

Proverbs on Conflict

April 29th, 2018

Paul and Genessa Wright – in US raising additional support probably for one year, restrictions increasing in western China where they hope to work with the Uyghur people, an ethnic minority that is predominantly Muslim.

Intro:

Christians are to be peacemakers.

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Luke 6:35 "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.

Ephesians 4:3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We worship a peacemaking God who takes initiative to reconcile with those who have wronged Him.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Peace is desirable

Proverbs 17:1 Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife.

Dry morsel pictures a piece of bread with nothing to dip it in or put on it compared to a wealthy meal that was sacrificed to the Lord (the meaning of the word for feasting) if it is in a house of strife.

But even with the desire to pursue peace, we sometimes lack the skills to carry it out.

This is where Proverbs can come in very handy.

The gospel provides the motivation for horizontal conflict resolution. The gospel provides the ability through the Spirit. The gospel even provides the basic framework.

But the riches mined in proverbs can provide boots on the ground application points so we can grow as wise resolvers of conflict.

1. Recognize that conflict can be rooted in ***hatred***, ***pride***, and ***anger***. (Pro. 10:12; 13:10; 28:25)
 - a. **Proverbs 10:12** ***Hatred*** stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions.
 - i. Matthew Henry – "Even where there is no manifest occasion of strife, yet *hatred* seeks occasion and so *stirs it up* and does the devil's work."
 - ii. Love cherishes the wrongdoer as a friend to be won, not an enemy with whom to get even. (Waltke)
 - b. **Proverbs 13:10** Through ***insolence*** comes nothing but strife, But wisdom is with those who receive counsel.
 - i. Insolence – pride, presumption
 - ii. **Proverbs 21:24** "Proud," "Haughty," "Scoffer," are his names, Who acts with insolent pride.
 - iii. The parallel contrasting line shows that the pride is shown through a lack of teachability.

- c. **Proverbs 28:25** An *arrogant* man stirs up strife, But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.
- d. **Proverbs 30:32-33** If you have been foolish in exalting yourself Or if you have plotted evil, put your hand on your mouth. ³³ For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the *churning of anger* produces strife.
 - i. Play on words here in Hebrew because the word for anger comes from the word for nose (aph), because it visually pictures the flaring of the nostrils when you are angry.
 - ii. Have you ever made homemade butter? According to one food science website, the key to making butter is agitation. As the heavy cream is shaken, beaten, mixed, or churned the microscopic fat globules suspended in the liquid collide into each other until their walls are damaged and they clump together forming butter.
 - iii. Anger that is allowed to churn unproductively will lead to strife.

2. **Avoid** conflicts that don't concern you; don't *pursue* them. (Pro. 3:30; 20:3; 26:17)

- a. **Proverbs 3:29-30** Do not devise harm against your neighbor, While he lives securely beside you. Do not contend with a man without cause, If he has done you no harm.
 - i. We are not to devise (plan) harm or quarrel without reason.
 - ii. Shalom would be a neighborhood in which each neighbor feels secure if they haven't done wrong.
 - 1. Application to the present brewing civil war in Cameroon as shared by Martin on Tuesday
- b. **Proverbs 20:3** Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, But any fool will quarrel.
- c. **Proverbs 26:17** Like one who takes a dog by the ears Is he who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him.
- d. ***In what scenarios might people meddle with strife not belonging to them? Why is this unwise at best and possibly sinful?***
 - i. Taking up the offense of a friend, jumping in without knowing the details

3. Abandon quarrels early because the momentum is hard to *stop*. (Pro. 17:14; 18:19)

- a. **Proverbs 17:14** The beginning of strife is like letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.
 - i. When I was a child we spent a lot of time camping by rivers and creeks. I would love to build a dam out of large and small rocks to divert the water. But when time came to let the water out, it could not be stopped. The flowing water pulls away gravel, sand, and sediment.
 - ii. Likewise after a quarrel has broken out, it can build momentum as others are pulled into it until the collateral damage is significant and many people are swept away by its pull.
 - iii. This can happen in a church as a minor conflict between two people escalates, people take sides, and the initial conflict becomes merely the catalyst to something major.
- b. **Proverbs 18:19** A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a citadel.
 - i. Synonymous parallelism - Rhyming of concepts rather than rhyming of sounds

- ii. Is not justifying the actions of the stubborn person but dealing with reality that when an offense has been done it can be very difficult for it to be undone. It can take years for a relationship once harmed to feel like “normal.”
 - 4. Control your **tone** to calm a conflict. (Pro. 15:1)
 - a. **Proverbs 15:1** A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.
 - i. What is pictured is an anger person confronting you and you are faced with a choice in how to respond. The emphasis is not on the content of your respond but the tone.
 - 1. Will it be harsh and reciprocal or will it be gentle?
 - 2. Gentle answer – turns away wrath, harsh word – stirs up anger
 - a. Some people speak harshly almost all the time. Maybe they think it makes them sound tough or gets them respect. Maybe they think that is the only way people will listen to them.
 - 3. This says it stirs up anger to speak harshly
 - 4. Thermostat vs. thermometer
 - ii. **When do you have a hard time speaking calmly?**
 - 1. With your children – when they disobey
 - a. Late at night and they continue to get out of bed, when they disrespect or disobey you.
 - b. Addressing your children harshly stirs up anger; it leads them to respond the same way.
 - c. You can be both gentle and firm.
 - 2. With family members around the holidays?
 - 3. With coworkers?
 - 4. When you think you have been wronged or treated unfairly?
 - 5. When you are tired or stressed out?
5. Never **spread** strife. (Pro. 6:16-19, 28; 26:20)
 - a. **Proverbs 16:28** A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends.
 - i. **Proverbs 26:20** For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.
 - 1. Explains how we spread strife – by whispering (gossiping)
 - 2. Don’t justify by saying, “I’m just venting!” Or “they’re my best friends and we share everything!”
 - b. **Proverbs 6:16-19** There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.
 - i. Poetically, this builds to the final point
 - ii. What do the things on this list have in common?
 - 1. Each harm other people

2. Each is horizontal
 3. The first five involve misused body parts
 4. They include attitudes, thoughts, speech, actions, and influence
 - iii. “Brothers” can be used of literal brothers, extended family, or countrymen.
 1. But it does emphasize “insiders” to the community.
 - iv. Abomination
 1. Something that turns the stomach because the offense is so strong
 2. These things are so harmful to shalom that they turn God’s stomach and He hates them
6. Hear ***both*** sides of the story. (Pro. 18:13, 17)
- a. **Proverbs 18:13** He who gives an answer before he hears, It is folly and shame to him.
 - i. Great verse for counseling.
 - b. **Proverbs 18:17** The first to plead his case seems right, Until another comes and examines him.
 - c. In our bias we often only see our side of the situation, even if it isn’t intentional. We may not be intentionally holding information back but it just happens. Additionally, our sin can make us blind so that we don’t see things accurately.
 - d. Strife is often spread when a person hears one side of the story, doesn’t get all the details, makes assumptions, and shares it with others.
7. Be slow to anger and ***overlook*** an offense when possible. (Pro. 19:11)
- a. **Proverbs 19:11** A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.
 - b. ***When should you overlook an offense?***
 - a. The Parallel line helps – it is a situation when you would be prone to anger so it is a sin that primarily affects you.
 - b. Minor enough to be overlooked if it has not seriously dishonored God, permanently damaged a relationship, hurt other people, hurting the offender himself.
 - c. Waltke - Draws the curtain down in order to conceal transgressions . . . Instead of placing the transgressor on stage and withdrawing the veil to expose his faults and so exact revenge, love endures his wrongs to reconcile him and save him from death and to preserve the peace. Love withdraws the burning wood of gossip, but the quarrelsome and hot tempered fuel the conflict into disastrous proportions, producing still further transgressions. The saying must be held in tension with the truth that a spiritual friend corrects the sinful offender
 - d. **Proverbs 27:6** Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.
 - c. Note that it is discretion that makes someone slow to anger – his wisdom, insight.
 - a. He realizes things like – this isn’t in character for this person, there are extenuating circumstances, this is something I could see myself doing and I would like someone to overlook it in me, the person is working through this sin and is showing improvement.
8. Seek to resolve conflicts ***confidentially***. (Pro. 25:8-10)
- a. **Proverbs 25:8-10** Do not go out hastily to argue your case; Otherwise, what will you do in the end, When your neighbor humiliates you? ⁹ Argue your case with your neighbor, And do not reveal the

secret of another, ¹⁰ Or he who hears it will reproach you, And the evil report about you will not pass away.

- a. Keep the circle as small as possible as long as possible.
 - i. Involve only those who are part of the solution or part of the problem, only involving those people if necessary.
 - b. Otherwise, seek to resolve it solely between you and your neighbor.
 - c. Consequences:
 - i. Neighbor humiliates you, the one who hears you reproaches you, “evil report” will not go away.
9. If necessary, **remove** a contentious person. (Pro. 22:10; 26:21)
- a. **Proverbs 22:10** Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease.
 - b. **Proverbs 26:21** Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife.
 - a. Illustrations – Workplace becomes increasingly stressful and miserable because of a person that thrives on drama and infighting. Management has talked with the person several times but no real change has happened. Eventually good workers move on rather than put up with it. If you have been in a situation like that you know that sometimes removing the person, though never pleasant, can be like a fresh breeze blowing through the office.
 - c. **Titus 3:9-11** But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, ¹¹ knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.
 - a. This is not to be done lightly or impulsively (warn a couple times), but this tells us that there are some people who will simply not stop scoffing, provoking conflict, and causing divisions (factions).

Conclusion

Intentional peacemaking is a facet of a gospel-centered church

If we know we are sinners, we won't be surprised when people sin against us.

If we know God forgives us, we won't withhold forgiveness from others.

If we know God took the initiative to reconcile, we will take initiative with others.



Matthew 5:9

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Luke 6:35

"But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil *men*.

Ephesians 4:3

...being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Romans 5:1

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

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