

Revival and Reformation

Reformation: Healing Broken Relationships

Lesson #12 for September 21, 2013

Scriptures: 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1-25; 2 Corinthians 10:12-15; Romans 5:8-11; Matthew 18:15-17.

1. This lesson is about resolving conflicts, differences, and issues that arise among members in the church. The early Christian church saw differences arise among members that needed to be resolved. Jesus Himself also gave us some examples of how to deal with such issues. What can we learn from those early Christian examples?
2. When it comes to relating to the community, how the church lives is much more important than what the pastor says.

Let us remember that a Christlike life is the most powerful argument that can be advanced in favor of Christianity, and that a cheap Christian character works more harm in the world than the character of a worldling. Not all the books written can serve the purpose of a holy life. **Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives. Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth.** (9T 21.1)

The most powerful evidence a man can give that he has been born again and is a new man in Christ Jesus, is the manifestation of love for his brethren, the doing of Christlike deeds. This is the most wonderful witness that can be borne in favor of Christianity, and will win souls to the truth. (*General Conference Bulletin*, July 1, 1900 par. 13)

The life of a true, lovable Christian is the most powerful argument that can be produced in favor of the Gospel. (ST, August 16, 1905 par. 9)

“If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35, *GNB*) What does that imply about the lives of all others? If the church in our day really learned to show love for its members, would others be attracted? How much love is needed? Look at the way *Desire of Ages* describes the early years of Jesus while in Nazareth!

3. Look at some examples of differences that arose between Paul and his fellow workers. Read Acts 13:13; 15:36-39. John Mark’s parents owned the upper room where believers gathered.

This desertion caused Paul to judge Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 170.1.

4. Despite these problems, we are happy to report that Paul later spoke very well of Mark who was also known as John Mark. Read Colossians 4:10-11; 2 Timothy 4:11. On more than one occasion, Paul actually asked for and was thankful for the services of Mark.
5. While the differences between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark may have actually furthered the gospel by resulting in two teams traveling around instead of just one, we can rejoice that the differences between Paul and John Mark were resolved.
6. We need to recognize that holding grudges or being unwilling to forgive damages us. We need to learn to forgive and to set aside old problems so we can move on.
7. Read Philemon 1-25. This letter from Paul was probably written on a single page of papyrus. What does it teach us about Paul and his relationship with God and with his fellow church members? We need to remember that Paul grew up in a society that had very strong feelings about runaway slaves. Clearly, Paul had overcome any prejudice he might have had against Onesimus. Furthermore, Paul was willing to put his personal reputation on the line for that

runaway slave. He chose to do what was right instead of adhering to societal norms. Nevertheless, in trying to reconcile Onesimus to Philemon, Paul used some subtle as well as sometimes not-so-subtle diplomacy. Paul was asking Philemon to take a big risk in accepting Onesimus back as a Christian brother and a slave. Paul could have demanded that Philemon accept Onesimus back. Instead, Paul simply requested it.

8. As a member of a small unrecognized church, Paul realized that he would only bring persecution upon himself and other Christians by trying to attack the enormous problem of slavery. So, Paul took the approach that slaves should be treated as Christian brothers. If everyone had taken the attitude that Paul took, the slavery problem would have vanished.
9. Do we have any idea what the outcome was of Paul's writing of this letter to Philemon? What happened to Onesimus? The letter to Philemon as well as Ephesians and Colossians were clearly written from prison. (Philemon 1,9; Ephesians 6:20; Colossians 4:18) It appears those letters were written in the latter part of Paul's imprisonment since he seemed to think that he would be released soon. (Philemon 22) Very few scholars question the authorship of Paul for Philemon. Among the earliest scholars, Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 35 to 107) at least twice mentioned this letter as being from Paul. It is interesting that he wrote a letter to the Bishop of Ephesus who was a man named Onesimus. Onesimus was a fairly common name, especially for slaves *Onesimus* meant "useful." Do you think that could have been the same Onesimus? Is it possible that Onesimus helped to collect all Paul's letters together to form the New Testament? Many scholars believe that may have taken place in Ephesus.
10. It is fascinating to consider the possibility that this same slave, Onesimus, may have later been the "bishop" or "elder" of Ephesus. This is particularly significant in light of the fact that Ephesus apparently became the "publication center" for the early Christian church. Thus, it is possible that this former slave may have had considerable influence in putting together our New Testament! Paul's diplomatic letter may have had a great influence on the Christian church for all time to come! If it is the same Onesimus, the book of Philemon may be included in the New Testament to explain the history of that prominent man in early Christian church history. This may be similar to the reason that the book of Ruth was included in the Old Testament—partially to explain some of the history of David's ancestors. Does this short letter help to explain Onesimus' story?
11. When we first become Christians, it is very human for us to look around in the church and begin comparing ourselves with others. Read 1 Corinthians 3:5-11; 12:1-11; and 2 Corinthians 10:12-15. These verses make it very clear that it is not our job to judge others or to compare ourselves with others. Each person has been given his talents and his responsibilities for building up the church. (1 Corinthians 3:9) We are called to cooperation and not competition!
12. Furthermore, when we compare ourselves to others, we are tempted either to be discouraged if we recognize that they seem to be better than we are or to be arrogant if we seem to be better than they are. Either of those attitudes is unchristian. There is only one example that we have been given as safe to follow, and that is Jesus. And there is no question about how we compare to Him! Paul had strong words to say to people who wanted to judge others. (2 Corinthians 12)
13. Read Romans 5:8-11; Luke 23:31-34; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; and Ephesians 4:26-30. These verses teach us that God has forgiven everyone. That does not necessarily make each of them savable! Jesus forgave even those who were crucifying Him. And God wants us to be transformed from being His enemies to being His friends and then to help others to become God's friends also. We are challenged to use only helpful language while doing this. How could we possibly win friends for God if we cannot forgive or if we cannot speak loving and kind words.
14. Always remember that it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance. (Romans 2:4) As we study the character of God especially as lived out by His Son Jesus, the example is absolutely clear. God offers us forgiveness again and again and again. If we confess our sins, we are simply recognizing that truth. It changes our attitude toward God but not God's attitude toward us because His attitude does not need to be changed.
15. If we hold a grudge or fail to forgive someone, we are allowing that smoldering hurt to damage us more and more. We need to learn to release others from condemnation or judgment just as

God has released us. This does not mean that we are necessarily forgiving their behavior. But, we always need to remember that the person that we are concerned about and whom we may feel very uncomfortable with might end up living next door to us in heaven!

16. Read Matthew 18:15-17. What are the benefits of practicing Christ's advice? Clearly, the goal is to minimize conflict. It is so much better if we can resolve a problem just between the two people involved. When we call in others—which may be necessary in some cases—there is the risk that those others may begin to take sides, and the battle lines are drawn! If it ever becomes necessary for us to choose others to go with us to resolve such a case, it is very important to take level-headed, clear-thinking, fellow Christians and not just people that we believe will take our side in the case! If we are going to be like Jesus, we need to be forgiveness Personified!
17. Have you ever tried to use the approach of Matthew 18? Has anyone ever used that approach on you?
18. Occasionally, it may be necessary to take some serious problem to the church board. But, whenever possible, we need to resolve the issue before we get to that level. Consider these words from Ellen White.

Do not suffer resentment to ripen into malice. Do not allow the wound to fester and break out in poisoned words, which taint the minds of those who hear. Do not allow bitter thoughts to continue to fill your mind and his. Go to your brother, and in humility and sincerity talk with him about the matter.—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 499.

19. Look at the example of Jesus. If anyone has ever had to deal with a difficult group of church leaders, it was Jesus. How did Jesus relate to the church leaders in His day? Read John 8:12-59. Why did Jesus find it necessary to speak so bluntly to those church leaders? Three times He told them that He was God! It certainly did not resolve the differences between them!
20. What do we do in times when two parties hold opposite views about what should be done and each of them absolutely believes he is right?

When the laborers have an abiding Christ in their own souls, when all selfishness is dead, when there is no rivalry, no strife for the supremacy, when oneness exists, when they sanctify themselves, so that love for one another is seen and felt, then the showers of the grace of the Holy Spirit will just as surely come upon them as that God's promise will never fail in one jot or tittle.—Ellen G. White, "Unselfishness among Brethren," *Manuscript 24*, September 9, 1896; *1MR* 178.1; *1SM* Bk. 1, p. 175; *LDE* 190.1; *1MR* 178.1)

21. Read Colossians 3:12-17. Notice the words Paul used to describe the ways in which we should relate to each other. What would happen to church squabbles if we all acted with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, even with tolerance, forgiveness, love, thankfulness, and a willingness to teach and be taught? Isn't the answer obvious? Notice the following note from our study guide for Friday:
22. If we look at our church, that is, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a whole, what is the greatest thing holding us back from the kind of revival and reformation that will be needed in order to reach the world? Is it our teachings and doctrines? Of course not. [Our church leaders turned back the latter rain in 1888] These are the very things that God has given us to proclaim to the world. The problem lies solely in us, in our interpersonal relationships, our petty jealousies, our bickering, our selfishness, our desire for supremacy, and a whole host of other things. Why must you, yes, you, not the person next to you in the pew, not the pastor—but you, yourself—plead for the power of the Holy Spirit to bring the changes that have to occur in you before we will see revival and reformation in the whole church? (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, September 20, 2013)
23. Do you think we will ever see revival and reformation in the whole church?
24. One of the best ways to understand Bible stories is to try to put yourself in the place of the people

involved. Do you think you would have left Paul and Barnabas as John Mark did? Would you have been a runaway slave like Onesimus? How do you think Onesimus came into contact with Paul?

25. It is really important to understand that we will never be able to completely agree on everything. People are different. We are given different talents. We are given different responsibilities in the church. Each of us is to fill the place that God designed for us. In that process, we are to help build up the church. And, as far as possible, we should do so under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
26. What kinds of things have caused broken relationships in your world? How often have they been relatively minor things? Those who are locked into the past, constantly going back and thinking about some slight or even some large problem, are condemning themselves to a terrible kind of life. Christians need to be able to forgive and move on.
27. Read Romans 5:8-11. J. B. Phillips interpreted Romans 5:8 as follows: "Yet the proof of God's amazing love is this: that it was *while we were sinners* that Christ died for us." That is probably a more accurate representation of what the Greek actually says.
28. God's love is so amazing. And it was demonstrated so well by Jesus Christ when He was on this earth. And He did all of that while almost all members of the human race were basically His enemies! God reached out to us while we were apparently paying no attention at all. Can we learn to do that for those around us?
29. Who should take the first step in the reconciliation process? The one who has been wronged? Or, the one who did the wrong? When it comes time to try to reconcile with someone with whom we have had differences, consider these words.

In the spirit of meekness, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1), go to the erring one, and "tell him his fault between thee and him alone." Do not put him to shame by exposing his fault to others, nor bring dishonor upon Christ by making public the sin or error of one who bears His name. Often the truth must be plainly spoken to the erring; he must be led to see his error, that he may reform. But you are not to judge or to condemn. Make no attempt at self-justification. Let all your effort be for his recovery. In treating the wounds of the soul, there is need of the most delicate touch, the finest sensibility. Only the love that flows from the Suffering One of Calvary can avail here. With pitying tenderness, let brother deal with brother, knowing that if you succeed, you will "save a soul from death," and "hide a multitude of sins." James 5:20.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 440.

30. Do you believe Jesus's words in John 13:34-35? Is it really true that if we were indeed loving—even to other church members—that the world would recognize that we are completely different from them? Would they be attracted? One of the most effective ways of witnessing is to tell people your own personal experiences. If those experiences include times when we have truly demonstrated Christ-like love, it cannot help but move them.
31. Have you ever told someone that you forgive him/her when down deep inside your heart you really could not? Have your attitudes toward that person changed? Read Ephesians 4:26-28. What is implied by the idea that we should not allow the sun to set on our anger? How much better would things be in the church if every time there was some difference between church members, it was resolved within 24 hours?

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