

SAVING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are important. They are important to God and should be to us as well. In I Corinthians the apostle Paul had to deal with a sin issue that was not taken seriously by the church at Corinth. Thankfully, the church readjusted itself from complacency to becoming proactively involved with dealing with the sinning brother. By the time II Corinthians was written, the sinning man had repented of his sin. The new problem was that the church had not gotten out of their disciplinary mode. So Paul had to say, *"...Ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow"* (II Corinthians 2:7). The Greek word for the phrase "swallowed up" is also translated "devour" in I Peter 5:8, *"...your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* This is pretty severe! I would hate for my attitude toward any repentant brother or sister in Christ be compared to the Devil's attributes. There is only one time the word "schism" (Greek: "schisma") appears in the Bible. It is found in I Corinthians 12:25 when the apostle declares, *"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."* This word means a rent or tear, a split or a gap division. God doesn't want the church, families, or friendships that He has ordained be torn apart.

How can we save and maintain relationships?

1. Remind yourselves you are not in competition.

It is not me against him or us against them. If you are married you are family. If you are members of the same church, you are on the same team. You may win the argument but lose the relationship. Hopefully, relationships, if lost, will be temporary. Don't throw away that which God has given you. *"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise"* (II Corinthians 10:12).

2. Consider the fact that you may be wrong.

We need to lay claim to Psalm 139:23,24: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

A man was once asked, "It must be a difficult life to know that you are always right." In jest he answered, "I wouldn't know because I am never wrong." The reason that is funny is because we all know there is but One and One only who walked this earth without sin -- and that definitely wasn't me and brace yourself - - it wasn't you. This One and Only One Savior, when standing in the presence of a person who, according to the law, could have died for being wrong, said, *"...He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her"* (John 8:7b). *"...Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more"* (John 8:11b).

3. Be sorry, really sorry for the wrong you have done.

This is where many of us fall short. We want to be humble enough to admit our errors, but prideful enough not to be transparent. Psalm 51:2 says, *"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin."*

"Thoroughly" means "fully; entirely; completely." According to the Webster's 1828 dictionary the word "thoroughly" means basically the same thing, but the definition for "thoroughly" adds one other meaning: "without reserve and sincerely." One student of our language commented, "What is the difference? Look again. You do not have to be sincere or engaged to do something thoroughly, but you do to do something thoroughly."

To be sorry for our sins involves becoming personal. We are not only sorry we got caught in the wrong, we are sorry we did the wrong. The next point will explain more "thoroughly."

4. Take accountability for any wrong you have done.

We are tempted to divert personal accountability for our wrong. This is apparent by expressions we use when we are discovered in the wrong, "I don't know what got into me"; "I was just beside myself"; "I went to pieces." This is my favorite, "I lost my head." We are not dealing with our sin by distancing ourselves from the act or acts we committed. We can only be helped if we own the wrong, declare it wrong and determine not to go there again.

Listen to the words of Joshua 7:19, *“And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.”* No matter how much it hurts, confess. According to Joshua, it brings glory to God when we confess our wrong. In the Old Testament, mankind died under the law. In the New Testament, through the grace and truth in Jesus, we are healed. There is healing power in confession. James 5:16 says, *“Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”*

5. Make restoration if required.

“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8). It may cost you something to be right with God and each other, but it is well worth the price.

6. Take the initiative to restore the relationship.

Romans 12:10 tells us to *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.”* “Preferring” is from the Greek word: “proegeomai” which means to lead the way for others, i.e. show deference, to go before another as an example of humble submission.

In counseling I sometimes hear people say, “I’m not the bad guy here.” And many times the defensive person is actually much more in the right than the other person. But think of this: if you are right and the other person was wicked enough to do you wrong, what makes you think they will arise more quickly from their “wicked state” and initiate reconciliation? Reconciliation is much more likely to take place if the more spiritual one takes the initiative. You must “prefer,” in other words, lead the way for others.

7. Forgive the one who offended you of all they have done.

David said in Psalm 25:18b, *“...forgive all my sins.”* Why would we expect God to forgive us of “all” our sins, and not be just as willing to forgive others who have sinned against us of “all” their sins? Partial forgiveness will never do, we must forgive all to have relief and to give relief. It may be hard, but it is the right thing to do. We are so tempted to put the person on probation. You may argue, well, I don’t want to be hurt again, but I say to you, take the risk. Love is a risk! The Lord took the greatest risk for you and me when He went to the cross and

died the death that we all deserved. Listen to the magnanimous heart of Jesus and may we emulate this attitude, *"Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven"* (Luke 7:47, 48).

8. Regain relationship and don't live in shame or blame.

The prodigal son's father, in attempting to get the elder son to accept his brother's repentance (which means to accept his brother himself), pleads, *"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found"* (Luke 15:32). The father is saying let the past be done away with your brother's repented sins and let us not let him live in shame! This is a new day and you have a new brother.

On the other hand, let us not live in the blame game. May we say with the Psalmist, *"Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit"* (Psalm 51:12). May we take to heart the words of Charles Tindley's old hymn, *"Nothing between my soul and my Savior, So that His blessed face may be seen; Nothing preventing the least of His favor; Keep the way clear! Let nothing between."* Let us remove anything between our Lord and each other. Let God save and let Him help you maintain life's relationships.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, decorative initial "J" and a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.