

# ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

## BIBLE STUDY, 13/08/2008

### STUDY 14

## PRESERVATION OF CHRISTIAN LOVE AND PEACE AMONG BRETHREN

Matthew 5:23 – 26

Having made a comparison between the command not to murder and the inner motive and heart intention of hatred, Jesus now proceeds to lay down the course for reconciliation. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Reconciliation takes precedence of all other duties, even of offerings made to God. A very important teaching in these days, when men, by corrupt practices, by extortionate combinations, and by grinding the face of the poor, accumulate millions of naira and then attempt to placate God by bestowing a little of their pocket change upon colleges and missionary societies. The offering of unclean hands is an abomination. Jesus reminded that *if thou bring thy gift to the altar* without reconciling with the offended party, God will not receive the intended gift. Therefore if conflict exists between any two people, it is God's desire that they reconcile the conflict before attempting to give a gift or an act of service unto the Lord. Many people undoubtedly try to suppress the guilt of their sin by an outward act that they hope will please God in some way. Jesus commands that we leave our gifts before the altar and *first be reconciled* to our brother before we offer them. To be reconciled means to be brought back into fellowship or favour with our fellow man. Any degree of hostility, any hidden thought of envy would be the great separator between the believer and God. The Christian should learn that with the grace of God he should build more bridges of communication with his neighbour, rather than construct fences of protection. Having resolved the personal conflict, we have then but to return and perform the act of service unto the Lord. The performance of our duty to men does not free us from the obligation of direct service to God.

### 1. Preservation of Christian love and peace

Matthew 5:20–24; 18:15–17, 21–35; Ephesians 4:3, 31–32; 5:3; Psalm 133; Mark 11:25; Genesis 42:21–22; 50:15–17; Proverbs 25:9; Romans 12:17–18

*"Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest 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"*. Christ here drew a practical conclusion from what He had declared in Matthew 5:20–22, in which He enforces the duty of preserving Christian love and peace between brethren, and that if at any time a breach happens, we should labour for a reconciliation, by confessing our fault, humbling ourselves to our brother, begging his pardon, and making restitution, or offering satisfaction for wrong done in word or deed, according as the nature of the thing is. The words *"thy brother hath aught against thee"* clearly signify, "if you have done him some injury" or he has cause of complaint against you. If you have treated him in some way inconsistent with the fraternal relationship, if he be conscious that you have wronged him, then you must promptly seek to right that wrong, no matter what the cost may be to your pride or interests. It may be that you were guilty of what some would lightly dismiss as "only an outburst of temper," which you regretted

afterwards; nevertheless, peace has been disrupted, and God requires you to do everything in your power to lawfully restore it. But if thou are the party offended, there needs not this delay; if thou *have aught against thy brother*, make short work of it; no more is to be done but to forgive him, and forgive the injury.

## **2. Reconciliation before offerings**

Matthew 5:23–24; Isaiah 1:11, 15; Isaiah 58:5, 6; Jeremiah 7:9–10; Amos 5:21–24; Leviticus 6:2–6; Psalm 4:5, 26:6; I Corinthians 6:7–8; Matthew 23:23; I Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6

*"Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother."* It was as though He said, If thou comest to worship God in any way, either by prayer, hearing His Word, offering sacrifices of praise, or celebrating the Lord's supper, you must live in peace with your brethren, or your worship will be rejected. *Therefore we must not let the sun go down upon our wrath* any day, because we must go to prayer before we go to sleep; much less let the sun rise *upon our wrath* on a sabbath-day, because it is a day of prayer.

Love or charity is so much *better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifice*, that God will have reconciliation made with an offended brother before the gift is offered. Of old the Jews were guilty of this very thing. "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks. . . . And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear". Why? "Your hands are full of blood." While they cruelly oppressed their brethren, the worship they offered unto God was an abomination unto Him. So again in Isaiah 58:5, 6, we find Jehovah despising the religious fasts of Israel because they omitted those acts of mercy which He required, and instead were guilty of evilly treating their fellows.

The Lord charged the people with the same sins in the time of Jeremiah: "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely . . . and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name?". The performance of any outward service unto God is displeasing to Him if it be separated from unfeigned love of the brethren. To serve God acceptably we must perform not only the duties of the first table of the law, but also those of the second.

## **3. Agree with thine adversity**

Matthew 5:25 – 26; Proverbs 25:8; Matthew 18:28–30; Luke 12:58–59; Job 22:21; II Corinthians 5:20; Revelation 6:16–17; Matthew 13:41–42; Hebrews 2:14; II Peter 2:4 *"Agree with thine adversary"* is the same as *"be reconciled to thy brother,"* for "adversary" is a general name applied to all persons in common who have a controversy or are at variance with each other. "Agree with" the one you have provoked, seek restoration to his favour, by repairing the injury you have done him. An injured one, or a creditor, might at any time sue him, demanding that his case be tried in a magistrate's court. While on their way thither, there was still time to come to an amicable agreement between themselves, but once they appeared before the magistrate the matter would pass out of their hands, and be subject to the decision of the court, whose business it is that strict justice be impartially enforced.

*Agree with him quickly, whilst thou art in the way.* The great God is an Adversary to all sinners, he has a controversy with them, an action against them. It is our concern to *agree with him*, to acquaint ourselves with him, that we may *be at peace*. It is our wisdom to do this *quickly, while we are in the way*. While we are alive, *we are in the way*; after death, it will be too late to do it; therefore *give not sleep to thine eyes* till it be done. They who continue in a state of enmity to God, are continually exposed to the arrests of his justice, and the most dreadful instances of his wrath. Christ is the Judge, to whom impenitent sinners will be delivered; for *all judgment is committed to the Son*; he that was rejected as a Saviour, cannot be escaped as a Judge. It is a fearful thing to be thus turned over to the Lord Jesus, when the Lamb shall become the Lion. Angels are the officers to whom Christ will deliver them; devils are so too, having *the power of death* as executioners to all unbelievers. Hell is the prison into which those will be cast that continue in a state of enmity to God. Damned sinners must remain in it to eternity; they shall not *depart till they have paid the uttermost farthing*, and that will not be to the utmost ages of eternity: divine justice will be for ever in the satisfying, but never satisfied.