

# Reformation: Healing Broken Relationships



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *2 Tim. 4:11, Philem. 1–25, 2 Cor. 10:12–15, Rom. 5:8–11, Matt. 18:15–17.*

**Memory Text:** “For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (*Romans 5:10, NKJV*).

Even after Pentecost, the relationship between believers was at times strained. The New Testament records repeated examples of the way that church leaders and individual members dealt with such challenges. These principles are extremely valuable for the church today. They reveal the positive results that can come when we use biblical principles to deal with conflicts.

In this week's lesson we will focus on restored relationships. Great spiritual revivals in the past fostered healed relationships. Movements of the Holy Spirit involve bringing people closer to God and to one another. They include breaking down the barriers in our relationship with God and breaking down barriers in our relationships with one another. In short, the greatest demonstration of the power of the gospel is not necessarily what the church says but how the church lives.

“By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (*John 13:35, NKJV*). Without this love, all our talk about revival and reformation will come to naught.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 21.*

## From Fracture to Friendship

Paul and Barnabas worked together in witnessing for Jesus. But they had some strife between them (*Acts 15:36–39*). Paul could not trust one as fearful as John Mark. The potential dangers of preaching the gospel had caused John Mark at one point to desert Paul and Barnabas and return home.

“This desertion caused Paul to judge Mark unfavorably, and even severely, for a time. Barnabas, on the other hand, was inclined to excuse him because of his inexperience. He felt anxious that Mark should not abandon the ministry, for he saw in him qualifications that would fit him to be a useful worker for Christ.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 170.

Although God used all these men, the issues between them needed resolution. The apostle, who preached grace, needed to extend grace to a young preacher who had disappointed him. The apostle of forgiveness needed to forgive. John Mark grew in the affirming mentorship of Barnabas and, eventually, Paul’s heart was apparently touched by the changes.

**How** do Paul’s letters from prison to Timothy and the church at Colossae reveal his renewed relationship with John Mark and a new confidence in this young preacher? *Col. 4:10, 11; 2 Tim. 4:11.*

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Although details of Paul’s reconciliation with John Mark may be sketchy, the biblical record is clear. John Mark became one of the apostle’s trusted companions. Paul highly recommended John Mark as a “fellow worker” to the church at Colossae. At the end of Paul’s life, he strongly encouraged Timothy to bring John Mark with him to Rome because he was “useful to me for ministry” (*NKJV*). Paul’s ministry was enriched by the young preacher, whom he had obviously forgiven. The barrier between them was broken, and they were able to work together in the cause of the gospel.

**How can we learn to forgive those who have hurt or disappointed us? At the same time, why does forgiveness not always include a complete restoration of a previous relationship? Why does it not always need to?**

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## From Slave to Son

While he was imprisoned in Rome, Paul met a runaway slave named Onesimus who had fled from Colossae to Rome. Paul personally knew Onesimus' master. The Epistle of Philemon is Paul's personal appeal to his friend regarding a restored relationship with the runaway slave.

Relationships mattered to Paul. The apostle knew that fractured relationships are detrimental to spiritual growth. Philemon was a church leader in Colossae. If he harbored bitterness toward Onesimus, it would color his Christian witness.

**Read** Philemon 1–25. What important principles about restored relationships can we find here? Remember, the key word is principles.

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At first glance it is somewhat surprising that Paul did not speak more forcefully against the evils of slavery. But Paul's strategy was far more effective. The gospel, ideally, breaks down all class distinctions (*Gal. 3:28*). The apostle sent Onesimus back to Philemon, not as a slave but as his son in Jesus and Philemon's "beloved brother" in the Lord (*Philem. 16*).

Paul knew that runaway slaves had little future. They could be apprehended at anytime. They were doomed to a life of destitution and poverty. But now, as Philemon's brother in Christ and willing worker, Onesimus could have a wonderful future. His food, lodging, and job could be made secure under Philemon. The restoration of a broken relationship could make a dramatic difference in his life. He became a "faithful and beloved brother" and colaborer in the gospel with Paul (*Col. 4:9*).

**Drawing from the principles of the gospel as seen here, what can you take away that can help you to deal with whatever stresses and strains, even fractures, you have in relationships with others?**

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## From Comparison to Complement

**As** we saw in an earlier lesson, the church at Corinth had deep problems. What principles does Paul outline in 1 Corinthians 3:5–11, 12:1–11, and 2 Corinthians 10:12–15 for healing and restoration, all of which are so vital to revival and reformation?

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In these passages, the apostle outlines critical principles of church unity. He points out that Jesus uses different workers to accomplish different ministries in His church, even though each one is laboring together for the building up of God's kingdom (*1 Cor. 3:9*).

God calls us to cooperation, not competition. Each believer is gifted by God to cooperate in ministering to the body of Christ and serving the community (*1 Cor. 12:11*). There are no greater or lesser gifts. All are necessary in Christ's church (*1 Cor. 12:18–23*). Our God-given gifts are not for selfish display. They are given by the Holy Spirit for service.

All comparisons with others are unwise, because they will make us feel either discouraged or arrogant. If we think that others are far "superior" to us, we will feel despondent when we compare ourselves to them. If we think our labors for Christ are more effective than the work of others, we will feel proud. Both of these attitudes cripple our effectiveness for Christ. As we labor within the sphere of influence that Christ has given us, we will find joy and contentment in our witness for Christ. Our labors will complement the efforts of other members, and the church of Christ will make giant strides for the kingdom.

**Can you think of someone whose gifts in ministry have made you jealous? (Not too hard, is it?) At the same time, how often have you felt proud of your gifts in contrast to those of others? The point is, Paul's concerns are an ever-present reality in fallen beings. Regardless of the side on which we fall, how can we learn the unselfish attitudes that are necessary in order to avoid the pitfalls here?**

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## From Friction to Forgiveness

What is forgiveness? Does forgiveness justify the behavior of someone who has horribly wronged us? Is my forgiveness dependent on the offender's repentance? What if the one with whom I am upset does not deserve my forgiveness?

**How** do the following passages help us to understand the biblical nature of forgiveness? *Rom. 5:8–11; Luke 23:31–34; 2 Cor. 5:20, 21; Eph. 4:26–30.*

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Christ took the initiative in reconciling us to Himself. It is the “goodness of God [that] leads you to repentance” (*Rom. 2:4, NKJV*). In Christ, we were reconciled to God while we were yet sinners. Our repentance and confession do not create reconciliation. Christ's death on the cross did; our part is to accept what was done for us.

It is true that we cannot receive the blessings of forgiveness until we confess our sins. This does not mean that our confession creates forgiveness in God's heart. Forgiveness was in His heart all the time. Confession, instead, enables us to receive it (*1 John 1:9*). Confession is vitally important, not because it changes God's attitude toward us but because it changes our attitude toward Him. When we yield to the Holy Spirit's convicting power to repent and confess our sin, we are changed.

Forgiveness is also so crucial for our own spiritual well-being. A failure to forgive someone who has wronged us, even if he or she does not deserve forgiveness, can hurt us more than it hurts him or her. If an individual has wronged you and the pain festers inside because you fail to forgive, you are allowing that person to hurt you even more.

Forgiveness is releasing another from our condemnation because Christ has released us from His condemnation. It does not justify another's behavior toward us. We can be reconciled to someone who has wronged us because Christ reconciled us to Himself when we wronged Him. We can forgive because we are forgiven. We can love because we are loved. Forgiveness is a choice. We can choose to forgive in spite of the other person's actions or attitudes. This is the true spirit of Jesus.

**How can focusing on the forgiveness we have in Christ help us to learn to forgive others?**

## From Rancor to Restoration

**Read** Matthew 18:15–17. What three steps does Jesus give us to help us to resolve conflicts when we are wronged by another church member? How are we to apply these words in our contemporary situations?

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Jesus' desire in giving the counsel of Matthew 18 is to keep conflict in as small a group as possible. His intent is that the two people involved solve the problem themselves. This is why Jesus declares, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (*Matt. 18:15, NKJV*). As the number of people involved in a conflict between two individuals increases, the more contention is created. People take sides, and the battle lines are drawn. But when Christians attempt to settle their differences privately, and in the spirit of Christian love and mutual understanding, a climate of reconciliation is created. The atmosphere is right for the Holy Spirit to work with them as they strive to resolve their differences.

There are times when personal appeals for conflict resolution are ineffective. In these instances, Jesus invites us to take one or two others with us. This second step in the reconciliation process must always follow the first step. The purpose is to bring people together, not drive them farther apart. The one or two who join the offended party are not coming to prove his or her point or to join in blaming the other individual. They come in Christian love and compassion as counselors and prayer partners in order to participate in the process of bringing two estranged people together.

There are occasions when all attempts to solve the problem do not work. In this case, Jesus instructs us to bring the issue before the church. He is certainly not talking about interrupting the Sabbath morning worship service with an issue of personal conflict. The appropriate place to bring the issue, if the first two steps have not helped to reconcile the two parties, is the church board. Again, Christ's purpose is reconciliation. It is not to blame one party and exonerate the other.

"Do not suffer resentment to ripen into malice. Do not allow the wound to fester and break out in poisoned words, which taint the minds of those who hear. Do not allow bitter thoughts to continue to fill your mind and his. Go to your brother, and in humility and sincerity talk with him about the matter."—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 499.

**Further Study:** “When the laborers have an abiding Christ in their own souls, when all selfishness is dead, when there is no rivalry, no strife for the supremacy, when oneness exists, when they sanctify themselves, so that love for one another is seen and felt, then the showers of the grace of the Holy Spirit will just as surely come upon them as that God’s promise will never fail in one jot or tittle.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 175.

“If we stand in the great day of the Lord with Christ as our refuge, our high tower, we must put away all envy, all strife for the supremacy. We must utterly destroy the roots of these unholy things, that they may not again spring up into life. We must place ourselves wholly on the side of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, p. 190.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Read Colossians 3:12–17 in class. Discuss the Christian qualities that the apostle Paul encourages the church at Colossae to seek. Why are these qualities the basis for all conflict resolution? How do they guide us in carrying out the principles that Jesus gives us in Matthew 18:15–18?
- ❷ Look again at Colossians 3:12–17 and the teachings found in these verses. Why are these things so utterly essential for the revival and reformation that we so desperately need in the church?
- ❸ If we look at our church, that is, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a whole, what is the greatest thing holding us back from the kind of revival and reformation that will be needed in order to reach the world? Is it our teachings and doctrines? Of course not. These are the very things that God has given us to proclaim to the world. The problem lies solely in us, in our interpersonal relationships, our petty jealousies, our bickering, our selfishness, our desire for supremacy, and a whole host of other things. Why must you, yes, you, not the person next to you in the pew, not the pastor—but you, yourself—plead for the power of the Holy Spirit to bring the changes that have to occur in you before we will see revival and reformation in the whole church?

## The Power of Faith

I come from an influential family in central India and grew up worshipping stone gods. My parents wanted the best education for me, so they enrolled me in a Seventh-day Adventist secondary school. We didn't know what "Adventist" meant then.

I liked the school and made friends quickly. One friend, Amith, invited me to his home on Saturday. I was surprised that he and his family weren't watching television but instead were talking about something called the "Sabbath." When I asked Amith what the Sabbath was, he invited me to church the next Saturday. I was curious, so I went.

Inside the church I recognized some people I knew from school. To my surprise, the sermon was on the Sabbath. The pastor read Bible texts and explained why the Sabbath was so special. I didn't know Christ, but by the time we left church I understood the Sabbath.

I attended church with Amith every week. I loved the worship service, and the hymns brought me peace. The Bible lessons were simple but profound. Christianity was so different from my family's religion.

I often joined a classmate for her family's worship. They explained difficult Bible texts, and I began reading the Bible for myself. The Creation story was so different from what I had been taught. I knew I had to follow God, not my family's gods.

I told my parents that I had decided to follow Jesus and would no longer worship the gods I had once worshiped. But they didn't give up. One day they asked me to go with them on a religious pilgrimage—to carry their luggage, they said. But when I realized that they wanted me to take part in the temple rituals, I knew I couldn't do it. I didn't want to argue with them, so I left the train at the next station and returned home.

When my parents returned, they asked me why I had left them. I explained that God forbids worship of other gods. We sat for five hours as I explained what I could about God, Creation, Jesus' life and death, and His second coming. Finally my parents nodded. They didn't understand my new faith, but they let me follow my convictions.

I thank God for leading me to the Seventh-day Adventist high school. It changed my life. I now teach young people, knowing that they can share their faith with their families. It's my way of giving back.

Our mission offerings help to build strong Seventh-day Adventist schools around the world where thousands of young people find Christ every year. Thank you for supporting missions.