

Biblical Dynamics of Human Relationships 10

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[0 : 00] Ah, yes, the hardness of heart. It is the culprit behind so many heartaches and heartbreaks.

And you have heard me say a number of times over the years that the only thing wrong with this world is the way people treat one another. And because of our morally fallen humanity, we are all endowed with self-centeredness.

We needn't work at being selfish. Comes automatically. But we do need to work at being unselfish. And our self-centeredness, which is part and parcel of all humanity, yes, it even includes Christians because we still have the flesh with us.

And our self-centeredness dwells in our flesh. That is, in our fleshly human nature. We will not be rid of it until we exit this body in physical death or until the Lord returns and changes us.

[1 : 12] In the twinkling of an eye. And it is our self-centeredness that leads to often speaking and doing things to one another that we ought not to say and do.

These inflict hurts and wounds or offenses that we inflict upon one another.

And often it occurs between individuals. It may involve whole families or larger groups, including even political parties.

Or, for that matter, it can involve entire nations that offend one another through their actions or through their deeds.

All human conflict is born out of offenses committed in word or deed. These are the only two ways we have of hurting each other.

[2 : 17] Things we say and things we do. But, as I've said, they have proved to be adequate. We don't need any other avenue. These two serve us very well.

Offenses unresolved results in injured relationships. Injured relationships result in emotional distancing between the offended and the offender.

Offenses are often of a mutual nature when both parties are the offended and the offender. The frequency and the seriousness of offenses determines the extent of the emotional distancing that separates them.

These are made up of things all the way from minor tiffs that people have, just little petty spats, to major mayhem and everything in between.

And whatever they are, from the minor tiff to the major mayhem, they can and should be resolved so that the injured relationship can be salvaged, mended, and maintained, rather than simply discarded.

[3 : 35] As is often the case with divorce or the termination of other long-term, once-good relationships. It needs to be emphasized that while offenses are always at the base of our broken relationships, they are not actually the culprit that does them in.

Human relationships can be very resilient and can sustain many major and minor offenses if only the offended and the offender will implement the necessary steps toward the God-provided resolution.

Human relationships. The relationship doesn't have to come to an end. It doesn't have to be broken permanently. But herein lies the rub.

If you want to know why relationships are not salvaged, why people are unable to kiss and make up or shake hands and make up or restore the relationship so that there is reconciliation, If you want to know why that doesn't happen, it's always because of just one thing.

Always. No exception. And that is the hard-heartedness of which the scriptures speak, either on the part of the one who was offended or on the part of the offender.

[5 : 10] In either case, the resolution will not be forthcoming and the distancing will remain intact. Often, as a result of the offense, the offended party is given to extreme hurt and anger.

And they do not want a resolution. They don't even want to consider a resolution. And their thinking is, I've been hurt too badly, too deeply, too often.

I don't even want to think about forgiveness. I don't even want their apology. I just want out. And we've all seen that kind of scene played out time and time again.

Hardness of heart is nothing more than human stubbornness and anger that results from having offended or being offended.

And this prevents the steps toward resolution from being taken. And in each of these cases, there is always the injection of feelings.

[6 : 21] Feelings are really powerful. And they're really important. And they are with all of us. And no one would suggest doing away with feelings. But sometimes our feelings are more detrimental than they are anything.

Because the anger we feel or the hurt we feel over having been offended may be so great that we allow it to dominate our intellect.

And hear me well, especially young people. Nearly every time there is a contest between feelings or emotions and intellect.

That is your ability to think and to rationally reason. Whenever emotions and intellect conflict, emotions almost always win.

And that's a shame. Because if a cooler head will prevail. If the intellect will be brought into play.

[7 : 35] If reason and logic will be brought to the fore. And dwelt there long enough. You can use them to overcome the very real hurts and feelings that you have.

And no one is denying them. And no one is saying, you shouldn't feel like that. You feel the way you feel. And you hurt the way you hurt. But what is required for reconciliation and restoration, what is required to salvage the relationships, is for the individual, the offender, and the offended, to allow the reasoning, logic process, and the application of the biblical principles involved, to take first place.

Rather than give first place to the emotions and feelings. This is almost always why relationships end. Our emotions and feelings are very real and very raw sometimes.

And just the pain is excruciating from some of the ways we are hurt by people. And it leads us to say, based on what I'm feeling, based on the misery, based on the heartache that I have, I don't even want to talk to them.

I don't want to see them. Reconciliation is out of the question. I don't ever want to see them again as long as I live. And these are very real feelings. They are very human.

[9 : 07] And we are all capable of them. But for the believer, that is the exercising of an option to which you are not entitled, scripturally.

You are not entitled. Oh, you are entitled to feel the way you feel. God isn't saying, don't hurt. God isn't saying, don't feel that way. God is saying, even though that hurt is real and deep, I want you to put into practice what you know you ought to do, regardless of how you feel.

That's a tall order. That's a real tall order. But that's what love really is. Love does not operate on the basis of the way you feel.

Did you get that? Biblical love is not energized by the way you feel.

Biblical love is to be energized by what you know and apply. It is an intellectual thing, not an emotional or a feeling thing.

[10 : 25] And emotions and feelings may very well and often do accompany doing the right thing. But that which empowers us to do the right thing is the truth you know and the Spirit of God to energize you and enable you to do it.

So often, we don't want to put ourselves in the position where we want to be available to the Spirit of God to energize us to do anything, especially if it has something to do with forgiving that rat.

And that's emotion talking. That's feelings talking. That's not calm, cool, biblical logic talking. Now, for the world, that's all you can expect from them.

They operate almost entirely on if it feels good, then it must be okay. And this is a principal reason why relationships of people living in the world at large are in such shambles.

And they are encouraged to operate that way through everything you see on the media and Hollywood and all the rest of it.

[11 : 44] It's all shallow, feeling, emotion oriented. No depth, no stability, no hard, tough love. Just go with your feelings.

And if you as a believer do that, you will experience a lifestyle that is just as miserable and just as wretched and just as lacking and just as unfulfilling as the world.

Because you're using their model. But as a believer, you don't have to do that. And as a believer, you can't justify doing that.

You do really march to a different drummer. And this one enables us to provide tough love. The hardness of the heart. The hardness of the heart is related to the way you feel.

Let's return to that passage in Matthew 18 for a moment, if we may. The hardness of the heart feels entirely justified in being unwilling to entertain even the possibility of resolution.

[12 : 53] The hardness of the heart is nothing more than human stubbornness and anger resulting from having offended or being offended.

This prevents the steps toward resolution from being taken. And Jesus said that Moses made provision for divorce to occur.

That if a man and woman unable to live together any longer, provision is made for divorce, but it needs to be accompanied by a legal act, a writ or a paper of divorcement so that it is legal in the society.

And the disciples asked our Lord the question, well, why does Moses make this provision?

And of course it wasn't Moses who made it, it was God who made it. God made the provision for divorce. And yes, the book of Malachi tells us that God hates divorce.

[14 : 03] And if you're wondering why God hates divorce, it's always for the same reason that God hates anything. God hates anything and everything that hurts people.

Because God loves people. And divorce hurts. Hurts people. Hurts a lot. I don't care who wanted the divorce or who didn't want the divorce or what the grounds were or what the circumstances were.

You cannot have a divorce of a marriage without pain. Heartache. It's impossible. Because two lives cannot be intertwined and be torn apart without a great deal of pain.

Maybe it's a marriage that should have never taken place. So you get a divorce. But it's still painful. It still hurts. And this is why God hates divorce. But he has made provision for it.

Why would he do that? Jesus said, because of the hardness of heart. And what this means is, God, having created us with volition, having created us with a capacity to choose, having created us with the ability to will something, He does not step in, in the midst of a crisis, and overwhelm our volition, so that we are powerless to do anything other than the right thing.

[15 : 38] God will let you have a hard heart. Sometimes people almost give you the impression that God is obligated to just move in and soften a hard heart, so that it will be pliable.

And do you know, sometimes it appears that God in His grace does that, but He has no obligation to do that. Let me put it this way. God is not obligated to prevent even Christians from destroying themselves, from bringing heartache or disaster upon themselves.

God is not obligated, nor does He promise to step in and prevent anything that would hurt you. If He were to do so, He would have to deny and take from us the very volition that He has given us, the power to make choices.

It is a solemn, solemn obligation that we have, the ability to make choices. Choose well.

Our choices always have consequences. And any time we are confronted with a situation, as an offender, and we need to apologize to someone and ask for their forgiveness, the only thing that will prevent us from doing that is the hardness of heart.

[17 : 17] We would be embarrassed. Our ego would be bruised. We would have to admit that we were wrong. And that does our ego no good.

So, we deny it. We try to justify it. We try to make excuses for it. We try to... All kinds of... That's the hardness of heart. That's the stubbornness of the individual.

To repent for what they have done. And ask an apology. The only thing that keeps us from doing that is our will. If we are on the receiving end of the hurt, the only thing that will keep us, the only thing that will prevent us from accepting an apology and being willing to say, I forgive you, is the hardness of heart.

We don't want to do that. Because we want them to have to live with the guilt of the hurt that they inflicted on us.

It's our way of paying them back by saying, No, I won't forgive you. Live with that! Isn't that something?

[18 : 31] And do you know, there are numerous cases that can be documented all throughout the world. That there are people, and I dare say there are undoubtedly Christians among them, although we may be hard-pressed to understand that, but I'm satisfied that there are people who hate so deeply and are so revenge-oriented and so unforgiving they will actually take their own life.

Now that is a hardened heart. And in doing so, they may leave a note behind to the extent, See what you drove me to.

My death is your fault. Now live with that. All that is, is retaliation and revenge and an unforgiving spirit.

Now granted, there are multiple reasons why someone would take their own life. And what I have just given you is merely one of many. And sometimes there is mental deficiency and instability involved where the individual is simply not responsible.

And they may take their own life or injure themselves in some other way. But all of this that I've just mentioned comes from a hardened heart and a desire to retaliate to get even.

[20 : 22] And the idea is they want that person to suffer pain for the rest of their life over the fact that they took their life.

That is a real hardness of heart. Consequently, what could have been and should have been an amazing demonstration of love and grace and forgiveness is still born.

Resolution could be the birth of an incredibly new and revitalized relationship. But it never sees the light of day because hard-heartedness has killed it.

And sometimes the hard-heartedness is present in the offender and the offended.

Both of them may suffer from a hard heart. Neither of the parties are willing to have the situation resolved because there is just so much anger and so much hurt there.

[21 : 33] So, if you want to turn to your bulletin for just a moment, we've got the steps pretty much laid out there. And I'm just going to very briefly run through them.

And no, I cannot give you any chapter and verse for each of these and tell you exactly where you may go to find this, but this is a collection of provisions that I have found all throughout Scripture. And to the best of my ability, this is the way the process is designed to work. And all I can say is it does work.

And I would add to that, I don't know anything else that does work when it comes to resolving conflicts that have been caused by offenses that have been inflicted.

So, let us just work our way through this. The steps of progression begin with a normal, close relationship. Okay? Everything is okay between these two parties.

[22 : 39] They are good friends. Or, if they are married, they are deliriously in love like they're supposed to be. Or, if they are good friends, it is a good, solid friendship that they have and that they enjoy.

That's the starting point. But, because we are all imbued with this thing called self-centeredness, this fallenness that we all experience, this close relationship is marred or threatened by the commission of an offense in word or deed.

We say something or we do something that hurts this other person and it causes them to bristle on the inside and they take offense to it. And, you know, sometimes it isn't even intended.

Sometimes we can offend people without meaning to do so. I know I've done that. I know every time I step behind this pulpit, I run the risk of offending somebody by something that I say.

That's not my goal. I certainly wouldn't do it intentionally. but at the same time, I don't want to make any apologies for the truth of God if I say something that is biblical and scriptural and it rubs your fur the wrong way and you are offended by it.

[24 : 07] My only response to that is deal with it. Tough bananas. Or as old Vance Havner used to say, when the cat complains because its fur is rubbed the wrong way, let the cat turn around.

That's called repentance. So, we don't apologize for that, but out of my humanity and out of my self-centeredness, I can say something that is simply stupid and offensive and people are hurt by it. Don't mean to do that, but I can promise you this, it's very easy to do. I can do it without trying very hard. And that results in an injury to the spirit of the offended.

And sometimes somebody may say, well, if that's how it feels, I'm never coming back to that church again. And they won't darken the door of the church. They're gone and you don't need to look for

them again because they won't be back.

Someone has said, never in the history of the Christian church has it taken so much to get people into church and never has it taken so little to cause them to leave it.

[25 : 23] I would agree with that. So, we have an injury to the spirit of the offended and that results in internal or external resentment.

Now, if it's internal resentment, that just means that they are hurt, but it's on the inside and they often keep it to themselves and they don't say anything about it. They just kind of emotionally crawl off in a corner and lick their wounds.

And they don't let the person who offended them know that they have offended them. But they have. And it hurts. And this is an internal resentment that they cannot help but begin building in their human spirit.

And sometimes it is an external resentment. Sometimes when a person is offended by something that someone else says or does, they let them know right away.

And many times there is an argument that ensues. They have words. And they have even been known to come to blows over it. Especially men.

[26 : 33] Well, why don't we just step outside and settle this? That kind of a thing. that's an injury, internal injury, external explosion that is going to come to blows and be settled that way, unfortunately.

Resentment causes emotional distancing and coolness between the offended and the offender.

And folks, that's just natural.

You just start to pull back a little bit in your feelings and emotions toward that person. The way you felt toward them before the offense is altered after the offense.

And you just kind of distance yourself a little bit. Sometimes it's out of resentment. Sometimes it is a mode of protection. You want to get out of range so they can't do it again.

And you may even go out of your way to avoid that person. If you're at school and you see them coming down the hall, you take a quick left turn where you didn't plan to take one, just so you won't even have to face that person because you're on the outs with them.

[27 : 50] This happens in neighborhoods, communities, neighbors are sometimes offended and at war one with another. How many times, how many times have Springfield's finest or Clark County's finest been called in to try and referee or settle some kind of a dispute between neighbors and property lines and people fussing with one another and offending one another.

And they build up a head of steam and now when they drive by, they won't even so much as wave at that guy.

just ignore him like he doesn't even exist. That's resentment speaking. It's a terrible way, terrible way to live life, go through life that way.

External, internal resentment toward the offender. Resentment causes emotional distancing and coolness between the offended and the offender. for normalcy to return.

Information is processed, paving the way for crafting the apology. What do I mean by information? Information comes in two forms, internal and external.

[29 : 11] An example of internal information is, you see so-and-so on the street the other day and you're planning to stop and have a chat with them.

and they just say, hello, and just go on by and you say, boy, he seemed like he just brushed me off. He just didn't want to take the time of day to even pass the time of day with me.

I wonder what's bugging him. Oh, what did I do to offend him? He acted like he just passed me up like a dirty shirt. What's going on here anyway?

I thought we were friends. And then you say, oh, wait a minute now. You don't suppose at the barber shop a couple of days ago when I said what I said about thus and so, you don't suppose he got really sore about that.

I wonder, let's see now, what was it exactly I said and what was it? And you know what you're doing? You are processing internal information.

[30 : 20] You are replaying that thing and if you come to a conclusion, oh, you know what, I just, oh, oh, I remembered. Now I remember his son is involved in thus and so.

Oh, yeah. No wonder he's sore. I didn't mean to offend anybody like that or, you know, cast aspersion on his son.

yeah, that's why he's giving me the cold shoulder. Okay. Now what are you going to do about it? You know what most people do about it?

Nothing. Nothing. Because to take the bull by the horns and go to that person and offer an apology is very awkward, very difficult to do, very undesirable, and it is ego-shattering to admit your insensitivity and you're saying something without thinking and you offended this person.

So, instead of doing the right thing, we say, oh, give it time and he'll forget about it and things will be okay.

[31 : 46] That is the coward's way out. And it is the way I would prefer to take. Wouldn't you? But that's not the right way.

The right way is to man up and go eat your slice of humble pie. You deserve it.

And that's part of the punishment that you inflict upon yourself for your big mouth. And my mouth can be as big as anybody's.

heart. In order to do that, however, you will have to lay your hardness of heart aside because the hardness of heart will not let you do that.

Hardness of heart will say, well, you just have to deal with it. I didn't say anything that wasn't true. That's self-justification. That's rationalizing.

[32 : 51] we put a dart or an arrow or a spear in the spirit of that person and we're the only one that can take it out.

Sometimes this information doesn't have to be processed internally. It can be processed externally by them or a third party informing us as to what we said and how it hurt them or what we did and how it hurt them and we process that information.

That's external information. It comes from outside ourselves. It may come from the party that we offended. And we may not have to wait long. You may wait only ten seconds to start getting information to process because they may come right back at you and let you know that you have offended them and you have hurt them and blow them and you've got something right then and there to process and what are you going to do?

Are you going to repent? Which means to change your mind. It means you take a different position. Take the opposite position. That's what repentance is.

It means to change the mind. And let me say this. There there is no greater act or activity on the face of the earth that is so incredibly powerful that has the resident ability to heal wounds, to salvage relationships, to restore people, than repentance and apology and forgiveness.

[34 : 45] These are utterly awesome concepts. Let me say this. The power of repentance is so great that God himself accepts that as the coin of the realm.

When you come to Jesus Christ, Christ, that makes it pretty powerful. And without repentance, you cannot come to Christ, because coming to Christ requires a change of mind.

Someone has said that they don't have much use for the idea of repentance, because that's adding a stipulation to the gospel, and we are only required to believe, not to repent.

That is pure hokum. You cannot believe without repenting. It's impossible, because when you believe, you are taking a different position than what you had before.

You have changed your mind, or you wouldn't believe. So repentance is the doorway. Repentance has to proceed belief.

[36 : 06] belief. And when I repented, I didn't even know it. I didn't even realize that I had repented. Nor was I told to repent. Nor did I tell God, I repent.

Never used the word. Never knew what it meant. Never thought of it. Didn't make any difference. I still did it. I still changed my mind. And that's what brought me to faith in Christ.

Christ. This is such a powerful thing. It means repentance always means it always means changing your mind or your position from that of being wrong to that of being right.

That's what repentance is. Change of mind from the wrong to the right. Always. And it may be about spiritual things, maybe about buying a car, maybe about going in debt, maybe about getting married, maybe about anything.

It doesn't make any difference. But it is always changing your position from one thing to another.

What you understand and accept and acknowledge as being wrong to what you have discovered as being right and you want to go the right way.

[37 : 11] That's repentance. And it doesn't necessarily have any spiritual connotation to it, although it may have. Powerful, powerful concept. Information is processed, paving the way for crafting the

apology, and that is, will you please forgive me.

The apology needs to be requested. And when you do that, you are putting the person that you offended, you are putting that person in the driver's seat.

You are relinquishing power and giving it to them because they don't have to forgive you. They should forgive you.

They can forgive you. But they don't have to. That, again, involves a volition. And what does it mean if they won't forgive you?

It means they are exercising a hardened heart. They shouldn't be doing that. but as a volitional individual to whom God has given the power and the will of choice, they have that ability.

[38 : 28] And they may misuse it. Don't we all misuse the volition we have? On a lot of different occasions. Of course we do.

And we may do so there too, although we can't justify it. And we ought to be eager to forgive. And this is why I made a distinction between having a forgiving spirit and actually forgiving. someone has said, can you forgive someone who doesn't ask for your forgiveness?

No. No. You can't. In the first place, forgiveness and apology is a transaction. A transaction has to occur between more than one person.

There has to be at least two parties involved in a transaction. Trans means across. There has to be something to go across from to. So you need at least two parties.

And when forgiveness is requested and granted, a transaction has occurred. But where forgiveness is not forthcoming, you cannot forgive.

[39 : 33] You cannot complete the transaction. You can't close the sale because there's no trans.

There is just one. And you cannot forgive someone who doesn't want your forgiveness, hasn't asked for your forgiveness, or doesn't believe they need your forgiveness.

You can and you should have a forgiving spirit. I make a really important point of that. Even if they haven't asked for forgiveness, you should have a forgiving spirit.

That means you have an attitude that causes you to want to forgive, to be eager to forgive, to relish the idea of being able to forgive.

If only they would come to the position where they would ask for your forgiveness, you would gladly give it. You can always have a forgiving spirit, even though you cannot actually extend forgiveness. And when you cannot, then of course the rupture in the relationship continues. and the offended has the option of granting forgiveness resulting in reconciliation and restoration.

[40 : 47] And what if they won't do it? Hardness of heart prevails again. And there is no reconciliation and there is no restoration and the rift continues, the separation continues, and it may be permanent.

The relationship is over, kaput, ended. If I ever see them again, it will be too soon.

That's hardness of heart, speaking all over again. It's a beautiful thing. I do not think there is anything more beautiful, and you know, it is best exemplified in our hearing information, usually external.

The information may be from scripture, the information may be from a TV or radio program, the information may be from a Christian book, the information may be from a mother or father or Sunday school teacher or pastor, or a neighbor next door, but the information is about the gospel, who Jesus Christ is, what he did, why it matters, and how it relates to you.

And that's all information that God has provided, and you process that information, and you reach a conclusion, and your conclusion is, you know what? I've been wrong.

[42 : 30] I have really been wrong about what a Christian is. I used to think a Christian was a goody two shoes, never did anything wrong, never said anything wrong, somebody that goes to church every Sunday, somebody that always does and says the right thing, and just good people, and I've been trying to be one of those kind of people, but you know what?

I fail, and I falter so many times, and I just mess up so many times, and now I've heard this information, that the way to heaven is not by my being what I think is a good person, it's not by going to church, it's not by this or that, but the information I'm getting is that my destiny in heaven is determined on my connection with Jesus Christ as my Savior, and I never understood that before, but I do now, and you know, I'm changing my mind, I am seeing now where I have been wrong all this time as to what I thought a Christian was, and now I know what it really means to be a Christian, it means to be in Christ, to receive Christ as your personal Savior from sin, so in changing

my mind,

God, I am repenting, and if I embrace Jesus Christ as my Savior, that is in effect my apology to God, that's my apology for being a rotten no-good what I have been, and you know what God does? God accepts my apology, and God takes my repentance, and he wraps his loving arms around me, and he receives me, and he reconciles me personally, individually, he gives me his life, he gives me his righteousness, he gives me his peace, he gives me his joy, he gives me his destiny, and I am in Christ.

That is the greatest example in the whole wide world over what repentance, and apology, and forgiveness is all about. That's on the grandest scale possible, and everything less than that is what we've been talking about with the dynamics for human relationships, but the principle is the same.

[45 : 03] Principle is not changed. Wonderful. God himself couldn't improve on it. Isn't that something?

Would you pray with me, please? Father, you have graced us and blessed us with incredible operating assets, and we just need to really do business with our tendency to have a hardened heart that will prevent us from repenting, will prevent us from apologizing, will prevent us from forgiving.

And we need to see all of that in perspective of the great love and forgiveness that you have bestowed upon us. How can we possibly not repent, not apologize, not forgive?

for anyone who may be here today who has never really seen this issue as it is, perhaps they see it now.

We pray that you will speak to them as only you are able to speak to them and cause them to know. people. Jesus loved them in such a way that he went to that cross for them.

[46 : 35] He was buried for them and he rose again for their justification. What a glad, happy, wonderful gospel you give us to believe and to preach.

Anyone here today, boy or girl, man or woman, who has never made that transaction, may they see the folly of continuing one moment longer without it and put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

We pray in his name. Amen.