
Calvary Church: Coordinated Curriculum 2007-2008

Romans: The Transforming Power of the Righteousness of God

Interlude

This interlude lesson is intended to:

- allow us to review—see the big-picture after we have focused on the parts. . .
 - we will seek to practically apply key principles dealing with interpersonal conflict
- allow us to examine felt needs based on the truths taught
 - we all will face interpersonal conflict and need to understand how to deal with it in a biblical and God honoring way
- allow us to slow down and insure that we are applying the main point of the section. . .
 - Are we demonstrating humility and love as we seek to maintain the unity of the Body?

Main idea

A practically and biographical look at interpersonal conflict.

Teaching ideas

This lesson takes a birds-eye-view of three interpersonal conflicts recorded in Scripture rather than “telling” the principles these passages illustrate through narrative what causes conflict and how to deal with conflict appropriately.

Recommendation

This lesson lends itself nicely to group discussion. Please make sure to provide plenty of time at the conclusion for application.

Review

Romans 12:1-15:13

The mercies of God motivate our consecration which results in transformation, leading to doing the will of God particularly in humble service within the Body of Christ.

The mercies of God motivate us to a consecrated life (living sacrifice) that does not allow the world and its belief system to force us into its mold, but which results in transformation by the renewing of our minds, leading to doing the will of God particularly in humble service within the Body of Christ.

In Romans 12:1-2 we are urged to view God’s mercies which have been delineated in chapters one through eleven, and in light of this, to offer our bodies to God as a “living sacrifice.” This in fact, is a reasonable response—our worship. We are called upon to reject being pressed into the mold of the world and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Love one another and the things that are good, hate what is evil. But in the midst of evil, seek to live at peace with all, not retaliating evil for evil, bless and minister to those who are against you. Submit to governing authorities who have been given authority by God. Seek to fulfill the Law by loving neighbors and doing good and living right (righteously).

We are told to love without hypocrisy, and to be so devoted to each other that we will honor one another above ourselves (Romans 12:9-10). Paul also exhorts us to live in harmony, not to be proud, but be willing to associate with those of low position, and as far as it depends on us, to live at peace with everyone (Romans 12:16, 18). This requires that we submit to governing authorities because God had delegated authority to them (Romans 13:1-7). And finally, we are instructed to “love your neighbor as you love yourself,” for love does no harm to its neighbor (Romans 13:9-10).

It is with this kind of love that we are to approach our relationships with other Christians—especially when we disagree on disputable matters—accepting one another for the glory of God.

A practical demonstration of love is seen in our acceptance of other believers, differences and all. Seeking to do all we do, to the Lord and out of love and humility we seek the greater good of others to the glory of God (14:1-12).

Not judging their practices and it may require forgoing freedoms for the sake of the weak, so as not to cause them to stumble. Sacrificing our individual rights demonstrates love of others and a submission to God. We must seek to maintain peace and build others up (14:13-23).

- Don't judge
- Don't cause an offense
- Don't flaunt your freedom

The strong are not to use their Christian liberty as an excuse for selfishness but rather they must put others first, they have an obligation to please and buildup the weak for their good—for unity is required for God to receive glory (15:1-6).

All believers are to accept each other—to welcome or receive each other (even into their homes), because Christ has welcomed them as a means of demonstrating God's blessing on both the Jew and the Gentile in fulfillment of Scripture (15:7-13). Therefore as Christ was a servant for the glory of God, so should all Christians be with each other.

Preview

Conclusion Romans 15:14–16:27					
Motivation for Writing		Intention of Visiting		Greetings and Admonitions	
15:14	21	15:22	33	16:1	27

Paul has challenged us in Romans 12:1-15:13 to make our relationship with God through Christ a reality in our daily interactions with others. To truly live transformed lives. The proving ground or testing of our transformation is our relational contexts.

Sometimes principles are learned through experience rather than teaching. But none of us wants to experience difficulties and struggles, so we need to learn through the experiences of others. One way we can learn how to deal with conflict, from a biblical perspective is to see how individuals in the Bible handled conflict—the good, the bad and the ugly.

So today, we want to look at three interpersonal conflicts to see what we can learn.

For each of the three passages we need to understand:

The situation

What was at stake?

What was the solution or outcome?

And what steps were taken to resolve the situation?

We also want to try to identify in each “case study” whether the conflict or confrontation was dealt with privately or publically.

What can we learn that must be applied in all our relational contexts—home, neighborhoods, work and church?

Teachers

The best way to teach this section is to have groups look at one passage and then share their observations with the class.

As you move through the passages you can add additional comments to provide summary and application.

Was the situation dealt with privately or publically?

Biblical Conflict: What can you learn?

1. Abram and Lot Genesis 13:1-13

Private

Situation:

They had cumulated too much stuff causing their herdsmen to fight over land and water

At stake: Possessions

Solution / outcome: Compromise

Abram let himself be taken advantage of

Steps toward resolution:

Deal with conflict quickly.

Abram went into the conflict produced/caused by outside circumstances

Let God show His sovereignty

Keep Unity — Relationships are important

Don't hold on to your “stuff” too tightly

Submit

Humility

2. Paul and Barnabas Acts 15:36-41

*Private**Situation*

Paul and Barnabas prepare for 2nd missionary journey. On the first journey, Barnabas' cousin John Mark had abandoned the team when things got rough (Acts 13:13). Barnabas proposes taking him along again. Paul refuses.

It is possible that there was an additional source of tension between Paul and Barnabas. Galatians 2:11–13 speaks of an incident that took place in Antioch, evidently after the Jerusalem Conference, in which Peter and Barnabas gave in to pressure from “certain men” from James and withdrew from table fellowship with Gentiles. Paul sharply confronted Peter on that occasion for his “hypocrisy” and was none too happy with Barnabas for following Peter’s example. Even though Paul had now been sufficiently reconciled to Barnabas to request his companionship on the mission, there may have been lingering wounds and possibly still some differences over Paul’s “law-free” Gentile outreach. Mark may himself have represented a more conservative Jewish-Christian outlook. However that may be, Paul did eventually become reconciled to Mark and mentioned him as a coworker in several of his letters (cf. Col 4:10; Phlm 24; 2 Tim 4:11). Standing in the background was Barnabas, always the encourager, showing faith in Mark when others had lost theirs and eventually redeeming him—ironically, *for Paul*.¹

Though the word Luke uses for the resulting conflict is a strong one (*paroxysmos*), it does not give us a hint about who was right and who was wrong. That the team should have broken up because of this conflict is sad. Perhaps the pain of the public confrontation in Antioch after Barnabas went along with Peter (Gal. 2:13) had something to do with the severity of this conflict.

We agree with Marshall: “It is a classic example of the perpetual problem of whether to place the interests of the individual or of the work as a whole first.” It is encouraging to find out that later Paul and Barnabas seem to have become colleagues again (1 Cor. 9:6; Col. 4:10) and that Paul had not only come to appreciate Mark but also to depend on him so much that he asked for him to come to him towards the end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11; cf. Col. 4:10; Philem. 24).

The sovereignty of God as he works out his purposes even through human weakness is revealed as two teams now set out, and the area of the first missionary journey is divided between Paul and Barnabas. The latter goes to his native Cyprus with Mark (15:39), while Paul takes Silas and travels via Syria and Cicilia to South Galatia (15:40 – 16:1).²

Personality differences

Paul — Task

Barnabas — “Encourager” (Joseph)

At stake: People
Purpose, vision, preferences

Solution: Win/Win? (More accomplished by two teams, Synergy?)

Later:

Don't hear from Barnabas again

Mark worked with Peter (1 Peter 5:13)

Mark was in Paul's group during Paul's first imprisonment (Col. 4:10; Philemon 24)

Paul requested his presence near the end of his life because he has become useful (2

Timothy 4:11)

Steps toward resolution:

Unity may mean: Agree to Disagree

¹ Polhill, John B. Vol. 26, *Acts*. (electronic ed. Logos Library System; The New American Commentary, Page 341. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992.)

² Fernando, Ajith. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Acts*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1998.) 431.

Disagreement is not unspiritual

Disagreeing is not the same as being disagreeable

Disagreement does not necessarily mean being divisive

But God is bigger than our problems, and he wills for his children to live in unity. Thus, we can hope for a resolution whenever there is a problem. That we may be unable to resolve it is because of stubbornness, error, or ignorance on the part of one or both sides of the conflict. Conflict is a fact of life in this fallen world, and sometimes conflicts in Christian relationships do end up unresolved.³

How does Paul's instruction to "welcome/accept one another," "harmony" and "mutual upbuilding" in Romans 14:1-15:13 impact our understanding and more importantly our application of this story?

3. Paul and Peter Galatians 2:11-16

Public

Situation

Galatians 2:1-10 recounts the Jerusalem counsel (Acts 15) where the Church realized that Gentiles could become Christians without first becoming Jewish also.

Fear prompted Peter to adjust his behavior (and beliefs) to satisfy Jewish Christians
Peter's actions as a leader influenced others

Paul observes hypocrisy in the leaders related to adding to the gospel through cultural norms, therefore he publicly and forcefully confronted the leaders.

If this event took place after the council, the visit may have originated in Peter's desire to see what Paul had reported concerning the work of God there, but it is impossible to be certain. Whatever the reason, at Antioch Peter discovered a community of Jewish and Gentile Christians living together and, in particular, eating together in apparent disregard of Jewish dietary customs. This was probably against the practice then prevailing in Jerusalem even after the council, but God had already shown Peter what he was to do in such situations. God had told Peter in the vision of the great sheet, "Do not call anything impure that God had made clean" (Acts 10:15). So Peter, no doubt remembering this and being impressed with the example of Jewish/Gentile harmony, joined with other Jews in eating with his Gentile brothers. According to Paul, Peter did this for some time, because the imperfect tense of the verb implies that he ate with the Gentiles not once, on a single occasion, but on a regular basis, habitually. In this decision, Peter went beyond the letter of the decrees of the council, for though the council had acknowledged the right of freedom from the law for Gentiles, it had nevertheless retained the observance of the law for Jews. Now Peter was declaring that the Jew as well as the Gentile was free from Mosaic legislation.

After a time, some influential Jews arrived in Antioch from Jerusalem, giving out that they were representatives of James. They were the legalists or, at the very least, strict Jews. Peter's practice shocked them. Not only was his conduct not required by the Jerusalem agreement, they might have argued, it was actually contrary to it; for Peter was encouraging a disregard of the Mosaic law by Jewish believers. These persons brought such pressure to bear on Peter that though he was unconvinced by their views, he nevertheless gradually detached himself from the Gentile fellowship and began to eat with Jews only. Moreover, his conduct drew others away with him so that when Paul returned (it is hard to understand how he could have been present during these events and have let them go as far as they did without protest), he found a church divided and the Gentiles under an unwarranted pressure either to accept the division or to conform to the legalistic standards of Judaism as the means of avoiding it.⁴

The sharing of a common meal was a visible and socially powerful symbol of the new slogan Paul was teaching his young churches: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male

³ Fernando, Ajith. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Acts*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1998.) 431.

⁴ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Pradis CD-ROM: Galatians, Book Version: 4.0.2

nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28). But this symbol was publicly damaged by Peter’s behavior.⁵



At stake: Proper Doctrine (“not straightforward about the truth of the gospel”)
 Paul finds this behavioral change not only “hypocritical” (in the sense of contradictory) but also theologically wrong and dangerous. This latter point is important: Paul was more than concerned with the “contradictory behavior” of Peter. True, he changed his color, like a chameleon, but changing colors may be necessary at times (see 1 Cor. 9:19–23). But Paul sees something more in Peter’s behavior: he sees theological danger.⁶

Solution: No Compromise
 Public rebuke

Steps toward resolution:
 Confrontation
 Conflict will happen—don’t avoid it
 Purity of church and doctrine should never be compromised
 Public confrontation because the issue was public

Summary

Conflict happens
 Confrontation is sometimes necessary
 Compromise, out of humility and submission is sometimes necessary.
 Personality difference can cause conflicts.
 No Compromise when dealing with the Gospel
 Best solution: Win/Win

Process of Conflict Resolution (Summary)

1. Remember
 - Significance of Unity — Love God
 - Significance of People — Love People
2. Identify cause of Conflict — Beware of “triggers”
3. Personal Evaluation (Prayer)
 - Humility, submission, forgiveness, restoration, motivation
4. Determine level of Disagreement
 - Absolute
 - Convictions
 - Preferences (Weaker Brother)
 - Opinions
5. Empathic Listening
 - Seek to understand not simply to be understood
6. Seek new/better solution

⁵ Scot McKnight, *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Galatians*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1995.) 99.

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Gently Restore

Another key principle of peacemaking involves an effort to help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict. When Christians think about talking to someone else about a conflict, one of the first verses that comes to mind is Matthew 18:15: "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you." If this verse is read in isolation, it seems to teach that we must always use direct confrontation to force others to admit they have sinned. If the verse is read in context, however, 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 passage, we find Jesus' wonderful metaphor of a loving shepherd who goes to look for a wandering sheep and then rejoices when it is found (Matt. 18:12-14). Thus, Matthew 18:15 is introduced with a theme of restoration, not condemnation. Jesus repeats this theme just after telling us to "go and show him his fault" by adding, "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." And then he hits the restoration theme a third time in verses 21-35, 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 (Matt. 18:21-35).

Jesus is clearly calling for something much more loving and redemptive than simply confronting others with a list of their wrongs. Similarly, Galatians 6:1 gives us solid counsel on our what our attitude and purpose ought to be when we go to our brother. "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently." Our attitude should be one of gentleness rather than anger, and our purpose should be to restore rather than condemn.

Yet even before you go to talk with someone, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offenses (see Prov. 19:11). As a general rule, an offense should be overlooked if you can answer "no" to all of the following questions:

- Is the offense seriously dishonoring God?
- Has it permanently damaged a relationship?
- Is it seriously hurting other people? and
- Is it seriously hurting the offender himself?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, an offense is too serious to overlook, in which case God commands you to go and talk with the offender privately and lovingly about the situation. As you do so, remember to:

- Pray for humility and wisdom
- Plan your words carefully (think of how you would want to be confronted)
- Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses (rehearsals can be very helpful)
- Choose the right time and place (talk in person whenever possible)
- Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise (Prov. 11:27)
- Listen carefully (Prov. 18:13)
- Speak only to build others up (Eph. 4:29)
- Ask for feedback from the other person
- Recognize your limits (only God can change people; see Rom. 12:18; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

If an initial conversation does not resolve a 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. It may also be wise to ask a spiritually mature friend for advice on how to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again with even stronger prayer support.

If repeated, careful attempts at a private discussion are not fruitful, and if the matter is still too serious to overlook, you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and your opponent and help you to resolve your differences through mediation, arbitration, or accountability (see Matt. 18:16-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; for more guidance on getting such help, click Get Help.)