

WALKING IN LOVE
DEALING WITH CONFLICT
SEPTEMBER 7, 2014
23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

TEXT: MATTHEW 18:15-20

Notice the word "brother" in verse 15. This is addressed to Christians. This is dealing with believers who are in conflict.

In one "Peanuts" comic strip, Lucy demands that Linus change TV channels and threatens him with her fist if he doesn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing, but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold." "Which channel do you want?" Linus asks. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

You and I are connected in covenant and relationship with one another through Jesus. Our connection with the Father affects and governs our relationship with each other, and our relationships with each other affect our relationship with God.

It is so important that you and I have a right relationship with each other that Jesus said in Matthew 5:23, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." In fact, the last thing that Jesus prayed for was that the Father would make us one as Jesus is one with the Father.

We should walk in love. How do we walk in love when there is conflict with one another? You say, "Oh, but this is the church! There is no conflict in the churches!" What rock have you been sleeping under? Can't you see the conflict in the churches?

I quote an excerpt from an on line in an article I read: "The difference between spiritual and unspiritual community is not whether conflict exists, but is rather in our attitude toward it and our approach to handling it. When conflict is seen as an opportunity to draw more fully on spiritual resources, we have the makings of a spiritual community." In other words, it is how we handle conflict that determines the level of our spiritual maturity!

The truth of the matter is that relationships can be strengthened through conflict, if we handle them correctly. What make or breaks relationships, and what

makes or breaks churches is what they choose to do in conflict. We must learn how to walk in love while dealing with conflict, beginning with the appropriate attitude.

At the beginning of Matthew 18, Jesus sets the stage for His teaching on resolving conflict by saying this in verses 3 and 4: "We are to become as little children." Granted, we have all seen Christians act like little children when it comes to getting their way, but that is not what Jesus is talking about. Verse 4 is the key: we are to humble ourselves like a little child.

We must approach conflicts with humility. To humble means to bring low. And that is the opposite of what the flesh wants to do in conflict. Flesh seeks to exalt itself, to justify itself, to prove itself right. If that is how we approach a conflict, the conflict will grow.

When we are dealing with conflict with another person, the goal is reconciliation, not justification. In other words, our hope is to mend the relationship, not to choose sides and declare a winner. If only one person wins, everybody loses.

We must ask the Lord to search our hearts before we ever deal with a conflict. We must ask ourselves, "Am I walking in and motivated by love?" You must get your heart right first, and then deal with the problem at hand.

We must have the right approach. Jesus gives us a very simple four step plan on how to handle conflict. We make things so complicated, but Jesus makes it SIMPLE! We would save ourselves much heartache and would show Jesus to the world more effectively if we would simply FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS!

STEP # 1: A private conversation.

This is where we most often miss it right off the bat! What does He say to do? Go to the person who has sinned against you. This means that we do not go to our friends, our church family, our pastor, or our family first, but rather to the person with whom there is a problem. When someone comes to you with a problem about another person, here is what you need to ask them. "Have you addressed this with that person?" If not, encourage them to do so. That is where Jesus said to start.

STEP # 2: Take Witnesses.

These witnesses are there for the same reason; to bring reconciliation. It is not to gang up on the person! In fact, we should involve others only when going alone did not bring about healing. What am I talking about? A mediator. A neutral person. Someone who can keep emotions in check and clarify the issues.

If that doesn't bring resolution, then the next step comes into the picture.

The third step is the most drastic.

STEP # 3: Take it to the church!

Please understand, this does **NOT** mean to make an announcement from the pulpit! In some extreme cases that may be necessary, especially if there is continual, confirmed, unconfessed sin. So who does it refer to? **US!**

1 Corinthians 6:1-8, says to gather wise men from the church. This is where the elders and saints should get involved. Again the goal is reconciliation.

Conflict will come, even in the church. But what are you and I going to do when it comes? We must start by walking in brokenness and humility. Are you walking in love today in your attitude toward others, even those who have wronged you? Amen.