



June 11, 2021

Pursue Peace with All

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from our offices here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We examined the subject of *An Infection of Bitterness* last Friday evening. Life can also, and for some often, present us with bitter events such as untimely deaths, severe health problems, unfair job losses, and damaged relationships. The list could be longer.

Over the years in our lives most of us have faced one or more of these events. Unfortunately within the Body of Christ, the last category has been all too often shared by all of us.

Wouldn't it be great if all relationship problems could be healed and made right? But it doesn't always work that way in spite of trying to address the issues that lead to the damaged relationship. Of course we all should strive to be part of a solution and not keep doing things that are part of the problem or creating even more problems! But, humans are humans. We are not yet Spirit.

From time to time I'd like to look at more closely, and discuss some of these aspects of our humanity, and how to overcome challenges from a Godly perspective.

As a young person, I loved to set traps (that would not hurt), for small animals. Upon carefully examining them visually through the trap, I would then release them back to their freedom. What was interesting, was so often the animal that was trapped, seemed to have no clue, or be overcome with the potential of some type of food, and took a risk to obtain it. The snare quickly "snapped" or shut, and the trap usually worked perfectly.

I even watched the events unfold and was interested in the process of it all.

There's a lesson in what I learned for me, and perhaps will be helpful for others.

One of the "traps" that one can fall into when we have been hurt by someone, is to view the person who has hurt us as always being wrong and that any problems in the relationship are always totally and completely the fault of the other person. We can even be blind to any changes, improvements, or even genuine repentance the person makes and so thereby block reconciliation and healing of past hurts.

In most instances both sides have some involvement and begin to blame when conflict arises and then escalates. Of course if someone is exhibiting genuinely abusive behaviors those have to be addressed. If they are severe enough the relationship may not be able to be fully restored because of the damage already done. The term "abuse" can be overused or incorrectly used to apply to any or all actions that another person does that bothers us. We can be impatient, impolite, or too strong in stating things, but not be actually abusive. Again there can be an over-reaction to labeling every imperfection in words and deeds as "abusive" when someone has fallen short and said or done something in the past that could be genuinely labeled as abusive.

The world you and I live in is quick to label things without critical or constructive thinking. Few take responsibility, and many do not want to reconcile but remain hurt and be considered the victim.

One thing that is clear, is that our merciful heavenly Father calls upon us to do what we can to promote peace with others. "*Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.*"(Hebrews 12:14) Jesus taught in the "Sermon on the Mount:" "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*" (Matthew 5:9)

He also taught "*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*" (Matthew 5:44)

We read these words, but, it's a tall order and goes against our human nature. Later on in His discourse Jesus presented the "Model Prayer" or prayer outline. Then He made a sobering statement. "*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" (Matthew 6:14-15)

Now we get into the nuts and bolts of an important aspect of peace, don't we?

Recall where Jesus gave a parable following his response to Peter concerning how many times he needs to forgive his brother who sins against him. Jesus stated it we need to forgive 70 times 7 (or an unlimited number of times).

In the parable recorded for our benefit in Matthew 18:23-35 Jesus described a situation where a servant owed a king a huge amount of money. Because the servant was unable to pay, the king directed that he and his wife and children be sold as slaves and what he owned be sold to pay the debt. The servant fell down and begged for patience and mercy. The king had compassion on him and forgave the whole debt. But then that same servant encountered a fellow servant who owed him a relatively small amount. He begged for patience and apparently for more time to repay the debt. The servant who had been forgiven the huge debt had the

other servant thrown into prison. The master heard about what happened and was angry and had the unmerciful servant turned over to the torturers until his debt was paid.

Jesus summarized the lesson from the parable with "*So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.*" (v.35)

You and I should heed the lesson from this parable, and take it to heart as we interact with others. A very real part of our Christianity is that of pursuing peace with all people...how are we doing? Tensions remain, relationships damaged at times beyond repair, and it is never easy. But, with Christ living in us, His Spirit, there is indeed hope.

As we enter His Sabbath, reflect, pray and meditate on these thoughts with me will you?

Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

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