



PRESENT TRUTH



Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12)

Volume 1, Issue 2

FEBRUARY 2003

CONFLICT (Part 1)

By: Art Nelson

(Taken from the seminar: "Conflict and Crises")

There is an impression among Christians (and unbelievers too) that the Christian should avoid conflict completely in order to keep a Christian witness to the world. To justify this, scripture is quoted about turning the other cheek and about being a peacemaker. While it is true that we have been given a "ministry of reconciliation" we must balance these scriptures with others that present a different view.

All scripture is inspired and given for our benefit. It is absolutely necessary that the whole of scripture be applied to our understanding or we get out of balance in our thinking. Concentrating on one scriptural truth to the exclusion of another produces error. Watchman Nee once said, "Any truth taken to an extreme is a heresy". Every truth must be balanced with its counterpart. An example is Pre-destination and Free Will doctrines. Both of these are equally true. Each can be logically and conclusively proven from the Scriptures when the balancing aspects of the other is ignored or explained away. A focus on one to the exclusion of the other produces doctrinal error. Both are needed to provide a complete view of God's unchanging will and purpose and Man's involvement with it.

This is also true of the "war and peace" aspects of the Bible. The same Jesus who told us to turn the other cheek also told us:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. (KJV) Matt 10:34-36

These are very potent scriptures describing conflict that is instigated by Jesus! Look at what He said: He came to send a sword, not to send peace on earth. He came to set people against one another especially those of one's own household. In other words, Jesus brought conflict at the closest level of our relationships, which, by the way, means that the closer a person is to us the easier it is to come into conflict which damages the relationship.

Because of a general shortage of teaching on the different aspects of conflict and its righteous resolution, many of us endure needless persecution and aggravation by determining that peace is a requirement of the Lord and is to be achieved at any cost. This is simply not true. While the goal is the God kind of peace (we are told to pursue peace with all men), this can't be achieved by our own

efforts because it requires the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of people. The idea that peace is something that we absolutely must achieve no matter what the price or cost is a deception of the enemy and is designed to confuse the believer concerning appropriate behavior. Peace is something that the Lord gives us individually—in our inner being—not something to be used to compromise with the world system. Peace with others is rooted in righteousness and does not mean the absence of conflict. God uses conflict to move us out of our comfort zones and to initiate the process of change in us. Being “fat, dumb, and happy” is not righteous contentment but rather an acceptance of worldly satisfaction without regard to the requirements of the Lord upon our daily lives—in thoughts, actions, attitudes, relationships, and calling.

By His own words, Jesus speaks of occasions where peace is appropriate and other occasions when the sword is appropriate. We cannot choose one over the other by ourselves. We must discern which occasions warrant which approach. We must keep our thinking in balance. Either extreme does violence to the desires of the Lord and to our understanding of His character.

When Jesus first sent the disciples to minister, He told them how to use peace to determine where they were to stay. They were to take no provisions but trust the "peace of the Lord" for their needs.

Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. (KJV) Luke 10:3-6

Later, Jesus told them to take a sword. If they didn't have one, they were to buy one, even if it took selling their garments. Jesus anticipated that an occasion for conflict was about to come upon them.

And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. (KJV) Luke 22:35-36

Which conflicts require peace and which require a sword? Before the question can be answered, we need to look at the four different types or arenas of conflict:

- Conflict with our old nature—our desires are in direct conflict with the new nature received from the Lord. We come into a conflict crisis as we attempt to walk in the Spirit. This initiates the process of change in our desires.
- Conflict with the world system—the way of the world is not the way of the Lord. We come into a conflict crisis when we try to do the Lord's work the world's way. This initiates the process of change in our ways and methodologies.
- Conflict with the powers of darkness—the goal of the enemy is to keep us ignorant of the way and will of God and distracted, confused, and deceived from His purpose. We come into a conflict crisis when we seek to learn more of the way, will and purpose of the Lord. This initiates the process of change in our exercise of authority.
- Conflict with other believers—doctrinal issues prevent us from maintaining unity. We are not told to create unity, but to maintain the unity of the Spirit. We come into a conflict crisis when we try to create unity of doctrine or practice over aspects of the Scriptures that are not absolutes. This initiates the process of change in our relationships.

We cannot yield or compromise our conflict with three of these areas: the old nature, the world system, and the powers of darkness. However, when it comes to conflict with other believers, we must be careful to manifest the character of Jesus.

We are to be conformed to the image of Christ. Conformed means molded, shaped; in other words—changed. While our bodies are changed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”, the other aspects of our being undergo a process of change which extends over time and requires our active participation. The Lord uses “conflict” to bring about these changes in our lives. As we mature in the ways of God, each of the areas listed above will come into “conflict” with our desires, our beliefs, our traditions, and other aspects of our lives that are not compatible with the character of the Lord. Remember, we lay down our life where our will “crosses” the Lord’s will. When Jesus took up the cross, He was following the will of the Father, which took Him to a place of death. When we follow Jesus’ command to take up our cross, we are also going to a place of death—we crucify, put to death, the flesh. This produces conflict and crises in our lives.

Understanding these arenas of conflict will help us to apply the words of Jesus to our situations in a balanced and effective manner.

For comments or discussion contact Art Nelson
