

Getting Along with People

Why is there constant war and bloodshed on the earth? Why are so many people unable to get along with others? Psychologists have written books to explain the reasons, but fail to examine the Bible for the answers. The fundamental cause is, of course, human nature. Contrary to liberal ideology, human nature it is not plastic and changing, with an unlimited capacity to do good.

Human nature is just the opposite. The threat of thermonuclear war constantly threatens. We live in a world where differing national interests, ideas, backgrounds, and cultures play an important role. For example, when we think of national interests, we should realize that the origin of war begins with theft. Men simply are unable to live in peace. The Bible candidly states: ". . . The way of peace have they not known" (Rom. 3:17).

While there is little most of us can do about the world in general, we can be at peace with people around us and with the people we know. That is the purpose of this article. The Bible instructs: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). While we cannot control the thoughts and actions of others, we can do our part in living peaceably. That is why it states, "if it be possible." There is much in the Bible about the need to be at peace. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

There are several principles, if understood and applied, that will help us to get along with others.

One can never expect to get along with others unless one recognizes the value of peace

Happiness is a frame of mind. Getting along with others requires a proper frame of mind. Peace is something that should be pursued. "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14). What does the Bible say about the wicked who refuse to seek peace? "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked" (Isa. 48:22). Most people desire to be happy, but many are deprived of happiness because they are unable to live in peace with others. Peter wrote: "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it" (1 Pet. 3:10-11). James adds: "And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace" (Jas.3:18). What are the fruits of righteousness? "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isa. 32:17-18). "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Ps. 119:165). There is a reason the Bible instructs: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

We must have a desire to get along with others

Recognizing the value of peace is one thing, but without the desire to achieve it we will be unable to live in harmony. How much happiness does one experience while bickering and arguing? Not much. Many insist in getting in the "last word." Somehow the one who gets in the last word feels that he or she is the winner. The winner, however, is the one who avoids an argument in the first place. Consider this text: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). A number of New

Testament passages instruct us on the importance of getting along with people, both with our neighbors and with our church brethren. "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). Rather than arguing with others, we are told: "Let your [gentleness] be known unto all men . . ." (Phil. 4:5). "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:8-9). When the Apostle Paul closed his second letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: "Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).

Peace comes to those who have a desire for peace, to those who seek it, and without compromising their convictions take steps to avoid hostile situations that arise because of trivial issues. These issues usually have no direct bearing on salvation, but can greatly affect one's relationship with others and with God. Seeking peace must be applied in the home, the neighborhood, the workplace, and the wherever one finds oneself.

How important is the issue at hand?

When emotions are beginning to run high, the first question we need to ask is: How important is it? As parents we have witnessed our children squabbling over some minor thing that generally is soon forgotten. At the time that they are arguing, this becomes the most important thing in their lives. But how important is it, really? The same thing can be said about arguments that many adults have. Often couples squabble over issues they later cannot even remember. In society, even the most trivial issues can lead to mayhem or death. Emotions take over reasoning, and the proper perspective and importance of the issue is completely lost. Both parties generally think they are right, yet the Bible says: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov.14:12).

Authorities inform us that one of the characteristics of this age is the unwillingness on the part of many to admit they could be wrong. The Bible speaks of such a generation. Could it refer to this age? "There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness" (Prov. 30:12). These are the kind of people who refuse to receive correction; so to contend with them is futile. The book of Proverbs tells us: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15). Sometimes counsel comes in the form of solid advice that flies in the face of what one or both parties refuse to believe.

To save face seems to be the most important goal of many. They will defend their view at any cost, even if it is wrong. To win the argument is what they seek. To them it is the most important thing in the world. Yet, Jesus said: "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). People need a proper perspective of the real values of life. This does not include winning arguments. Debate is a work of the flesh (Rom 1:29). So the first thing to consider when any issue arises is: How important is it? If one can accurately evaluate that, he will be on the road to achieving peace—a goal the Bible says is a tremendous blessing for all involved.

Learn to assume at least half the responsibility in any issue

Often two or more people will argue, fully believing the other party is wrong. Yet, an arbitrator more often than not will find that both parties are at fault. Often, during an impasse, both parties refuse to accept the fact that they could be, at least, partially at fault. The one who is willing to admit he could be to some

degree at fault will have a much better chance of disarming the other party. But one who takes the position that he is 100 percent right and the other party 100 percent wrong will never have peace. In most of our dealings peace is achieved by compromise. However, some things, such as spiritual convictions, should never be compromised. But many of the disagreements we have with others do not involve spiritual matters.

Here is what the Bible states regarding the certitude that many people display: "The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him" (Prov. 18:17 NKJV). A careful look by someone not involved in a disagreement can often see what those who are arguing cannot see. Those who refuse to have an open mind will likely be unable to reach an agreement with anyone. Sometimes, though, a party will give in to an argument, even knowing the other party is wrong, just for the sake of keeping peace. Again, notice this description of one who is totally self-assured. "All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, But the LORD weighs the spirits" (Prov. 16:2 NKJV). That is, the Lord alone is the Judge whether a man's ways are as clean as the man himself thinks them to be. Since we are often blind to our own faults, it is God who weighs the inclinations and intentions of a man's ways.

Consider these texts: "Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?" (Prov. 20:6). As noted above, many people find it very difficult to acknowledge their faults, but if so they tend to minimize them. Who, then, can find a man who is perfectly honest with himself and is willing to admit that he could be wrong? This is what is required to keep peace. As long as one is unwilling to assume part of the responsibility in a disagreement, it is unlikely peace will prevail. Too often we are unwilling to hear the other side of the story. "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him" (Prov. 18:13). When tempers soar little can be resolved. "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife" (Prov. 15:18). "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression" (Prov. 19:11). "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident" (Prov. 14:16).

Emotional control is a key to getting along

Uncontrolled emotions can be a major factor in disagreements, often leading to bloodshed. Not only are individuals prone to a lack of emotional control but entire nations can be whipped into a frenzy. These volatile emotions often occur because of real or imagined wrongs. There are many warnings in the Bible to avoid this. Trouble rapidly escalates when people lose emotional control. "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Eccl. 7:9). People who make complete fools of themselves often do so when they lose emotional control. They refuse to receive correction or to admit they could be wrong. "Understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it. But the correction of fools is folly" (Prov. 16:22 NKJV).

A fool has many characteristics, and one of them is the inability to control emotions. We are told: "A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame" (Prov. 12:16). It is a shame, therefore, when one is unable to control his thoughts and allows his emotions to run wild. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov. 25:28). "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression" (Prov. 29:22). Such a person is usually unable to control his or her tongue. "A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards" (v. 11).

What should those who constantly argue realize? For one thing, they will be labeled a fool and possibly hated by others? "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked [intentions] is hated" (Prov. 14:17). This is why we are admonished: "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly" (v. 29).

What needs to be realized in all this is that emotional control is the key to solving most disagreements that

arise. In such a situation, if one finds himself becoming angry and losing his ability to think clearly, it is best to withdraw in order to have time to think the matter over clearly and to be able to realize that he may not be entirely correct or have all the answers.

Learn to be forgiving and not to hold grudges

How many times do problems continue unresolved because one or both parties cannot forgive and forget? Many people tend to hold grudges. Even though problems may appear to be resolved on the surface, unless one can put the matter aside, no resolution can be achieved. One who continues to hold a grudge cannot possibly find peace, neither in his mind nor with the other party. This is the cause of much unhappiness and certainly not of peace. Not only that, but one who cannot forgive cannot expect forgiveness from God. Why? "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The words of Jesus are plain: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15).

Several gospel passages instruct us on the importance of forgiving. What are some of these passages? "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21-22). Many Bible commentators regard the expression "seventy times seven" to be a hyperbole, that is, when more is said than what is literally meant. Regardless of the number of times Jesus meant, Christians should be willing to go out of the way to forgive. When praying, Jesus said: "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11: 24-25).

One of the reasons people hold grudges is because of what others say about them behind their backs. Often these remarks are the result of some disagreement the person had with another. What does the Bible say about this? "Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others" (Eccl. 7:21-22). We often think the critical things we say about others will not get back to the other party. Not so. When others find out about our remarks, how many times have we heard, "Oh, a little bird told me." Here is what the Bible says: "Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" (Eccl. 10:20).

Aside from the gospels, other New Testament passages emphasize the importance of putting hard feelings behind and not holding a grudge. The Apostle Paul wrote: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:12-13). "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

One who holds a grudge and is unable to forget the past is the one who is really harmed. Such negative feelings deprive him or her of the happiness and joy one should be experiencing in life. In the long run what is reaped from holding a grudge is not worth the effort. This only plays into the hands of Satan who is the real accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10).

Pray for God's Spirit and mind

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The natural mind with which we were all born does not delight in the things of God (Mark 8:33). Paul tells us: ". . . They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:5-7). How does the carnal mind normally behave? "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21). It is easy to understand why many people cannot forgive and continue to carry grudges.

To be able to truly live up to the Bible teachings, one must have the mind of Christ. We may have the desire to fulfill God's will but often find it impossible to accomplish it. Like the disciples, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak (Matt. 26:41). To succeed we must have the help of God by means of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible states:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

When one receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, a transformation begins to take place in the mind and heart. The fruits of the Spirit now begin to develop, "That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). This is a lifelong process that must continue until death or until Christ returns, whichever may occur first.

The transformation that begins to take place is truly dramatic:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal. 5:22-26)

How many can live up to this description? Yet this is what the Holy Spirit brings about in our lives. God is more than willing to give us the gift of His Spirit.

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:11-13)

But we must meet the conditions God requires before we can receive this gift. We must repent and be baptized. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy [Spirit]" (Acts 2:38).

Repentance means more than simply feeling sorry for what we may have done. It not only requires that, but also a turning around and going the other way. It means we must stop doing what is wrong and change our entire approach to life. It means coming to a godly sorrow that is permanent, not temporary in nature. It means accepting the shed blood of Christ as payment for our sins-our transgression against the Law of God (1 Jn 3:4). "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as

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silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

One who has the Spirit of God can achieve peace with his fellow man, and if a problem arises he or she will be able to overcome it. We may recall what the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:6. “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” It is God’s desire that we achieve the harmony and accord that comes with practicing Christianity rather than just professing it. While we cannot change the thinking and attitude of others, we can change ourselves. If we do our part, we can expect positive results. If the other party refuses to change, it is his or her problem, not ours. We each bear our own responsibility before God. “For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6:5).

The Words of God were given for man’s benefit. They are the Words of Life (Phil. 2:16). “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Ps.19:7-8, 10-11). “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way” (Ps 119:128). “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (v. 105).

By applying the Bible instruction, we can make our lives more enjoyable. We can learn to get along with others, but we must heed the principles outlined in God’s Word. We are told: “Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end” (Prov. 19:20).