

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church
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Lesson 22: “Be Slow to Give or Take Offense”
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:12-21

Goal: To embrace and fulfill our covenant relationship with God and one another.

Objective: To understand the importance of being slow to give or take offense.

Covenant Segment:

“We further engage...to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliations.”

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.(2 Corinthians 5:12-21 KJV)

Introduction of Lesson 22 and 23

Reconciliation is the doctrine of our faith whereby the estrangement between God and man is overcome through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Through the sacrificial death of Christ, unity between God and man has been restored. An extension of this doctrine of reconciliation is found in the unity of believers in the body of Christ—the church.

It is not a coincidence that the two phrases, ‘*be slow to give or take offence*’ and ‘*always ready for reconciliation*’ are joined together to form a conjunctive phrase. They become a correlative conjunctive in which two phrases occur as an equal pair. This suggests that there are two actions that would demonstrate the doctrine of reconciliation in the life of the church. We will examine the behaviors that bear witness that we have been reconciled to God through Christ and therefore reconciled to each other. The inward witness is our ability to “be slow to give or take offense”. There is an active “outward” witness represented by our willingness to take the necessary steps to reconcile the breach caused by any offense. Both actions require a dependence on the Holy Spirit and demonstrate spiritual growth and maturity.

Our study for the next two months will involve the doctrine of reconciliation and its manifestation in our daily lives as a covenant community. This month, we will examine the inward discipline of “being slow to give or take offence” and next month we will examine the outer action of “always being ready for reconciliation.

Overview

Many of us have either experienced offense or have been offended by someone. A short temper, a quick tongue, and impulsive reactions can inflict hurt, vexation, discomfort, and displeasure into the lives of others. Whether the offense is a result of a deliberate wrong, petty disagreement, insensitivity, a ‘bad day’, or unintentional, intense relational difficulties can ensue within the body of Christ. For this cause, this segment of our church covenant admonishes us to be slow to give or take offense.

The word *offense* translated in the Greek is *skandalizo*, meaning generally to offend, vex, or scandalize. It is derived from the word *skandalon* meaning a trap, stumbling block, and to cause to stumble and fall. It always denotes an enticement to conduct, which could ruin the person in question.¹ Christ said woe to the world because of offences and woe to the man by whom the offence comes. [Matthew 18: 6-7]

Questions 1

How does our relationship with Christ guide our thinking, attitudes and responses in offensive encounters?

- As Christians we should be ready to extend patience, love, and kindness toward those who offend us; thereby cultivating the virtues of the fruit of the Spirit.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (II Corinthians 5:17)

Summary

Whether we are the receiver or the initiator of offenses, we are to always be ready for reconciliation. The presence of Holy Spirit in our lives empowers us to live a godly life and to live victoriously in unity and fellowship with one another. God has given us His Word, which teaches us to be peacemakers, pray for the offender and seek forgiveness if we are the offender. The love of God ought to shape our treatment of each other when we consider what Christ has done for us.

Question 2

How does holding an offense cause us to stumble in our faith?

- When we allow animosity and anger to disrupt our fellowship and unity with one another we quench the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not move freely among hearts that are not turned toward one another in love and reconciliation.²

“So then, my beloved brethren let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20)

Summary

To be slow to give or take offense requires self- control. Not only are we to be sensitive to the feelings of others, but we need to know our own strengths and weaknesses. We must be aware of and consciously work on our own short comings. If we weigh our responses against the Word of God, increase our reaction time, avoid responding in anger or with evil intent or vengeance, we can fulfill this part of the covenant and bring glory to God. Since God has given us the grace to live as reconciled people, let us go forth as ambassadors of reconciliation.

¹ Zodhiates, Spiros, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament*, Chattanooga: AMG International, 1993, 1292

² Turner, William C. *A Journey through the Church Covenant* Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press (2002) 111

Question 3

How do trivial disputes among the church family affect the unity and larger work of the church?³

- As Christians, we are sometimes easily offended or easily offend others, including those close to us, based on such seemingly trivial matters as a tone of voice, nonverbal communication, not being recognized for something we have done, or feel taken for granted and unappreciated.

“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. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, whom we have now received the reconciliation.” (Romans 5: 10-11)

Summary

God has provided all that we need to be victorious. God has reconciled us by Christ Jesus and given us the ministry of reconciliation. [II Cor. 5: 18] He made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God.’ [II Cor. 5: 21]. As Christians we are expected to strengthen our relationship through fellowship with each other because of the loving relationship we have with God.

Reflections:

What principles can we apply to our lives to increase the capacity to be slow in taking offense?⁴ [For example, refer to Ephesians 4: 26; Ephesians 4: 29].

³ Turner, William C. **A Journey through the Church Covenant** Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press (2002) 118.

⁴ Ibid. pg. 118.

Where we are in the Church Covenant... *

HAVING BEEN LED, AS WE BELIEVE, BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to give it a place in our affections, prayers, and services above every organization of human origin; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God has prospered us, towards its expenses, for the support of a faithful and evangelical ministry among us, the relief of the poor and the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. In case of difference of opinion in the church, we will strive to avoid a contentious spirit, and if we cannot unanimously agree, we will cheerfully recognize the right of the majority to govern.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to study diligently the word of God; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintance; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be kind and just to those in our employ, and faithful in the service we promise others; endeavoring in the purity of heart and good will towards all men to exemplify and commend our holy faith.

We further engage to watch over, to pray for, to exhort and stir up each other unto every good word and work; to guard each other's reputation, not needlessly exposing the infirmities of others; to participate in each other's joys, and with tender sympathy bear one another's burdens and sorrows; to cultivate Christian courtesy; ***to be slow to give or take offense, but always ready for reconciliation***, being mindful of the rules of the Savior in the eighteenth chapter of Matthew, to secure it without delay; and through life, amid evil report, and good report, to seek to live to the glory of God, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When we remove from this place, we engage as soon as possible to unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

Each month we will include a copy of the Church Covenant and highlight the current lesson. It is our hope that this will give the larger context for the passage being studied.