

## **Class 202 Leadership in the New Testament Church, Part 2: Session Five Notes**

*He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes heavy with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. (Psalm 78:70-72)*

### **Priorities, Goals and Methods in Resolving Kingdom Conflicts**

As we've discussed, Kingdom "management" is different from managing the things of this world. For this reason our priorities, goals, and methods in resolving conflicts must be those of the Kingdom, not the world.

### **Priorities in Kingdom Conflict Resolution**

#### 1. The truth

*For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. (2 Cor. 13:8)*

As Christians, we are called to be people of the truth. In any attempt to resolve conflicts we must have the highest concern for the promotion of the truth. Truth here has two senses:

- First, it means truth in the philosophical sense of *what is real* - the absence of falsity. Truth should be prized in all our dealings and we must avoid every form of falsehood, deception, and exaggeration. (Remember the example of the philosopher Hegel.)
- Second, truth also means *the truth of the Gospel*. As messengers of Christ, we must uphold the Word of Christ. We do no favors by using lies or falsehoods, however well-intentioned, or however much we may think we are doing so out of necessity in order to uphold the cause of Christ. As Christ Himself would never be false in His own cause, neither can we.

Christians in conflict must be called to acknowledge the truth, both in the abstract sense and, where there is a doctrinal dispute, the truth of the Gospel.

2. The unity of the Spirit ...*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:2-3)*

The Spirit Himself creates the unity of the Church by taking human beings and making them members of Christ's body. Unity is the natural condition of Christians in community with one another and cannot be created by human efforts – only maintained. A weakness of the modern ecumenical movement is a tendency to insist on unity without the real grounds for it: *being people who are loving one another as they are being built upon the rock of Christ.* Where people are not reconciled to: (1) God; (2) each other; (3) or the truth of the Gospel, such attempts are only a modern day re-creation of the Tower of Babel. However, our love for Christ and each other contains the grace to transcend denominational differences.

*Endeavoring* is too weak a word in English to capture the force of this Greek word which means to speed, be diligent. When there are breaches in the walls of love which protect the Body, we must make haste to repair them.

Unity is guarded in the bond of peace. This means that all Christians and particularly leaders must strive to follow the things that make for peace. (Rom. 14:19) This means we must forego our "right" to make war with people as we discussed last time. Christians in conflict must be called to do everything that is biblically enjoined upon us in order to preserve peace - and make peace where it is broken - for the sake of safeguarding the unity of Christ's Body.

3. The testimony of the Church

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? (1 Cor. 6:1)*

While the priority of unity challenges us to look to the internal health of the Body, conflicts necessarily involve the outward testimony of the Church – our ability to represent Jesus to the world without scandal. The matter of lawsuits is merely one example where Christians can show themselves to be no different from (and certainly not better than) people of this world. The very word *scandal* literally means a trap or a snare. It is often rendered as a "stumbling block" in English. Such things give opportunity to people's flesh to dismiss the message of Christ and despise His servants.

This should need little elaboration, but for the honor of Christ's Name, the believer must be encouraged to avoid creating offenses and scandals that may reach outside the four walls of the Church. It is sadly the case that many are more concerned with self-vindication.

### **Goals in Kingdom Conflict Resolution**

#### 1. Reconciliation to God

*Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight... (Psalm 51:4a)*

As Christians we have been given the ministry of reconciling fallen humanity to God. Many Christians also create offenses and conflicts through ignorance of (or refusal to obey) what Christ commands. At its root, sin against God drives sin against men, whether it be in the form of (1) outright violation of Christ's commands, or (2) the character of those driven by uncrucified flesh. As in the quote from David above, all sin is sin against God in the first instance. The wise leader may not be able to begin discussions with someone at this point but should "observe the sheep" and so know when this is really where the problem lies. Telling someone he was wrong to shout at another is different from telling him he has an anger problem.

#### 2. Reconciliation to each other

The second goal is of course reconciling brothers to each other. We have discussed this briefly above, but seeing as Christ has commanded us to love another as He has loved us we cannot pray and work too strenuously to achieve such a goal. It is easier to keep some commands than others, especially when we feel wronged, but this command is indeed a command from our Lord and not merely helpful advice from a friend.

#### 3. Reconciliation to leadership and vision

*Finally, be ye all of one mind... (1 Peter 3:8a)*

The third goal is restoring people to the commonality of purpose and vision in the assembly or the mission, wherever possible. However, this is not always possible. The New Testament is not shy about revealing the bumps in our relationships in the Kingdom. Some may be resolved over time (Paul and John Mark); in other cases (Paul and Barnabas) we are not sure if resolution was ever achieved. In any case, the parties must forgive one another and commit to walk in love towards each other despite their differing approaches or visions.

## **Methods in Resolving Conflicts Among Christians**

### 1. Handle with Prayer

You will need access to the supply of the Spirit in these situations; remember our discussion of the Spirit of counsel and might.

### 2. Commit to follow Jesus' commands

*... if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. 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. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. (Matt. 18:12-22)*

It is not optional for Christians to obey the instructions of Jesus for resolving these matters. This means there are certain things we cannot do: practice gossip; slander; disclose confidences; or, do other things against the way Christ prescribes. The issue for many is just that: there are many who believe in the truth, and will fight for it, but truth is only part of discipleship. Being willing to not only follow a certain doctrine but also to follow the way of Christ is the main issue in being a disciple of Christ.

### 3. In practice

- Defusing aggression, thoughtlessness, cruelty, revenge
- Gentle instruction reinforcing forgiveness, Christlikeness, and the fear of the Lord
- What about arbitration?
- What about pointing out doctrinal errors?
- What about shunning and excommunication?
- The wisdom of saying, in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.