

GET THE LOG OUT OF YOUR EYE.

TXT: MATTHEW 18:15-20.

THEME:

How can I show Jesus' work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict?

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

Conflict is a two way street where both sides/parties are equally guilty when they decide to be in conflict with each other. These people may do so with good reason and best of intentions to show how they were wronged [because they feel that they are right]: but like we heard last week [the bottom line], does this infighting quarrelling honour God?

Let me share this anecdote: Mark was an associate pastor of a large church who felt he was overlooked for the senior pastor's job after the retirement of the previous pastor, which he put down to the elders prejudices against him. In fact, they believed among other things that he was too young and was not mature enough to take on the role.

This situation left a lasting effect on the congregation [because he had his supporters] and after six months had passed, the leaders brought in Peacemakers to handle the situation. Here was his big chance to now get back at those who overlooked him in the first place. He had in his hand, he held a prepared statement that will make the elders look silly because of their oversight of him and he was fired up to give them, 'what for?'

Yes, they talked behind his back, slandered him openly, and generally doubted his ability to fill the shoes of the retiring pastor. So, how dare they ignore him; they are

the one's who are going to walk away with their tails between their legs and with egg on their face.

So after seven of the nine elders told of their involvement and confessed their sins and asked for forgiveness; because some of them went to great pains to tell how truly sorry they were, it became evident they now wanted to move on. But this didn't deter Mark; this was his big chance, until he heard his wife Donna who was invited to speak first.

She told that right up until a few moments ago she was holding on to her hate and was murdering each of them in her heart [1 John 3:15, Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. NIV], and now she was sorry for how she felt and wanted their forgiveness as well.

Now it was Mark's turn and the words that came out of his mouth shocked even himself. He now spoke of how

he was the guiltiest of all; simply because he desired the senior pastor's position and was not taking counsel from the elders that God was always in control over their lives, and that he wasn't the right choice for the position at that particular time.

Mark confessed openly that he exalted himself and became defensive when people raised honest concerns about him, and even when people asked for his forgiveness he refused to give it. He now asked forgiveness from every one and hoped that they would forgive him as well.

The point of the story is that both sides have equal responsibility in a conflict. It's not a matter of who is right or who is wrong; because when we take a look at our own personal role in a conflict, we can become our own accusers, because deep down we know when we are wrong or where we have erred. So we refuse to let others know that.

This true incident is an example of “The Golden Result”. It is an outcome of The Golden Rule, which is; *people will usually treat us as we treat them*. If we blame others for a problem, they will then blame us in return. So when God moves one person to start getting the log out of his or her own eye, it is rare that the other side fails to do the same.

What we all need to do is to admit that our own sins are so serious that Jesus had to die for us, and also remember that he has forgiven us for all our wrongs. That way; we can let go of our illusions of self-righteousness and freely admit our failures, which will make it easy for us to see the other person’s point of view.

So let me ask this question: ‘are things worth fighting over?’ Jesus had much to say about resolving conflict. As we read in Matthew 7: 3-5. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no

attention to the plank in your own eye? 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. NIV

The danger about this verse is for people not to look at the other person and the faults they have, and not to look at your own. Jesus wants you to face up to your own responsibilities in a conflict. For instance, is the conflict itself; personal or material?

Personal issues involve our attitudes and feelings towards others that result from how we have treated one another. An example could be, “I am upset about your lying to me” or ‘You did that just to embarrass me’.

Material issues can be illustrated as in Luke 12: 13-15, “Someone in the crowd said to him, ‘Teacher, tell my

brother to divided the inheritance with me.’ Jesus replied...’Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.’” The personal issue here is on how can the family inheritance be divided? The outcome for both is that *material and personal issues* often feed on and aggravate each other.

In many situations, many conflicts can be resolved by simply overlooking the offenses of others. This approach is highly commended in the Bible; we can read that in books such as Proverbs (19:11; 12:16; 15:18; 20:3), 1 Peter 4:8; Eph. 4:2; and Col. 5:13. So when we overlook the wrongs of others, we are imitating God’s extraordinary forgiveness towards us. (Psalm 103: 8-10) tell us, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities”.

Since God does not deal harshly with us when we sin, we should be willing to treat others in a willing fashion. This, however, does not mean that we must overlook all sins, but it does require that we ask God to help us discern and overlook minor wrongs.

One way we can do that is to examine our attitude and change it appropriately so that we don’t have an overly sensitive attitude to others on what they have done. It is also good to examine our attitude in the light of God’s word.

The Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians contains an excellent formula for examining our attitudes during a conflict (which you can read in Phil.4:2-9). So when Paul heard about the argument of two workers [Euodia and Syntyche who were in conflict with each other, he firstly urged them to ‘rejoice in the Lord always’.

Basically, if God has lavished good things on all of us, why on earth are we conflicting with each other? How can we ‘rejoice in the Lord’ if we are in a conflict with each other?

Secondly, let your gentleness be evident to all who are watching you [Gal 6: 1-2]. By being gentle in the midst of a conflict is a most powerful way to breathe grace to others, especially when your behaviour is noticed by all. Such gentleness reflects Christ’s presence and power in your life which honours him.

Thirdly, replace anxiety with prayer. This will help in developing a godly attitude toward conflict. When Paul writes ‘be anxious about nothing’, he is not talking about trivial matters. He knows we cannot stop being anxious, because worried thoughts have a way of creeping back into our minds no matter how hard we try to ignore them.

Therefore the best way to overcome this negative thinking is to replace it with more constructive thoughts, such as praising God for his grace in the gospel. Thanking him for the many things he has already done for us in this and other situations, and praying for assistance in dealing with your current challenges [cf Matt. 6:25-34].

The fourth thing you can do is to see things as they really are. When you get rid of the negative stuff that’s hanging around in your head, you are now able to think deliberately about the aspects of others that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy [Phil. 4:8]. Paul is teaching us to counterbalance our natural tendency to focus only on the bad things in those who oppose us.

And fifthly, practice what you’ve learnt. Paul’s final instruction to Euodia and Syntyche [and to us] is direct and encouraging; “Whatever you have learned or

received or heard from me, or seen in me, put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” Paul knew what he was talking about when it came to conflict. He had to deal with intense conflict and opposition during his stay with the Christians in Philippi [Acts16:16-40] which means those people saw him in action.

Not only did Paul teach and demonstrate how to deal with disputes, he also understood our human tendencies to be hearers rather than doers of the Word. He exhorted the men and women of the Philippian church to put their knowledge into practice: otherwise all their learning was in vain.

I pray that we learn from his examples as well. Amen.

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