

# ***Forgive Your Enemies & Your Friends Too!***

September 7, 2008, 23rd Sunday, A, Matthew 18: 15-20

The Prophet Ezekiel complains about how nobody appreciates him. He even complains that God *blackmailed* him. If he does not warn sinners and they continue to sin and die he is responsible so he will die too.

Paul says that all the commandments can be summarized into one "*love your neighbor as yourself.*" Love does no evil to a neighbor. If you love you will never commit adultery, never kill, never steal, never covet.

Jesus talks about *arguing* that is tender, loving, courageous, one-on-one, when we see a friend doing evil with terrible consequences.

When two or three gather in Jesus' name, or anybody's name, there will be arguments, differences of opinion & hurt feelings. The Bible tells us to forgive our enemies, but we have to forgive our friends too.

*Jesus has "5" steps to resolve conflicts:*

#1. If anyone wrongs you put your complaint into *words*. One of the biggest mistakes we make is not to say anything, to brood about it until it poisons our whole life until we can't think of anything else but our hurt.

#2. Tell them face-to-face, do not send a letter or e-mail, which can be easily misinterpreted or misunderstood or convey a tone we never meant to convey. Jesus adds, "*If you go first and they listen to you, you have gained your brother, you have saved a friendship.*"

#3. If you have taken steps #1 and #2 and it still did not end the conflict. Jesus says, "*If they do not listen to you, then take one or two others with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.*"

Don't take others along to prove that you were right and they were wrong. Sometimes we just can't say or do the right thing to resolve the conflict ourselves. There are always a few saintly peacemakers to help.

If we talk things over with a wise person, that person can often help us see ourselves as others see us. The rabbis say, "*Judge not alone, for none may judge alone save one (God).*" The third step is to ask for help.

#4. If all that fails, take our troubles to the Christian fellowship. Don't go to a court of law. Come to your church for help. Legalism seldom settles relationship problems, but often drives them deeper. What Jesus means here is this: It is in an atmosphere of Christian prayer, Christian love, and Christian fellowship that personal relationships may be righted.

#5. "*If he refuses to listen even to the church let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector*" Sounds tough doesn't it? The Jews wouldn't have anything to do with Gentiles, couldn't eat with them or even touch or be touched by them. They were even tougher on tax collectors.

So it sounds like, after you have done all four steps without any reconciliation you can just give up on that loser.

However, if you remember Jesus also said, "*Forgive seventy seven times or even seventy times seven times*" we should realize that as Christians we could never give up on anyone.

Jesus challenges us to win the heart of the one you are in conflict with and need to reconcile with. We are not to give up on the hardest heart. Jesus finds no person hopeless - and neither must we.

Sure, we'll have conflicts with lots of people, even those who belong to the church, even the priest, but we should never give up, never move on or move out of the church community because of a conflict with anyone. It is tough.

Our Savior tells us ways we can do it; we should do it; we must do it - if ours is a Christian fellowship and we are Christian.

*1. Talk first! 2. Person to person, Face to face! 3. Bring a wise saintly peacemaker along with you! 4. Or two! 5. Never, never, give up!*