

MESSAGE TRANSCRIPTS

Series: 1 Corinthians

War of the Roses Pt 3

Matthew 18:15-20

Tim Armstrong, Senior Pastor

Weekend 09.28-29.10

Let's turn in our bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 3. By now your bible should almost automatically turn there. We are continuing in the series that we started just a few weeks ago as we started chapter 3 called War of the Roses. And we're focusing primarily and on conflict. Really, if you think about it since we started the book, in the first half of the first chapter Paul introduces that there were conflicts within the Corinthian church and he goes all the way up into chapter 3 and he starts nailing the issue, the problems that were going on. And so what we're doing is we're extracting the principles that we're learning and we're applying it to conflicts in general. So far we've learned three essential things - that there is always a situation, a source and a solution behind every conflict.

We've studied in great detail the situation, the source and what Paul says was the solution for the Corinthian church. so I'm not going to go back over that again except to say that as we brought our teaching in for a landing last week I was saying something and I hope you caught it. It was critical that if we want to be people who end conflict in our lives then we must be people who say that our lives are wrapped around glorifying God; that we want to bring glory to God in all that we say we do. Like Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, no matter what we do. No matter what we eat; no matter what we drink; whatever goes on in our lives that we would do all to the glory of God. And I said that if two believers who are in a conflict both have a desire ultimately to glorify God they will seek a solution that glorifies God. And that's really kind of where we ended it.

But then I left you with a question. What happens when you're in a scenario and there's a conflict and the other person does not really have a desire to glorify God; does not really have a desire to reach a solution; doesn't really have a desire to reconcile. What do you do then? Where do you go? What happens? Does the scripture give us any indication, give us any guidance on what we should do if we're in the midst of a conflict and one party doesn't have a desire to reconcile? Well, the answer is yes. The scriptures do give us clear understanding how to deal with those situations and so kind of extension on last week - that's what I want to talk about this week.

To do that we're going to leave the book of 1 Corinthians. We're going over to the teaching of Jesus in the book of Matthew. Matthew chapter 18 is where I'd like you to head with me this morning. We're going to look at not really a lengthy passage of scripture but it is filled with information, verses 15 through 20. Jesus gives us a clear godly process towards reconciliation. It's not always easy but it's the process that is set forth by our Lord. Now, let's look at the text; understand the text and then we'll see what we can pull out. We're just going to do kind of a bible study this morning. I'm just going to teach you a few things. Most of this is pretty self explanatory. You'll pick that up.

Jesus is teaching, verse 15 and He says if your brother sins against you go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. If he does not listen take one or two others with you that every charge may be established by the

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evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them tell it to the church. If he refuses to even listen to the church let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them. Now, stop right there.

Verse 20, a very familiar passage. Where two or three are gathered in my name there is the Lord. There I am. That's often a misquoted passage. It's true. Wherever we gather together Jesus is in the midst of us. But what this passage is talking about is conflict resolution and that wherever there are two or three people that join together the desire to bring a resolution to a conflict there you will find Christ. What does that tell us about the heart of our Lord? That He really has a heart toward reconciliation. And so really what we're going to learn here this morning is from the words of the Lord how we can bring our conflicts to an end in a godly way.

Now, when you look at the passage you can really divide it in two ways. Two points, if you're taking notes. There is a motive and there is a method. There is a motive of why we should resolve conflict and then there's a method of how we should resolve conflict. Let's look at the motive to begin with.

What's our motive for reconciling a conflict in the first place? Think about that. Wouldn't it be easier just to avoid the other person than just to resolve the conflict? Well, the answer is yes. It would be to avoid that person. It's like the grocery store syndrome. You know. You're in the grocery store and you're pushing your cart around and you see that person at the end of the row and you think I don't really want to run into that person and so you back your cart out and you spend the rest of the time avoiding that person. Or, God has such a sense of humor, doesn't He? You get into a conflict with somebody and you really don't want to have anything to do with them and what happens. Their son or daughter becomes friends with your son or daughter and their on a sports team together and now you're running into them all of the time. You have all of this emotion that's worked up. You don't want to see that person and that's conflict, right? That's conflict. How do you resolve, what's our motive to even resolving that conflict?

Well, when we read the passage what we're going to find out is what really is a spiritual benefit to resolving conflict. It's a benefit for you as a follower of Christ. And it's a benefit for them as a follower of Christ. Notice the text; notice the context. The conflict is between a brother. Do you see that? So we're talking about a fellow Christ follower. He is a believer. In other words, this is a family dynamic. We cannot let the conflict continue. Why? Because it's not good for the family of Christ. It's not good at all between brothers.

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Notice this – there are two things here. They're all inclusive. He says if your brother sins. Now this is brother. This is any believer. Male, female, old, young. This is inclusive. He's talking about all believers. He's not talking about a specific case. He's just making a general statement. If a brother in Christ offends you then you have a responsibility to end that conflict and that offense. He says sin, the word sin. Also all inclusive. It's the Greek word hamartánō. It's just a simple Greek word that means miss the mark. It's a basic New Testament word for sin. So he's saying, any brother, any believer, any sin needs to be confronted.

Now, here's the major question. Why? Why do I want to confront them? Look at the end of verse 15. Jesus says if you're brother sins against you go tell him his faults between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. Circle that word gained. That is actually banking terminology used in a spiritual situation. Those of you who are accountants love this. What this words means is that there is a profit margin that you have gained. You are in that profit, that earning category of this brother. What does that mean? Why would Jesus use a banking term to define reconciling a conflict with a brother? What does it mean that we've gained them?

Well, first I think we have to understand the heart of God. Just let your eyes drift up to verse 10 of this same chapter. What is the parable about? The parable is about the lost sheep, right? What do we know about the story of the lost sheep? Do you remember the story? There's a shepherd. The shepherd has a hundred sheep. One of them comes up missing. So he goes up to the mountain and he tucks the ninety-nine away in the safe keeping and then he goes all over the place to find that one lost sheep. And look at verse 13. What happens, what's the shepherd feel when he finds that one lost sheep? He rejoices. There's great rejoicing over that one that was lost. Then we look at verse 14 and who is the shepherd? God. God the Father. What's that tell us about the heart of God. That God values people. God values us. It doesn't matter if there's a whole group of us or if there's just one of us. He values us and there's a sense here when we come then into the teaching of Christ this very next section where He begins to talk about conflict resolution. Why is that so important to God? Well, because values you. He values your life. He values the situation of your life. We too ought to value one another, the situations of our lives and not to value when we have division and conflict enough to bring a sense of resolution. We gain a relationship is what He's saying. Which, by the way this is common language throughout the New Testament.

Hold your place in Matthew and turn with me over to Galatians. I could take you to a number of different passages but let me just take you to a couple. Galatians chapter 6 by way of an example. Now, this is the writing of Paul. Paul obviously influenced greatly by the teachings of Jesus. We see that move through his writings in the text of scripture quite often that bear his name. But look what he says in verse 1. Galatians 6, verse 1. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression. Again, inclusive – any. You who are spiritual. Now, we learned the definition of this word a few weeks ago. What does spiritual mean? It doesn't mean ultra

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mature. It means that you're a believer. So those of you who are believers should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Why do you have a desire to gain your brother, to gain this relationship? Because really what you're doing in the midst of it is you're fulfilling the law of Christ. What's the law of Christ? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. The second is like this love your neighbor as yourself and so what's the Law of Christ? Love God, love people. So really that's what Jesus was saying. That's what Paul was saying.

Turn over to James. James is tucked right behind the book of Hebrews by the way if you have a hard time finding it. Right before 1 Peter. James chapter 5, verse 19. Fascinating passage. Talks about the value of restoring someone who has fallen into an offense, caused a conflict. Listen to this. Verse 19. My brother, is any one among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. And so we have, in a sense a responsibility to the brotherhood, to the sisterhood to do this.

By the way, let me just stop here for a moment. This is the point of corporate church discipline. Do you understand that? Most people think that church discipline is like some kind of punishment. We're going to kick that guy, kick that woman out of the church. You know, that's never the desire of the true church of Christ is to kick someone out. That's not the point of it. Church discipline is supposed to be a positive thing. We all live under somebody's authority. We've chosen as believers to place ourselves under the authority of Christ. He set up the church and put leaders or Elders in place. So, we place ourselves under their authority. Why? Well, Hebrews 13 tells us that they have watch care. They guard our souls so it's a good thing. And if they see us wandering off into unrighteousness their responsibility, along with the community of God is to call them back to righteousness. And so it's really a safety net for me. Now I know myself. I know it would be very easy for me to walk off the edge and start following unrighteousness but I have a support system. I have a godly support system and I have godly men who would call me on that and say you need to come walk the righteous life. That's church discipline, by the way.

The furthest extreme is when you have to ostracize someone. But it's always done for two reasons. It's done so that they might be awakened to their spiritual, their depravity, their sin, what they're doing at the present and secondly it's done for the protection of the whole body. Now, we're going to see that in a moment but I tell you that beforehand just so that you can kind of log that away.

What we've just learned is the motive – why we do what we do in reconciliation. Now we need to look at how we do that. We need to look at the method. There are four steps in this text. Really they're so self-explanatory. I really don't need to give you much. I will give you

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some hooks to hang our thoughts on this morning as we study the scriptures this morning. There are four steps that Jesus outlines in the method to reconciling.

The first step is to basically is confront personally that person that has offended you. And that's what He says in verse 15. If you haven't already picked that up He says if your brother sins against you go and tell him his faults between you and him alone. Now, notice the pronoun. The offense is against you. It's a personal offense and so you are to what? Go. Not that complicated, right? You are to go. It's an imperative. It's a command and you are to tell. That's also an imperative. That's a command. So Jesus is saying you are to go and tell. Tell what? This word tell basically means to explain to them why you feel offended. Did you catch that? When Jesus says go and tell He's saying go and just explain to them why you feel there's an offense or there's a conflict between you. He's not saying that you take your emotionally charged energy of feeling as if you are not receiving what you should receiving. He's saying, no, you just go and you tell. You don't need to be the Holy Spirit for somebody. Just go and say, look, you did this. This is how I feel. I want to resolve the conflict. That's the idea behind tell.

And now notice. What does He also say? He says you need to do this in private. This is one on one time. In fact, some of your translations will say that. You need to do this privately. But what do we tend to do? We tend to like to go get advice from our advisors? And so what happens? We go to one advisor and then we go to another advisor and another advisor. All this ever before we've talked to that person. And all these advisors start talking and word leaks out and before you know it the person you're having the conflict with – they hear about it and so what goes on? There's this wall that is built between you and them because everybody else now knows about it. What Jesus is saying is don't do that. First, just go. Sit down. Let the emotions cool and tell them why you feel offended.

Now, what happens if they do not take the next step? Well, look what He says. He says in verse 16. But, if he does not listen take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. So, step number one is to confront personally. Step number two is to confirm with others. I use that word confirm strategically. He's not saying you take your pose and you go and you confront them again. That's not what he's saying. He's saying you take these witnesses, two or three and you use them to confirm that there's even some kind of conflict because isn't it often the case that we have some issues between one another and there might be communication issues. Or you might have said something you really didn't mean or it came out a certain way or they hear things you really didn't say and you get together and you try to talk it out and it just makes things worse. And then you bring people in and they look at you like what's the problem? That's witnesses. The witnesses are trying to establish if there really is a conflict. That's what Jesus is saying here. He's saying what you need to do is not assume that your right or assume that they're wrong. Bring in other people that you respect. Work through all of the details and confirm if there's really a fault.

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By they way, this is nothing new. This comes directly out of the Mosaic Law. Deuteronomy chapter 19. Turn there. Jesus takes an Old Testament principle. Pulls it out of the Old Testament and drops it into the New Testament. In Deuteronomy, chapter 19 what we have here is the Mosaic Law. Moses is teaching the people of Israel how to get along with one another and he says when there's a conflict that arises this is what I want you to do. Verse 15. He says a single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime, for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Now, already we've learned a lot. Don't trust yourself. Don't trust your instincts that you're absolutely sure they're at fault. It goes back to what we learned in the Corinthians dilemma that not only should we look carefully at the situation but we should look carefully at the source. And so, he's saying don't start there. Only on the evidence, continue reading, only on the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses shall a charge be established. He says we want to bring together witnesses to be sure they're truly is a conflict. And so what do you bring? You don't bring them in for confrontation. You've already done this. You do this, step two for confirmation. You understand that? And so when you get to a point where your conflict cannot be resolved just between the two of you that's a great time to go get your advisor, sit down and work through the issues. Now, this might be someone that you pay to go to – a professional, a counselor, marriage, some family relations, someone who mediates between two people or it could be friends. It's not really specified. The idea is don't let the conflict linger between the two of you. Finish it. Be resolved to come to a resolution.

What happens if that doesn't work? Well, Jesus doesn't leave them hanging. He says something interesting. Notice this, verse 17. If he refuses to listen to them, the advisors then do this. Go tell it to the church. So we have confront personally, confirm with others. Step three you confess it publicly. In other words, this is the first time, step three, that you bring it out of a private matter. You've now moved this onto a whole new level. Now, we have to answer a question before we go any further. Are you ready for this? What does the word church mean in this context? He just uses the word *ekklēsia* which, by the way could be used for the church in general. You are the church. Am I to stand before all of you and tell you every time that there is a conflict that cannot be resolved between two people? Or could it mean something else? It could also mean not just the whole church but also the leadership of the church. Why I believe it's more funneled towards leadership is because there is an implication in the text. The text implies that you're now going to some other person or people or group of people that you want to have them help you resolve this with. We can't just take this to the general church. It's not going to solve the issue. So, I think what we have here is this is pointing to leadership. Again, this is the idea where you know I am under, I'm called to submit, Hebrews 13:17, I'm called to submit to those who keep watch over my soul and so I've asked you now to help us solve this dilemma.

By the way, this is how our leaders at Crossroads understand this text. That if there's conflict between people and they've gone through the first step, the second step. They still can't

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resolve it. Gladly bring it to the Elders. We will take it and work from there to resolve the conflict in a godly manner. But I have to tell you. It doesn't always work. I think Jesus understood that because He adds a fourth step. But I have to warn you that the fourth step is the most difficult step to imagine. Look at it. It's at the end of verse 17. And if he refuses to listen even to the church let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. What does that mean? Well, think about it. What is a Gentile? A Gentile who are those who are outside the covenant community; those who do not know God. It's used as almost slang throughout the New Testament to mean those who are pagans – those who do not have a relationship with Christ. Treat that person that you are in conflict with as though they do not know Christ is what He is saying.

Or a tax collector. Now He ups the anti. A tax collector was an insider, was one of them. It's a person who has sold out to the Roman Empire so that they could turn, become a traitor and collect taxes from their own people. You need to know historically tax collectors were ostracized in the Jewish community. They were not even permitted to come to the temple for worship. Do you hear what Jesus is saying? He's saying if you get to this fourth step and this person will not repent of clearly of an offense that has been first brought to them by you, second confirmed by others, third church leadership, fourth step then is to you are to corporately, as a body of believers avoid that person. Difficult. Difficult to think about this. You say but where is the love of Christ in that? Where's grace? Where's forgiveness? Listen. It's right there. It's ready to be given if it's ready to be received.

What did we learn about church discipline earlier? That is for an awakening and a protection. You see when a community of believers ostracizes one of their own it's for the point of saying don't you see what you're doing? You're whole community is disintegrating around you. Wake up. Repent. Come to Christ. Here is grace. Here is forgiveness. Join the rest of us who have messed up our lives. You're no different. We will not judge you. Come. Receive the grace of Christ. But if you refuse to do that we have to protect the body.

Let me take you over, back over, one last time over to 1 Corinthians. I want to take you back there and let me show you this in living color. Let me show you this lived out in reality. It's 1 Corinthians chapter 5. We're going to get there probably in a couple of months and we're going to go through here in detail but let me just give you the big picture of it. There was a problem in the Corinthian church with one individual who was sinning and it was public and even the Elders knew about this and Paul writes about it. He said verse 1, chapter 5, it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated among pagans. In other words, the church is tolerating things that the un-churched is saying I can't believe they're doing that. For a man has his father's wife. So a man is sexually involved, sleeping with his stepmother. Verse 2, and you are arrogant. Ought you not rather to mourn? Aren't you to mourn over this? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

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Why Paul? Why should we do this? Well drop down to verse 5. You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. He's saying if he wants to act like an unbeliever, if he wants to live by the flesh put him out into the world to live by the flesh. You know what? His live might prematurely come to an end but if he's a true believer he'll be saved in the end. Or that process will awaken him and he'll be brought back to the community of believers.

Notice, continue reading, he says your boasting is not good, verse 6. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the whole leaven that you might be a new lump. Do you see what leaven is in the Old Testament? He's referring back to an illustration used in the Old Testament? Leaven illustrates sin. He says take that out of the bread. Take that out of the loaf. It's going to impact everybody else so again we go back to an awakening and a protection. Now, listen to this, verse 9. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. Not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy or the swindlers or the idolaters since then you would need to go out of the world. Almost tongue in cheek. He's saying I'm not saying don't associate with the un-churched. You'd have to leave the world to do that. You're supposed to be the witness. No, but verse 11, now I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of, what's the word? Say it. Brother. If a brother has fallen into this type of sin don't associate with him. If he's guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater or a reviler, drunken, a swindler not even to eat with such a one for what have I to do with judging outsiders, the un-churched. Is it not those inside the church whom you are to church? You say what? You're allowed to church someone? You're not allowed to judge someone's motives. But you certainly can evaluate, judge their lifestyle and if they're in clear and open sin and rebellion then it is correct to judge them. God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Now listen to me, look up here. This is difficult on multiple levels. Imagine this. How would our conflicts change if we became people committed to following the words of Christ? Many times we never get to step one. Do you know what I might think would happen? If we would be committed to doing that which is difficult, personally confronting, many times the conflict would end right there. And the Spirit of God would rain down on us. This intimacy of bond and unity that we would have not felt otherwise. There are going to be times when we have to go the distance and it's going to be difficult to do it. But I think if we're committed to the Word of God what are we ultimately saying? We're committed to the wisdom God over our own wisdom. The exact same issue the Corinthians were falling into – believing their wisdom was wiser than the wisdom of God. We're saying no God. We're putting ourselves under your authority.

The reality is, and me included, not always lived up to this standard. There are conflicts in my life that I wish I would have taken this biblical approach and maybe they would have ended differently. But you know what we need to do from this point forward? It's like what Paul says put the past behind us and move forward. He's saying this is now the standard of

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how I am going to resolve conflict, why? So that God might be glorified through me. Is that your desire? Amen? Amen. Let's pray together.