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“Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).

Reconciling Differences

Central Truth: You can be an instrument of peace and reconciliation.

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Topic: Reconciliation: With Man.

Differences arise between us because we are different. If we all thought the same, we would agree on everything and there would be no problems. Jesus said it is impossible for offenses not to arise between us (Matthew 18:7). How we handle those offenses is of major importance. By our response to them, each of us can be an agent of peace and reconciliation or a cause of further conflict.

The Bible teaches us how to reconcile differences. It gives the principles (I Peter 3:8-12) and an illustration of how to apply them (Luke 22:24-30). God is very concerned that we live in such harmony that we are *“likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Philippians 2:2).

When differences arise, we deal with them according to Bible principles. They dissolve into nothing when we follow these biblical guidelines in solving them. Look for principles which you can apply personally as you continue this study.

The Causes of Differences (Luke 22:24)

A desire for personal advancement causes differences. The disciples were at peace when they were ministering with Jesus. But in their private times there was a rivalry among them as to which of them was considered the greatest in His kingdom. That problem surfaced several times during Jesus' ministry with them. On more than one occasion Jesus used a little

child to teach them humility (Luke 9:46-48; Mark 9:33-37). James and John asked permission to sit on Jesus' right and on His left when He came into His kingdom (Mark 10:37). Their mother came to Jesus with the same request on their behalf (Matthew 20:21). The disciples pictured Jesus' kingdom in a political vein, with Jesus as King and them as His administrators. So each desired to have the highest position possible.

That same spirit motivates many people today. It is often the cause of divisions and hurt feelings, even in the church. Since it is so tragic, we must constantly guard against it.

The influence of the devil causes differences. Eve would not have eaten the fruit from the forbidden tree in Eden if the devil had not tempted her. The angels that fell would not have fallen if the devil had not led them. David would not have sinned in numbering Israel if the devil had not enticed him. Satan is the direct or indirect cause of all our problems.

When you have a difference with a Christian brother or sister, remember who is behind it. Do not rest until that difference is dealt with and peace is restored. You are a child of God and a disciple of Jesus Christ. Do not yield to the devil at any point. The loss of devotion to the will of God causes differences. Jesus' apostles forgot that they were chosen to serve, not to rule. They sought the honor that comes from mankind, not that which comes from God (John 5:44). That focused their attention on themselves. With each seeking his own advancement, differences were sure to arise. And it still does. Jesus taught us to take the lower seat rather than pressing to be recognized and honored (Luke 14:10). He came among us as one who serves to teach us to serve one another through the motivation of love. It is always the will of God that we *“by love serve one another”* (Galatians 5:13). The desire to put people under our authority is not a sign of love.

The Seriousness of Differences (Luke 22:25-29)

Jesus forbids rivalry among His people (verses 25, 26). Those disciples challenged one another about who would be first in His kingdom. Jesus replied, “The pagans wield authority over one another. Those who rule are called benefactors of those who are ruled. But it must not be that way among you.” Do you suppose the Lord stressed the words must not in that last statement: *“It must not be that way among you”*? The emphasis was probably in His voice. He was placing a total prohibition on the desire to rule. That may be the way the pagans acted, but it is not the way for Christians to act.

Jesus teaches us to take the lower place by our own choice (verse

26). If we are to be honored, another will do it. We are not to seek honor for ourselves (Luke 14:7-11). The person who promotes himself is not accepted before God (Luke 18:9-14). The unregenerate of the world may push and scheme to get into positions of authority, but it must not be so with God's people. The Christian principle is to seek the advantage of the other person, not of yourself. That will end your rivalry.

Jesus set an example of selfless living (verse 27). “Look at the typical household,” He suggested. “Who is greater, the person who is served at the table or the one who is serving him? The one being served is obviously greater, isn't he? But look at Me. I am among you as one who serves.” (Read Matthew 20:28 and Philippians 2:6, 7.) How that must have shamed the ambitious apostles who were contesting for the highest places in the kingdom. And how it shames you and me for seeking promotion over our Christian brothers and sisters for personal gain. Taking a lower place is not helpful to our pride, but it is honoring to God. And it is the remedy for all vain ambition.

Jesus gives a special promise to those who seek to serve rather than to rule (verses 28-30). There is a reward ahead. Look at God's promises in Psalm 91:14; Revelation 3:21; and Isaiah 58:14. Even if your service involves sacrifice, *“the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). The world may never compliment you for selfless service, but God will remember your work and labor of love which you show in His name (Hebrews 6:10). Rewards are coming from the hand of the Lord himself. Ambition for authority dies in the face of our Lord's “well done.”

The Remedy for Differences (I Peter 3:8-12)

Is there any possible way we can keep differences from arising with our fellow Christians? Yes there is, thank God. First Peter 3:8-12 identifies ten principles which, when applied, will keep rivalry from among God's people.

Cultivate unity. *“Be ye all of one mind”* (verse 8). To be of *“one mind”* means to have unity of spirit. It is based on the unity the Holy Spirit creates by His indwelling presence in each of us. The unity established by the Spirit is maintained by our diligence (Ephesians 4:3). The appeal for Christian unity is repeated all through the New Testament. It is essential in order that the testimony of Jesus Christ might go throughout the world (John 17:21). Division among God's people hinders education, evangelism, and missions. The alternative to that sin is Christian unity. Practice it day by day until you are an “expert” in its exercise.

Practice compassion. Have “*compassion one of another*” (verse 8). Remember that compassion means “to suffer with.” It means to identify with the hurting person and do all you can to relieve his problem. Jesus gave an example of compassion in the story of the good Samaritan helping a man who had been beaten, robbed, and left to die (Luke 10:33, 34). The Philippian jailer showed compassion by washing the stripes of Paul and Silas after he had been saved (Acts 16:33). How do you show compassion in the affairs of daily life? That is the end to all conflicts.

Exhibit brotherly love. “*Love as brethren*” (verse 8). Do not miss the significance of this principle. Peter uses the term agape, which refers to divine love, not human affection. It is love that delights to lift. This love is not extended because of merit, but because of the beloved's need. This is the second of the two greatest commandments (Matthew 22:39). It is a grace in which Christians are to increase and overflow (I Thessalonians 3:12). Seeking the welfare of the other rather than personal advantage slays vain ambition and reconciles differences.

Show sympathy. “*Be pitiful*” (verse 8). The call is not for you to look pitiful or to act pitiful; it is a call for a tender heart. That enables you to feel what the other person feels. It causes you to grieve at the disappointments or difficulties of another. It will kill the spirit of self-seeking and remedy the differences which arise in personal relationships.

Use courtesy. “*Be courteous*” (verse 8). There is no substitute for old-fashioned courtesy. It involves being polite and well-mannered toward others. It is appropriate when exhibited in society at large. It is a spiritual grace when exercised among the people of God. Here is the biblical statement on courtesy: “*Let your speech be alway with grace*” (Colossians 4:6). Rivalry dies in the presence of that virtue.

Manifest grace. Do not practice “*rendering evil for evil . . . but contrariwise blessing*” (verse 9). When people do harm to you, do not return it to them. Turn that other cheek without retaliation, but leave it in the hands of God. Do good whether others do it or not.

Exercise discipline. “*Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile*” (verse 10). Many of our differences arise from spoken words. Control of the tongue is the proof of spiritual maturity (James 1:26) and the solution to differences between brethren.

Demonstrate purity. “*Eschew evil, and do good*” (verse 11). What a simple principle: “Shun wrong and do right.” Yet how profound and far reaching it is in application. And what a remedy it is for broken relationships between peers.

Promote peace. “*Seek peace, and ensue it*” (verse 11). Kenneth Taylor

suggests that the idea is, “Live in peace even if you must run after it to catch it and hold it.” Make peace your aim. Search for it, and maintain it with all your heart. Differences never exist where there is a sincere commitment to peace.

Be reverent. *“The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil”* (verse 12). God knows the truth about your spirit as well as your actions. He will reward truth and judge error wherever it is found. Remember the saying, “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool God any of the time.”

Look back over the major points of this study. Evaluate your relationships with your peers in view of what you have learned. How do your differences with others appear in the light of this study? More importantly, what will you do about correcting any differences that exist? Remember this Bible principle about reconciling differences: “It is my move first.” Do it, and be at peace.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the desire for personal advantage cause differences?
2. Why does vain ambition cause us to lose sight of God's will?
3. Why does Jesus forbid us to desire positions of authority over one another?
4. How does Jesus demonstrate true greatness?
5. How can you cultivate unity with Christian brothers or sisters?
6. How can you express brotherly love in daily affairs?
7. How can old-fashioned courtesy preserve our unity?
8. How can personal discipline keep differences from arising?
9. How can you be a peacemaker?
10. How will you put this study into practice this week?