

Restoration And Forgiveness

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Please turn to chapter 57 of the book of Isaiah. This chapter shows the contrast between the righteous and the idolatrous world. Humanity's primary desire is peace, however, its real need is greater than the carnal peace that they seek. It needs peace with God.

People out of relationship with God, people in sin, are restless and miserable and unhappy. There is a real and desperate need for spiritual healing, restoration, and forgiveness in this world and we are to help with that.

Isaiah 57:19 "I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace to him who is far off and to him who is near," says the Lord, "I will heal him."

This is referring to those who have been sinful and wicked during their life, and Israel in general, that God is going to eventually heal their attitudes and change [them] around and give them peace. But then Isaiah goes on to say this in verses 20 and 21:

Isaiah 57:20-21 But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

So he is reminding them very clearly that there is no peace when you are a sinful person. But he promises that eventually He will turn Israel around.

Now, we have just read the picture and explanation of society today: Like the troubled sea. We are all familiar with that picture of the restless sea. Why is the sea always restless, always in motion? Why are there waves and why is there ebb and flow? Well, the scientists tell us that the answer is that the sea is being acted upon by two opposing forces. On the one hand, there is the

moon which partly controls the movements and the motions of the sea. And on the other hand, there is the magnetic force in the heart of the earth, a tremendous magnetic pull.

So on the one hand, there is the pull and the influence of the moon and the converse influence of the magnetic powers in the center of the earth on the other. And the result is that the sea is in constant motion. You have the waves and the billows and the ebb and flow. And then occasionally there comes a gale. The wind rises and begins to blow on the sea and raise the billows and then comes a terrible storm.

The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. Have you ever walked along a beach after a storm and seen the mud and the dirt and the bits of wood and the various debris and things. When that hurricane hit Myrtle Beach last year the 1100 foot pier that was there was piled up onto the beach just like you would see in maybe some disaster film or a lumber yard or something of that sort. Only 100 feet was left. So there was a lot of debris after that hurricane along the beach. But even normally there tends to be debris on the beach from the motion of the ocean. There are the flotsam and the jetsam, the filth and the mire left on the seashore after the ending of the storm. It is a perfect illustration. And Isaiah says the wicked are like that. The picture is of mankind apart from God, restless like the sea.

What is the cause of this? You already have several ideas, no doubt. It is the same explanation in a spiritual sense as that of the state of the sea. It all began in Eden. Man and woman were made by God and placed in the Garden of Eden. There was no contrary motion there. There was no restlessness in the Garden because there was only one force working on mankind—God. And God made man in His own image and he was in correspondence in unity and in fellowship with God. He was enjoying God and his life was a life of unmixed peace. There was no unhappiness, there were no problems, there was no trouble, no anxiety, at least at first. Man and woman were in a state of innocence and of near-perfect peace and quiet and freedom.

But man and woman sinned against God and they listened to another influence who offered them power. And in listening, they became subject to

it. The force of Satan, the force of evil, the force of death began to play on them and from that time on men and women's lives have been restless and in conflict.

Mankind apart from a relationship with God is exactly like the sea and there is in humans a factor called the conscience. Most people probably wish they did not have one, but we have it anyway and it will go on speaking to us and pulling and nagging in its definite influence on us in life.

Now people know deep down that they were meant for something better and they have a sense of right and wrong, and good and evil. And we know from Scripture that they even have a sense of God. God's attributes are clearly seen in creation. People in the world certainly do not like it and it disturbs them, it makes them restless, and like the ways of the sea—the troubled sea—it cannot rest. And when a storm comes, some ferocious onslaught from Satan, there is always a slight movement in the air, but people do not always call it a gale. They do not always know that movement, that influence from Satan is coming their way. And when the movement is magnified, it is called a gale, as in gale force winds.

Satan is always looking for ways to trouble people. And there are times when he really lays into us and then we are dashed about like a storm at sea. There are times when Satan's forces seem to be unleashed and our little lives are as turbulent and tossed about as the sea in a vicious storm. And that is the effect Satan's influence has on it, that is the effect that sin has on us when we follow Satan's influence. Not only that, there are ongoing and repetitious circumstances. Wars come, illnesses come, a loved one is taken ill, something goes wrong, trouble with others, and our whole life is upset. As a result, we feel like our lives are like the sea, rocking back and forth. In this state we have no peace.

Without trusting God there is no peace, only restlessness. And so we see we cannot have true peace and unity in either this nation or this world. And the contrast between God's people in the world, which parallels Satan's conflict of enmity toward God, is so striking that for there to be peace the God Family will have to miraculously renew everything. And that renewal has begun with us, the members of God's church.

Regarding unity, Paul instructs the Ephesian church to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity or oneness of the Spirit refers to unity of devotion, unity of faith, unity of love. And it means that we should be united in outlook and purpose and not split into factions. But that is what we see happening more and more, even in the church of God. There is but one Spirit that acts on our hearts to renew us and we must demonstrate the same feelings and views with God and one another.

God's church is unified and always has been. The question is: are you part of that unified church? Or are you part of some other faction?

The phrase fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 indicates something that is a natural product of the Spirit rather than of human nature. And one of the natural products of the Spirit is peace. Peace is God's gift to mankind achieved by Him at the cross of Christ. It is peace with God and is to express itself both in peace of mind and, in a very practical sense, between all those who know God. This peace should be seen in the home, between Jew and Gentile within the church, and in our relationships with all human beings, especially with those of the fellowship of Christ, as much as depends on you.

Peace is a fruit of the Spirit but is not produced without effort. Although it is a gift from God through Jesus Christ, peace must be strived for, sought after, and pursued. It takes work to have peace. Psalm 34:14 commands, "Seek peace and pursue it." We have a hymn that says, "Seek peace, pursue it earnestly."

The importance of the word peace is evident from its frequent and extensive occurrence in the New Testament. Eighty times and in every book, peace is mentioned. I think that is important to God that He is so inspired in Scripture to be mentioned so many times. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord." That puts quite a duty on each and every one of us in God's church.

Turn with me if you will please to James 3. The pursuit of peace is not merely an elimination of discord, but is produced by a conscious effort to bring it about by a mindful determination to accomplish it.

James 3:13-18 Who is wise in understanding among you? [We hope that is all of us. I mean, as members of God's church, should we not be that way?] Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

So if you want to produce the fruit of righteousness in your life, it means that you have to work at producing and making peace yourself and with God's Holy Spirit that becomes peace with God and the peace of God.

James tells us here that a crop of righteousness cannot be produced in the climate of animosity and self-seeking. Righteousness will grow only in a climate of peace and it must be sown and cultivated by the peacemakers. They not only love peace and live with peace of mind, but also endeavor to promote conditions of peace wherever they go.

God grants peace as a gift through Jesus Christ, whose suffering and sacrifice opened the way for peace between human beings and God and between human beings and other human beings. Colossians 1:20 says that we have peace through the blood of His cross, that is, through the suffering and sacrifice of His life, resulting in the forgiveness of sin. What depends on us? We have a Christian duty to pursue peace and to make an effort to promote conditions of peace.

The Bible provides us with a simple yet effective way for resolving conflict. These principles are so simple that they can be used to resolve the most basic conflicts in daily life. But they are also so successful that they can be used to arbitrate any of the worst divorce and child custody actions, church divisions, business disputes, and abuse cases. They are simple but they are effective. These principles should be used to solve conflicts within the

church and disagreements within the family. So let us look at the various principles that will help us to be peacemakers.

Now, we must have a right perspective. If we do not have a right perspective, we are never going to be able to pursue peace. We will not even know what it looks like, not in the spiritual sense. Conflict is not necessarily destructive. That is surprising, is it not? Conflict is not necessarily destructive and we fare far better if we view conflicts and differences of opinion from an accurate viewpoint. It is an opportunity for glorifying God and serving others and becoming more like Christ because it is an opportunity to grow in character. Even when conflict is caused by sin and produces a great deal of stress, God can use conflict to develop righteous character in people with inconsistent views, provided the individuals apply godly principles in resolving the conflict.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

The principle here is that the main beneficiaries of God's benevolence are those who love God and are called according to His purpose. And so when things in our lives work together for good, an immediate and ultimate benefit is peace. We go through life with peace of mind, knowing that all righteous efforts will work together to produce peace.

Turn to I Corinthians 10 please. In verse 31 Paul especially encourages the church to focus on glorifying God in all that we do and as part of that, do not needlessly offend others.

I Corinthians 10:31-33 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

I Corinthians 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

It is a tall order to do. But Paul worked at it and said even the things that he wanted to do he did not do and the things that he did not want to do, he did. But he still worked at it, tried to do righteous things all the time in his life.

These verses that we just read present the right perspective. It is not just other people being focused on, but God, the Creator and Giver of all things. The ultimate focus on God benefits our attitude toward others. Are we glorifying God in our actions? Are we bringing peace?

The glory of God must be our goal in everything. And this right perspective is the only way to have true peace. It holds true for the family, for family and marriage relationships, for friendships, and in all relationships in life. Paul is emphasizing the truth that doing all for the glory of God means thinking of the good of others, both Christians and non-Christians as we see here in verse 32.

So we see contained within these verses the two great commandments, love God and love your neighbor. These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or they concentrate on overcoming their opponent. It is wise to sometimes step back from a conflict and ask ourselves whether we are doing all that we can to take advantage of these opportunities to promote peace. When the apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to live to glorify God, he wanted them to show God honor and reverence in all their thoughts and actions. And he was encouraging them to give a true witness of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ in everyday life. Everything matters and he admonished them to live God's way of life 24/7.

Included in "whatever you do" in verse 31 is the way in which we resolve personal conflicts. Do we look at a conflict as an opportunity to develop a right perspective, to do all to the glory of God?

One of the most challenging principles of making peace is revealed in Matthew 7. Quite often we handle conflict by looking through dark glass or with total blindness.

Matthew 7:5 [Jesus says] "Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

If we consider the plank when looking at personal conflict, we see that it prevents us from seeing the conflict clearly and we may have a critical or negative or overly-sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. Now one of the best ways to avoid this is to spend some time meditating on Philippians 4. It describes the kind of attitude we should have even when we are involved in a conflict.

Philippians 4:5-9 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, and whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things that you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Also, God will give us peace of mind as the result of doing these things. Often though we forget about such righteous qualities, thereby causing our own conflicts.

Sometimes we may have harsh words, poor manners, or inappropriate behavior, which are offensive, and we are sometimes blind to our own sins and may need help from a friend who will help us take an objective look at ourselves. He may be able to help us face up to our contribution to the conflict. When we identify ways that we have wronged another person, it is important to admit our wrongs honestly and thoroughly.

I have tried, if possible, to make this sermon as practical as possible and to give you as many ideas as possible on how to resolve conflicts and by backing it up with the the Bible as well. So please consider seven things that a Christian should do after offending another person. Here are my suggestions.

1. We should admit specifically any mistake we made both in attitude and action because this is the first step in developing humility. People are more apt to receive a humble person. The most important aspect of getting the plank out of your own eye is to change our own behavior and attitude. And this means we must admit our own shortcomings. So the first one is we should admit specifically any mistake we made both in attitude and action.
2. We should not make excuses for our earlier actions. Reasons are one thing, excuses are quite another. Regarding hurting someone, a reason is a justified explanation or an action or attitude towards someone. But an excuse is a false or weak reason for improper conduct or attitude. Excuses do not work because they are usually insincere. So that second one was we should not make excuses for our earlier actions.
3. We should acknowledge the hurt we caused and we should express genuine sorrow because peace is fed out of and promoted by real compassion and empathy. We should acknowledge the hurt we caused and we should express genuine sorrow.
4. We should accept the consequences, especially if it means we must make restitution because it is important to uphold justice.
5. We should overcome the negative behavior by changing our attitudes and actions because peace will not last if the same mistakes or offenses are made again. God requires us to overcome our sins and faults. We should overcome the negative behavior by changing our attitudes and actions.
6. We should face up to and apologize to the offended person because peace comes when offense ends in remorse.

7. We should ask for forgiveness because peace comes when there is forgiveness. Otherwise, resentment may last a lifetime. Also, it gives the offended person an opportunity to help end the conflict, so we should ask for forgiveness.

These seven things should help bring peace out of conflict between converted people who are willing to seek a right perspective. And of course, it does not work if you are dealing with an unconverted person. But we still should try these things with an unconverted person because it often will work because a soft answer turns away wrath. But converted or unconverted, it should work really every time.

Any time we become excessively preoccupied with something, even a good thing, and seek to find happiness, security, or fulfillment in it rather than God we are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God as well as conflict with other people. So please turn to James 4. In verse 1, James writes, when people want something but do not get it, often they will covet, quarrel, fight, and even murder to to acquire it. James expresses the principle that conflict comes from the desires that battle in our heart.

James 4:1-2 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

It means we do not ask God in a right attitude to help us overcome these things and to do things that are pleasing to Him. Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal the truth, bend others to your will, or have revenge. Conflict can be fueled by good desires which we have elevated to sinful demands, such as a craving we allow to turn into an obsession. Food or alcoholic beverages are often abused in this way.

How can we overcome the idolatry that fuels conflict? In a very similar way to the things we considered for when we have wronged another person. We must admit our wrongs honestly and thoroughly. First, we should ask God to help us see where we have been guilty of neglecting Him. Second, we should

specifically identify and reject each of the desires contributing to the conflict. And third, we should deliberately pursue a right relationship with God. In other words, we must thoroughly set our mind and heart and mind on God's will rather than on our own seeking joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction in Him alone.

We can find freedom from idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make right choices that will please God and honor Him. And this change of heart will usually speed a resolution to the problem and, at the same time, improve our ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

Please turn over to Matthew 18, verse 15. How do we help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict? When we think about talking to someone else about a conflict one of the verses that comes to mind is,

Matthew 18:15 "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother."

Now, if this verse is read in isolation, it seems to tease that we must always use direct confrontation to force others to admit they have sinned. At least that is the way the world interprets it. If the verse is read in context, we see that Jesus had something much more flexible and beneficial in mind than simply standing toe to toe with others and describing their sins.

Just before this verse, we find Jesus' wonderful metaphor of a loving shepherd who goes to look for a wandering sheep and then rejoices when it is found in this way. Verse 15 is introduced with a theme of restoration, not condemnation. Jesus repeats this theme just after telling us to go and tell him his fault by adding, "If he hears you, you have gained your brother." And then He hits the restoration theme a third time in verses 21 through 35, where He uses the parable of the Unmerciful Servant to remind us to be as merciful and forgiving to others as God is to us.

God has forgiven us of all our sins. We struggle with forgiving one sin in one person. God is so much greater than we are!

Turn with me, if you will please, to Galatians 6. Verse 1 gives us positive direction on what our attitude and purpose should be when we go to our brother, and we are to bear and share burdens.

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass [or sin or whatever that wrong may be], you who are spiritual [which means every member of God's church] restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.

Again, we see the theme of restoration with an emphasis on the approach, that of gentleness. Our attitude should be one of gentleness rather than anger. And our purpose should be to restore rather than condemn. The situation of verse 1 is one that more than any other inevitably reveals the real character and spiritual maturity of a member of God's church.

Here, Paul is imagining a hypothetical situation in which one member unexpectedly learns that another member is trapped in some sin. What should he do? Should he overlook the sin or should he expose the sin? Paul shows that a true member of God's church, being led by the Spirit of God, should not proceed in either of these ways. Paul spells out the proper course of action by showing what to do, who should do, it and how it should be done.

First, Paul says that members of God's church are to restore the person who has fallen into sin. Restore here is the Greek word transliterated *katartizo*, and it is a medical term in secular Greek for setting a fractured bone. That is the word restore. So Paul's point is that what is wrong in the life of the fallen fellow member is to be set straight, it should not be neglected or exposed openly. Second, Paul says that the work of restoring must be done by those who are spiritual. The word spiritual here in the Greek is transliterated, *pneumaticos*. You recognize the first part of that word.

In verse 1, it cuts two ways. On the one hand, it is obviously related to Paul's use of it at the end of Galatians 5. He says there,

Galatians 5:25-26 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

So the word Spirit there is that word *pneumáticos*. Paul basically says, Do you consider yourself to be a spiritual instead of a worldly Christian? Then there is a way you can test it. Restoring an erring brother is exactly the kind of thing that spiritual members of God's church do. On the other hand, Paul is reminding us that only those who are genuinely led by the Spirit have the maturity to deal with sin in others. Every member of God's church should want this spiritual maturity and to be spiritually mature.

And then third, in verse 1, Paul says that the restoration should be made gently. He uses the same word he used in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in verse 23 of chapter 5. This gentle restoration should be made with the awareness that none, no matter how spiritual, have immunity from temptation and that all can fall.

Now, let us look at conflict within marriage. Some marriages start off on the wrong foot. Here is a light-hearted example. Two neighbors were talking over the back fence. "I went to a wedding this weekend," said one. "But I don't think the marriage will last." "Well, why not," asked the other? "Well, when the bride said I do, the groom said, don't use that tone in a voice with me!" It is sad and laughable, of course, that some people really do not have a clue when it comes to a peaceful life. And this fictional anecdote illustrates that the contention with which some people begin their marriages carries on throughout the rest of their marriage.

Please turn with me to I Corinthians 7, verse 10. The prideful nature of human beings guarantees conflict within a marriage no matter how much the spouses are committed to each other. And it is how husbands and wives handle these conflicts that determine if the result will be peaceful.

I Corinthians 7:10-15 [which is about keeping your marriage vows] Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart,

let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife. But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such case cases. But God has called us to peace.

That is God's emphasis here and that's Paul's emphasis here. God has called us to peace and we are to do everything when there is a conflict, even of the seriousness of a separation or a divorce, to bring peace wherever possible in every situation. If peace cannot be obtained by living together, there should be a peaceful separation if possible. And where such a separation has taken place, the one that has departed should be encouraged to remain separate in peace. God has called us to live in peace with all, meaning everyone, if we can. The biblical principle should always guide us in our relationship with our spouses as well as in all our other relationships and circumstances.

I Corinthians 7:16 For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?

So there is the ultimate goal there that possibly peace between the two will bring restitution. The strength of verse 16 restrains any tendency to encourage a split in the marriage.

Now, we know that there are valid reasons for having to go the route of separation and divorce. But they are very, how would you put it, narrow in their scope. Paul is teaching that the member of God's church is to try to keep the peaceful mixed-belief marriage together in the hope that the witness of the member will be used by God to call and convert the unbelieving spouse. The realistic condition of verse 16 indicates that there is a good hope that God in His providence will do just that. He will call that unbelieving spouse someday. But what we find is quite often an unbelieving spouse pulls

down the believing spouse and causes them to compromise way too much. And then the believing spouse's example does not help the unconverted spouse come to the knowledge of and grace of God.

Peace is not necessarily the total absence of problems. It is the ability to confidently work with God to solve problems. It is the miracle fruit that produces harmony. And when we produce good fruit sown in peace, our relationship becomes agreeable and cooperative, but sometimes a problem in marriage or in any other personal relationship for that matter is a problem that just cannot be overlooked because of its seriousness. It may be that it dishonors God or that it will permanently hurt the relationship.

Please turn over to II Timothy 2. It is possible that it is seriously hurting people or it is hurting the offending spouse himself. Then we must humbly go and talk with the offending spouse privately and gently and lovingly without condescension about the situation.

II Timothy 2:23-26 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility, correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

And there are times when the ministry has to deal firmly with the person because they have caused dissension or they are dishonoring God or God's ministry. So there are times for firmness, but the general rule and the rule that stands is peaceful and gentle. This is the way that we work with one another in every way. *Barnes Notes* gives this advice regarding correcting those who are in opposition and those who embrace error and array themselves against the truth.

We are not to become angry with such persons and denounce them at once as heretics. We are not to hold them up to public reproach or scorn. But we are to set about the business of patiently instructing them. Their grand difficulty, it is supposed in this direction, is that they are ignorant of the truth. Our business with

them is calmly to show them what the truth is. If they are angry, we are not to be; if they oppose the truth, we are still calmly to state it to them; and if they are slow to see it, we are not to become weary or impatient nor if they do not embrace it at all are we to become angry with them and denounce them, We may pity them, but we need not use hard words.

And this is the apostolic precept about the way of treating those who are in error. And can anyone fail to see its beauty and propriety? Let it be remembered also that this is not only beautiful and proper in itself, it is the wisest course. If we would bring others over to our opinions, you are not likely to convince a man that you are right and that he is wrong if you first make him angry. Nor are you very likely to do it if you enter into harsh contention. But you then put him on his guard and you make him a party and from self-respect or pride or anger, he will endeavor to defend his own opinions and will not yield to yours. Meekness and gentleness are the very best things if you wish to convince another that he is wrong, with his heart first and then modestly and kindly show him what the truth is in as few words and with as unassuming a spirit as possible and you have him.

So consider dealing with the situation of approaching the offending spouse with these nine things in mind which I am about to give you. Remember, this is still under the idea of marriage.

First, pray for humility and wisdom in handling the conflict. Proverbs 6:3 states a principle that is tied to usury, but it still applies to contentions in marriage and elsewhere, assuming you and your wife are friends.

Proverbs 6:3 So do this my son, and deliver yourself; for you have come into the hand of your friend: Go and humble yourself, plead with your friend.

The second suggestion I have is: Plan your words carefully, putting yourself in your spouse's shoes. How would you want to be approached? Luke 6:31 records Christ saying, "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

The third is: Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses. Rehearse a response in your mind first. Hebrews 10:24 says, "Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works."

Fourth: Choose the right time and place. Talk face to face with the person if possible. In this day and age, most people text to each other. I do not think you are going to get very far in solving a conflict by texting somebody because they cannot see the smile on your face or the pain in your eyes or whatever it may be. Everything has its proper time. And here is a summary of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8: To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate [or love less]; a time to war, and a time of peace.

The fifth one is: Assume the best about the other person until you have the facts to prove otherwise. Proverbs 11:27 says, "He who earnestly seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil."

And six: Listen carefully. Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him."

Number seven: Speak only to build others up, to be uplifting. Ephesians 4:29 says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

Number eight: Ask for feedback from the other person. What is his or her view of what you brought up? Proverbs 11:14, "Where there is no counsel, the people fall. But in the multitude of counselors, there is safety."

Nine: Recognize your limits. Only God can change people. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

These nine suggestions are a way to restore relationships of any kind and they certainly would help in a marriage relationship or a friendship

relationship or a brethren to brethren relationship. If an initial conversation does not resolve the conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow up conversation.

The carnal mind is not peaceful naturally. And Paul said, we do not even know the way to peace on our own. We must ask God to show us the secret sin of how unpeaceful we really are and he will show us that striving to have it our way encourages conflict and we must see that our wanting to get rather than to give has upset the peace many, many times.

Let me illustrate what I mean with something lighthearted once again. "I was relaxing in my favorite chair on Sunday," said one office worker to another, "reading the newspaper, watching a ball game on TV, and listening to another on the radio, drinking beer, eating a snack, and scratching the dog with my foot. And my wife has the nerve to accuse me of just sitting around doing nothing." I am sure many wives can identify with that while their husbands do not have a clue of their guilt.

Once God has shown us how neglectful and contentious we have been, we must repent, change our ways, and be more giving. Push out and resist those raging desires to win that argument or disagreement. It is not worth winning the argument and damaging your marriage in the process. Yield to God's peaceful spirit by turning God's inspired thoughts of peace into action. And we should always give our spouse that soft answer, which I mentioned before.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

As Christians, we have a duty to overcome evil with good. It takes two to fight, but it takes only one to give. We must give our spouses peace and in doing so, show, as an ambassador of Christ, that the flag of love and peace flies over our marriage.

Now, one of the most wonderfully unique fruit produced by the Holy Spirit is peace. Seeking to grow and produce peace is to develop genuine

forgiveness toward others. And even though we have personally experienced the greatest forgiveness the world has ever experienced, we often fail to reflect that forgiveness toward others.

Please turn to Colossians 3, verse 12. If we have ever had an insincere attitude, it is probable that we have unconsciously used variations of thoughts like, I forgive him, but I do not want anything to do with him ever again. What if God said that to us? How would we feel? Thankfully, He never says that or ever will. God inspired the apostle Paul to instruct us to bear with one another.

Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do so.

The terms "bearing with" and "forgive" expand the thought of longsuffering. Paul uses them to show that we who are truly longsuffering will manifest this attitude by a willingness to bear with those whose faults or unpleasant traits are an irritant to us and a willingness to forgive those we have grievances against. In other words, "bearing with" indicates the thought of putting up with things we dislike about others. Forgive has the sense of forgiving freely. Forgiving another person is not a limited one-time action. It is an unlimited, long term commitment. And the real continuation of the process of forgiveness generally requires four things.

The first is that we not think about this incident. The second is that we not bring this incident up again. Third, that we not talk to others about this incident. And fourth, that we not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

We cannot fully accomplish the spiritual process of forgiveness on our own. Therefore, we must ask God for the humble attitude to be able to reflect His loving forgiveness toward us as we work to forgive others.

I would like to just take a moment to mention something about negotiating. It is not wrong to negotiate an agreeable solution. Even when we managed to

resolve personal offenses through confession and forgiveness, we may still need to deal with issues that may involve money or property or the exercise of certain rights. And these issues should not be swept under the carpet or automatically passed to a higher authority. Instead, they should be negotiated in a biblically faithful manner. A Christian must try to negotiate these issues in a cooperative rather than a competitive way. Instead of aggressively pursuing our own interests and letting others look out for themselves, we should deliberately look for solutions that are beneficial to everyone involved and that is the key to a proper and right negotiation: Looking for solutions that are beneficial to everyone involved,

Negotiate means to discuss with the goal of finding terms of agreement. And we know from the Scriptures that two cannot walk together unless they are agreed. It is sad that in this society, many people interpret negotiation as being the skill of persuading other people to accept their point of view. Today, when we hear that someone is a good negotiator, it usually means that he comes out on top of every deal, that he gets the best of the other person. That is the world's way.

Business today is flooded with books and magazines, articles and seminars about negotiating. And of course, the Internet gives more than enough advice. Success in business has often been equated with a person's negotiating skills. Promoters suggest the use of intimidation to win. And some recommend compromising in a very limited way or letting the other person win on an insignificant point, but only as a last resort. Their goal is to overpower the other people or at least to talk them into it. I believe someone, it might have been the president, said that always make sure you have leverage when you go into a negotiation. That means you are holding something over the other person. That is not God's way. That is the way of the world.

Please turn with me to Philippians 2. The result of such worldly negotiation is that it is struck to the advantage of one person and to the detriment of the other. Also, seeds of this agreement and retaliation are often sown that can have negative unforeseen future results and certainly no lasting peace comes from it. So what is the right way to negotiate? Find out what the needs of the other person are and try to meet them without losing sight of your own goals. And that is your own *goals*, not necessarily your wants or desires.

Philippians 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interests of others.

The goal is to reach an agreement of mutual accord and benefit, but often it requires sacrifice on the side of one of the contenders. A true Christian will sacrifice personal desires but not personal spiritual convictions.

Now, we cannot try to attribute our motives to other people. We must find out what they want or what they need. Because of our high regard for our own opinions and motives, our own human nature tells us that any other intelligent person must think the same way we do. And this exposes our own selfish ambition and conceit. So daily in our lives, we have the challenging opportunity to reach fair-minded agreements and to solve thought provoking problems while helping others to achieve their goals. Amicable and benevolent negotiation is a valuable skill to teach members of a family, including children.

We should try to sensitize ourselves to discern the needs and emotions of others. We should be concerned about others emotions and needs. Sometimes a position may at first seem completely adversarial, but it can be worked out so that the opposing person becomes an ally in achieving a mutual goal.

In a marriage it is heart warming to find a solution that meets both the husband and wife's needs, whether agreeing on how many children to have or being in accord with what to spend money on. Proper attitude and outlook go a long way to smoothing over potential problem areas.

On the lighter side, here is one way we are coming to terms with potentially annoying differences. You are better off just acknowledging and enjoying the differences. John, an unconventional painter, got married. Someone asked the bride a few weeks after the wedding, "How's married life, Mary?" "It's great," she answered. "My husband paints, I cook, then we try to guess what he painted and what I cooked." You can groan if you would like. But I thought those expressed the sentiment.

We must face the facts. No one of or by his own strength can make complete and lasting peace with others. That type of peace only comes from God. But before we can receive that help, we must be at peace with God Himself. Peace with God does not come automatically because all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from Him. Sadly, when we sin our iniquities make a separation between us and God and our sins hide His face from us and He does not hear. That is, if we sin habitually and as a way of life. He will hear if we go to Him in genuine repentance and remorse.

Now, because human beings are not inclined to live the righteous lives needed to enjoy fellowship with Him, each of us has a stained record as a result. We deserve to be eternally separate from God. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Because, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Please turn with me to Ephesians 2. Believing in Jesus Christ means more than just going to church and trying to be a good person. You see hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people doing that in the world. None of these efforts can totally erase the sins we have already committed and will continue to commit throughout our lives. Believing in Jesus means admitting that we have been sinners and acknowledging that there is no way we can earn God's eternal life by our own works.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast for. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared before beforehand that we should walk in them.

Believing in Jesus Christ means that we are convicted that Christ paid the full penalty for our sins when He died on the cross. It means trusting that He took our sinful record on Himself and paid the penalty for it in full.

Believing in Jesus Christ means that we have counted the cost, repented, and are willingly overcoming our sins. Also, we are working with God to develop perfect righteous character.

Jesus Christ made it possible for us to receive His righteous mind, making it possible for us to really have true peace with God. As we receive this peace, God gives us an increasing ability to make peace with others by producing the fruit of the Spirit in us.

Now please turn to Romans 5. Paul wrote at length about justification by faith in chapter 4 of the book of Romans. He wraps up chapter 4 by explaining that Jesus' work was accepted by God, thereby guaranteeing our justification. And this acceptance is evidenced by Christ's resurrection.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

"Therefore" in verse 1 indicates that the immediate benefit of justification is that we have peace with God. The justified members of the body of Christ receive this peace with God because of this justification by faith. To have faith is to be spiritually minded and elsewhere Paul says that to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Romans 5:3-9 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit that was given to us. For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having been now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

"Justification" is a declaration that God has made a judgment and it is a legal act on God's part to impute the righteousness of Jesus Christ to us. Once we have accepted His sacrifice on our behalf, it puts us in alignment with God and His law.

Romans 5:10-11 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Sinners are the enemies of God because of their rebellion and enemies cannot promote peace. So the sinner is always somewhat troubled and his natural state distressed, making it impossible for him to have true peace of mind. But we have a responsibility as God's people to reconcile because we have been reconciled with by God. And we must continue to do the same in forgiving others and reconciling with them.

But, as God calls a person, He begins the process of salvation and the process toward true peace. God began to show His willingness to be reconciled through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ, and He is willing to forgive and be at peace with us. This peace cannot be gotten from the world. It is a result—a fruit—of the Holy Spirit of God. Now we have peace with God and access by faith to His grace through our Savior. Once we have peace with God, we can begin to reflect that true peace to our friends and family and brethren. But if we are not of a peaceful state of mind, how can we do that? How can we pass it on to others? This depends on our peaceful relationship with God.

For a final passage, please turn to Romans 12. Paul expresses several principles regarding behaving like a peaceful Christian. To be a peacemaker we must be recognized as one who aims to live at peace with our fellow human beings.

Romans 12:14-21 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your

mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now, this is a checklist of more than a dozen godly principles which if followed will bring peace to almost any situation.

To live in a state of peace with our neighbors, friends, and family is not always easy, but the person who loves God has a duty to work hard for peace. And it is essentially necessary, even for our own sake. We cannot have fights and conflicts with others without having our own peace significantly disturbed or disrupted. To have peace of mind we must be peaceful with everyone, whether they will be at peace with us or not.

Paul knew that it would be difficult to get into and maintain such a state of peace. We see this clearly in his own words, "If it is possible, as much as depends on [us], live peaceably." And though it is barely possible, we must work hard, for it is as much as depends on us, on you and I. A true Christian lives peacefully because of His peaceful relationship with God, reflected to everyone he comes in contact with.