condemning and judging, but going in the spirit of meekness.

1b) *... considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. (KJV)*

We make an effort to show one of the lost sheep gently, kindly, with humility what that fault might be. We have to make the effort. Remember what did God say in Isaiah 66:2?

Isaiah 66:2. *For all those things hath mine hand made, and those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word. (KJV)*

This is who God looks at. Somebody who trembles at God's word knows that they need to be doing this and yet does so out of a contrite, humble spirit, going to a brother or a sister when they see them going astray. They need to go there with a humble attitude.

We know that God listens to those who are humble and He rejects those who are prideful and haughty. Sometimes we might wonder if God is listening to us. We need to look again at ourselves, not at other people. Look at our humility gauge and see where it is, because maybe we might have a hidden fault or a flaw that results in pride or arrogance or something like that.

If we are humble and work for peace, God will grant that peace. Now that leads to the third point. This is something where Satan steps into the picture.

Point 3: Fear and Suspicion Destroy Peace.

Wherever there is fear, wherever there is suspicion peace goes away. Several years ago, in marriage counseling I counseled the husband. I asked him about his background and how he grew up and what his home life was like. He said when I was a little boy, as it got into mid-afternoon, late afternoon around four o'clock I would start getting knots in my stomach because I knew my father was coming home. When I heard his car in the driveway I ran and hid under the bed. He said what would happen every day is my father would come blasting in the front door and start attacking my mom; yelling, screaming, taking out his problems, frustrations, whatever it might be on her. The boy was under the bed when that was going on. He said the rest of the evening my mom would spend getting back at my father, overtly and covertly.

Can you imagine the turmoil in this little boy's mind when that happened every day? The home is supposed to be where there is peace and safety and security. This young boy had anything but that. All he saw were the fruits of the flesh between his dad and his mom. The only thing he knew to do was to hide under the bed.

Peace is destroyed when there is not harmony in the home. Peace is destroyed when one mate suspects the other mate of infidelity. Peace is destroyed when a rumor is spread about a friend and people hear it. That gets people upset, so therefore peace is destroyed. Because of all of the historical turmoil in the church, basically since the '70s, brethren are sometimes quick to suspect the worst. They have been burned before and once you've been burned you suspect maybe it's going to happen again.

Today there are people in God's church that are expecting "the other shoe to drop." I've heard that term for years, so I went and did a little search on it to find out where it originated. It originated in the United States about a hundred and fifty years ago. Back then, certainly in the major cities, the industrial revolution coming, many people lived in rooming houses, boarding houses or apartments. In those days there wasn't insulation between floors or even in the walls in many cases. If you lived on the first floor of an apartment or rooming house and the neighbor above you let's say was a working man, factory worker, all you had above you between him and you were the rafters and then the floor boards and that was it. When he came home from work, you could hear his door open, walk across the floor and plop down on a chair or on his bed. Then after a few seconds you would hear a boom when he took off his work boot. You knew within

three, four or five seconds there was going to be another boom as the other boot was taken off and dropped on the floor. It wasn't if it was going to happen. It was when it was going to happen. That is where the term "waiting for the other shoe to drop" came from.

With that in mind when people have had trouble or been burned in the church then it's very easy to understand why some people are always in a state of tension because they are "waiting for the other shoe to drop." They learned to expect the worst. When you expect the worst, it leads very easily to making accusations and to having suspicion. That in turn turns to gossip and rumors. If you have been in the church any length of time, you know that gossip and rumors sweep through the church quite often. It's amazing that people speak of things when they are totally unencumbered by knowledge, not knowing anything about the facts. I heard after the Feast that there was a rumor about me that I had given a sermon saying that an angel came down from heaven and impregnated Mary. That is really silly, because I've never said that, but it's been heard, repeated and undoubtedly believed by some people. You hear something like that which is so off of the wall and ask why don't people go to the source, make a phone call, send an email and say did you really say that? That way it could be taken care of. In many cases, in part because of suspicion, the agenda is not finding the truth, but of discrediting somebody other than yourself or discrediting a group other than your group.

The lesson here for all of us is that we must verify before we believe. When those kinds of things happen, be assured that Satan is right in the middle of it stirring the pot. We know that the apostle Peter warns us to be sober, to be vigilant because your adversary the devil is like a roaring lion. He is wandering around seeking who he may devour. Satan doesn't take days off. Satan doesn't sleep. Whenever there's an opportunity to cause division or trouble or upset or fear, Satan is right there in the middle of it. Satan, plants the spirit of fear. He broadcasts and can plant emotions in us. He can plant the emotions of apprehension or dread or fear. They have no object. I think all of us have experienced it. I certainly have. Everything's fine and all of a sudden you have this feeling of impending doom or dread or fear come across you. I think, wait a minute. There's nothing ahead of me that should cause me to have that feeling, particularly since we know the truth and have God's spirit. Where did that come from? You see, Satan provokes that and suspicion and expecting the worst in mates, brethren, ministers, waiting for the other shoe to drop. That is Satan's job, because he wants to get to each one of us. When we have suspicion or apprehension or dread or the feeling of waiting for that other shoe to drop, what is at the heart of it? That is fear. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7:

2 Timothy 1:7. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (KJV)

When we have the kind of fear I'm talking about, we're guaranteed it does not come from God. I'm not talking about reverencing God. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:7 about love:

1 Corinthians 13:7. ... believeth all things ... (KJV)

That means love doesn't wait for the other shoe to drop. Love isn't suspicious. When fear and suspicion and dread come, we need to realize the source of it. It's not God. It is Satan. When we have those emotions come upon us, what we have to do is go to the source of love, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faith and that is God Almighty. The holy spirit imparts that into us through its very power.

Let's understand this third point is that fear, suspicion destroy peace. Now that leads us to the fourth point.

Point 4: Not Condemning, Not Attacking Others Leads to Peace.

If people condemn and attack, that is the opposite of peace. That destroys peace. I think we've all seen it in the church that some make a habit of putting down their life mate, their husband or their wife. I've known people that you can pretty much guarantee that the minute they walk in the door they are putting their mates down in public, making snide remarks or comments about their mate. Guess what? There's no peace in that marriage I guarantee you.

It's sad to say in the greater church some individuals and some groups make it their job to look down on other groups, look down on other people. Some individuals do the same thing. It's very easy if we yield to our human nature to look down on others, either groups or individuals, because in doing so we are subtly aggrandizing ourselves. I wouldn't do that, but look what they're doing. You see some groups or some brethren have become experts in character assassination, which is a sad thing. They are saying horrible things about people when they weren't there, didn't know the truth, and couldn't know the truth. Yet they assassinate somebody's character by making accusations they have no basis of knowing, just repeating something that somebody told them.

In Pacific Church of God, we try our very best to cooperate with other groups. We do so in the state of Washington. We did at the Feast in Elkhart. We had a combined dinner with another group in the evening. It wasn't a service, just a dinner with another group that had a Feast nearby. There were about a hundred people there. By all accounts everyone had a wonderful time. Everybody got along and the group was at peace.

Let's look at a great moral principle regarding the church. Let's turn to 1 Kings 6:1. When you first read this you might wonder how this is a moral principle, but we'll see.

1 Kings 6:1. *And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of*

Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord. (KJV)

Now let's go down to verse 7.

7) And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building. (KJV)

What this tells us is that the temple rose from the ground in quietness and in peace. Can you imagine being there to watch it being built? If you've ever been near a construction site recently, all you hear is noise. We had an orchard taken out across the street from us. There were backhoes and wood chippers and clanging and banging, big trucks coming and going. It's anything but peaceful. Yet we're told the mighty temple rose in peace and quietness. There's a great moral principle here. Even some of the commentaries remark about this. Matthew Henry's Commentary says regarding 1 King 6:7 that "God's work should be done with much care and little noise. Clamor and violence often hinder, but never further the work of God."

There's a principle here because we're the temple of God as we all know. As a reminder, let's turn to 1 Corinthians 3:16. We're going to see there is a great lesson here for us today in the construction of the first temple in the fact that we are the temple of God.

1 Corinthians 3:16. *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (KJV)*

Turn to 1 Corinthians 6:19.

1 Corinthians 6:19. *What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [Spirit] which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? (KJV)*

He is drawing a direct analogy to the Old Testament temple. What we're told in these two verses is that our body is the temple where God dwells, just as God dwelt in the holy of holies of the tabernacle first and then later the temple.

Think about this. We, in the church of God that carries His name, together are a temple where God's holy spirit resides. Let's turn to Ephesians 2:21-22. Not only is our body the temple where God's holy spirit resides; we are going to see the church is the temple where God's holy spirit dwells.

Ephesians 2:21. *In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord:*

22) In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. (KJV)

Not only are we individually the temple of God, but the church is being built by individuals who have God's spirit. The church in that sense is being built and is comprised of those who have God's holy spirit. Peter alludes to this in 1 Peter 2:5. Notice that we are actually the building blocks.

1 Peter 2:5. Ye also, as lively [living] stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (KJV)

Let's ask the question, how can we be building the spiritual temple, the church, if we keep tearing it down? If we are the temple of God and the church is the temple of God, why is there so much strife in the building of this temple? Hammers are used to beat people down who stand in our way. Chisels are used to chip away at people that we disagree with or dislike. Can we really be God's temple when these conditions exist, if there is clamor, if hammers are being swung at one another, chisels are being used to chip away at one another? Obviously, God is not pleased when that happens.

The logical question then is what can I do personally to change so that I can be assisting in building a spiritual temple, the church that will never fail? It will always be there, because it's built of spiritual stones of which each of us is one of those stones. Let's turn to Colossians 3:13-15. This is how it gets done. Remember, peace does not occur naturally from our human nature. We have to do something to work for peace.

Colossians 3:13. Forbearing one another ... (KJV)

That Greek word "forbear" is Strong's number 430, which means figuratively *to put up with, to bear with, to endure, to suffer*. Sometimes the stone that's residing next to us in the temple is having a bad day. Maybe something is said or maybe an attitude is gotten across. We are told here sometimes it's good to keep the mouth shut and just put up with somebody who might be having a bad day.

13b) ... and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel [blame] against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. (KJV)

We see here that forbearing and forgiving, going back to the first point, take work. They don't come naturally. Continue in verse 14 out of the New International Version.

14) And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (NIV)

Continue in verse 15 from the King James Version.

15) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts ... (KJV)

Rule is command. Rule is authority.

15b) ... to the which also ye are called ... (KJV)

We are called to peace, but peace takes work.

15 continued) ... in one body; and be ye thankful. (KJV)

Again, it takes forbearance, forgiveness. It takes work to let God's peace rule in our hearts. Let's turn to 1 John 2:9-11, because John lays it on the line. I like the words of John, because his sentences are short and he says it plainly. They are very direct and he cuts through a lot of the fluff that we see in the modern world today.

1 John 2:9. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother ... (KJV)

The Greek word for "hate" can mean *detest or love less*. Remember the second great commandment. We are to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. He is saying hating here you can be loving your neighbor less than yourself.

9b) ... is in darkness even until now.

10) He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.

11) But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes. (KJV)

We see here that there are some people, even with God's spirit, even in the church who do not exercise God's holy spirit and can be blind to the fact that they love their brother less than themselves. They do so by criticism, being judgmental, condemning others be it individuals or groups. Now let's turn to 1 John 3:15-16.

1 John 3:15. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. (KJV)

If we love our brother less, detest our brother, we will not be in God's kingdom is what John is saying.

16) Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (KJV)

We understand that Christ died for us. By laying down our life we should be willing to die for our brothers and sisters. That is the way this verse has been explained down through the years. Also, "lay down" has a broader meaning than that and John has a

broader meaning than that. "Lay down" means *to bow down or to commit*. When he says we ought to bow down before our brothers and sisters, that ties in with Philippians 2:3 where it says:

Philippians 2:3. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (KJV)

In that sense when we esteem somebody better than ourselves, we are willing to bow down in front of them and put them ahead of us and to commit to our brothers and sisters, to their welfare wanting them to be in God's kingdom.

We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, but how can we do that if we are attacking our brethren, judging our brethren and condemning our brethren. Now John hits it again in 1 John 4:7.

1 John 4:7. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. (KJV)

We see here that we are individually responsible for loving one another, even if somebody does evil toward us. Christ said turn the other cheek; walk the extra mile; don't return evil for evil. We are responsible for loving one another, for not attacking and not condemning. If we do so, we will have peace, not only peace individually, but peace in whatever group we belong to.

Point 5: Not Listening to or Repeating Gossip Leads to Peace.

Let's turn to Proverbs 16:27-28 from the New King James Version.

Proverbs 16:27. An ungodly man digs up evil ... (NKJV)

We have heard in the presidential campaign both the Democrats and the Republicans were paying other people to dig up dirt on their competitor. God is saying if you do that you are an ungodly man or woman.

27b) ... and it is on his lips like a burning fire. (NKJV)

He can't wait to spread it all over.

28) A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends. (NKJV)

There are two parts to gossip. The first part is the hearing. Let's go to Proverbs 20:19 from the New Living Translation.

Proverbs 20:19. *A gossip tells secrets, so don't hang around with someone who talks too much. (NLT)*

That's true, because in a multitude of words sin is going to be there sooner or later. A gossip tells secrets.

A number of years ago, over ten years ago anyway, one of our ministers called me one day and said I just had a conversation with another minister. I just want to let you know about it. He said this about you. The other minister got about half way through and our minister told him I don't want to hear it. I know it's not true. I don't want to hear it and I'm not going to talk to you again if you keep doing this. By that action of not hearing you can stop gossip in its tracks. When we personally refuse to hear gossip, then we are individually doing our job of stopping it in its tracks.

The second part in gossip is the repeating of gossip. This is where it can spread like wildfire. As we know, there have been rumors spreading through the church for decades about all manner of stuff. Let's turn to Proverbs 26:20. I love the analogies here. This is so clear about repeating gossip.

Proverbs 26:20. *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. (KJV)*

When strife ceases, you have the opportunity for peace. Look at verse 22.

22) *The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (KJV)*

All of us over time have been the subject of gossip. When you hear it you have this kicked in the stomach feeling. That's what this verse says. When you realize that somebody is saying something horrible about you, we have that human reaction. Now let's turn to Proverbs 11:13 from the New International Version.

Proverbs 11:13. *A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret. (NIV)*

Benjamin Franklin famously said "three may keep a secret if two of them are dead." That is true. When you have three people there are going to be secrets passed around. Yet, God tells us that a gossip betrays a confidence, but somebody who is trustworthy, a true friend, can keep a secret. Look at Proverbs 18:13. This is a principle that we all need to take heed about.

Proverbs 18:13. *He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him. (KJV)*

When we hear gossip about an individual or a group, we weren't there. We weren't eye witnesses. We didn't hear it with our own ears. If we repeat it, we are giving an answer before we know the truth. Often when somebody tells me something like that, I say were you there? Did you hear it with your own ears? They say, well no but I have it on good authority. That and five bucks will buy a cup of coffee. Let's understand that God says if you answer a matter before you hear it, then it is a folly and shame. If you don't investigate, if you have an opinion, whether it's doctrinal or about a human being, what you are hearing is just bogus. Let's see this principle followed up in the New Testament in Titus 3:1-2. Paul is writing a letter to Titus. He is giving him advice. He is actually giving him a command in this case. He is saying this about the people under his authority.

*Titus 3:1. Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,
2) To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers [fighters], but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men. (KJV)*

Gentleness and meekness are fruits of God's spirit. Brawling and speaking evil are of Satan. He is saying just put them in mind that they need to show forth the fruits of God's spirit rather than follow the provocations of Satan.

We can all personally stop gossip by refusing to spread it. Maybe somebody tells you something and it's out before you can stop them. The way to stop it there personally is just not tell it to anybody else. After all we've been through in the church, all of these years, we should have learned one thing by now and that is not to listen to gossip or grumbling, because the vast majority of the gossip, at least that I hear, is not true. We need to be the one who stops gossip in its tracks by either not hearing it or not repeating it.

Point 6: Following Christ's Instruction on Conflict Resolution Leads to Peace.

This has been an issue in the church for over fifty years in my observation. If we don't follow Christ's instruction, just the opposite occurs. My wife and I had our own business for sixteen years. I did the traveling, the marketing, the sales, the teaching and the training and she ran the office. We represented manufacturers. The president of one of our manufacturers visited us. The three of us traveled together. He told me afterwards, you and your wife seem to be very happy together. I said yes, we are. My wife runs the office and I do the traveling and selling. We work together very well. I can still remember as if it were yesterday that his head hung down. He put his hands in his pockets and shuffled his shoes. This was the president of a fairly large corporation. He said my wife and I have unresolved issues. He had been married for between ten and fifteen years. He indicated that these issues had gone on for years and he didn't see any hope in the future of resolving them. The point I'm making is that if conflict is not resolved quickly, love is diminished and peace goes away. He indicated that there was this low level of tension in their relationship because these conflicts after all of these

years had not been resolved. When he came home there was a degree of tension. If we don't follow Christ's instruction on how to resolve conflicts then relationships go away; love goes away and peace goes away.

What has happened historically in the church since I first came into the church is that when there is a conflict, the one who is offended, rightly or wrongly, rather than going to the person that caused the offense, they go to everybody but that person. They spread it all over the church that so and so said this to me or did this to me or offended me and I'm hurt and on and on and on it goes. Maybe they even go to the minister about it. The reason is to go to your brother or sister takes character. It's really hard to do. With that in mind let's go to Matthew 18:15-17. This is Christ's instruction on one aspect of conflict resolution.

Matthew 18:15. Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee ... (KJV)

This assumes guilt on the other part.

15b) ... go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: ... (KJV)

This should be big, bold with a neon sign and flashing lights around it. Gird up the loins and go over and tell the person that caused the offense.

15 continued) ... if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (KJV)

This means that you have reconciled. I have heard some people say well, I can't go to him because he's not approachable or I can't go to her because I know she'll explode. There are no qualifiers in this verse. It doesn't say go if it's easy or convenient or go if they're going to welcome you with open arms. It just says go to them, but it says alone. If it involves a minister, it's double problematic because in the past brethren were afraid to go to a minister. All too often somebody would go to a minister who had caused the offense. They would tell the minister what the offense was and how they had been offended. The reply often was that you're in a bad attitude. You go back and fast and pray. Some of us, and I've had it happen to me, go to a minister and you get your head handed back to you. That's not a pleasant experience. Over the years people became reluctant to go to a minister if there was an offense.

I will speak for the elders in Pacific Church of God. We are very much aware of this and we do our very best to listen to what the other person is saying and not condemn. We don't want to fall in that category that all of a sudden people stop talking because they are afraid of having their head handed to them.

You see, going to someone who has offended us takes character. It is contrary to our human nature. Let me give you an example. This was in the late '70s here in central Washington. One day I got a call from a woman who was in tears, because she was very hurt. She overheard another person gossiping about her and saying something

that was not true. This woman who called me is very sweet and very humble and she wouldn't hurt a flea. She was just in tears because she thought this woman was her friend. She said what do I do? I said, get your Bible and I went over Matthew 18:15 with her. I asked her to read it and she did. I said, okay what do you think you should do in light of this scripture? She said I need to go talk to this person. She said she didn't know if she could do that, because she was a humble, sweet young woman. I said look you have to. If you obey God, God will give you the strength to do it. I didn't want to know who it was and she didn't tell me. If the other woman has an ounce of God's holy spirit, then God will guide you to reconcile and come back together. She said, okay I'll do it, but I'm just scared to death. She apparently did, because I didn't hear anything for four or five days and then got a phone call. The tone of her voice was totally opposite from the first call. She had joy and a lilt in her voice. She said she went to the other woman. She told her what she had heard her say. The other woman was so apologetic and was so sorry and she cried. They both cried. She said I'll never do that again. I love you. I didn't mean to say that. At the end of the conversation they were closer friends than they were before she ever heard the gossip. That is God's way of solving a problem. Continue in verses 16-17.

16) But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17) And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglects to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

(KJV)

We see here that God gives a minimum of three chances to reconcile.

This covers the aspect of somebody who has been on the receiving end of an offense. Now let's turn that coin over and go to Matthew 5:20-24 from the New Living Translation. Notice the strong language here.

Matthew 5:20. *"But I warn you—unless you obey God better than the teachers of religious law and as the Pharisees do, you can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven at all" (NLT)*

Wow, unless we're more righteous we can't enter the Kingdom of God at all.

21) "You have heard that the law of Moses said, 'Don't not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.'

22) But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high counsel. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell." (NLT)

We see here that Christ equates anger against a brother or a sister with murder.

23) "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple offering a sacrifice to God and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you,

24) leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. (NLT)

This doesn't say well if you're guilty go do it. It just says do this if you are aware that somebody has something against you or is ticked off at you. It's easy to see, because somebody isn't as talkative around you or their tone of voice changes or their facial expression changes. Most people can't hide it all that well. It doesn't make any difference if we are guilty or not guilty. Maybe we don't even know what the problem is, but we are commanded to go to that person, whether you are guilty or not. Yet I've heard people say well it's not my problem. They are ticked at me. I don't know what it is. That's not what this verse says. It says if you realize somebody has something against you, doesn't make any difference if you are guilty or not, we have to go to them. We are commanded to go to them and make an attempt to reconcile.

You see between Matthew 18 and Matthew 5 it covers every aspect of personal conflict. Matthew 18 covers those who have been offended and Matthew 5 covers those who have caused an offense or a perceived offense. We must go directly to our brother and sister. If we do that, we will have peace. It's hard to pick up the phone and say, you know I heard a rumor and they told me that you said this. You will find out if both people have God's holy spirit and exercise it, peace results. We have to be able when we go to somebody like that to discuss differences or apparent offenses. We have to do it calmly and respectfully, not losing our temper; once anger comes in, once emotions come in, then Katie bar the door. We can't allow that to happen.

As I said if two people have God's spirit and exercise God's spirit, there is no conflict that cannot be resolved. Let's turn to Romans 8:6, a principle we need to keep in mind.

Romans 8:6. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. (KJV)

If we put our brother or sister first, we're doing so with a spiritual mind. We need to talk even though we are fearful of the other person or intimidated by the other person. It doesn't make any difference.

Let me cover one scripture that some people quote as a way to avoid going to their brother or sister. It's found in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-16. Paul is giving the church and us today a warning.

2 Thessalonians 3:14. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. (KJV)

Many stop right her, slam the book and say, okay that guy or woman over there is not obeying Christ's words or the apostles' words in the New Testament. I am going to have nothing to do with them from this point forward. I have seen that happen. Guess what? They don't read the next verse. It's so simple.

15) Yet count him not as an enemy ... (KJV)

No, they're a brother or a sister that may be taken in a fault. We don't know.

15b) ... but admonish him as a brother. (KJV)

The Greek word for "admonish" means *to caution or to reprove gently*. My question is how can you admonish somebody if you don't have contact? You can't. It's impossible. The Greek word for "company" means *to mix up together or to associate*. You see, we can admonish and not associate. We can talk to somebody without rubbing elbows continually, but we can talk to them in an effort to reconcile, maybe to get somebody to see the errors of their ways. Remember, leaving the ninety-nine and going after the one? That's a principle too.

16) Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all. (KJV)

This verse tells us if we follow this, we will have reconciliation. If we disobey it we are going to have fighting and dissolution. If we obey God's word, peace is the end result.

Point 7: Patience Leads to Peace.

This is the most important point. The very first split in the church occurred in 1972. I was a deacon at the time on the east coast. There was a group of ministers and district superintendents in the middle to southeast part of the United States talking about breaking away from the Worldwide Church of God. It was the first time there were ever any rumors about that. Rumors were flying all over the east coast. People were taking sides. It was very disturbing to me, because this was the first time. I called my mentor, who was a regional pastor when I first came into the church. He had been assigned to Pasadena at the time. I told him and he already knew, of course. He gave me some advice I never forgot. I was a pretty upset guy. I was worried, because this had never happened. He said don't do anything fast. Be patient. Let things play out. He said you don't need to be afraid, to be upset because God is in control. If you let things play out then you are going to see clearly what to do, because you will see the fruits come out over time. His counsel of patience gave me great peace in the middle of this turmoil. I learned a great lesson there that we have to be patient with ourselves. We get in trouble by pulling the trigger, by shooting first and thinking afterwards. His counsel was to be patient. Let things play out. God is in control. Yes, the split occurred, but it became very clear that those that were causing the disruption were in the wrong. It's not that every upset they had or every accusation they had wasn't true, but they were clearly in the wrong. Let's turn to Psalms 37:7-11 from the New King James Version. David is speaking. This follows on this advice that my mentor in the church gave me.

Psalms 37:7. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret ... (NKJV)

If you look up the word “fret” in the Hebrew it means *to glow or grow warm*. We know when we’re upset and angry, you can just feel the heat in our body grow. In some people you can actually see their face glow red, because they’re upset.

7b) ... because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.

8) Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret — it only causes harm.

9) For evildoers shall be cut off; but those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.

10) For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more.

11) But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (NKJV)

Christ repeated this in his very first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. He is saying look if we wait on God, if we are patient, peace is the end result.

There is a Chinese proverb that says “If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.” If we are not patient, we do and say things we later regret. In Luke 21:19 the New King James Version says:

Luke 21:19. By your patience possess your souls [lives]. (NKJV)

We take hold of our life. The Greek means *to possess or acquire our life*. If we have patience with each other and with the church, we possess, grab hold of our lives. We don’t lose our lives. Patience is a key to achieving peace.

Let’s wrap this up. The words of God, every one we’ve read today, are always for our benefit, for our good because God loves us. God wants all of us to have peace. He wants to give us peace. As we’ve seen, we have an individual responsibility in this matter. We can destroy peace or we can make peace. It involves work.

Pacific is named so for a reason. It wasn’t named because we are in the Pacific Northwest, as many people think. There are many who are part of the Pacific Church of God that are emotionally hurt, that have been abused, neglected, have had their faith damaged. Many have come to us because of that. As we’ve talked many times, we’re all kind of walking wounded in that regard. We want to provide a safe haven for the brethren where they can be taught God’s way and they can see it put into practice, where the brethren are being served. It can be a place of peace and safety where they will be taken care of and well treated. Let’s turn to Philippians 4:7. This is what we can achieve through the power of the holy spirit and it is the gift from God.

Philippians 4:7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (KJV)

Peace comes from God. It's the peace of God that came through Jesus Christ. Then let's turn to what Christ himself said the night he was taken captive in John 14:27. Notice what Christ says. He is going to go die and the disciples are all discombobulated. They don't know what to think. They have no clue as to what's really going to happen, so he is trying to encourage them.

John 14:27. Peace I leave with you, my peace ... (KJV)

This means the peace Christ had at that moment facing death.

27b) ... I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (KJV)

You see, peace comes from God and Christ when we obey them and when we have the mind of Christ, but we have a part to play in this. We all need to determine now that we will do our part in making peace.