

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday morning, we’re taking a deliberate journey through the wonderful book of 2 Corinthians in a series I call, “Hope for Cracked Pots.” The title of the message today is “Can’t We All Just Get Along?”

When you turn on the television news all you hear are more depressing stories about violence and disaster. If had a news program, I’d try to make people smile a little. “Good morning, this is the GABC newsroom and I’m David Dykes. Here’s the news: “A grenade exploded in a kitchen in France last week. Nobody was hurt, but one eyewitness reported seeing Linoleum Blownapart.” Or, “Last Monday, a local man fell into an upholstery machine—but doctors report that he is fully recovered.” “Yesterday a grand piano fell down a mine shaft—the resulting tune was a flat miner.” “In Washington, a Joint Committee has been appointed to study marijuana use.” “A short fortuneteller escaped from prison today. So be on the lookout for a small medium at large.” And finally (thankfully), “Green Acres has relocated its computer center to the basement below the old sanctuary, including our Local Area Network. That area is now called the LAN down under.” Well, maybe I’d better keep my day job of just delivering the good news!

And the best place to find the good news is in the Bible. Before we read our text today, let me explain the context. There were people in the church at Corinth who claimed that Paul lied to them about when he was coming to visit. These critics were saying that Paul couldn’t be trusted. Soon this misunderstanding had escalated into a full blown conflict in the church. We can infer from this passage that Paul had written some pretty harsh words to them in a letter we don’t have. So this is a great lesson on how to deal with relational conflicts in the church. Let’s start reading in 2 Corinthians 1:23-2:4 “I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth. Not that we lord over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, because it is by faith you stand firm. So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did so that when I came I should not be distressed by those who ought to make me rejoice. I have confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.”

You may recognize the phrase, “Why can’t we all just get along?” In 1992 Rodney King was arrested and resisted the LAPD officers attempts to subdue him. The arrest was recorded on video and led to a trial and riots in South Los Angeles in which 53 people were killed and \$1 Billion of damage was done. In the midst of the riots Rodney King pleaded, “Can’t we all just get along?” The short answer to that question is: “No, we can’t get along.” That’s why we have laws to protect us. That’s why we have to have brave men and women serving as law enforcement officers, because we can’t get along with each other. If we all got along there would be no need for officers to enforce the law.

In our fallen, sinful, self-centered condition, we can’t get along with others. But those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ live by a different standard. The only way we can get along with others is through the supernatural power of Jesus Christ. Just because you’re a Christian doesn’t mean you automatically get along with everyone else in the church. There were conflicts in the

church 2,000 years ago and there are still conflicts between Christians today. So, let’s examine four important relationship rules for Christians.

1. SOMETIMES BELIEVERS HURT EACH OTHER

Verse 23 says, “Now, are you ready for the real reason I didn’t visit you in Corinth? As God is my witness, the only reason I didn’t come was to spare you more pain.” (2 Corinthians 1:23) In the church at Corinth, there were people who had caused Paul pain, and some of the things he had said or written had caused them pain as well. It was such a sticky situation that Paul didn’t want to visit at that time because he suspected that he would cause them more pain.

Have you ever been hurt by someone in the church? If you have, then join the club. Churches are made up of imperfect people. We have a perfect Savior, and He will never disappoint you. But if you are expecting perfection from the brothers and sisters down the pew from you, then you’re setting yourself up for disappointment.

We all know the Bible commands us to love one another, but that’s not easy because we encounter so many unlovely people—even within the Body of Christ. As the little poem says, “to live above with saints we love; oh, that will be glory! But to live below with saints we know; now that’s another story!” Or to quote that great theologian Lucy from the Peanuts cartoon, “I love humanity; it’s people I can’t stand.”

We shouldn’t be surprised when there is conflict in the church because the Bible is full of stories of conflict. Cain killed Abel; Joseph’s brothers beat him and sold him into slavery; The Israelites griped about Moses’ leadership; Saul tried to kill David; and David killed Uriah; the members of the early church argued because some widows were being neglected; Paul got so fed up with John Mark that he parted ways with him. The list goes on, just read your Bible.

Jesus KNEW we would experience relationship problems. That’s why He gave us rules and procedures to follow when we face conflict within the church. Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15)

From the perspective of 2,000 years later, it seems petty and trivial that a minor issue of Paul’s travel plans could cause such a huge stink. But I’ve known churches to split over issues like where the piano should go, or whether there would be drums in the sanctuary. I heard of one church that was building a new building and the plans called for the inclusion of a chandelier. One man stood up and said, “we don’t need no chandelier! I’m against it for three reasons. First of all, the church doesn’t need anything I can’t spell. Second, if we got one nobody could play it, and third of all what we really need is more light!”

The reason we have so many different churches and denominations is simply because Christians in one group argued and disagreed and one of them said, “Well, I’ll just take my Bible and go play somewhere else—and another denomination was started.” Sometimes Christians act like jerks and we hurt one another. I have to smile sadly whenever I think of a little stretch of highway in East Alabama where there are three churches. One of them is named Harmony

Baptist Church. When they named it, they used a wonderful word like “harmony” to describe the loving spirit in their church. Apparently they didn’t live up their name because just across the street today is a church named NEW Harmony Baptist Church. That must not have worked because down the road from both of them is a church named GREATER NEW HARMONY Baptist Church. “Can’t we just all get along?” Not without being filled with the Holy Spirit we can’t.

2. SPIRITUAL LEADERS SHOULDN’T DOMINATE OTHER BELIEVERS

One of the reasons there is conflict in churches is because we have missed God’s plan for how He wants His church organized. Many churches have suffered conflict over what is called a “power struggle.” Paul was an apostle, but he made it clear that he didn’t want to lord over the believers in Corinth. He wrote, “I was being considerate of you, not indifferent, not manipulative. We’re not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical.” (2 Corinthians 1:24)

This passage touches on a very important subject: the role of spiritual leaders. Maybe you know some pastors and other church leaders who are so dominating that they try to lead by the sheer force of their personality. I’ve heard that some pastors’ motto is, “it’s MY way or it’s Trailways.” That means, “you do what I say, or you’re on the next bus out of town.” There are secular leadership books on winning by intimidation. But God doesn’t want His church to operate that way, and the dispositions of domination and intimidation have no place in the church. The Biblical model for leaders is servant leadership. If you’re a deacon, or a SMBS teacher, or a ministry volunteer, you are spiritual leader in our church just like I am. Every SMBS teacher who shepherds the members of that class are serving as a pastor to them. Here’s A Spiritual Leader’s Job Description: “Be shepherds (pastors) of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers (*episcopos*) that’s the word we get “episcopal” from. It comes from *epi* and *scopos*, it means to scope it out, keep looking out for your members—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you (*kleros*)—that’s where we get the word “clergy” but notice that “clergy” is NOT referring to the pastors who are the shepherd, but to the PEOPLE entrusted to the pastor’s care. , but being examples to the flock.” (2 Peter 5:2-3) The word “pastor” means “shepherd.” The role of spiritual leaders is NOT to dominate and control, but to loving lead and feed the members of the flock.

History’s most damaging heresy: A hierarchy of “clergy” and “lay people”

There have been many damaging heresies that have infected the church throughout the centuries. But in my opinion, history’s most damaging heresy is the false notion of a hierarchy of “clergy” and “lay people.” Some of you have been around for the past 16 years. Let me ask you, “how many times have you heard me use the word “clergy” or “laymen” or “Lay people?” In case you don’t know, the answer is, “Zilch. Nada. Never.” It’s because the Bible never makes that distinction. The word Greek word *laos* means “people” and to talk about “Lay people” is simply redundant. It’s like saying, “people people.”

I don’t like the word clergy for pastors either. The Bible never uses the word *kleros* (clergy) to

describe a pastor or other spiritual leader. So where did we get this heresy? From the Roman Catholic Church of course. Until the 16th Century, the only churches were the Roman Catholic Church and what we call the Greek Orthodox Church. In 313 A.D. when the Roman Emperor, Constantine, “Christianized” Roman paganism, what he really did was to “paganize Christianity.” Part of that process involved making “officers” of the religious leaders. They became “officials” instead of servants. Soon, the Bishop, or Pastor of Rome became the Pope (the Father). So, let me ask you what’s worse: One Pope over all the churches, or, like many evangelical churches, one Pope in each church? Because some pastors act like they’re the church boss, and some members treat them as they would the pope.

Many Christians have unknowingly swallowed this artificial hierarchy and think that I’m on a different level than they are. It’s like “the pastor and staff and deacons are up here (pointing up); and all the rest of us are down here on this level.” No, there’s only one level—and the ground is level at the foot of the cross. We embrace a beautiful doctrine called the priesthood of all believers. We’re all equal in our service for Jesus.

It’s funny the things I’ve been called through the years. I’ve even had people address me as “Father David!” Actually, I like that a lot better than “Reverend.” I don’t like being called “reverend” because that’s the official title of certain priests, monsignors, and metropolitans in the Orthodox and Catholic Church. So what do I want to be called? Most adults call me David. If that doesn’t fly with you, you can call me Pastor David or Pastor. I love the term pastor! Or you can call me Brother David. Or if none of those fit you can always call me King David...not! But, please, anything but “reverend!”

You see, I believe that every member of our church is to be a minister. It’s just that some of us do it as a vocation and the rest of you do it as a volunteer. This church has only one head, and I’m NOT it—that role is already filled by Jesus Christ. The greatest example of spiritual leadership ever shown was when Jesus got up from the table and wrapped a towel around Himself and washed the feet of the disciples. Jesus led with a towel, not with a title.

3. TEAMWORK PRODUCES JOY

This relationship principle can be seen in verse 24, “We’re not in charge of how you live out the faith, looking over your shoulders, suspiciously critical. We’re partners, working alongside you, joyfully expectant.” (2 Corinthians 1:24) Paul was saying, “I’m not your boss, I’m your partner.” He didn’t say, “I’m working over you,” He said, “I working with you.” Whenever we work together as teammates on the Lord’s team, there is joy.

My observation over the past 30 years of being a pastor is that people who are most miserable in the church are the ones who only come and sit and then go home. They are like spectators, and they become armchair (or pew chair) quarterbacks. They belong to the group I often call the 3S club—they sit, soak, and sour. On the other hand, the people who are the most joyful and excited in the church are those who have joined a ministry team and they are busy serving the Lord. As the Psalmist says, “they serve the Lord with gladness.” Which are you?

When I was a kid, one of my very favorite TV shows was “The Lone Ranger.” Long before

television the Lone Ranger was a popular radio show that started in 1933. I can almost hear the music now! (Piano begins to play). The Lone Ranger’s famous line was “hi ho, Silver, away!” Here’s a little trivia for you. What was the name of Tonto’s horse? Answer: Scout. How many bad guys did the Lone Ranger kill over the forty years he was on radio and television? None—in all those years he never killed a man, he always shot the gun right out of their hands! Sometimes Christians think that they can go it alone and be a “Lone Ranger Christian.” But that’s impossible, you need a team. Hey, even the Lone Ranger had a team! He had Tonto who called him Kemosabi which means, “trusted friend.” And of course, they had Silver and Scout. Everybody needs a team!

Here’s a great acrostic for the word team: Together Everyone Accomplishes More! There are three spiritual teams you need to join. First, you need to be a part of a church team. You can’t just be a lone ranger Christian who doesn’t connect with a local church. You won’t ever find a perfect church, but you can’t say you love Jesus without loving and supporting His church. After all, the church is the body of Christ and the bride of Christ.

Second, you need a fellowship team. That means you need to be a part of a SMBS group at Green Acres. Look on the back of your worship folder and you’ll see that last Sunday (and every Sunday) there are about 1,500 people who attend worship, but don’t yet attend a small group Bible study. I don’t know who you are, but you know who you are. You are missing out on the JOY that comes from teamwork! In a church the size of ours every SMBS group operates like a church within the church. You’ll never discover the friendship, discipleship, and fellowship God wants you to enjoy until you connect with a fellowship team in Sunday Morning Bible Study!

And you need to be a part of a ministry team. You need to find a job to do for Jesus and join your teammates in serving Him. You may think since you can’t sing or teach that there’s not a job for you. We need people to greet folks at the entrances, and greet folks in the parking lot, and deliver meals for shut-ins. We have a TEAM for you to join if you’re willing.

Talk about a great team, aren’t we proud of our own Coach Jon Groth and the World Champion TJC baseball team? Let’s give it for them. Coach Groth brought together these talented athletes and made a team out of them. And when they won the World Series, did you see the joy they expressed as they ran onto the field and piled onto each other? Team work creates joy.

People who are busy serving the Lord are too busy to get sidetracked into petty conflicts. The best way to get along with other people in the church is to lock hands and hearts with them and start serving the Lord!

4. GOD’S LOVE CAN MELT OUR HEARTS TOGETHER

Paul and some people in Corinth were in conflict, but through it all, he still loved them. We know that from what he wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:4, “As it turned out, there was pain enough just in writing that letter, more tears than ink on the parchment. But I didn’t write it to cause pain; I wrote it so you would know how much I care—oh, more than care—love you!” God had broken Paul’s heart, and as he wrote to them about the pain he had caused them, he was moved to tears. God’s love had melted Paul’s heart.

America has often be called a melting pot. That term was first used by a Jewish playwright, Israel Zangwill who wrote a play called, “The Melting Pot” in 1908. However, today some people see America more like a salad bowl of individual group identities instead of a great melting pot. It’s no longer politically correct to call people just Americans; we now have hyphenated citizens like African-Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans. However, the church remains God’s true melting pot. There are no hyphenated Christians. We don’t identify ourselves as African Christians or Hispanic Christians...we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. God takes people who are as different as can be in terms of background, education, race, and culture and makes us all one. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Only God’s love can melt us together. The church is not wired together by organization or frozen together by formalism, or locked together by structure, or bound together by tradition. The church is melted together by love.

CONCLUSION

Let’s ask our question again, “Can’t we all just get along?” Yes, we can, but only when we surrender to Jesus Christ and allow Him to fill our hearts with God’s love. This tuning fork in my hand can teach us a powerful lesson about how we can love one another in the body of Christ. We have all kinds of musical instruments on this platform. Can you imagine the sound they would make if they weren’t in tune with each other? It would sound like a hundred screeching cats! But the reason they make beautiful music is because they are all tuned to the same pitch. Each of them is tuned to this tuning fork.

I once learned from a piano tuner that if there were 100 pianos lined up in this room and you tuned the first one to the tuning fork, then put away the tuning fork and tuned each piano to the one beside it, then the 100th piano would be terribly out of tune with the first one. Why? There are such minor variations in pitch that it would be impossible to precisely duplicate each piano’s pitch. But if you tuned each piano to the same tuning fork, then all 100 would be in perfect tune. What’s the lesson? It’s won’t work for you to try to tune your life to mine, even if I’m tuned in to Jesus. Each of us must tune our lives by Jesus Christ. But when that happens our lives will be in perfect pitch with each other. As the wonderful old hymn says, “tune my heart to sing your praise.” So the secret to maintaining loving relationships in the church is to make sure we keep our eyes on Jesus. When we are walking in fellowship with Him, then we’ll be walking in fellowship with everyone else who is walking with Him.

Lloyd C. Douglas wrote the wonderful book, *The Robe*. When he was a university student he lived in a boarding house. He befriended a retired music teacher who lived on the first floor and was confined to a wheel chair. Douglas said that every morning as he would leave he’d stick his head into the music teacher’s room and ask, “What’s the good news today?” Every morning the music teacher would pick up a tuning fork and tap it on the side of his wheelchair and say, “that’s an A note. It was an A yesterday, and it will be an A tomorrow; it will be an A a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs is flat, the piano across the hall is out tune, but, THAT is an A!” He’s right. There are so many things that are temporary and false in this life. But the Bible

says that Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Have you ever turned from your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord? That’s the only way you can tune your life into His life. And when each of our lives is in tune with Jesus, then, yes, we CAN get along with each other.

OUTLINE

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes