

HOW TO PROMOTE PEACE

Introduction

Do you want to know how to start a civil war? A classic example would be the tactics of the National Liberation Front, a terrorist group that operated in French-occupied Algeria in the early 1950's.

On November 1, 1954, the leader of the FLN, Ahmed Ben Bella, launched the campaign of ridding Algeria of French control. The National Liberation Front knew that they could not defeat the French army, so how would they go about achieving their goal?

The strategy to which they resorted was devilish. By means of terror and murder, they would eliminate the moderates on both sides (the pro-Arab French leaders and the pro-French Arab leaders who really wanted to work together for the good of all.) They would force the population to take sides: either with the FLN against the occupying French government, or with the French (and thereby be marked as an enemy of the FLN.)

The newly appointed French Governor-General, Jacques Soustelle, thought he could defeat these FLN terrorists by giving the Arab people genuine democracy and social justice. But the FLN systematically murdered the local leaders who sought to carry out Soustelle's liberal policy, both French and Arab. They strove hardest of all to kill those French administrators who loved the Arabs. It was at the funeral of one such victim that Governor-General Soustelle first used the word "revenge." (*Modern Times*, pp.496-499)

In contrast to the diabolical pursuit and promotion of strife, such as that of the FLN, the Word of God declares, "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*" (Rom. 12:18.) With this in mind, let us now give our attention to the next study from the Book of Proverbs on the subject, How to Promote Peace.

I. Promote Peace, by Recognizing the Awful Consequences of Strife (Proverbs 17:19; Proverbs 18:19)

He who loves strife loves transgression; he who builds a high gate invites destruction. (Prov. 17:19)

Strife and contention go hand in hand with transgression: contention is a form of transgression and it inevitably leads to more and greater transgression—the pattern is that of offense, followed by retaliation, followed by an escalation of the conflict.

We may also take note of Proverbs 17:14, "*Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; therefore, stop arguing before a dispute erupts.*" Just as a small hole in the

dam will allow the water to seep through, first slowly, then as a trickle, and finally as a gushing torrent, so, too, contention can grow to increasing degrees until it is out of control and lets loose a torrent of sinful conduct. The counsel of Scripture is to *“stop arguing [to cease from it and let the matter rest] before a dispute erupts.”* Consider the good example of brother Andrew and brother Thomas.

The story is told about two monks, Andrew and Thomas, who lived in a cave. They got along so well that not even a cross word passed between them. In fact, life was so harmonious that it seemed monotonous at times.

One day Andrew came up with an idea to break the boredom. “Let’s have a good quarrel,” he suggested, “like people in the outside world!” Thomas responded, “But we don’t have anything to argue about.” Andrew thought for a moment, and then suggested, “Let’s find a rock and place it on the ground between us. I’ll say, ‘This rock is mine!’ And you’ll say, ‘No, it isn’t, this rock is mine!’ Maybe that will get a good argument started.”

So, finding a rock, and placing it on the ground between them, Andrew exclaimed, “This rock is mine!” Thomas, pausing for a moment, responded meekly, “I think, brother, that the rock is mine.” “Oh, very well, then,” Andrew said agreeably, “if the rock is yours—take it.”

All too often Christians quarrel with one another over insignificant things. In many cases, their disputes could quickly vanish if one side unselfishly yielded to the desires of the other.

A sure cure for quarreling is to give honor and preference to one another. Two cannot quarrel when one will not. (*Our Daily Bread*, 7/13/90)

What causes contention? Among other things, stubbornness, misunderstanding (due to a lack of listening or a failure to give clear explanation of one’s actions, motives or desires,) or demanding our rights. But perhaps the chief cause is pride—wanting to win the argument and have the last word, or refusing to admit when we are wrong. Consider Proverbs 17:19b, *“he who builds a high gate invites destruction.”* “*Building a high gate*” may be a reference to the outward display of pride that refuses to dismiss an offense and “erects a barrier” that severs fellowship rather than seeking reconciliation and pursuing the way of peace; it is vanity, arrogance, and pride that is a chief cause of contention. Note Galatians 5:25-26, *“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk in line with the Spirit. ²⁶Let us not become conceited—provoking each other, envying each other.”*

An offended brother is harder to be won over than a fortified city; such disputes are like the barred gates of a castle. (Prov. 18:19)

This proverb is graphically portraying the difficulty of reconciling an offended brother and the strong separation and barrier that contention produces,

especially between close friends. Because of the deep bonds, a conflict is felt more acutely and therefore it is more difficult to reconcile: a trust has been broken; there is a sense of betrayal. With this in mind, let us give special heed to the Apostle Paul's admonition to the Romans, "*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification*" (Rom. 14:19.)

What are some ways by which we may promote peace and edification? First, cultivate a brotherly attitude:

Since you have, by obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love of your brothers, earnestly love one another from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22;) one of the great purposes of salvation is to live in a state of brotherly love (vs. 22a,) the command then follows to carry out this purpose in our lives (vs. 22b)

So then, I, the prisoner for the Lord, exhort you to walk in a way that is worthy of the calling for which you were called: ²walk with all humility and meekness, and with patience, bearing with each other in love, ³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

Second, cultivate a servant's attitude:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself. ⁴Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others. ⁵Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:3-5;) i.e., view yourself in the role of the servant and your brother in the position of the one to be served (such is the meaning of, "*consider others as occupying a higher position than himself*")

Third, cultivate a forbearing and forgiving spirit:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Col. 3:12-13)

II. Promote Peace, by Controlling Your Temper (Proverbs 29:22)

An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man commits an abundance of transgressions. (Prov. 29:22)

"An angry man stirs up strife." When you approach an already volatile situation in an angry spirit you are sure to make matters worse: it is like pouring gasoline on smoldering charcoal. Consider, also, Proverbs 15:18, "*A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger pacifies contention.*"

The proverb goes on to say, *“and a wrathful man commits an abundance of transgressions.”* As Proverbs 14:17 indicates, *“A quick-tempered man will do foolish things, and a crafty man is hated.”* When you lose your temper you also lose your reason and your long-range perspective. Later, when the flames of your anger have burned themselves out, when you calm down and return to your senses, you may regretfully survey the damage: hateful words that leave deep wounds; broken relationships cut off by deep and wide chasms; and stupid decisions or wicked actions that can never be undone.

When you surrender to your temper, remember what else you are surrendering: your reason and your long-range perspective. Remember, too, what you may well get in exchange: the painful consequences of foolish and sinful behavior that may last for a lifetime.

III. Promote Peace, by Avoiding a Greedy Spirit (Proverbs 28:25)

He who has a greedy spirit stirs up strife, but he who puts his trust in Jehovah shall be made fat. (Prov. 28:25)

If you possess and are possessed by a greedy spirit, you can expect to be a source of strife, or at least contribute to strife and contention. A greedy spirit will cause you to act selfishly, will motivate you to take advantage of other people, will make your life become self-centered and will cause you to sacrifice your relationship with others to reach your goals and satisfy your greed. Bear in mind the warning of Proverbs 15:27, *“He who is greedy for wealth brings trouble upon his own household, but he who hates bribes shall live.”*

Consider the striking contrast between a greedy spirit (that stirs up strife) and the spirit exhibited by Isaac:

Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, because the Philistines had plugged them up after the death of Abraham. He gave them the same names his father had given them. ¹⁹When Isaac’s servants were digging in the valley they discovered there a source of spring water. ²⁰But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen, saying, “The water belongs to us.” So Isaac named the well, “Esek” [Contention], because they contended with him. ²¹Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he named it “Sitnah” [Enmity]. ²²He moved on from there and dug yet another well. And they did not contend for it. So he named it “Rehoboth” [Room for us] declaring, “Now Jehovah has made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land.” (Gen. 26:18-22)

How could Isaac be so forbearing? To discover the answer, first consider the example of his father, Abraham:

Then Abram said to Lot, "I beg you, let there be no conflict between me and you, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. ⁹Is not the whole land before you? I ask you, please separate yourself from me. If you will go to the left, then I will go to the right. Or if you will go to the right, I will go to the left." (Gen. 13:8-9)

Second, consider the experience of Isaac's own life. Isaac willingly allowed himself to be made an offering unto the LORD:

Then they came to the place of which God had told him. There Abraham built the altar, and arranged the wood upon it. Then he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (Gen. 22:9-10)

Isaac received his life back again from God:

But the angel of Jehovah called to him out of heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham." And Abraham said, 'Here I am.'" ¹²Then he said, "Do not lay your hand upon the boy, neither do any harm to him" (Gen. 22:11-12a)

Once you have given up your life to Christ, it becomes so much easier to give up anything else. Once you have died to the world, you tend to look at the things of the world in a new light. Once you have experienced God's faithfulness, you tend to have a greater confidence in His promises. In the case of Isaac, he was aware of and he trusted in the promise the LORD had made to his father, Abraham:

After Lot had separated himself from him, Jehovah said to Abram, "Now lift up your eyes from the place where you are and look northward and southward and eastward and westward; ¹⁵because I will give to you and to your descendants forever all the land that you see." (Gen. 13:14-15;) this is the promise the LORD made to Abram after Abram had graciously offered Lot first choice of location in the Promised Land of Canaan

IV. Promote Peace, by Avoiding Gossip (Proverbs 26:20)

For lack of wood a fire goes out; and where there is no gossiper, quarreling stops. (Prov. 26:20)

By way of Illustration: Conrad Dobler, a former professional football player with a reputation for stirring up trouble, was featured in a T. V. commercial in which he would incite people to contention by playing the role of a whisperer. He would antagonize one man by telling him that his neighbor held an opposing view, he then would tell the neighbor that the first man was opposed to him. Then the two neighbors would confront one another and an angry strife would

ensue, while Conrad Dobler quietly slipped away. Have you ever witnessed this type of behavior? Have you ever been the victim of it? Have you ever incited it yourself?

Let us bear in mind the message of Proverbs 16:28, and refrain from such evil behavior: *“A perverse man scatters strife all around, and a whisperer separates intimate friends.”* Let us rather follow the admonition of the Psalmist: *“keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies.”*¹⁴ *Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it”* (Psl. 34:13-14.)

V. Promote Peace, by Minding Your Own Business (Proverbs 26:17)

A passer-by who troubles himself with a quarrel that is not of his concern is like someone who takes a dog by the ears. (Prov. 26:17)

You are out for a walk and you happen to see the neighbor’s dog sleeping in the sun. You sneak up on him and give his ears a good tug. What do you think is going to happen?

Once again you are out for an afternoon walk, this time you see your two neighbors arguing back and forth over their fence. Uninvited, you feel the impulse to become involved. But before you do, remember the previous episode with the dog.

The lesson of this proverb: it is not wise to thrust yourself into quarrels and conflicts, especially when your aid or opinion has not been solicited. The Apostle Peter warns, *“May none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer, nor as a troublemaker”* (1 Pet. 4:15.) Note, too, Proverbs 20:3, *“It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.”*

VI. Promote Peace, by Seeking and Accepting the Will of God (Proverbs 18:18)

Casting lots settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart. (Prov. 18:18)

By way of illustration: Every spring the National Basketball Association holds a lottery in which the eleven weakest teams draw lots to determine who will receive the first pick of the best of the graduating college players. It is the only way to conduct the business of the league in a fair and equitable way.

In Old Testament Israel the drawing of lots was employed as a means of settling controversies and determining the will of God. For instance, when it came to dividing the land of Canaan, the LORD gave the instructions, *“Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans ... Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs”*

(Num. 33:54.) The lot was also employed when the apostles sought to determine who would take the place of Judas:

... they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas ... and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take over the apostolic ministry, which Judas left ..." ²⁶Then they drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:23-26)

In employing the lot, the people of God were aware of the fact that the LORD sovereignly controlled the lot: *"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Jehovah"* (Prov. 16:33.) Consequently, it was a means of submitting a matter, (which men by themselves could not resolve with fairness and equity,) to the LORD for His direction and decision. Although we may not necessarily employ the lot as did Old Testament Israel, the principle is important to employ in our lives: submit a matter to God, seek His will, and accept His will (often determined by the outcome of the matter;) as opposed to striving for your own will to prevail. Bear in mind the words of the Apostle James:

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Do they not come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but do not get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. ⁷Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.... ¹⁰Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (Jam. 4:1-2,7,10)

Conclusion

Let us realize that the life of godly peace is itself one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit—it is another aspect of Christ's divine character that He is reproducing in us as His people: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, integrity, ²³meekness, self-control"* (Gal. 5:22-23.)

Bearing this in mind, let us give heed to the teaching of Scripture:

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" (Psl. 133:1)

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the LORD." (Heb. 12:14)

In reliance upon the Holy Spirit, let us seek to promote peace in our lives and in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.