

GENTLY RESTORE.

Text: Matt 18:21-35.

THEME: How can I lovingly serve others by helping them take responsibility for their contribution to this conflict?

Grace, peace and mercy, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Galatians 6:1, 'Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.'

Talking to other people about a conflict is often an unpleasant experience which can degenerate if the other person takes it in the wrong way. Because no sooner than when you start making a list of their wrongs towards you [to show how they've wronged you], they give it back to you all the more, which will further put the healing

process on hold indefinitely. So the best way to approach this subject is to remember God's love, grace and mercy towards us.

This way, we can approach others in a spirit of love rather than in a spirit of condemnation. And instead of using guilt and shame to force others to change themselves, we can tell of the grace through the wonderful news that God wants to free them from their sin, and help them to be the person he wants them to be.

Sometimes when people are weighed down by problems and stress; God may use you to help carry that person's load. And if the situation can be sorted out by the two of you, then the better off for all concerned. But if they don't listen to you, then you are better off getting others involved who know how to handle difficult situations like this. But the difficulty in serving others in the midst of a conflict; is to help them see where they have been wrong and where they need help to change it. But how

do you do that in the best possible way, without confronting, offending and condemning the other person?

Just how do you confront someone without pain, and restoring them without irritation? One way we can do that, is by simply listening to Jesus in his boundless love for us. To “show them their fault” by using his ‘restoration’ theme to help, restore, give, and forgive those who are caught in sin [1 Thess. 5:14; Gal. 6:1; James 5:20].

This can be done using actions like, teaching, instructing, reasoning, showing, warning, admonishing and rebuking if necessary [Matt. 5: 23-24; Luke 17:3; Acts 17:17]. These are just some ways in helping this cause, perhaps you may know of some other techniques or behavioural patterns to help in times of conflict as well.

If we are sensitive and are aware of the body language of the other person by sensing their feelings and mood, then

this is the time to do your best not to let your disagreement that you are facing, degenerate into further quarrelling or arguing. There is more to restoring someone than merely confronting them for their wrongs. If you interested and are asking yourself how; then listen on?

Let’s look at some Scriptural examples of approaching someone about their wrongs. First of all, I’ll ask you to recall and remember the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, and the conversation they had? He did not confront her directly about living in adultery, but instead he engaged her indirectly by using questions and discussion that engaged her in the process of thinking about and assessing her own life [John 4: 1-18].

The apostle Paul is another example of when he engaged with the Athenians, in regards to the statue to ‘The Unknown God’. He did not confront them head on about their idolatry, but spoke on a point of common interest

and then moved gradually to the good news of the one true God. In doing it this way he won over some converts to Christianity.

Queen Esther took two days and two banquets to get to the point of telling the king about the injustice of his decree to kill all off the Jews [Esther 5-7]. These examples show that we can approach someone about their faults in an indirect way and not the obvious direct approach that we are used to, which may be necessary at times but is not always the case.

Okay, so now we've touched on it, so what can you do if someone's sins are too serious to overlook? Is this why Jesus said, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" [Luke 17:3]. But how would you gauge whether their sins are very serious in the first place: what would your definition be?

The best thing to do is to approach the individual personally and privately and remember bringing in others is usually a last resort if your attempts fail. Then to help you sort out the seriousness of the conflict; work out if the sin is dishonouring God, the church and other fellow parishioners and also with your relationship with this person!

And I'm not talking about this matter in a minor way, for God is patient with his people, we all sin and do silly one off things: but conclude whether it really is very obvious and harmful to all questions asked before in what that person is doing.

Finally, is this person's sin harming himself? An example could be: alcohol abuse, or unwholesome talk which is damaging their relationship with God and other people. After all, looking out for the well-being of other Christians is a serious responsibility. It would be irresponsible of any Christians to let members of their

congregation do their 'own thing'. And where possible you can use non-Christians to help this person's problems or sins. There is good help in this world as well, because we live in this world and Christians and non-Christians alike can help each other. Another way of helping this person is to contact someone in authority [pastor or elder] who may be able to help.

Let us now refocus and take a sobering look at this issue of conflict once more. It is wise to remember that many differences and offences are the result of misunderstandings rather than actual wrongs. So if and when you approach another person in regards to conflict, do so in a tentative manner. And unless you have a clear understanding of the situation and circumstances, give the other person the benefit of the doubt and be open to the possibility that you have not assessed the situation correctly.

But if all goes well and you were on the right track after all, you now ace the next challenge of 'what do you do after the log is out of your eye?' As Jesus teaches in the book of Matthew 7:3-5: You should not try to talk to others about their wrongs until you have dealt with your contribution to a problem. When you follow Jesus' teaching, your confession will sometimes encourage the other person to admit sins, but not everyone will respond in this manner. In some cases the other person will acknowledge little or no responsibility for the problem, which can sometimes put you in an awkward position.

On the other hand, if you just walk away without discussing the other person's wrongs, he may not come to grips with the need for a change. And if that becomes the case, then you can revert back to overlooking the offence[s], or you could build on your confession of your part in the conflict. This can mean, that you are making a confession whereby the other person will or may be encouraged to make some form of admission from which

you can start to build a relationship from. You can also use appropriate words and reflect back to them in more detail. Here is an example of what I mean: “I appreciate your admitting that you lost your temper, Bob. May I explain how that made me feel?” This may open the door to talk about the other person’s sin. Otherwise it may be reasonable and right to postpone talking to them when you feel the circumstances and mood may not be appropriate right now.

Now, just to give a summary, overview and application of this week’s lesson in ‘Gently Restoring’ someone back into the fold in the nicest possible way, this is roughly what was discussed. First of all let me restate, that the best way in resolving conflict is to best overlook the offence of others; even though this can mean feeling the pain of alienation, exclusion, and encouraging these people to continue to act in a hurtful manner. And to your detriment, you may be seen as a steaky-beak,

interferer, nosy parker or something similar; which comes with the territory.

But if you know that this person’s sins are against you personally, go and speak to that person as soon as possible. And likewise, if this person’s sins are dishonouring God, damaging your relationship, hurting others, or hurting that person, then one of the most loving and helpful things you can do is to go and see that person for a need and change in attitude. Simply because damaging behaviour cannot go on without end.

And with God’s grace and the right words [including your own confession], such a conversation will lead to restored peace and stronger relationships. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.