

LŌŌKING

It would be well for all wrong-doers to remember a remark once made by a little boy to his father who was contemplating a theft of potatoes from a field. The father looked east, west, north and south, and seeing no one, began pulling up the roots.

"Father," said the boy, "there's one way you forgot to look!"

"Where?" asked the alarmed man.

"Up, father."

—An Overturned Barrel

THINK ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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The Reality of Conflict

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

We do not live in a world of peace. Recent conflicts around the world, shooting sprees throughout our nation, and even murders in our hometowns remind us that we live in a world of sin and that with sin comes conflict. On a long-term basis, this is unavoidable. Yes, often conflict is the result of two or more selfish and evil entities battling one another, but sometimes even those who desire peace find themselves having to enter the fray to defend themselves or those worthy of help. We may consider "peace-keeping forces" an oxymoron, but keeping the peace often involves the ability and will to fight. This is no less true in the spiritual realm.

The scriptures have much to say about peace, all of which must be balanced with what they say about the reality of conflict. It is not wrong to long for peace, but to do so unrealistically only gives aid and comfort to those who would take advantage of our unwillingness to fight. The ecumenical movement so predominant in our culture scorns conflict, but, in so doing, creates only an artificial peace and gives evil the opportunity to get a foothold.

Martin Luther once said, "When Christians are not doing battle with the devil . . . that is not a good sign. . . . Therefore, whoever desires to see the Christian Church existing in quiet peace, entirely without crosses, without heresy, and without factions, will never see it thus, or else he must view the false church of the devil as the real church" (*The Three Symbols or Creeds of the Christian Church*, 1538).

Peace, we want. But any peace movement that gives evil a respite is ill-conceived. The spiritual battle is real and there can be no compromise with evil. Thus, in reality, there will be no lasting peace in a world of sin.

In speaking to His apostles just before his

arrest Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace," but then He warned them, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). The peace offered by Jesus is that which is found in Him and reconciles us to our Creator (Eph. 2:14-17). Notice, however, that it was through the conflict, violence and blood of the cross that peace was achieved.

The world will call for peace and, perhaps, even declare it, but it is not the peace of scripture. Jeremiah spoke of the religious leaders of his day who would declare, "Peace, peace!" when there was no peace. They were a people without moral shame who had forgotten how to blush (Jer. 6:14,15).

I dare say that we are in a similar situation today. There are those who preach visions of their own hearts instead of the will of God and declare peace for those who despise God's ways (Jer. 23:16,17).

To declare peace when there really isn't any is a superficial attempt to make people feel better when they should be repenting. Instead, we have a multitude of clergy who haven't the moral conviction to preach the truth that calls for genuine repentance and submission. Part of the reason for this is that we have a culture that can't stand to be told that its attitudes and behaviors are wrong. The apostle Paul warned that the time would come when professing Christians would not "endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3,4).

The call for peace by some on spiritual issues is an attempt to neutralize conflict and controversy. In large part it has worked, and we have reared a generation untaught in the

ways of God and unable and unwilling to take a stand against evil.

Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." Consider His practical application as He said, "A man's foes will be those of his own household" (Matt. 10:34-36). Jesus did not seek to negotiate peace with evil. He sought to defeat it, and did. On whose side do you want to be?

Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). He didn't say, "Let him deny his cross and look out for himself." Being a disciple of Jesus means being willing to make sacrifices and face conflicts.

Peter warned that there would be false prophets who would secretly bring in destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1-9). The reality is that there will always be those who will oppose what is good. One way to do that is to deceive people into believing that they're getting peace when they're getting poison. Certainly the presence of conflict can be disturbing and sobering, but that is better than allowing evil to rule at will.

"Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). Conflict is unavoidable! Either you are with God or you're against Him. If you're with Him, then you'll have conflict with the world. If you side with the world, then you have conflict with God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:6,7).

Do not allow the presence of conflict to discourage you. Instead, "take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day" (Eph. 6:13). Be encouraged knowing, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

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WILLING SUBMISSION

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

In times of discord it is not unusual to hear the plaintive cry, "Why can't we all just get along?" Confrontations often arise and are exacerbated by those who are unwilling to submit to others. From family problems to labor disputes, from church divisions to war, unsubmitive attitudes are core.

To many, submission is a negative word that conjures up visions of victimization at worst and weakness at best. However, submission is consistently presented positively in Scripture. The English word *submit* means: "to yield to governance or authority; to commit to the discretion or judgment of another; to defer to the opinion or authority of another." The dictionary lists *yield* as a synonym. The Greek word translated *submit* literally means to *yield under*.

Where do conflicts come from? They come from our selfish desires and pride (Jas. 4:1-10). When we approach our relationships in this life (with God or anyone else) on a "me first" basis, then we are unsubmitive. This causes friction. We are called upon to humble ourselves before almighty God and let Him do the exalting. Of course, He has the ability to force us to conform, but it is His desire that we choose to submit ourselves to Him (1 Tim. 2:4).

In turn, God expects us to submit to those to whom He has given some measure of authority. In Peter's first letter he specifies some areas in which we are to submit. Citizens are to submit to the civil government (2:13-17). Servants are to submit to their masters (2:18-25). Wives are to submit to their husbands (3:1-6). The younger are to submit to elders (5:5).

Now, to some, the very thought of submission to another is repulsive. Indeed, this is central to much of the conflict that we are having in our culture. The problems that result from an unwillingness to submit manifest themselves in so many areas: from the home, to the classrooms, to the churches, to the nation. Yet, God expects us to have a submissive spirit toward one another (1 Pet. 5:5; 1 Cor. 16:14-16; Eph. 5:18-21).

Submission to authority simply acknowledges roles and humbly follows those who have been given the responsibility of leadership. If this concept is not consistently taught to children so that they obey and honor their parents (Eph. 6:1-3), then it is not likely that they will be very good at submitting to authority as adults. Indeed, most of our delinquency problems are due to a lack of discipline in matters of submission. Hence we have rebellion not only toward parents, but toward teachers, elders, the law of the land and God.

Scripture says: wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord, the husband is the

head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, and wives are to be in subjection to their husbands in everything (Eph. 5:22-24). Older women are instructed to teach the younger women to, among other things, love their husbands and be obedient to them (Tit. 2:4,5). However, this is not taught in our culture. Instead, these passages are simply fodder for those who delight in blaspheming and have cultivated an unsubmitive posture toward God and His word.

It is interesting that there are many who will claim allegiance and, perhaps, even submission to God, but who will not teach or practice submission to the authorities that He has ordained. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?" (1 Jn. 4:20). Likewise, if people say that they are submitting to God's authority, but they are unsubmitive to those He has put in authority, they are liars; for they who do not submit to those whom they can see, how can they submit to God whom they have not seen?

The refusal on the part of many to submit to anybody willingly reflects our general attitude toward God. It is then no wonder that our culture has departed so quickly from scriptural standards and has embraced doctrines that feed our pride and selfishness.

That the world's unsubmitive attitudes have encroached on professing Christians is seen in the way in which the role of elders is being addressed. Elders are supposed to be men who are qualified to lead, oversee and rule, but that can be hard to do with a bunch of unsubmitive goats. Elders are being told by some that they lead only by example. Is this the only way in which parents, husbands and governments exercise their God-given authority? Indeed, example is a powerful teacher and must be used, but to restrict oversight to example *only* is foolishness. How does one obey (Heb. 13:17) another man's exemplary behavior, and how would such a limited role be worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17)?

Some argue that elders can't legislate. What is meant by this? Are governments allowed to legislate? May husbands legislate? What about parents? Certainly, no man is authorized to make laws that contradict scripture, but is *any* human authority allowed to rule by making specific application of biblical principles to their realm of oversight? Governments, husbands and fathers can forbid those they rule to smoke tobacco, but elders who attempt such are accused of lording it over the flock. Husbands and fathers may rightly expect the wife and children to attend a family devotion, but some think that elders don't have that authority.

Do not misunderstand. I am not suggesting that elders need to get busy making rules. Good shepherds ought to be able enough in their teaching and handling of God's word (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9), and flocks ought to be submissive enough that literal legislation is unnecessary. However, often the practical application of scripture to promote or condemn specific action is called legislation by those who have no interest in submitting to the shepherds' guidance. Also, there are often general obligations that churches have (assembling, edification, benevolence, etc.) that involve liberties in how they are accomplished (times, frequency, curriculum, budget). Some liberties are expedient and others are not. When elders make decisions in these realms, the flock should submit.

In all of our relationships to various authorities, the true indicator of a submissive spirit is not merely when we submit to an authority's decision that we agree with, but when we humbly submit in matters of judgment in which we disagree. The unsubmitive spirit automatically elevates to the realm of conscience any and all issues on which there is disagreement. This is disingenuous. The submissive spirit yields to her husband, his boss, the policeman, the elders, the parents.

On the other hand, God has just as clearly spoken on the responsibility of those to whom He has given authority. As God is gracious and benevolent, He expects those in authority to be the same. God will not tolerate the abuse of power. As the submissive spirit honors and obeys those in authority, the same spirit motivates those in positions of authority to be caring and sensitive to those they are to lead.

God calls for children to honor and obey their parents; but He insists that fathers not provoke their children to wrath but train them in the ways of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). God tells wives to be in subjection to their husbands, but husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25). Husbands are to treat their wives as joint-heirs of the grace that God has offered and live with them in an understanding way (1 Pet. 3:7). Elders are warned not to lord over the flock (1 Pet. 5:3).

For those in positions of authority to selfishly misuse those positions is to forget that they also have a Master in heaven to whom they must answer. God is not going to show partiality just because one is in a position of authority and another is not (Eph. 6:9).

Therefore, no matter who we are, it is in our best interest to learn submission and make it our aim to be well pleasing to God, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ" (2 Cor. 5:9,10).

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By AL DIESTELKAMP

Most men don't like to admit to running from things. Running away projects an image of cowardice in our minds which is foreign to our thinking except in rare instances. Yet, when we're thinking straight, we realize there are some things which warrant a hasty retreat.

The Lord has warned us of a sin from which we must "flee" (1 Cor. 6:18). The sin of sexual immorality (called fornication in some translations) is of such destructive force that when Satan tempts us with its allurements we need to turn and run. Many a man who thought he could stand in the face of prolonged temptation has fallen (1 Cor. 10:12).

It is true that we cannot remove all sexual temptations from our lives, but we don't have to subject ourselves to unnecessary and unwise situations which give Satan an advantage over us. At the first onset of temptation is the time to seek help from the Lord. Like many other of Satan's allurements, sexual temptations are "common to man." However, we have God's assurance that we will be able to resist, and that He will provide "the way of escape" (1 Cor. 10:13). Perhaps our problem is that we aren't really looking for an escape.

What is fornication?

We have already noted that some Bible translations use the word "fornication" where others use the term "sexual immorality." The original Greek word is *porneia* which is defined as "illicit sexual intercourse" (Vines, p. 125) which includes, but is not limited to adultery. The word "illicit" (which means unlawful or improper) might confuse some, since we live in a time when little is considered improper. Just because our civil authorities have "legalized" some activities which God has not authorized does not make them proper. A person who, even

Something To Run From

with government approval, divorces his sexually faithful wife, or whose wife divorces him, and marries another, commits adultery (see Matt. 5:32; 19:9).

Since God has authorized each man to "have his own wife," and vice versa (1 Cor. 7:2), any variation (pre-marital or extra-marital sex, as well as bigamy, polygamy and homosexuality) is illicit and falls within the definition of fornication.

What is marriage?

It is sad that we have to define marriage, but forces of evil have tried to legitimize perversion by calling it marriage. In some places governments are giving sanction to same-sex relationships and calling it marriage. Since God is the author of marriage, He is the one who has the right to define it. The God-inspired Bible is consistent from beginning to end in every statement and example in applying the word marriage exclusively to relationships between men and women. Though God at one time allowed a man to have a plurality of wives, in the New Testament there is no authority for polygamy, and though it might be called "marriage," it is still unlawful.

Avoiding fornication

One of the purposes of marriage is to provide an environment in which men and women can fulfill their sexual desires and avoid fornication. In order for marriage to serve as an effective deterrent to sexual immorality the needs of both partners must be met, and so God commands both husbands and wives to yield to one another's sexual needs (1 Cor. 7:2-5).

Lovemaking should be a mutually fulfilling experience for both partners, not merely an opportunity for self-gratification. It is no secret that men and women react to sexual stimuli at different paces, and as a result some men become impatient. Just as a skilled craftsman does not rush through a project in order to produce a work of art, a skilled husband takes the time necessary to learn how to please his wife in this important aspect of their life together.

Sometimes married couples wonder just what is allowed and what is forbidden within the marriage relationship. Because God's "divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 2:3), we can rely on what is revealed in His word on this subject. The New Testament says that "Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). Therefore, by general authority, any intimacy involving

only a husband and his wife which: 1) does not offend either's conscience (Rom. 14:22); and 2) does not violate some other God-given principle, is "undefiled."

Adultery and other forms of fornication start in the heart. Jesus recognized this and warned against looking at other women for the purpose of arousing sexual desires (Matt. 5:28). One of the most obvious avenues for this sin is pornography, which must be avoided in order to have wholesome thoughts (Phil. 4:8).

It should also be remembered that it is not good to become too familiar with women other than your wife. If another woman is your friend, the friendship should be cultivated only in the presence of your wife, and even then it must be free of any sexual flirtation. Beware of any woman who tries to be your "buddy."

Sexuality is a part of God's creation and was given to us for our enjoyment. God knows what is best for us and has authorized us to fulfill these desires within the marriage relationship. Any deviation from God's plan will bring disaster on your marriage and your soul.

Study & Apply

Prov. 5:1-23

Consider the inspired warnings about the pitfalls of adultery.

Resolve to make personal application in your own life.

Practical Suggestions

- ✓ Avoid, as much as possible, situations where you are expected to work closely with a woman other than your own wife.
- ✓ If your occupation requires you to work with women, make sure there are others present so that no false accusations can be made and no doubt planted in the mind of your wife.
- ✓ Even in situations involving Christians, never visit a woman alone. Take your wife (or another man) with you.
- ✓ Don't provide "counseling" to a woman unless your wife, or another man, is also present.

Not Exactly

By AL DIESTELKAMP

Perhaps you've seen the TV commercial in which businessmen are walking through an airport terminal on their way to an important meeting. The one who had made the travel arrangements is questioned by his superior about their car rental.

"Did you go with Hertz?" he is asked. A timid, "Not exactly" is the reply. This is followed by a series of questions related to efficiency and comfort, each evoking the same, "Not exactly" reply.

Finally, the boss asks the man if he's expecting a promotion. You know the reply: "Not exactly."

Suppose we were to pose the same type of questions to members of various sectarian churches:

"Is the Bible your only guide?" would be one question to ask. If they were honest they'd have to say, "Not exactly." Though they might give lip-service to the authority of the scriptures, they'd have to admit they rely on creeds, manuals and constitutions. Some rely on church leaders or scholars, others on tradition, feelings or human logic. The apostle Peter showed us the true guide (2 Pet. 1:2-3). Exactly!

"Is your church organized like the churches in the New Testament?" would be another question. Again, they'd have to admit, "Not exactly." Some have the minister in charge (called the pastor system). Often women exercise authority over men. Many have regional, national or international headquarters. The Lord's will is to have elders in every church (Tit. 1:5; Ac. 14:23). Exactly!

"Is your church's work the same as we see

in the New Testament?" With churches involved in social causes, recreational activities, educational ventures and day-care businesses, they'd have to say, "Not exactly." In the New Testament we find the church's primary mission in the area of evangelism and edification, and a secondary work in benevolence toward needy saints in emergency situations. Exactly!

"Is your worship the same as it was in the New Testament?" Here again, "Not exactly." Everything from unauthorized ritualism to unrestrained emotionalism is the norm. Additions such as the use of instrumental music (sometimes full-fledged bands), rhythmic clapping and performances are common. Many have abandoned weekly communion. On the other hand, the New Testament requires "worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23-24). Exactly!

"Do you teach the same plan of salvation as did the New Testament Christians?" Once again, if honest, "Not exactly." They teach faith only, grace only, the "believer's prayer," and shout that water baptism has nothing to do with salvation. Then they declare that once you're saved, you can't fall from grace. The Bible tells us how to be saved (Jas. 2:24; 1 Pet. 3:21; 1 Cor. 10:12). Exactly!

Even the appeal that many make to sinners to "join the church of your choice" is not exactly what Paul had in mind when he wrote about "one body" (Eph. 4:4).

Before we get too smug, perhaps we ought to examine our own beliefs and practices (2 Cor. 13:5). It's possible a list of questions could be drawn up to which we might be embarrassed to have to reply, "Not exactly." Remember 1 Pet. 4:11—Exactly!

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November 1, 1999 will mark the 30th anniversary of the publication of this paper. Never did we dream that a free paper depending on voluntary contributions would last so long. The Lord willing, we will try to make the next issue "special" as we look back on three decades and look forward as we approach the last year of the 20th century and this millenium.

—Al Diestelkamp

THINK

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