

Doctrine of Spiritual Lessons from the General Conflicts of Life

1. Conflicts have to take place for the purpose of spiritual examination and approval. *1 Corinthians 11:18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*
2. When the pressures of life come, and a conflict surfaces, God is often more interested in the reaction than the initial action.
3. By interpersonal conflict(s) God teaches His people spiritual lessons. Only the Holy Spirit can crystallize precisely what God is trying to communicate in a given situation. Sometimes the Lord is pleased to reveal what His stated purpose is, but not always. For example, as far as the record shows Job never knew he was part of an angelic conflict to test his loyalty. Nevertheless, Job was tested for the purpose of approval and came forth as gold. His reactive words and example have become a source of inspiration to countless over the centuries. Many a heart has said during dark days of the soul, *“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 15:13).*
4. Without trying to usurp the place of the Holy Spirit it can be noted that in most conflicts there are general lessons that can be learned to include the following.
 - God would have His people learn afresh how depraved their own human heart is without exception. Saul of Tarsus was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. In his own estimation he was a righteous person, fair and just in all that he said and did. Before the Law he was blameless. Then one day the Law of the Lord revealed to his heart his sin of covetousness. *“Sin revived, and I died,”* said Saul. In one brief shining moment he saw the true sad state of his heart. He saw his inward corruption and it slew him.

This spiritual experience is not unique. It happened to Isaiah when he went into the temple. Isaiah had a sudden insight into his own heart and cried out, *“Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5).*

In like manner Peter was in a boat when he received that horrible insight into his soul and cried out, *“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8).*

To get a clear sight of how desperate the human heart can be is the beginning of spiritual knowledge. However, it takes certain conditions for righteous people to see just how unrighteous they might be in the sight of God who does not look on the outside but looks upon the heart. It is one thing to admit theoretically the doctrine of human depravity; it is another reality to experience it and cry out, *“I am a sinful person O Lord. Father, forgive me.”*

God will help His children to discover, in a painful way, whether or not they are a smitten sinner in need of mercy and thus willing to show it to others, or in their spirit they are a Pharisee, self-righteous to the core. *Luke 18:10 Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. 12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

- God would have His people learn painfully and emotionally the end result of sin is death. Death in the *Bible* is not only the cessation of activity but the separation of two entities. In physical death the body ceases to function and is separated from the soul. The body returns dust to dust and ashes to ashes while the soul wings its way to its maker. However when there is a death of the soul there is not only the cessation of friendly and intimate behavior but the separation of hearts which is emotionally dramatic and traumatic. It was meant to be, for love has been wounded. *Psalms 35:14 I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother. 15 But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not:*
- God would have His people learn they cannot change others until they change themselves. *Matthew 7:3 And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? 4 Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? 5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*
- God would have His people learn not to put their trust in the flesh but in Himself. People in general, courts in particular, lawyers as a whole prove to be a broken reed, which, when leaned upon will pierce the hand with a wound. *Isaiah 36:6 Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him. Psalms 7:1 O Lord my God, in thee do I put my trust: save me from all them that persecute me, and deliver me:*
- God would have His people learn they cannot assert their will or power over others. *Mark 10:42 But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43 But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 44 And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 45 For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

- God would have His people not return railing for railing. *1 Peter 3:9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.*
- God would have His people learn not to worry about matters beyond their control. *Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek :) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*
- God would have His people put no confidence in the world (the courts), the flesh (the will to power) or the devil (by the casting of curses or spells) but to use His way (gospel terms) to settle disputes. *1 Corinthians 6:2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?*
- God would have His people learn to establish priorities. *Matthew 6: 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*
- God would have His people invest His financial resources entrusted to them in advancing the gospel. *2 Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*

God knows how to collect time owed Him as well as resources. When national Israel did not let the land rest according to the sabbatical law for 490 years, God sent the Jews into a 70 year exile in Babylon. *2 Chronicles 36:20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: 21 To fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

- When Ananias and Sapphira pretended they had given all to the church but kept back a portion misrepresenting what they could give they were judged for lying to the Holy Spirit. When time and resources are not properly directed God will make sure His people do not enjoy either. Limited resources will be further squandered on meaningless pursuits.
- God would have His people learn to judge themselves before they judge the motives and intentions of others. *1 Corinthians 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*
 - God would have His people learn the exceeding sinfulness of sin. One reason why hell is described as a bottomless pit is because there are depths to hell which are deeper still. Anger turns to wrath and wrath to hatred. Hatred turns to soul murder if not physical murder and that in turn leads to damnation. *Mark 11:26 But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*
 - God would have His people be like Christ not only in His life but in His death to self. *Matthew 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. 25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*
 - God would have His people be more humble about what they will and will not do in the future and the setting of dates and deadlines. *James 4:14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. 16 But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.*
 - God would have His people learn a new definition of sin. *James 4: 17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*
 - God would have His people treat others as they would like to be treated. *Matthew 7:12 Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*
 - God would have people learn that He is interested not only in what is done but the way something done; not only in what is said but the motive which drives the soul. Unfortunately a motive rarely remains pure, noble and single. King Saul wanted to be a good king. But then his single motive became mixed and then corrupted until in the end he justified gospel disobedience with an impressive rational argument until confronted by God's prophet who asked, *"What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed"* (1 Samuel 15:14-15).

In context Samuel did not argue with king Saul but waited upon the Lord for an answer to the king's rationale for gospel disobedience. Sometimes that is all the prophets of God can do. Just listen and wait for the Lord to address the issue of concern.

- God would have His people learn that repentance is a divine gift which, while rarely sought might be granted or given in grace. *Acts 11:18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.* It is when the soul sees the heart being hardened it should be the most concern for "*the same sun which melts the butter can harden the clay.*" The same gospel which brings sorrow to one can bring confirmation of a self righteous condemnation to another. Let every one who would be saved experience a tender conscience haunted by its failures and hounded by heaven.
5. There are other lessons God will show to the person who cares. *James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*
 6. A word of warning must be given. There are individuals to whom God will not speak.
 - God will not speak to the proud.
 - God will not speak to the self righteous.
 - God will not speak to those who refuse correction and instruction in righteousness.
 - God will not speak to the willful and the obstinate.
 7. As there are individuals to whom the Lord will not speak so there are individuals to whom He will communicate.
 - God will speak to the poor in spirit.
 - God will speak to those who are spiritually hungry.
 - God will speak to those who are thirsting after righteousness.
 - God will speak to the broken hearted.
 8. How will God speak?
 - God will speak primarily through His Son Jesus Christ.
 - God will speak through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
 - God will speak through His Word which is why *Scripture* reading is so vital.
 - God will speak through His pastors and teachers.
 - God will speak through His church, the fellowship of the saints.