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Presentation Transcript
Go To Your Brother
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Today we're going to talk about getting along with fellow Christians. There's a saying, "You can pick your friends, but you can't pick your relatives." If a friend does something wrong, we can move away from them. Friendship is *not* a committed relationship. Sometimes people do things that we didn't expect and they're hurtful to us. So live and learn. Choose better friends next time, or learn to be a better friend, next time, yourself, as the case may be. Sometimes *we're* the one that is the offending party. But family...well, that's a whole different ballgame. If our relatives do us wrong, we can move away from them, like you would a friend, but we will always be connected to our family by genetics. That's the way God designed it. Our family is always supposed to be there for us, and we're always supposed to be there for them. With family, it is necessary to *all* we can to resolve issues. And it's like that with our fellow church members as well.

Look with me at a scripture that talks about that. It's in John 17:11. Jesus has just given the new Passover symbols of bread and wine to the disciples. He's washed their feet. He knows He's going to die and be separated from them for a time. And so He's praying for them.

John 17:11 – *For I am no longer going to be visible in the world. They'll continue in the world while I return to You. Holy Father, guard them as they pursue this life that You conferred as a gift through Me, so they can be one heart and mind.*

God wants us, as His church, through the commonality of the Spirit, to be of one heart and mind – unified. Once we make a commitment to Jesus Christ, we are also connected by the Holy Spirit to *all* the other members of the church, which Christ tells us is like His own body. We're told that all the members of the body have a function. Each one of us is placed in the body, just the way God wants us, for a specific role.

You know, our body has eyes, and it has toes, and it has fingers, and a liver, and all these body parts do different things. The Church of God is just like that in eyes of God. He's placed each one of us in the body to do something special that He's set for us to do. Paul tells us, "God is building us, as a church, up into a holy temple." That's another analogy. The temple is no longer a building, but people that will make up the New Jerusalem – the Church of God, the body of Christ, the mother of us all, the holy temple. And each of us is *way* more important to God than we can ever imagine – not because we're great or have anything to offer God, but because of what He intends to do *with* us, *for* us and *to* us.

When God started the New Testament church, as recorded in Acts 2, He intended the church to be not only the vehicle for spreading His message of salvation, but also the unified, strife-free, safe, warm place, where Christians could grow up and mature – a nurturing place. Actually, those two functions – nurturing and evangelism – work together. If your congregation is a unified, safe, warm place, it's much more likely to grow. The warmth and unity of the congregation is one of the most important aspects of evangelism or church growth. The world is a cold, disconnected, chaotic place. If a congregation is warm, unified and focused on mission, it *draws* people. Once drawn, they are nurtured to maturity and to service. They get excited about it and tell others. It's a circle.

So let's look in 1 Corinthians 1:10. Paul said:

1 Corinthians 1:10 – *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*

I was talking to a friend, recently, who went to the Feast of Tabernacles up in Colorado. We were both deploring the division among the Church of God there, evidenced by so many different festival sites. It would be better for the brethren if everybody could get together. All it would take is if everyone would agree to talk about what we could all agree on, instead of pushing our own divisive agendas. It's only for eight days. Give us a break! And you know who is the real problem in all this. It's the leadership! Of course, they want to have control and influence. I'm pleased to say that on the gulf coast of Florida, an organization, called Common Faith Network, has been making an effort to unify the Church of God festival – at least, in that area – and has met with some success in 2013 - harmony through focusing on what the Holy Spirit provides, which is unity in Christ. But that's easier said than done for us.

The church started up as one unified group – you can read about it in the first four to five chapters of Acts – but very soon, there were divisions over anything and everything – from different beliefs to hurt feelings. We don't get to pick the people who are in the church with us. God's people come from all different races and cultures. They come from families that are vastly different from our own. We came to God with varied values and styles of living. Some few are rich. Some are poor. Most are in-between. All these differences cause

problems for us, as we attempt to live in unity of the Spirit. It's easier to focus on the differences we have than on the unifying factors provided by the Holy Spirit.

If carefully placed people in the body are run off from the body by other body parts, it's like causing an amputation to Christ's own body – like chopping off one of His toes, or putting out one of His eyes – serious business! And, if it is not serious to us, it certainly *is* to Jesus Christ and God the Father. God wants us to be an example of His way of life in the church – loving and unified – so that people, who are not a part of it, will see what He is like. He wants people to look at us and know that we know that we are the way we are because of God's power to change people and because of His love.

So unity in love and fellowship is one of those areas where there's no hiding – no faking it. Here's one of those places where the rubber meets the road. We either get along or we don't. We either are kind or we're not. We're either fair or we're not. We either push our own agenda above others or we listen to them – one or the other. You can't do both. We're loving or we're not. We're selfish or we're not. Paul said, “We can do all kinds of good works” – vacuum the church during the week, clean the toilets, give money to the poor, look good – come to church dressed up – “but, if we don't have love for each other, all the other stuff is like the prayers of the pagans, who let wind chimes pray for them in the breeze” – completely useless.

Knowing that we would have problems with unity and love, God has given us instructions to preserve the unity and love of the members of the church. These instructions are very hard for us, because we're prideful, arrogant, self-absorbed, committed to our own will, rather than God's, and always wanting to be right. So before we look at these rules for fellowship, remember Proverbs 28:9.

Proverbs 28:9 – *If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer his prayer is an abomination.*

God gives us rules. If we ignore them and then want God to bless us, He can't. The way of blessings is that narrow road traveled by the few who obey Him. Let's look at that same scripture in the modern translation, *The Message*.

Proverbs 28:9 – *God has no use for the prayers of people who won't listen to Him.*

Once, when I was a child, a moth was flitting around me and bugging me. And after a while, it landed on the table right in front of me. And I just put my little finger on its wing, pinning it to the table. Sounds kind of mean, when I say it out loud now, but when I did it, I didn't think of it as a mean act. I just wanted that moth to stop bugging me. I wasn't trying to kill it or even hurt it. Well, that moth flopped and flopped and flopped and flopped and flopped, but it couldn't get away, as long as I had it pinned to the table.

This proverb we just read is just like God's finger on us. We can flop all we want. We can pretend we're doing what God wants. We can kid ourselves into believing we're obeying God. We can force our agendas on others. We can ignore that we're not doing that. We can get stubborn and flop, flop, flop, flop. But the fact is, unless we do what God's tells us to do in this matter – in the matter of unity among the brethren – we're on our own.

When we get crosswise with others, God wants us to fix it, so there can be a unified spirit in His church. It's only then that the body will give off the right vibe. Have you ever walked into a group and you know something just isn't quite right there? I remember my wife and I went on vacation, in northern California, one time. We were driving and camping. And we came to this little town and everywhere we went – we went to a grocery store, we went to a restaurant – people would give us the sideways eye, you know – you know how that looks? And we got this very uncomfortable feeling while we were there. Later, when I was home, I was reading that that was one of the major pot growing areas in the United States, and I wondered if that had anything to do with it. We might have looked like feds to them – you know, paranoia among those who are lawbreakers.

So when there is a problem with someone, the tendency is to go talk to someone else about them – just to get advice – right? You know how we do that. The problem there is, that the other person we talk to often goes and talks to the person we were talking about and tell them that we're upset with them. That's called triangulation. You have three points there – you, the person you're upset with, and the person you went to. And there's crosstalk, but it's just back and forth. Everybody talks to everybody but the two who are not communicating. So we try to draw an ally in to be on our side. We talk to our ally. Our ally talks to our enemy. Our enemy talks to our ally. And then our ally tells us what our enemy said. That's just gossiping! Pretty soon, it's even worse than it was before. A serious misunderstanding has erupted and blown emotions all out of control. The first place we turn to for an ally, if we want to do it God's way, is to *God*.

Rick Warren, in *The Purpose-driven Life*, talks about vertical venting. We vent *up* to God, not out to others. Some of the psalms are an example of going to God when we have problems with others. David was pretty direct in his statements to God about his enemies. So lay it out for Him. Tell Him how you feel, what your feelings want you to do, how unfair it is. Ask God to give you wisdom and patience to see clearly. Ask Him to help you learn what you need to do.

You know, people come to my counseling office and they ask me if their story has upset me, or if I have ever heard something as bad as their situation. And I tell them, "Nothing surprises me anymore." I've just heard so much. What they're going through is common experience for people who have been subjected to what they have been subjected to. And God is way ahead of me. So just lay it out there. You can't shock God. Tell God you know you only have your perspective to work with and that you need to see it from the other person's side as well. You know, it takes two to tango. There's never been a fight with one

person. So ask God to help you see your part of the problem. If something has been taken from you, ask God to restore it. Even if the person who took it from you doesn't give it back, God can.

I mediated a conflict once between a contractor and one of his customers, both of whom were in my congregation. After the mediation, I didn't hear from either one of them for quite a while. So several months later, I asked the contractor what had happened. He told me that he had agreed to do everything the person, who was picky and unreasonable in his mind, wanted, even though it was not in the contract. And he did it at no charge. I told him that I didn't think that that was necessary. He said that he knew it wasn't, but he didn't want to upset the man, even if he was unreasonable. So he just ate it. He fixed it for free. But he said, "The very day I decided to take that approach, I got a call from a new customer that will keep my crew busy for the next year. And I stand a good chance of making a lot of money from that deal. So I'm a happy guy, in spite of my unhappy experience with my brother."

James gives us some hard words to think about. Let's read that in *The Message*, too.

James 4:1 – *Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again! They come about because you want your own way and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'll be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way. You're cheating on God. If all you want is your own way, flirting with the world every chance you get, you end up enemies of God and His way.*

Pretty harsh, isn't it? But we do that. We want to think we're right and so the stuff that we believe, for example, is right, no matter what, and other people need to be taught that, and let's just tamp it down their throats.

Let's look at another scripture. It's in Matthew 5:23 – more of Jesus' words.

Matthew 5:23 – *So, if you are offering your gift at the altar – okay, you go to church – right? – you're making your sacrifice, which is your time that you spend observing the Sabbath and going to church – and there remember that you have a brother that has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go – get out of church immediately and go to the person that you know has a grudge against you. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.*

Doesn't this tell us how important this is to God? Notice, too, it doesn't do any good to do religious things until the relationship is restored. Apparently – from the Proverb we read –

that would include praying. So go to the person you have the problem with or who is having a problem with you. Don't put it off. Take the initiative.

Let's look at another thing God tells us to do. It's how we go to the person that's important – what we're trying to accomplish. We're told, in the book of Exodus, that God looked down on children of Israel, when they had been slaves in Egypt for nearly four hundred years, and He wanted to save them. Do you remember the very first thing He did? It's in Exodus 3:7.

Exodus 3:7 – *The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people, who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry, because of their task masters. I know their suffering."*

So God investigated the situation. And He listened to what the children of Israel had to say. And after those two things – after seeing and hearing – He *knew* their sufferings. He could empathize. He could understand their situation. And He understood their situation because He observed and listened. You know, we're such self-centered people. We think about what we should say when we think about a confrontation. It never crosses our mind that we don't have the whole story. We never think about listening to them. We just want to say what *we* want to say. We don't realize that when we do that, it makes the other person feel like we're just trying to attack them, instead of being interested in solving the problem.

Stephen Covey, in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, put it this way: "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." This is the missing piece in human communication. It's so powerful, it's almost like magic.

I was talking to a fourteen-year-old boy once, who was telling me that his father never understood him and that he had just given up trying to explain how he feels. He said, "He always tries to fix me before he even knows what to fix. It's so discouraging." Instead of blurting out, "Your father's a typical guy – get in, fix it, get out. He doesn't know. He can't fix you...." You see, if I had said that, I would be doing the same thing his father was doing – trying to fix him. But instead, I asked him if he'd ever seen the movie, *A Christmas Story*. And he looked at me with sort of a question mark on his face and said, "Everyone's seen that one." And I asked him, "Did you remember the scene where the little guys were confronted in the ally by the two bullies?" Yes, he understood that. And I said, "Everyone but Schwartz ran off." And he nodded. And I said, "He just turned around and put his arm up behind his back in a hammer-lock position, because he'd had that happen to him so many times. He knew what was coming next. He knew there was no use to run and he just gave up." And the boy looked at me, and a smile crept across his face, and he said, "Yes, exactly like that." So he was experiencing what it felt like to be understood. Now he can really talk to me, because he knows I get it.

So, instead of saying to our antagonist, "I came to talk to you today," say, "I came to hear your side of the issue." And then, don't make excuses or try to defend yourself until you

know what they think and how they feel about the issue. You know, until you know how *they're* thinking and feeling – even if you don't agree with them – you'll never get any resolution.

So ask questions for clarification. Repeat back what you heard in your own words and then ask if you got it right. That's probably one of the most important things you can do. Once they know you understand, then it's okay to explain your side of things. But don't say it in a judgmental way. You're trying to get agreement from people, so why would you say attacking things – put down kinds of things – that you *know* they're not going to agree with?

Avoid words like *always* and *never*. “You're always late.” Well, that's not ever true – or maybe I should say, “It's never true” – to break my own rule. And they will not agree with it, so don't say, “You're always late.” Don't say, “You never show up on time.” That's the same thing. Say, “It seems to me...,” or “The way I took was...”

So, when you're repeating back what you hear, leave yourself out of it. It's only about them and what they're feeling. And when you talk about your side of things, talk only about yourself.

When you're talking about yourself, instead of saying, “You were thirty minutes late,” say, “It seems to me that we agreed that you would be here thirty minutes earlier than you were.” You're talking about what you understood then, right? If you're trying to cause agreement, say things that they can agree with while still remaining true to yourself.

We've covered all of this before in other presentations, but mostly they were given on audio, before we started up on YouTube. So you might want to go to our Website and do a search. There's a search button on the front page on liferesource.org, where you can find other stuff about conflict resolution, how to be empathic – things like that.

Another thing to do – most of the time, when we engage in confrontation, it's to make ourselves heard, to get our way, to win, to push our agenda down somebody's throat. We really want other people to just agree with us, but the way it feels to them is like we're pushing it down their throat. That is *not* God's way! If you think you can go into a conflict resolution with that attitude, forget it!

Let's read Philippians 2, 1 through 4:

Philippians 2:1-4 – *If you gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if His love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care, then do me a favor. Agree with each other. Love each other. Be deep spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front. Don't sweet-talk your way*

to the top. Put yourself aside and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourself long enough to lend a helping hand.

I know someone who is kind of like water in your hands – a coworker from several years ago – you know, when you go to the sink, and you use your hands as a cup to drink water out of? Well, unless you hold your hands really tight, that water will just find a way to leak out, won't it? It's going to go with gravity every time. Working with this person was like trying to hold water in your hands. If there was a way around you, through you, over you, she would do that. She was on a mission to get her way. And she really didn't care how she affected others, because she was so self-centered. You know, in working with her, if I just relaxed for a second, she was going to get where she wanted to go, because she had to be withstood at every point. You couldn't relax for a second. While she's getting her way with people, she's also accruing a deep well of ill will and distrust among others. That's what creates the bad vibe at church.

People who operate this way are so self-oriented they think things are going well, because they keep getting their way. I mean, that's all that matters, right? They don't see the affect their having in other people, because they generally don't care. It's all about them. This kind of approach usually leaves people isolated in the end. And, in the church, it corrodes the loving, warm vibe that we try to create. It turns us into a bad example, rather than an example of love and the unity that the Father and Jesus Christ share.

If, on the other hand, we go to our brother *to understand*, to heal bad feelings, to make amends, to apologize where we can, to make peace, to take the high and holy road, then that not only restores the vibe, but it puts the person that does that – hopefully you – in a very special category.

The pinnacle of Godly attitudes is the seventh beatitude taught to the disciples by Jesus, when He first instructed them about success with God. He told them, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.”*

Well, that's it for today. Check back in two weeks. We'll be starting a new series, *Unlocking Your Full Potential*. Don't miss it. You're going to be surprised.