

## Perfect Harmony

Weddings are wonderful occasions that begin something brand new. Two families and their friends come together to celebrate the birth of a new family - a man and a woman leave their previous homes, cleave to one another, and weave themselves into something uniquely different. Whether the ceremony is private or public, brief or lengthy, simple or elaborate, music usually plays an integral part in the ceremony and the celebration that follows. It is a time to worship the Creator of marriage and celebrate the newly wed couple with joy. It sends the couple off with a united cheer that demonstrates support and excitement for the future. All this and more has the power to present a picture of perfect harmony.

This too should be observed when the church gathers, worships, and serves. D.L. Moody once remarked, "I have never yet known the Spirit of God to work where the Lord's people were divided." Harmony is an essential part of church life! The Holy Spirit is the Indweller of believers (Eph 2:19-22), their constant Helper (Jn 14:16; 15:26), and the Convicter of sin (Jn 16:7-11). He should be busy in reconciling the lost to the Father through the Son, rather than grieving over prideful, resentful, and unforgiving brothers and sisters. Harmony among church members frees the Holy Spirit to work in and through them for the sake of the Gospel.

This is why Jesus' words at the outset of Luke 17 are so important! Jesus' time with His disciples will soon come to an end. His journey to Jerusalem and suffering at Calvary is close at hand. He will then give His disciples the indwelling Holy Spirit, who will remind them of all He has taught (Jn 14:26). So, in the first few verses, we find another essential teaching before His departure. It is in this short text (Lk 17:1-6) that the One by whose "wounds we have been healed" (1 Pet 2:24) reminds His disciples of the seriousness of ignoring discord and withholding forgiveness.

What a kind and caring Savior we have! He knows us so well! Like the disciples, we are impulsive, prideful, selfish, doubting, judgmental, and so on. Often we bicker and argue over our little "kingdoms" rather than furthering His eternal kingdom. And so, Jesus gives directions on how to live together with other imperfect people. As a matter of fact, it is so important that we "keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3-6) that Jesus actually pleads with Father for our unity (Jn 17:20-23).

Here, however, He addresses His disciples personally by first warning them of becoming a stumbling block that might cause others to sin (Lk 17:1-2). Jesus' dramatic admonition is clear: "Maintaining harmony begins with the person in the

mirror. You!” We need to pay attention to our own actions. Which includes the way we respond when we are sinned against. Jesus shares three essential steps to restoring a relationship (v. 3). First, rebuke the perpetrator with gentleness and respect. Then, if the individual repents, forgive. And finally, in the event of repeated offenses, continue to forgive if genuine repentance is sought (v. 4).

This is extremely difficult! It is hard. It can be exhausting, especially when the same offenses continue to repeat themselves. Whether you are the perpetrator or the victim, the painful burden of a broken relationship is wearisome. It is why the disciples respond with, “Increase our faith!” (Lk 17:5). Forgiveness is laying down our right to remain angry and giving up our claim to future repayment of the debt we have suffered. Forgiveness requires the faith of one who has been forgiven. Theologian and minister Philip Ryken commented: “The ability to forgive is one of the surest signs of having been forgiven. It is part of the proof that we have received God’s grace... Those who are truly forgiven, truly forgive. **The sins they commit are of greater importance to them than the sins they suffer.**” This perspective positions us on the other side of Calvary’s cross having been forgiven of an unspeakably infinite sin debt.

All this, Jesus shares so we might be peacemakers. It provides us with an opportunity to model the forgiveness we have received by being “kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you**” (Eph 4:32). In a blog post entitled “Ministry of Reconciliation”, Ray Ortlund noted the following:

The gospel being what it is and always will be, “the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19), our churches should be the most reconciling, peaceable, relaxed, happy places in town. We are so open to enemies, so meek in the face of insults and injuries, so forgiving toward the undeserving — if we do make people angry, let this be the reason. We refuse to join in their selfish battles. We’re following a higher call. We are the peacemakers, the true sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

With God’s help, let’s do the Christian life together. That means aiming constantly for reconciliation with our fellow imperfect brothers and sisters. Confess. Repent. Forgive.

**Colossians 3:12-17 (ESV)** - *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; **as the***

***Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”