

Making Peace

A Sermon by Rev. Dr. Andrew M.T. Dibb

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar,
and there remember that your brother has something against you,
leave your gift there before the altar and go your way.
First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

(Matthew 5:17,18)

It would be an understatement to say that we are living in challenging times. Of course, life in this world is always challenging. The world seems difficult because we are in it and have to deal with it. In today's world we are faced with conflict: the war in Ukraine and other places, the conflicting ideas and opinions of our fellow citizens, and at times strife in our own families. Television and social media bring these conflicts to our consciousness, and we react to them. Our tendency is to take one side against another, causing the conflicts around us to become conflicts within us.

Conflict is never a good thing, but people can grow because of it. War may bring out the worst in some people who see in it an opportunity to vent their personal cruelty or hatred. But war also brings out the best in many people, those who find the opportunity to serve others by helping or protecting them. In a war, many people, military and civilian, are willing to lay down their lives for their friends. While some people see war as an excuse to do harm, others see it as a reason to defend and protect. During a war each person, whether a soldier or civilian is faced with a similar question: do I slip deeper and deeper into the spheres flooding out of hell, or will I use the opportunity to overcome those hellish spheres and take the opportunity to serve. Of course, those of us in this cathedral, or listening online, are not at war. We are blessed with peace as far as the country is concerned.

However, in the book, *Divine Providence*, there is a startling teaching. We read,

[T]here are lesser and greater wars, the lesser ones between property owners and their neighbors and the greater ones between the rulers of nations and their neighbors. The only difference between the lesser and the greater ones is that the lesser ones are limited by national laws and the greater ones by international laws. There is also the fact that in both cases the participants want to violate the laws, and that the lesser ones cannot, but the greater ones can, though still not beyond the bounds of possibility. (DP 251)

At some point in our lives, we will find ourselves in conflict, the question then, is how do we grow through it? As individuals we have less influence over the development of the “greater wars” as the Doctrine describes them, but we have complete control over our own behavior in the “lesser ones.” In these “lesser wars” we are faced with the same questions a soldier has to answer in a “greater war,” do I use our personal conflicts as an excuse to vent negative feelings, or do I overcome them and seek to serve? The Lord addresses this three times in the Gospel of Matthew.

A familiar passage on how to deal with others who are in conflict with us is given in Matthew chapter 18:

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if your brother trespasses against you, go and tell him about his fault between you and him alone: if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, then take with you one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican.

In these verses the Lord lays out a process of what to do when someone had done something, has trespassed, against us. We are the person wronged. Reconciliation in this kind of situation rests on the willingness of the other person to be reconciled. When a person is willing it is a simple matter, a discussion of what transpired, with the person who “trespassed against us” and disrupted the relationship. If the person hears us, the transgression can be repaired; the person in the wrong admits that they were wrong and are willing to make peace.

The Lord acknowledges that not everyone is willing to make amends and repair their relationships. People dig in their heels, especially if they think they are right, and the other person is wrong. This adds fuel to the fire of the conflict, making it harder to resolve. The Lord laid out the steps to follow as the conflict intensifies: discuss it again with witnesses who hear both sides of the story. If this intervention does not work, then the final effort is to take the conflict to the church to try to find a solution and forgiveness in the presence of the Lord. If such a person still refuses to be reconciled, to remedy the wrong done, then there is little else one can do. While it is important to continue to wish well to the person, to hope for eventual reconciliation, for the sake of peace, it would be worth it to steer clear of them.

Following the Lord's instructions in this teaching can be challenging, it is often hard to confront someone with their trespass, but at the end of the exercise there is a degree of satisfaction in saying "I've done everything I can" and leaving it at that. But have we done everything we can do?

In our perception of a conflict, it is often much easier to find the other person at fault, and at times it can be pleasant to tell them what their faults are, although that feeling may not come from heaven. The obvious danger in focusing on another people's trespasses is that it deflects our minds away from our own complicity in the conflict. Conflicts are seldom one-sided, by definition it happens between two people. It is easy to ignore our part in the conflict and exaggerate the other person's contribution.

We now turn to the second teaching in the Gospel of Matthew. Towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 7, the Lord asked the assembled crowd:

Matthew 7:3-5 And why do you behold the mote that is in your brother's eye, but do not consider the beam that is in your own eye? Or how will you say to your brother, Let me pull out the mote out of your eye; and behold, a beam is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first cast out the beam from your own eye; and then you shall see clearly to cast out the mote out of your brother's eye.

If we don't pay attention to our role and our contribution to the conflict, we may overlook important factors in it. The Lord's command to cast the beam out of our own eye timeless. We all have "beams" in our eyes, these are our own issues, attitudes, habits, ways of acting and so on, that we are often blind to. These because are part of how we feel and think, they are part of our definition of who we are. Over time these attitudes, habits and actions may become so ingrained from such habitual use that we no longer see them.

Again, we turn the Gospel of Matthew, this time towards the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. The Lord introduced the need for self-examination saying,

Matthew 5:23,24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

What are the "gifts" we bring to the Lord's altar? In some ways we share the activity with the ancient Jews: they approached the altar in the Temple with their sacrifices, and we approach the altar in our form of worship, as we are doing this morning. In both cases the people are worshipping the Lord

conscious of what they are doing. The motions or rituals of worship have little effect if they are merely matters of the body. The Lord looks at our internals, He sees our motives in worship, so He has a complete picture of who we are and what we bring to worship. One thing He would notice is that we have done something to harm or offend another person who has not harmed us. When we do that, we give the other person a reason to have a grievance with us, to want to retaliate. We become the person who needs to be spoken to, and if we will not hear, spoken to in front of witnesses or in the Church.

It is not unusual to do things that others can hold against us. Most of us are spiritual works in progress and have things in our makeup that need to be removed or reordered. Perhaps this is why the Lord spoke these words at the end of His explanation of the fifth Commandment: You shall not kill. This was and is a familiar teaching, but the Lord expands on the physical act of taking someone's life. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord describes this Commandment as about our own mental attitudes and feelings, often expressed in actions that create conflict with others. The difference between this teaching and the Lord's command to speak to someone who has trespassed against us, is that this time we cause the conflict.

Most people don't kill others in the physical sense, but killing involves many things that may not be physical, things that are much more common: anger at another person for some reason that exists only in our heads which leads to unprovoked attacks on another person. We can kill a person by harming their reputation through gossip or accusation, we can harm others by making them appear foolish for no reason. In each of the cases the Lord described, the person is diminished in the eyes of others. This is a more subtle form of killing others. Yet many times we feel justified in the things we say or do, it is not difficult to make excuses for why we are angry, and when conflict ensues, it is easy to blame the other person as the source of our anger.

Conflict is never good, but it can be useful if it leads to growth. The Lord told the crowd gathered on the mountain to hear Him to "reconcile" with those who we have injured in some way. We can only do this in steps. First it is important to see and acknowledge that at times we are not victims, but perpetrators. A second step is to reflect on the effect of what we said or did on others. The final step is to make peace with the person. To "reconcile" with them is the process of making peace.

Making peace is not always easy, it requires honest introspection and evaluation, it requires a willingness to let go of the thing in us that is causing the problem, it requires humility to apologize for

what we may have done or said, or how we did it. If reconciliation is to be real, we may need to work at it.

You may have noticed that this morning I have worked backwards through the Gospel of Matthew to find the Lord's teachings about dealing with conflict. In chapter 18 we read the Lord's instructions on how to act when conflict comes to us. In chapter 7 we read about the need to remove a beam from our own eyes to see clearly to remove the mote from someone else's eye. Finally in chapter 5 we are told to look inside ourselves to see what we have done cause another person harm. We began with the conflict outside of us and ended with ourselves as the source of conflict.

But what would happen if we reversed that order? If we approached life with an effort to not give others a reason to be angry with us? If we could approach the Lord's altar reconciled to those around us. This would take some self-examination; we would see the beam in our own eyes as a barrier to being able to work with others. As we let go of our self-concerns, so it becomes easier to interact with others, so that when someone does something to us, we do not respond with anger, but instead approach the other person with a firm intention to reconcile.

There are many conflicts in this world that we cannot control, especially the "greater wars" spoken of in Divine Providence. But there are conflicts, the "lesser wars" where we do have some control over, for we can control what we say and do and when we harmonize our feelings, thoughts and actions with what the Lord teaches, we will eventually have peace and experience the words of the Psalmist who wrote:

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

AMEN

Lessons

Psalm 133

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!

2*It is* like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.

3*It is* like the dew of Hermon,
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the Lord commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Matthew 5:17-26

17“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. **18**For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

19Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches people so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20**For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

21“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’

22But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.

23Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24**leave your gift there before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

25Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. **26**Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

Arcana Coelestia 9293. Gifts are like all a person's deeds, which in themselves are nothing but gestures, and regarded apart from the will are merely movements that are fashioned in various ways, and as it were jointed, not unlike the motions of a machine, and thus devoid of life. But a person's deeds regarded along with his or her will are not such motions but are forms of the will shown before the eyes; for deeds are nothing else than testifications of such things as belong to the will; and they also have their soul or life from the will.

And therefore the same can be said of deeds as of motions, namely, that there is nothing living in deeds except will, just as there is nothing living in motions except endeavor. That this is so, is also known to us; for one who is intelligent does not attend to another person's deeds, but only to the will from which, by which, and on account of which, the deeds come forth.

Nay, someone who is wise scarcely sees the deeds, but only the nature and amount of the will in them.

The case is the same with gifts, in that it is the will in these which the Lord looks at; consequently by the gifts offered to Jehovah—that is, to the Lord—are signified such things as are of the will, or of the heart. A person's will is what is called "heart" in the Word. From all this it is also evident how it is to be understood that everyone will receive judgment in the other life according to their deeds or works ([Matthew 16:27](#)); namely, that it will be according to those things which are of the heart, and from this of the life.

[2] That such things are signified by the gifts offered to Jehovah, is plain from the Word, as in the following passage:

If thou offer your gift upon the altar, and with this remember that your brother has something against you, leave there your gift before the altar, and go away; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer thy gift ([Matthew 5:23-24](#)).

Notes:

AE 746:6 That one who thinks ill of his neighbor without adequate cause, and turns himself away from the good of charity, will be punished lightly as to his soul, is signified by "Whosoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be liable to the judgment;"

- "to be angry," signifies to think ill, for it is distinguished from "saying Raca," and "saying, Thou fool."
- "Brother" means the neighbor, and also the good of charity,
- and "to be liable to the judgment" means to be examined and to be punished according to circumstances.

That one who from wrong thought slanders the neighbor, and thus despises the good of charity as of little value, will be punished grievously, is signified by "whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the council," for "to say Raca" signifies to slander the neighbor from evil thought, thus to hold the good of charity to be of little value, for "to say Raca" means to hold as useless and as of little value, and "brother" means the good of charity.

That one who hates the neighbor, that is, one who is altogether averse to the good of charity, is condemned to hell, is signified by "whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be liable to the hell of fire," to say "Thou fool" meaning to be altogether averse to, "brother" meaning the good of charity, and "the hell of fire" the hell where those are who hate that good and thence the neighbor.

These three describe three degrees of hatred:

1. the first is from evil thought, which is "to be angry,"
2. the second is from consequent evil intention, which is "to say Raca,"
3. and the third is from an evil will, which is "to say Thou fool."

All these are degrees of hatred against the good of charity, for hatred is the opposite of the good of charity. The three degrees of punishment are signified by "the judgment," "the council," and "the hell of fire;" the punishments for lighter evils are signified by "the judgment," the punishments for the more grievous evils, by "the council," and the punishments for the most grievous evils, by "the hell of fire."

AE 1012:3 The nearest sense of this commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," which is the spiritual moral sense, is that one must not hate his brother or neighbor, and thus not defame or slander him; for thus he would injure or kill his reputation and honor, which is the source of his life among his brethren, which

is called his civil life, and afterwards he would live in society as one dead, for he would be numbered among the vile and wicked, with whom no one would associate. When this is done from enmity, from hatred, or from revenge, it is murder. Moreover, by many in the world this life is counted and esteemed in equal measure with the life of the body. And before the angels in the heavens he that destroys this life is held to be as guilty as if he had destroyed the bodily life of his brother. For enmity, hatred, and revenge, breathe murder and will it; but they are restrained and curbed by fear of the law, of resistance, and of loss of reputation. And yet these three are endeavors towards murder; and every endeavor is like an act, for it goes forth into act when fear is removed. This is what the Lord teaches in Matthew: Ye have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be liable to the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother rashly shall be liable to the judgment; whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be liable to the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire (5:21-26).

AC 4903:2 That the Jewish nation were in the external without the internal, and therefore believed truth to be falsity, and falsity truth, **is evident from their teaching that it was allowable to hate an enemy; and also from their life in that they hated all who were not of their religiosity. They even believed that they were pleasing and serving Jehovah when they treated the Gentiles with barbarity and cruelty, exposing their bodies after they had been slain to be devoured by birds and wild beasts, cutting them in two with saws while alive, lacerating them with harrows and axes of iron, and making them pass through the brick-kiln (2 Sam. 12:31). Moreover, it was in accordance with their teachings to treat in almost the same way a companion who for any cause was declared an enemy.** Thus it is plainly evident that there was nothing internal in their religiosity. If anyone had then said to them that such things are contrary to the internal of the church, they would have replied that this was false. That they were merely in externals, were wholly ignorant of what the internal is, and led a life contrary to the internal, is plain also from what the Lord teaches in Matthew, chapter 5, verses 21 to 48.

Life 73 If thou art offering thy gift upon the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Be well-minded to thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt not come out thence, till thou hast paid the last farthing (Matt. 5:23-26). To be "reconciled to one's brother" is to shun enmity, hatred, and revenge; that it is to shun them as sin is evident. The Lord also teaches in Matthew:

All thing whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets (7:12);

thus that we should not do evil. He teaches the same in many other places. The Lord also teaches that to be angry with one's brother or the neighbor rashly, and to hold him as an enemy, is also to commit murder (Matt. 5:21-22).

AE 1015:2 Since hatred, which is to will to kill, is the opposite of love to the Lord and also of love towards the neighbor, and since these loves are what make heaven with man, it is evident that hatred, being thus opposite, is what makes hell with him. Nor is infernal fire anything else than hatred; and in consequence the hells appear to be in a fire with a dusky glow according to the quality and quantity of the hatred, and in a fire with a dusky flame according to the quantity and quality of the revenge from hatred.

¹³Since hatred and love are direct opposites, and since hatred in consequence constitutes hell with man, just as love constitutes heaven with him, therefore the Lord thus teaches:

If thou shalt offer thy gift upon the altar, and shalt there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming, offer thy gift. Be well disposed towards thine adversary whiles thou art in the way with him; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt not come out thence till thou hast paid the last farthing (Matt. 5:23-26).

To be delivered to the judge, and by the judge to the officer, and by him to be cast into prison, describes the state of the man who is in hatred after death from his having been in hatred against his brother in the world, "prison" meaning hell, and "to pay the last farthing" signifies the punishment that is called everlasting fire.

AE 325:9 If thou offer a gift upon the altar, and rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave the gift before the altar, and first be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming offer the gift (Matt. 5:23-24).

- "Offering a gift upon the altar" signifies all Divine worship, for the reason that Divine worship with that nation consisted chiefly in offering burnt-offerings and sacrifices, by which therefore all things of worship were signified (see The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, n. 214, 221). From

this it can be seen that "praying," or "supplicating," and "offering a gift upon the altar," have a like meaning, namely, worship from the good of love and charity.

AE 391:20 In Matthew: Jesus said, if thou shalt offer thy gift upon the altar, and shalt there remember that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave the gift before the altar, and go; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming offer thy gift (Matt. 5:23-24).

- "To offer a gift upon the altar" means in the spiritual sense to worship God, and to worship God means worship both internal and external, namely, from love and from faith, and thus from the life; this is meant because in the Jewish Church worship consisted chiefly in offering sacrifices or gifts upon the altar, and the chief thing is taken for the whole.

From this the meaning of these words of the Lord in the spiritual sense can be seen, namely, that **Divine worship consists primarily in charity towards the neighbor, and not in piety without that; "to offer a gift upon the altar" means worship from piety, and "to be reconciled to a brother" means worship from charity, and this is truly worship, and such as this is such is the worship from piety.** (On this see The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, n. 123-129; and in the work on Heaven and Hell, n. 222, 224, 358-360, 528, 529, 535; and above, n. 325.)

AE **661**. And shall send gifts one to another, signifies their consociation. This is evident from the signification of "to send gifts," as being to **be consociated by love and friendship through good will**; for gifts from such an affection and disposition bring together both the well-disposed as well as the ill-disposed; ... Because **gifts captivate the mind and consociate**, it was a custom in ancient times to give gifts to the priest and the prophet, as also to the prince and the king, when they were approached (1 Sam. 9:7, 8); and it was also a statute:

That they should not appear empty (that is, without a gift) before Jehovah, but in their feasts everyone should bring a gift according as he had been blessed (Exod. 23:15; 34:20; Deut. 16:16, 17). So too:

The wise men from the east brought gifts to the Lord just born, gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matt. 2:11);

according to the prediction in David (Ps. 72:10). So again:

The oblations upon the altar, which were sacrifices, and also the meal offerings and drink-offerings, were called gifts (Isa. 18:7; 57:6; 66:20; Zeph. 3:10; Matt. 5:23, 24; and elsewhere);

and this because **external gifts signified internal or spiritual gifts**, namely, such as go forth from the

heart, and thence are of the affection and faith; and as by these conjunction is effected, in the spiritual sense **"gifts" in reference to God signify conjunction, and in reference to men consociation.**