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◆ Talk – Matt 18:15

There is no ‘airbrushing out’ the wrong. The terms used here are gentle, but the idea is still to help them see the wrong (ideally also noting the wrong in you too), so that together you can be reconciled. Do not put it off (Matt 5:24) ... I am not to let the day finish before I seek to deal with anger or hurt (Eph 4:24-27). This may take much time. It is difficult to reach out for reconciliation, and we need to cover it all with prayer. But without talking “just between the two of you” nothing is achieved.

◆ Accept help – Matt 18:16-17

Both here and in Phil 4:2-3 there is a recognition that you may need help in healing hurts. Sometimes one to one is not enough – there needs to be a third (or fourth) party. This is not to ‘gang up’ on the other person ... there is nothing ‘heavy handed’ in this. Phil 2:3 shows how others are called to “help”, to bring peace not pressure. And, of course, God has given the church Elders who can be brought in to help.

◆ Don’t give up – Matt 18:17

It might sound as though the end of v17 is just giving up on the person who has caused so much hurt. But that’s not what the intent is. In 1 Cor 5, the apostle Paul speaks of a believer who had been sexually immoral. Rather than tolerate the ongoing sin, Paul taught they should remove this person from their church family (1 Cor 5:3). But later, in 2 Corinthians, this same person had turned from this lifestyle, and Paul advised the Corinthian believers to accept him again and “to reaffirm your love for him” (2 Cor 2:8). Just as God won’t let you go even when you turn from Him again and again, so I also mustn’t give up, though for a time we might have to wait. Our goal is to be reconciled, brothers and sisters united in Jesus.

So there we have it. Heart, Head, Hands.

Wonderfully, God knows our weaknesses and our difficulties (Ps 103:13-15). He has already provided the way for us to face and resolve our hurts. Yes, it’s a command (Matt 5:24), but it’s also God’s loving call in view of His own mercy towards us, for our good and His glory.

DEALING WITH HURTS

A Biblical Model



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As people of God we are a mixed bunch! We come from different backgrounds, with different interests, cultures, ages, genders and ethnicity. The wonderful reality (Rev 5:9) is that Jesus has purchased His people “*from every tribe and language and people and nation*”, and it is they, with the Angels and all creation, who will one day sing together “*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power for ever and ever!*” (Rev 5:13). But we’re not there yet. Right now we are saved, being sanctified, but still sinful (1 John 1:8). Our differences (1 Cor 11:19) and failings can cause hurt, disputes and divisions (1 Cor 1:11, Phil 4:2).

So, what do we do when these difficulties occur? Well, of course, we could follow our instincts, act like the world around us. But that’s not what God seeks, and His ways are certainly not our ways (Is 55:8). Indeed, failing to deal with hurts or dealing with hurts our way negatively impacts our own spiritual walk (2 Cor 2:10-11), destroys unity (Eph 4:1-3), hinders the gospel work (Phil 2:14-16), and grieves the Spirit (Eph 4:30-32). Rather, by dealing with differences, disputes and hurts in the way God shows us we can bring God glory and shine the gospel to others (Eph 5:1-2).

There are three simple headings which we hope will help you remember how we should respond:

HEART

Whether you have been hurt by others, or have been the cause of hurt (knowingly or unwittingly), there is a heart issue – I’ve overlooked or forgotten things that should be primary in my heart. I am always to start with myself.

◆ Honesty – James 4:1

Jas 4:1 asks where the fights and quarrels come from. “*Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?*”. No matter how much things can seem to be the other person’s fault, there are attitudes within me which I need to address too – be that pride (which has been hurt), things I value (which have been undermined), status (which has been challenged), or temper (which has been inflamed). God knows my heart. I am called to bring myself before Him first of all and deal with my own sin or sinful response (Jas 4:7, Matt 7:3-5).

◆ Humility – Phil 2:1-8

Our human hearts react to difficulty by defending our own interests or status. But, rather, I am to have within the mind of Jesus. He humbled himself, became a servant, was misunderstood, abused, scorned, beaten, crucified, yet bore it all without striking back. Why did He do that? “*For the joy set before him*” – the joy of saving, sanctifying, securing His people. His Spirit’s work in me is demonstrated when I am prepared to be wronged and forgive, rather than uphold my ‘rights’, for the sake of His Kingdom.

◆ Family – 1 Cor 12

We are parts of one body, members of one family. 1 Cor 12 makes it clear that each one has a part and none can think they can do without the other. Yet my hurt can cause me to want to separate from others, not to fellowship with them, or even drive them out. But that can’t be of God, because we are each one chosen to be part of His body for fellowship with Him and one another.

So, I start with the heart – how is my heart? What of my response is from a sinful heart? What response may be pride rather than the heart of Jesus? Does my heart ring out our God-created fellowship as family? Getting these right is the fundamental first step.

HEAD

Where the Heart is about deep passions that I need to examine, the Head is about how I think which motivates my responses. Jesus transforms my mind (Rom 12:2) so how I think about the one who has hurt me is vital too.

◆ Repentance – Jas 4:6-10

Repentance is turning – turning from the way I am going and choosing to go a different way. In dealing with quarrels in the church, James reminds us that “*God opposes the proud*”. Rather, I am to “*submit yourself to God. Resist the devil ... Come near to God ... Wash your hands ... Grieve mourn and wail.*” I have to turn from heart attitudes that are wrong, take on pure actions and desires.

◆ Mercy - Matthew 18:21-35

Recognising my sin leads to the next thing – recognising God’s Mercy to me and reflecting this in my mercy to

others. Because He loved, He sent Jesus to die for me. Mercy is love in action without waiting for a reason. Jesus tells the parable of a man who was forgiven a vast debt – many millions in today’s money. Yet he then failed to show mercy to a debtor of his who owed him less than a thousandth of that amount. Mercy is a decision I have to take. A decision to not treat someone as their failure deserves, even when they are failing.

◆ Love – Rom 5:8

Rom 5:8 makes a most remarkable statement: “*God shows His love to us in this: while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*”. The ultimate demonstration of His mercy (treating us as we don’t deserve) is to love us while we were still acting against Him, resisting Him, hurting Him; to give up all and die for you when you were still rebelling against Him. God chose to love you despite all. Love is a choice. And if God can choose to love me despite all I am, I (in His strength and enabling) can choose to love the one who has wronged me.

HANDS

Having let God touch my heart and change my thinking first, we come to Matt 18:15-17. The context of these verses is the Parable of the Lost Sheep (God giving up all to seek and rescue the lost), and the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (which we looked at above). The requirement for the reconciliation we see in Matt 18:15-17 is Hearts and Heads challenged and transformed by Jesus. But then there has to be action (hence ‘Hands’).

◆ Go – Matt 18:15

Notice the pattern here “*If a brother sins against you*”. This is not about the person who has done wrong going to apologise for the wrong they have done – it’s the one who has been wronged seeking to heal the broken relationship! This is love & mercy in action. The work of the Spirit within is to write the same love as God has for us (in coming to us while we were yet sinners) so I go and seek reconciliation even though I am the one who has been wronged.

So, don’t stay away waiting for an apology ... go and seek to rebuild the relationship.

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