

More on Brothers & Sisters

God has made it so that, the church, are now family. We share the same Father, and that makes us brothers and sisters. Jesus uses many examples of this, and in a previous article we looked at two places, Luke 17 and Matthew 5. Regardless of whether it is us who sin or not, there are many people today who have been hurt by someone else's action, whether intended or not intended. We've been sinned against. It has brought us a lot of pain, even turmoil. It has upset us to no end, even causing us to avoid certain people.

Everyone deals with these upsets in different ways. Ken Sande refers to those who are "peace-fakers." These are the ones who are "more interested in avoiding the conflict than in resolving it." These are those who know very well the verses I quoted earlier from Luke and Matthew, but in the interest of peace they "pretend that it doesn't exist." The other extreme of that response are what Sande calls the "peace-breakers." These are the people who "are more interested in winning a conflict than in preserving a relationship." They win the conflict by "bringing as much pressure to bear on opponents as is necessary to eliminate their opposition."

Then there are the peace-makers. Peace-makers deal with conflict by overlooking the offense and not making an issue of it, and instead forgiving. Or, when the offense is too great to overlook, they seek reconciliation. What is reconciliation? It comes "through confession, loving correction, and forgiveness" (Ken Sande, "Conflict Provides Opportunities"). All of this takes work, and it cannot be resolved in one conversation we have. It takes time, it takes a lot of prayer, and it takes faith that God will somehow work it out as we follow the Jesus way.

And now a word on forgiveness. Lewis Smedes talks about what forgiveness is not. Forgiveness is not forgetting. Just like elephants, we have a hard time forgetting what someone has done to us. When God forgives, he forgets. He remembers our sins no more. Forgiveness is also not excusing. "We all deserve a lot of excusing for the crazy things we do." We had a bad day, a bad childhood, a bad spouse. What then is forgiveness? It is, writes Smedes, "a very simple sort of miracle." A miracle is an act of God upon our hearts. Forgiveness is "letting go of our resentment and spite, and starting over with the free spirit inside of us, leaving the other person to God." Forgiveness is a choice we make because we realize that we ourselves sin much, and sometimes sin boldly, and God forgives us; so we choose to forgive others.

Someone will ask, "Why should I forgive?" If we don't forgive it is not the other person who pays the price. It's we who pay. "Unrelieved resentment is like a videotape [or DVD] inside your soul, playing its tormenting reruns of the rotten things somebody did to you, playing it over and over, wrenching your soul tighter ever time it plays." When we choose to forgive – and it is a choice, a deliberate act on our part! – then we will find ourselves "dancing to the rhythm of the divine heartbeat." The good news is that we don't need to attempt this on our own. Peter has been calling us into a

costly co-operation with God the Holy Spirit. *Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other* (1 Thess 4:9). God can teach us how to love!