

## INTRODUCTION

One of the things you can count on in life is conflict with other people. Human history is littered with fractured relationships. The most famous family feud in American history was the fight between the Hatfields and the McCoys. They were two families who lived across a creek from each other on the Kentucky/West Virginia border. This feud started after the Civil War and continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At least 12 men were shot, one was hung, and several of them were thrown into prison. Do you know what started the feud? A pig. A prized pig was found and both the Hatfields and the McCoys claimed the pig was on their property (they couldn't agree on the property line). This disagreement escalated into violence and bloodshed for many years. Today, the term “Hatfields and McCoys” makes us think of conflict.

Wouldn't it be nice if there were never any personal conflicts in church? Like the home on the range, wouldn't it be wonderful if the church was a place, “where seldom is heard a discouraging word?” But the truth is some people in churches are as mean as snakes! Churches argue over the strangest things. There is a church near Mayfield, Kentucky called “No Peg Baptist Church.” The name comes from a conflict that happened in the late 1800's. The church had a circuit riding preacher who rode his horse from church to church. Some of the members wanted to place a peg in the wall for the preacher to hang his hat and coat. Other members refused to deface their church by driving a wooden peg into the wall. The conflict became so intense that the church split, and today there is a No Peg Baptist Church started by the members who didn't want a peg in their wall! I've known of church splits over where the organ would be placed, the color of the carpet, or whether the church should own a bus or not! Like Rodney King said, “Why can't we all just get along?”

There was plenty of conflict in the church at Corinth, too. Corinth was the Las Vegas of the ancient world. Paul went into that wicked city and started a church. After Paul left the church, many false prophets infiltrated the church and convinced some of the people Paul was not really an apostle. Others continued to live in open sin. Paul wrote this letter to address these issues. Much of what he wrote was to repair his relationship with the church. As he finished the letter, he expressed his love for the church.

2 Corinthians 12:14-15. “Now I am ready to visit you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you, because what I want is not your possessions but you. After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well. If I love you more, will you love me less?”

2 Corinthians 12:19-21. “Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? We have been speaking in the sight of God as those in Christ; and everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening. For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, and outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”

2 Corinthians 13:1-3. “This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be

established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you.”

At one time Paul had been close friends with the members of the church in Corinth, but his close relationship with them had been threatened, as he had been scrutinized and criticized by people who didn’t like him. He wrote these words to repair his relationship with his former friends.

As we go through this message, I want you ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind an individual, or several individuals with whom you used to be close. They were close friends to you at one time, but something has happened that destroyed or weakened your friendship. Will you be willing to do your part to repair this fractured friendship?

We need all the friends we can get. The British pastor, Charles Kingsley, wrote this about friends: “A blessed thing it is for any man or woman to have a friend; one human soul whom we can trust utterly; who knows the best and the worst of us, and who loves us in spite of all our faults; who will speak the honest truth to us...who, again, will comfort and encourage us in the day of difficulty and sorrow, when the world leaves us alone to fight our own battle as we can.” Someone once said that a friend is someone who walks in when everyone one else has just walked out. Real friends are valuable because they are so rare. Here are some lessons we can learn from Paul’s effort to repair his relationship with his friends.

## **1. VALUE PEOPLE MORE THAN POSSESSIONS**

The church in Corinth had provided financial support for some of the other teachers, but Paul reminded them he had paid his own way. We see his love for the church when he wrote, “what I want is not your possessions but you.” (12:14)

Paul expressed an important relational principle that people are more valuable than things. In our consumer-driven culture, we tend to work harder to accumulate possessions than we do friendships. But people matter more to God than anything else.

Francis Schaeffer was one of the most brilliant theologians and authors of the 20th century. Among many great books he wrote *He is There and He is not Silent* (1972). His wife, Edith, was also a prolific writer. Edith and Francis were married in the 1930s and were extremely poor. For their honeymoon, they decided to splurge on a rustic cabin with an indoor bathroom and rented for \$1.50 a night. Edith was wearing a beautiful white suit of costly fabric she had made for herself. On their way, they stopped at an ice cream shop, and Edith got a chocolate milkshake. She spilled the chocolate shake on her dress and ruined it. This could have ruined their day, but instead, they used that accident to establish an important principle in their marriage. Years later she wrote: “It was a vivid first lesson of the basic fact of relationships—that people matter more than things! Fran remembers clearly that he felt sorry, but that he felt the magic moment of starting out together was more important than the spoiled skirt. He also remembers that I had started to make a fuss about it, but that I stopped and made a decision to ignore the stain. It was

decision we would make many times in our life together. It was a deliberate choice that the broken, torn, spilled, crushed, burned, scratched, smashed, spoiled thing was not as important as the person, or the memory.”

Have you discovered people are much more valuable than things? When you do you’ll cherish friendships and relationships and do anything you can to maintain them, and to repair the ones that are broken.

## **2. RELATE TO OTHER BELIEVERS AS FAMILY MEMBERS**

Paul wrote, “After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.” (12:14-15) Paul considered himself to be the “father” of the church at Corinth—after all, he had birthed the church when he started it. He reminds us the church isn’t just an organization, we’re a family. We should treat each other like we would treat members of our biological family. But sadly, we don’t always treat our family members that well! I can remember the one thing my brother and I did most growing up was fight. But when it came time for meals we sat next to each other, and at night he climbed into his bunk bed below me and I climbed into the top one. I might not have always gotten along with him, but I couldn’t trade him in for another model, he was my brother and I had no choice about that. And the point is we can’t really pick and choose who our brothers and sisters are in the church—they’re in the family, so we have to get along with them whether we like it or not.

Sometimes biological families can be pretty dysfunctional. In the 1930s a songwriter named Dwight Latham read a paragraph by Mark Twain in which he explained how a man could become his own grandfather. So Latham wrote a funny song to illustrate this possibility. The song was funny when it was written, but with some of today’s blended families we have, it isn’t as far-fetched as it once was!

Many, many years ago  
When I was twenty-three  
I got married to a widow  
Pretty as could be.

This widow had a grown-up daughter  
With flowing hair of red.  
My father fell in love with her,  
And soon the two were wed.

This made my dad my son-in-law  
And changed my very life.  
Now my daughter was my mother,  
For she was my father’s wife.

To complicate the matters worse,  
Although it brought me joy,

I soon became the father  
Of a bouncing baby boy.

My little baby then became  
Brother-in-law to my dad.  
Which made my son my uncle,  
Though it made me very sad.

For if he was my uncle,  
Then that also made him brother  
To the widow’s grown-up daughter  
Who, of course, was my step-mother.

Father’s wife then had a son  
Who kept them on the run.  
And he became my grandson,  
For he was my daughter’s son.

My wife is now my mother’s mother  
And it makes me really blue.  
Because, although she is my wife,  
She is my grandma, too.

If my wife is my grandmother,  
Then I am her grandchild.  
And every time I think of it,  
It simply drives me wild.

For now I have become  
The strangest case you ever saw,  
As the husband of my grandmother,  
I am my own grandpa!

Sometimes the church family can become a little dysfunctional too! 1 Peter 2 says we are a “peculiar people” and some are more peculiar than others! Some are easy to love and others are easier to love! But the thing about the Family of God is we all have the same Father, so we don’t have a choice about getting along with one another. If you’re part of the family, we’re in this together whether we like it or not.

### **3. RESOLVE RELATIONAL PROBLEMS PRIVATELY BEFORE THEY BECOME PUBLIC**

Paul wrote, “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier.” (13:1-2) I believe Paul was referring to the specific guidelines Jesus gave for repairing broken relationships. Paul warned the

congregation at Corinth that it would be to everyone’s advantage if they settled these conflicts privately before he had to come and bring the matter before the entire congregation. Jesus gave three simple yet profound rules for reconciliation in Matthew 18:15-7. If you need to repair a fractured friendship, there are specific steps you can take to bring about reconciliation.

### **Step 1: Go and discuss it one on one**

“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). There several important keys to making this first step work. First, notice this reconciliation plan is for “brothers” (and sisters). That means it’s for two followers of Jesus Christ. This method is not recommended for two unbelievers, or one unbeliever and one believer. Second, it requires you GO to this person. We sometimes think if a person has said or done something to offend us, it’s their job to come crawling to us begging us to forgive them, but that’s not what Jesus taught. Who moves first for reconciliation? The one who is listening more closely to the voice of Jesus. Third, this should be a face-to-face meeting, not a letter or an email or even a phone call. Fourth, and most importantly, you must go alone. If you have talked about this problem with someone else, then you have actually sinned by committing the sin of gossip.

The truth is you can’t really worship God if you haven’t addressed a relational conflict. If the Holy Spirit reminds you of someone, Jesus taught that you should interrupt your worship of God and FIRST go be reconciled with that person. Jesus said, “If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you, abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God.” (Matthew 5:23-24 *The Message*) Even if the shoe is on the other foot, and you realize you have offended someone, then you should go to that person and seek reconciliation. Again, the person who moves first for reconciliation is the one who is most Christ-like.

This plan works. I’ve been on both sides of it many times. There have been times I’ve gone to someone and addressed an issue with them, and we both confessed our part of the problem, and prayed together, and the relationship was mended. And there have been times when someone has come to me and I’ve listened to them, and asked for their forgiveness, and we have prayed together and the relationship was restored. Because this is the confidential step, I will never reveal who those persons are and what we were discussing—that’s the whole point, to deal with it personally and move on.

The acrostic FIDO works well in these kinds of discussions. FIDO stands for “Forgive It and Drive On.” Some say “Forget it and Drive On.” But outside of brain damage, hypnosis, or dementia, we can’t forget it, but we can do something better than forget it, we can forgive it! Remember, your goal is to “win” your brother or sister back. You aren’t trying to win an argument you’re trying to win a friendship!

Imagine the Holy Spirit is reminding you right now of a broken friendship that needs to be repaired, and you want to obey Jesus. Call or write this person and set up an appointment to sit down with them—don’t just spring it on them out of the blue. Next, pray hard about what you

will say to this person, even write it out to help you know how to express it. Finally, as you talk to them, don't use "you" statements, instead use "I" statements. For instance, don't say, "You said that my nose is too big, what are you going to do about it?" A "you" message is an accusation that puts people on the defensive. When you lob a "you" message toward someone, you usually get a "you" message thrown back at you. "Oh, yeah, well you do have a big nose!"

Try it this way. "I need you to know that I am bothered that our relationship has suffered. I was hurt because of something you said about my appearance. I know I have a big nose, but I just don't like to be reminded of it. I hope we can get back on track as friends again." An "I message" expresses the way you feel about the problem rather than accusing them.

In my experience 90% of all personal conflicts can be resolved by humbly and prayerfully following this first step. But if that step doesn't work, Jesus taught us to take:

### **Step 2: Take a trusted friend or two**

"But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'" (Matthew 18:16) Those are the words of Jesus Paul quoted in 2 Corinthians 13:1. If your relational problem can't be solved in step 1, you still shouldn't broadcast the issue at large. You should then enlist one or two friends to help you resolve the conflict. The legal world calls this arbitration or mediation. If you get to this step, don't choose your best friend who is going to always side with you so that you can "gang up" on the other person. Take mutual friends who are going to be unbiased in their approach to the issue. You should take friends who are peacemakers not trouble makers.

This builds accountability into this process. An unbiased friend or two can ensure you are following the scriptural guidelines, and that you are correctly identifying and addressing the issue that created the conflict. In addition, these friends can serve to encourage the two of you to be reconciled for the sake of Christ. These friends can also help you see if you have a blind spot yourself. As Jesus warned, you might be trying to help a friend get a speck out of their eye while you have a log in your eye. A good friend will point this out and help both of you clear out your eyes and clear the air at the same time.

I've personally served as this mediator dozens of times over the past 30 years. Again, because this is still on the confidential level, I'll never reveal who the parties were, or what the issues were. I only want you to know this process works. I've seen that 90% of all conflicts are resolved at step 1 when you go privately to someone else. Of the remaining 10% of conflicts, I've discovered 9.9% of the issues can be resolved at step #2. But in the very rare instances when there is no reconciliation at steps 1 and 2, Jesus gives us a final step:

### **Step 3: Inform the group and treat him/her like an unbeliever**

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (Matthew 18:17) This is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the Bible. Throughout history untold multitudes of people have been hurt and even executed based upon this verse. Jesus never said the offending

person should be punished or humiliated. He said “the church” should be informed and they should treat that person like a pagan or a tax collector.

So, in our modern context, how do we apply this when this happens? We actually follow this verse at Green Acres, although we have never publicly announced to the entire congregation about a person who refused to follow the rules for reconciliation. However, this has been applied of the level of Bible Study groups or within specific ministries. Our congregation is so large that every SMBS group functions as a church within a church, so that is the “group” where this happens.

So how do we treat this person? Do we blacklist them and tell them they can’t come to church any longer? Absolutely not! Jesus said we treat them as a pagan or a tax collector. That means if a person who refuses to be reconciled, we treat them like an unbeliever. How do we treat unbelievers? We welcome them into our church with open arms and try to bring them to a point where they give their lives to Jesus. We don’t allow them to fill roles of leadership, but we LOVE to have unbelievers come into our church so we can show them the love of Jesus.

Pagans and tax-collectors were the terms used to describe the worst sinners in Jesus’ time. But do you remember who penned the gospel according to Matthew? A former tax collector! How did Jesus treat that tax collector? Did He spit and him and say, “You’re no good!” No, He said, “Follow me.” One day Jesus met a short tax collector named Zacchaeus. Did He point His finger at him and say, “You dirty rotten sinner?” No, He said, “I’m going to have supper with you.” Both Matthew and Zacchaeus had their lives turned around because Jesus treated them with compassion and grace. That’s the way we should treat unbelievers.

We don’t follow the steps in Matthew 18 to win an argument, we do it to win our brothers and sisters. The goal of confrontation is restoration not rejection! The Bible says, “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

If the Holy Spirit is placing someone on your heart to whom you need to go and start this process of reconciliation? You can’t truly be right with God unless you are right with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

## CONCLUSION

You may be shaking your head thinking there is a fractured friendship from your past that could never be repaired. Never underestimate the power of God to end conflict. Do you ever wonder what happened to the Hatfields and the McCoys? There are books and historical documentaries chronicling their feud, but you don’t hear much about how they were reconciled. The truth is these two families became friends again. Through the years, the violence died down. Gradually, the families let go of their animosity, and there were even weddings joining Hatfields and McCoys. To show that they had become friends, in 1979 members of the Hatfields and McCoys playfully faced off against each other on the game show “Family Feud” with Richard Dawson and the prize? A pig! In 2003, the Hatfields and McCoys even signed a ceremonial peace treaty declaring the feud was officially over. And every summer in Pikeville, Kentucky the two

families hold a joint family reunion and thousands attend. It has become the most popular tourist event in Pikeville. If the Hatfields and McCoys can reconcile, we should realize *any* fractured friendship can be repaired!

## OUTLINE

### 1. VALUE PEOPLE MORE THAN POSSESSIONS

“what I want is not your possessions but you.” (12:14)

### 2. RELATE TO OTHER BELIEVERS AS FAMILY MEMBERS

“After all, children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. So I will very gladly spend for you everything I have and expend myself as well.” (12:14-15)

### 3. RESOLVE RELATIONAL PROBLEMS PRIVATELY BEFORE THEY BECOME PUBLIC

“‘Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier.” (13:1-2)

## JESUS’ RULES FOR RECONCILIATION (Matthew 18:15-17)

Step 1: Go and discuss it one on one (vs. 15)

Step 2: Take a trusted friend or two (vs. 16)

Step 3: Inform the group and treat him/her like an unbeliever (vs. 17)



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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