

Handfuls On Purpose

Studies in the Book of Ruth

Chapter Thirteen

Dealing with Conflict and Problems God's Way

“The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust” (Ruth 2:12).

To read this verse, we would not view Ruth's life as being in great conflict. Yet it was. She wasn't even sure if she and Naomi would have food to eat. She was just doing the best she could with the life she had. Her life was certainly not a bed of roses. She had to work very hard each day just to survive. Dealing with conflict is a normal part of life. God is there to guide us through them if we will let Him.

There is a difference in the Bible in being *saved* and being a Christian. All true Christians are saved people, but not all saved people are Christians. Being a Christian is defined by living under the Lordship of Christ according to the principles and precepts of His teachings. The term Christian was a word coined by Caesar's Praetorian guards because they saw the same willingness to die for the Christian's Lord (Christ) as they were willing to die for Caesar. The difference between these two terms (being *saved* and being a *Christian*) is what I call the *Christian Conflict*.

When my son Brock was five years old, his mother and I were faced with a moment of conflict in his relationship with us. There was an occasion that warranted some discipline as is the occasional need in most five year olds. Being a strong willed young man (I do not know where he got that from); he decided he no longer wanted to live under the same roof with a couple of tyrants like his Dad and Mom.

He marched right up and told us he was running away from home. Understanding the Prodigal Principle from the example of the father in the story of the Prodigal Son, we said O.K. and promptly began to help him pack. My wife Patty made him a sandwich and we packed a little suitcase with some of his cloths and toys. We made sure he knew we loved him, told him we were sorry to see him leave so early in his life and helped him out the front door (to his amazement).

We didn't know what he would do or where he would go so we watched him carefully through a crack in the drapes. For about a half hour he walked up and down the half block in front of our house carrying that suitcase down and back, down and back. Finally he came knocking on the front door asking permission to come home. We welcomed him home and killed the fatted calf (he did eat his baloney sandwich). Once back inside the house, we asked him why he never went any farther then the end of the block. To which he replied, “You know I am not allowed to go across the street.”

This is a small and innocent example of how conflict can be used to both learn and teach. Even though we watched him carefully, we were concerned about him. We loved him greatly. Patty stood beside me holding my arm crying as we watched him walk up and down that street. We loved him, but for that short period of time fellowship was broken. He needed to learn that Dad and Mom meant what they said. He needed to learn that his place of security and blessing was in the center of obedience. Throughout the conflict, we were always his parents and he was always our son. However, during the conflict he was not living like he was our son.

We cannot live in rebellion against God and still consider ourselves Christians. We are not talking about salvation here. Being a Christian describes a way of life. Before the word Christian was coined, early believers were called *Followers of the Way*. If we live in rebellion against God Word, we may be His children, but we are not living like His children should live. In that case, we may be saved, but we are not living like a Christian.

I am sure God must view his children (you and I) much the same way as Patty and I watched our little five year old son run away in rebellion. He was not running away from home. He was running away from authority over his life. He choose to run out from under the “wings” of security and protection rather then live under the authority of the one who provided them.

That is the story of Ruth chapter one. The family of Elimelech and Naomi came under the chastening hand of God. Because of Israel's refusal to be separate from the heathen, God brought famine in their land. Instead of blessing, there was conflict in the House of Bread (Bethlehem). Elimelech and Naomi packed their little suitcases and ran away from home. All God wanted was confession and repentance. They departed from under His wings and left the place of His protection and security to go live in Moab with the heathen. There, they were on their own and Satan began to devour them one by one until Naomi was the only one left. This happened because they did not know how to (or refused to) do that which was right.

What we want to learn from this lesson is that God uses problems and conflict to teach us and strengthen us. Satan uses conflict to lure us out from under God's wings so he can destroy our lives. Then Satan uses our pride to keep us from confessing our sin, seeking God's forgiveness and resolving the conflict. Naomi (1:20) had to eat the bitter meal of her own pride before she could get right with God.

It is obvious that Ruth is in a very difficult situation in her life. She is a new believer in a strange land living by the ancient means of public support; gleaning. She is at the mercy of the grace of others and at this point in her life she is almost always in constant danger. Her problems are serious and her life is one of enormous conflict. But yet in this text she seems almost oblivious to those circumstances. Unlike Elimelech and Naomi in chapter one, Ruth has determined to remain "under the wings" of the God of Israel in Whom she had come to trust (2:12).

How we handle conflict and problems is a great measurement of the reality of our faith. That reality is best measured under conflict. We can learn some excellent lessons from Ruth as she lives with the difficulty of her life situation and circumstances to see how God works in her life as she translates what little she knows of the Word of God into the language of a living faith.

It is only as she remains obedient to God in what she knows that God is able to offer her the sheltering protection of His "wings." She could easily have gone back to the wealth, safety and security of her father's house in Moab, but she would not. She was like the Psalmist who said:

"I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee" (Psalm 84:10-12).

The arena of personal conflict is always a battlefield upon which God tests the reality of our faith. There, He wages war with the forces of evil to help us advance in *baby-steps* of growth. Unless we understand what God is doing, we may end up viewing that conflict from a very selfish perspective and actually join hands with the forces of evil, move out from under God's wings of sheltering protection, and begin to oppose ourselves. That is how God describes the unrepentant and disobedient in His Word.

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (II Timothy 2:24-26).

Because many people do not understand what God is doing in conflict, it is like watching a mother trying to wash the face of her toddler. Each time she tries to get to the area that needs cleaning the child pulls his head away. Sometimes it becomes quite a drawn out battle ending with the child in tears.

Under conflict, God is trying to *clean our faces* of things like pride, arrogance, anger, unforgiveness, hatred and a hundred other motivational forces of our sinful natures. When the "washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:26) comes upon the dirty faces of our sinful practices, we need to learn to stand still and lift our faces to God, allowing Him to remove from our lives those things that our failure in conflict exposes. Mothers do not like their children to have dirty faces because it reflects on their care for them. You can be sure God cares for His children enough to do whatever is necessary to make sure our lives are clean!

The purpose of this study is to understand God's purpose in conflict and to take away the

tools of deception that Satan uses in conflict to lure believers out from under God's wings of security and protection.

¹⁷ Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise *you* not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. ¹⁸ For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. ¹⁹ For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Corinthians 11:17-19).

The word "heresies" is from the Greek word *hairesis* (hah'-ee-res-is), which refers to dissensions arising from diversity of opinions. Notice God says "there must be heresies among you." Why must there be heresies? When we learn why, we can use this to disarm Satan from using conflict against us.

In every relationship there is eventually going to be dissention arising because of a difference of opinion. Expect it. How we view that conflict will determine whether or not Satan will be able to use the conflict against us and destroy that relationship.

Remember, God wants to use conflict to aid in our spiritual growth. Satan wants to use conflict to hinder our spiritual growth. In order to habitually allow God to use conflict to benefit us, we must learn to view conflict positively, not negatively.

² My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers **temptations** {**temptation:** or, trials}; ³ Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. ⁴ But let patience have *her* perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4).

When we learn to view conflict as an opportunity for spiritual growth rather than something to be avoided at any costs, we will learn to use it to teach and to observe.

According to I Corinthians 11:19, dissensions must exist "that" (in order that) "they which are approved may be manifest among you." The word "approved" is from the Greek word *dokimos* (dok'-ee-mos). Understanding the meaning of this word is extremely important to understanding God's purpose in allowing conflict. It was a word used to distinguish genuine currency from counterfeit currency.

There was no national mint at this time in history. All money was made from precious metals, melted down and poured into molds to make coins. Once the coins cooled it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. Since the coins were soft, they could be shaved down to take these rough edges off. Some coin makers would shave off more than they should in order to save the precious metal and increase their profits. The coins that did not measure up in weight were considered counterfeit (*adokimos*). The coins that were everything they were supposed to be were called *dokimos* or "approved."

Therefore, conflict must exist in the church and relationships so those involved can be observed and it can be determined if they are genuinely what they profess to be. If they are willing to resolve conflict, love one another, forgive one another and do that which is right before God then they are genuine Christians

Secondly, Christ allows conflict in relationships so Christians can teach righteousness (by modeling). That means the genuine Christian teaches the right things to do by doing the right things before others. This is one of the reasons a Christian is commanded to study the Word of God so he will know what God wants him to do in certain situations of life and so he can be "approved unto God" (the same Greek word *dokimos* is used here). In other words, we are to study God's Word so that we need not be ashamed before God and His people because we failed to act the way God expected us to act.

⁵ But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. ⁷ Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. ⁸ Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. ⁹ Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. ¹⁰ Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. ¹¹

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.¹² Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.¹³ There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.¹⁴ Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry” (I Corinthians 10:5-14).

The word “examples” in verse 6 is from the Greek word *typos* (too'-pos). As used in this context, it refers to the failures of God’s people in the things they did and the way they lived that served as admonitions and warnings against repeating the same failures. As Christians, we will be models of righteousness or models of unrighteousness. In either case we lead people directly and indirectly.

If you intend to disarm Satan’s ability to use conflict to lure you out from under God’s wings (within His revealed will) of protection and security, you will need to decide to view conflict as an opportunity and to determine to always do what is right within that conflict. There are three important things to remember about conflict management:

1. Observe counterfeit Christians in conflict and how they react in the conflict. Determine to direct them to do what is right in the future.
2. Teach conflict management by modeling righteousness (doing what is right) through your actions.
3. Study God’s Word to learn what God wants you to do in every situation of life (especially conflict) and then do what is right so as to show yourself “approved” (genuine) before Him.

If you have determined that you have repeatedly shown yourself to be a counterfeit Christian by your response to people in conflict, correct that by humbling yourself, seeking their forgiveness and acknowledging your failure before them and God. If you are unwilling to do that, it only gives further evidence of your being a counterfeit Christian.

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1. How can you use the everyday conflict in your life, such as your children's disobedience to teach them the things God wants them to learn about life and life's trials and problems? _____

2. Read Romans 2:4. The Word of God tells us it is God's goodness that leads us to repentance. Why is it so important to God that every act of sin and disobedience end with confession and repentance? _____

3. If every act of sin does not end with confession and repentance, has that conflict been resolved? _____

4. When a believer refuses to seek to resolve the conflict of sin through confession and repentance is he also refusing God's sheltering protection? _____

5. Compare the modern Christian with the idea of a person who attended school with perfect attendance, was never late, but who refused to do the assignments (do the work) or take the tests. _____

6. Can we ever discover what we have learned if we never take a test? _____

7. How did Elimelech and Naomi respond to God's testing and discipline in Ruth chapter one? _____

8. According to Romans 2:4, what could have Elimelech and Naomi expected from God's discipline in their lives? _____

9. When the Christian refuses to confess sin and repent, he remains outside of God's will. According to 1 Peter 5:8-9, who will be eating away at you while you remain outside of God's will and what does that mean? _____

10. Read 1 Corinthians 11:19. Discuss the meaning of the word "heresies." _____

11. Discuss why God must allow "heresies" to regularly arise in a local church. _____

12. Discuss the meaning of the word “approved” from 1 Corinthians 11:19. _____

13. Discuss how understanding the word “approved” helps us understand God’s purposes in allowing conflict and problems to exist in our personal lives and in a local church. _____

14. Discuss the concept of modeling righteousness in the context of why God allows conflict to exist in our lives. _____

15. Read 2 Timothy 2:15. How does the study of the Word of God relate to the believer’s modeling of righteousness? _____

16. Read 1 Corinthians 10:5-14. Discuss the meaning of the word “examples” from verse 6 and how it relates the believer as both a model of righteousness and of unrighteousness. _____
