

Dealing with Each Other as Brothers when We Disagree

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Dear Brothers,

The agenda committee struggled to bring together under one heading a number of concerns raised in various topic suggestions submitted to them. I have aimed at what appears as a common denominator, and I pray the treatment will be of benefit to all and relevant in particular to some of the troublesome situations Satan seems to delight in stirring up among us. We all know the Biblical basics that relate to this area of the Christian life; don't look for any new revelation. Instead I trust these pages will exhibit Law specific to the ways in which we fall as reflections of Christ, and by which we offend our God, grieve one another, and undermine His message of love for restoring sinners to His family. And of course I intend that each of us be able to hear our Savior's Gospel voice inviting us to take refuge in Him for the specific forgiveness we crave.

For "when we disagree" in the title you could substitute: "when we question another's action or judgment" or: "when we encounter criticism of our actions or judgment." This is in distinction from: "If someone is teaching false doctrine." That issue is not the emphasis in my assignment.

Another parallel topic that could be considered is the matter of being open about our disappointments and lack of "success." When a brother inquires: "How are things going?", "Just fine, thanks," tends to preclude brotherly dialogue and encouragement. But when I reply: "There are some joys and some difficulties," I let him know that I am neither defensive nor pretending, and I give his brotherly heart an opening to offer: "Sounds familiar, do you feel like talking about it?" That can be conducive to brotherly relations in difficult circumstances. If I can be open, I can be uplifted. And there is a corollary, when his brotherliness becomes evident, He gives me encouragement to bare my heart. We are drawn together in a cooperating relationship in the one kingdom, rather than dealing with each other as though we were competitors on differing turf.

The accent in our title is on "brothers." Let's start with that. Let's take a look at who we are and with whom we are dealing. Each of us is special. The guy with whom you may disagree is a redeemed and sanctified son who has the right to address the one awesome in majesty and holiness as "Abba." The Father's regard for His child bids us be careful how we treat anyone in that privileged and distinguished status. Surely he merits no less respect than the unregenerate peace officer or mechanic with whom I may have to discuss a disagreement.

There's a family characteristic in the household of those who share a place in God's favor. Peter expresses it:

"... live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. I Peter 3, 8.9.

Maybe all that's needed is to let that sink in. We might profitably devote the rest of the hour to private meditation on how far we have come short of what our Father so earnestly desires of those who are going to appear before Him together as heirs in glory. As Paul writes the Thessalonians (1.4.9): "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other."

One is reminded of what we point out regarding the marriage vow. It's not: "Are you in love?" But: "Will you love?" What God looks for is not merely some sentimental syrup when everything is pleasant, but some self-sacrificing commitment when things turn less pleasant. I Corinthians 13, 4-9: "Love is patient ... kind ... does not envy ... not boast ... not proud ... not rude ... not self-seeking not easily angered ... keeps no record of wrongs...protects ... trusts ... hopes ... perseveres." This is what God looks for in the brotherhood relationship too, and what His Spirit provides resources to produce.

In any case we are at a presupposition for this writing for this assembly: None of us sets himself above Scripture; each of us is willing to recognize that it is profitable for convicting, correcting, and training in righteousness - including the things that need correcting in me. Against that background this essay is not a lecture, but a prayer and a plea.

Since we are in this together it's fitting to proceed with the prayer: "May the meditation of my heart and the words of my mouth be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

Not as a John the Baptizer, then,(and hopefully not as a Pharisee), but as your fellow fallible servant looking into the Word, I claim your attention in this assignment.

His Word is clear: "The Lord hates a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." Proverbs 6,19
Application: If brotherly love is lacking, repentance is called for. God forgives, and He looks for change.

One of my worst character traits - but easy to mask with a calculated smile - is natural resentment at having my offenses pointed out and having to face up to them. My nature writhes and weasels rather than be crucified and brought to repentance. How about you ? My case is a replay of Prov.5,12: "How I hated discipline; how my heart spurned correction."

I'm a believer, but I'm also a client in need of what Peter counsels for us in a bad world desperately in need of our light: "Add to your faith ... brotherly kindness." (II Peter 1,5)

Another way to view it is that love for a brother - even a disagreeing or disagreeable one - is a fruit of faith. An aim of this essay is to cultivate that. We look for encouragement. To find it, what is more vital than to recall and assimilate how our Brother Jesus dealt with thick-headed, know-it-all, self-centered disciples -and how He has dealt with us with our shameful characteristics - in saving love. Then with the Spirit's strength we can strive and pray to our Father to become brothers more and more like His Son, in the spirit of Galatians 5,13: "Serve one another in love."

As we go about this cultivating I'm reminded of the anxiety that was involved in the effort to have greenhouse crops survive extreme subzero nights. What I'm getting at is that it strikes me each of us in our calling in today's social climate is virtually trying to grow oranges in Alaska. The tensions and the setbacks tend to keep us edgy. We need to allow for that in our dealings with each other and approach each other from the standpoint that we need each other - for carrying on with joyous zeal in the face of Satan's enmity for our Lord's flock.

When reports of dissension and strife among us weigh on your heart, do you sometimes seek small consolation as I do in supposing that the fact that Satan spews so much of his venom among us is evidence that our labors must be pinching his tail? In any case, we can give our minds to more substantial thoughts. Are you ready for the quiz? Tell me the context: Quote: "This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute" No, it's not over John Mark. This quotation comes from the record of previous events -when Paul and Barnabas were united on the same side in sharp dispute against a preaching of salvation attained partially through works. Their accord underscores that first of all they knew what they were for; they knew that the real enemy is Satan, lurking behind enslaving sinfulness and damning error. In this light we can benefit all the more in observing their later disagreement over John Mark and seeing how they handled it (and each other) in a constructive way - one that left the way open for future association. A disagreement in a matter of judgment can be resolved by agreeing to disagree, not closing the door or the heart - to further expression of fellowship.

It's also instructive to observe that resolving their disagreement did not symptomize diluting of doctrinal commitment. For although Paul later (I Corinthians 9,6) alluded to Barnabas favorably as an example of a "bivocational" minister (a matter of methodology), yet in another instance he did not shrink from faulting Barnabas' going astray (as a consequence of Peter's inconsistent actions) in the matter of Jew-Gentile association; this was in a practical/doctrinal matter. The Apostle didn't overlook that.

We too do well to distinguish disagreements over methodology from doctrinal ones, not over-emphasizing the ones or minimizing the others. Admittedly some of our disagreements today sprout along the fenceline of pastoral practice where these two areas touch. Dealing with that sensitive situation especially calls for brotherliness.

Let's get deeper into another aspect. John writes his letter to his friend Gaius (III John) in the interest of working together for the truth, commending Gaius' love for brothers who are strangers, and who have gone out "for the sake of the Name." John conversely severely castigates Diotrophes for his adversarial posture in regard to these brothers and indicts the man for malicious gossip.

Disagreement in the church ? Certainly! A difference in methodology ? In this case far more than that! John is able to identify the motive: Diotrophes loves to be first.

Application: When we encounter criticism or when we have a disagreement let's be sure we examine motives; and since you and I cannot look into anyone else's heart and are not infallibly inspired, the only motives we can really identify are our own. Let's be sure to ask ourselves: Why am I really acting (or reacting) the way I am? Is it love or is it self-interest? If we find what's ignoble there, let's admit it to ourselves and to God who already knows our hearts, seeking His mercy and His renewal so that we are not snared in what is destructive to souls and detrimental to the Name.

For instance: I disagree with your choice to smoke, or to golf so much, or to be a TV football addict. I needle you and appear to do it good-naturedly, indicating to you it is with the best intent. Intellectually I assent to its being adiaphoron, but emotionally I may be motivated to establish my self-righteous judgment that my stewardship of the body or of time or of money is better than yours. If we need to probe our motives when only "needling" friends - how much more when we get serious!

On the other hand what a blessing to be so confident of a brother's best intentions toward us that we can be completely candid about expressing our own moods and needs or in asking to talk about what reservation we may have about his opinions or plans, without fear of quarrelsome comeback, with the confidence Proverbs 27,6 indicates: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." To have a friend whose criticism we genuinely respect is earnestly to be desired. God help us to develop such brotherliness.

Does it go without saying that our objective in taking up this subject is not just taping up some organizational stress fractures; it's got to be a concern beyond synodical P-R. After all, the WELS is not going to hell, but neither is it going to heaven. Our synod is a temporal institution. People are the ones who are going either to heaven or hell. Furthermore while there is no security in organizational esprit de corps, dissension can shred hearts and lay down stumbling blocks like spiritual mine fields.

I ask you to consider that disagreements become destructive largely because of the Cain/Abel character of our brotherliness which tends to deal with differences, inquiries, or questions in an adversarial frame. Abel was not "rivaling" Cain when envy broke out. Our fallen nature is the womb where disagreement conceives sinful rivalry and from which it gives birth to malicious dissension, and full-grown it can end in death - spiritual murder, or suicide, or both.

"This is the message you have heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous we know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love, remains in death; anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him." I John 3,11-15

The characteristics of Cain's fraternity ought not to be rationalized or defended. We need to disavow them, and not just academically. If the observation is made that it's only natural to have rivalry and antagonism, we need to ask: Which nature?

One of those characteristics is the defensive mind-set that reacts to any question or disagreement as a personal attack. How much better to assume that my brother's concern is positive and to respond in a way that will build up both of us, and not aim at blowing him away.

Another is the Ahab syndrome - charging the one who raises a question about my actions with being a (the?) troublemaker.

Dealing brotherly with one who has said or is doing something that rubs me the wrong way is, after all, as basic as a third grade lesson on the Eighth Commandment: " ... fear and love God that we ... speak well of him and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way." Is that too complicated for us men of the cloth? Or is there some unspiritual machismo stigma afoot that stamps one as naive, if he repays evil with good?

How unbrotherly disciples can become in spite of being fully informed on the VIII Commandment! How often we hear blame affixed: "So-and-so's got an ego problem." Don't we all? And what about lapsing into name calling or attempts at stinging putdowns. All of it disgusting in the Father's house! The Father's name is to be lifted up and will be as each of us can count on the other to be a trusty brace for withstanding the pressures besetting those who are serving Christ in the midst of a pagan society. Consequently failing in brotherly love is especially detrimental under the circumstances.

How pathetic that we who represent ourselves as serving the Lord on the same team collide with one another like outfielders in the bottom of the ninth, knocking each other out - and letting the ball drop.

Is it possible that we are off on a wrong foot in the attitude we sometime exhibit regarding differences with those not on our team? Aren't we sometimes guilty of talking down self-satisfied noses at or about the heterodox, rather than up from caring hearts? Listen to the sometimes snide castigation of their ideas of piety or scholarship or theology. (Depending on your generation you can relate this to Protest'ants, CLC, or Maranatha.) What about the possibility that some heart could be persuaded by cultivating the spirit of II Thessalonians 3,14-15 also in such situations? "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but as a brother."

What Justification is there for conceit if we profess to be advocating a theology of SOLA gratia; what do we have that we have not received as an undeserved legacy? Academic excellence or intellectual competence - supposed or real - is no substitute for Christ-like humility.

Even when Paul knew the motive. of some preachers was false he could still set aside self-interest and rejoice that Christ was being preached. Surely we ought pray to discover that rejoicing attitude in our circumstances where we do not know motives.

Closer to home, the pulsing heart of brotherly dealing with those united in confession with us, but differing in regard to the way of serving the Lord, is set before us in Romans 14,3-13.

The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accented him. who are you to judge someone else's servant ? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike, Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God

You then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "As surely as I live," says the Lord, "Every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God." So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block in your brother's way."

The fact that somebody does not see things my way does not necessarily indicate that he is either stupid, fanatic, or "unspiritual." And must not I avoid proceeding to deal with him as though he were one or the other?

Consider how much the work of the Lord has been hampered by rivalry giving way to such insinuation among us, together with the polarizing that then sets in. In my early years in the ministry it was not unusual for

divisive party spirit to stereotype men as EITHER not being mission-minded OR not being school-minded, with people on either side claiming the distinction of blue ribbon Lutheranism. If you want some understanding of the context for this observation, read the account of those years in: *"To Every Nation, Tribe, Language, People"*

The tendency to polarize and choose up sides aggravates disagreement and hampers the work. At the 1967 synodical convention delegates were telling me what side (not theirs) they suspected I was on, since I was from the West, regarding phasing out the old WLC, before our committee had heard any of the argumentation. To be on Christ's side I don't have to be on your side of every tough question. Failing to concede that builds up destructive tensions.

There is still plenty of room in our circles for initiating more brotherly give and take with a goal of planning for nonpartisan kingdom balance as an ideal. Let's pray to avoid judging motives or hearts in the present agonizing over our worker training program, lest we thwart objective decision making.

The references above refer to formal issues leading to considered decisions. Likewise significant in brotherly relations are the week to week incidental matters that arise out of being in neighboring congregations, or out of pursuing specific interests and responsibilities, or that come up in talking shop, or even in social conversation. In all of them the Owner of the vineyard desires to see the fruits of His Spirit, not the works of our flesh: Galatians 5, 19-26:

" The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other."

Preceding this section is the Apostle's wide-ranging, evangelical admonition: "Serve one another in love." (v. 13) There's the resolution of the whole issue in this essay. Everyone in this conference has preached about what it means to take up our role as servant, putting others ahead of self; everyone has exegized about God's kind of love being commitment to action for the benefit of the other. We don't need new information. New encouragement, however, may be a different story.

Fundamentally such encouragement may have a parallel in the encouragement all of us at times have sought to impart to a troubled spouse: Love calls for servanthood, ministering to the spiritual needs of the other party, in spite of being Irritated, or unappreciated. The desire and the ability to do so, of course, can be sustained only out of humble and prayerful appreciation for: "He first loved us" - Just as we were.

And right after the verses quoted above from Galatians chapter 5 follow these words: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." Gal 6,1

If "gently" is in order for that situation, it surely is in order for the kinds of situations we are considering. Proverbs has the maxim: "The words of the upright rescue." (12,6)

In addition, "Watch yourself" in Paul's admonition, leads to the observation that after prayerful self-examination in the light of Scripture, a party to a disagreement might be able to gain some additional measure of guidance for himself by looking at himself through the glasses of psychology and assessing his personality tendencies in order to be better able to control them or direct them. Conflict management materials identify the pack hound, the lone wolf, the bold rooster, the tame duck, etc. and offer some common sense and/or worldly-wise possible helps.

We will benefit even more by taking Scriptural cues: "Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Proverbs 12,18

Someone once observed that when contending on the Lord's side we need to learn to be militant without being belligerent. It's a matter of hoping to rejoice, not in "I'm vindicated," but in "We're reunited in Christ and in confession." Those of us who went through the meetings of the '50's still thank the Lord for Nixie Meyer as an example of an earnest, non-belligerent fighter for the truth.

It's obvious, but we must not leave it unsaid: Let's not approach any conferring over differences in the church without earnest praying. Think how you and your elders pray preparing to visit a member resisting the first steps in church discipline. Let's not get so professional that in dealing with fellow clergy we neglect a humble prayerful approach for the Spirit to be in control in my attitude first, and then in his.

Paired with this might well be an optimistic attitude looking for a God-pleasing resolution of the matter, since we are committed to relying on the Spirit's persuasion, not on carnal weapons. When you are approaching a believer you have reason to anticipate that his wholesome fear of the Lord establishes a starting point for valid evaluation of whatever issues and insights are brought before him, for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." You have reason to anticipate experiencing an instance of the aptness of the Proverb: "Rebuke a wise man and he will love you." 9,8

There is some other basic counsel stemming from old-fashioned, unsophisticated Christian guidelines for living as God's children: If you can't say something constructive, keep quiet. "Charity shall cover a multitude of sins" has a corollary in Proverbs 10,19: "Sin is unavoidable when there is much talk; but whoever seals his lips is wise." (NET)

Be cautious about the grapevine. Sometimes it ought to be pruned rather than extended. Proverbs 26,20 observes: "Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies."

Assume sincerity on the part of the other party. That's in the Small Catechism too. Spawning suspicion does not serve the cause of Christ. My head can suggest that a person might have base reasons for pushing innovations: He wants to advertise his talent; he may have an immature lack of confidence in old ways; he might even just be wanting to call attention to himself; but it can be that he has sincere concern for being all things to all people in the interest of reaching their minds and their hearts with the truth. He may have some insights that I lack. Brotherly love for him and for the labor in the vineyard prescribes that I root out my judgmental notions before I try to discuss the issue constructively, not leading off with charges, but with sincere questions. Both of us can be the gainers.

Beware of *ad hominem* commentary. How unconvincing the one who manifests uncertainty about the strength of his position on the issues by exhibiting his readiness to rely on character assassination! Under any circumstance what justification can there be for degrading someone for whom Christ died?

Be alert to the tendency to distort or engage in selective editing of facts. Don't be too quick to reach conclusions. Proverbs 18,13 aptly cautions: "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame." Conflict management techniques advise: Beware of "escalators." Proverbs 15,18 deals with the foremost: "One who holds his temper calms disputes."

Another would be "going public" when private inquiry and discussion might be called for to avoid fanning defensiveness into flame. Let love dictate what is likely to be most constructive. At this point permit a personal observation regarding the familiar heat/light correlation in handling disputes. The better informed a party is, the less the likelihood of flaring into heat. Proverbs 14,19 observes this: "A man of understanding is slow to become angry." Seeing seminary graduates capable of involvement in various earnest discussions in a surefooted, cool, and convincing manner has been a particularly gratifying experience for me. It is, for one thing, a testimony to their thorough study of matters at hand. This can be an encouragement to all of us to avoid generating heat as a result of having strong feelings, but the benefit of only limited personal study of an issue. Sometimes it appears study requires more work than arguing, particularly if I'm arguing a popular majority position.

All of this needs to incorporate the realization that within orthodoxy there can be, of course, no latitude along a liberal/conservative axis in doctrine. Yet there definitely is latitude along a traditional/ contemporary axis in methods. Here in particular brotherly love is called for - in all parties.

I recall that when I graduated back in the late 40's I was rattled when informed that the pastor who was to be my neighbor and a mentor was not using the 1611 KJV! Though he was very open and constructive about his reasons for using the 1881-85 revision, discussion about that usage not always was; it was considered questionable. Irony is that our NWPB in those days was publishing Bibles incorporating the language of the revision and including a preface endorsing its accuracy and reliability. How pleasant to come to realize belatedly that the brother was not radical in this, Just ahead of the rest of us in getting beyond archaic language. (By the way he wasn't using the 1940 hymnal either, but the Norwegians' 1913 Lutheran Hymnary, and if you ever heard him assess the sub-evangelical tone of the collects in our 1940 hymnal, you know he had substantial reasons for dragging his feet about introducing it.) Point is people 2000 miles from the site erected negative opinions without surveying first.

Another observation: Generally we all pretty well assent to the principle that the objective is valued over the subjective in worship, for instance. Yet just what is objective quite often is determined by very subjective, and even isolated, minds. All of us might well profit from give and take on such matters in a "non-threatening" brotherly, informal, but earnest, conversation.

Introduction of extreme innovations can, of course, put a strain on mutual relationships. How much more brotherly to cultivate understanding in advance. On the other hand, for those who take issue with the extreme, all the earlier paragraphs are germane, even when convinced that evaluating as objectively as they can, they must conclude the innovation is trite or deleterious. If a maverick has exercised poor judgment he and his flock are still entitled to loving help, not just censure.

Now we're back in adiaphora 101A. Would you say we handle them well? If it's an adiaphoron it's OK to do it, right? Too often we capitulate to that thinking. Isn't the more mature way: If we have agreed that it is adiaphoron, now before we proceed we have to determine in brotherly consideration if it is "beneficial and constructive." (I Corinthians 10) How will it affect our brothers and sisters? Adiaphora are not just matters of right and wrong. Among brothers they become concerns for what's best.

In the absence of a Czar, I individually, not just with my intellect, but in love must do the deciding about when it's best to yield my judgment or my self-interest for the sake of the one I love in Christ. While rugged individualism may be seen as a virtue, I need to be alert lest it become individualism for its own sake, - ragged individualism that rips the fabric of brotherliness. I can benefit, and so can God's people, from the thoughts of others. Not all of God's gifts reside in one person - not even me.

Dealing with adiaphora calls for us to be precise in employing the two rubber stamps so handy on our desks and to our lips: "Legalistic" and "Evangelical." Mishandled, either can be both damaging and incendiary. One of the essay requests alluded to this peril.

Against the background of the Gospel "legalistic" has the connotation of fostering the notion that a person can contribute to his right standing before God by something he does or avoids. It involves misleading souls. Let's be careful not to water down this concentrated term by employing it as a stained glass synonym for "authoritarian," "arbitrary," or "unbending." Everything that is unloving or inconsiderate or harsh, as unacceptable as it may be, is not necessarily "legalistic." For that matter, declaring the demands and curses of the Law is not being legalistic, provided the objective is to show men their need of a savior. When we call someone's practice legalistic we ought to be aware we are rejecting his theology as destructive of souls; it's too drastic a term for identifying a rigid personality type or leadership style.

Similarly "evangelical" among us loses its life-giving connotation if people begin to employ it as a synonym for easy going. "Evangelical" ought never connote being tolerant of some things that offend God. The Holy spirit aims to save us from sin, not in it. Permitting people to be comfortable without repentance is not being evangelical. Permitting people to remain undisturbed in their respectability and merit-mentality is not being evangelical. Let not evangelical Lutherans blur the precious content of that term in our circles. Let it stand for that unique outlook that trusts completely in Christ's completed atonement and relies on the power of His saving grace through His Word to accomplish His saving purpose in people's hearts and lives.

Let's maintain "evangelical" as a theological identification, not a social commendation. Doing so can help us focus on truth, not personalities. This too can be constructive in dealing with each other when there are disagreements.

Another area highlighted in the essay suggestions raises the matter of brotherly relations when there are disagreements with synodical administrative policies or actions. Principles remain the same; exercising them may be more difficult under the circumstances of distance and organization. Administrators do not acquire or claim immunity from error or from inquiry. Administratees do not obtain exemption from dealing in constructive, brotherly ways as unfolded in the previous pages. Constructive critique, lovingly, humbly, winningly conveyed - when it is in place, yes; prayers for administrators -their strength, guidance, and endurance -always! Furthermore The Synod is still an US - not a THEM. It's a human organization in which we have a voice and a vote in carrying out the commission God gave to US, not to some super entity. Hence administrators are serving on our behalf. They merit our appreciation, and what was said about pressures in the early pages of this presentation applies particularly in this area, when you take into account the constraints under which administrators must operate.

It could hardly be otherwise than that this review of principles discloses that God sees despicable defects in Christian love in each one of us. That realization would be worthless or worse if we were to allow ourselves to get argumentative and resistant like Cain. God is always in earnest when He speaks His Word to us. I hope that these pages have served in that way.

One purpose of this assignment was to restate a set of principles which we would be ready to recognize as the way our Lord desires to see us conduct our relationships with one another. Hopefully setting down such a restatement might pave an avenue on which any one of us might be moved to approach a brother if there exist unattended rifts or unresolved bad feelings or unrepented hard words. Otherwise it's just all academic.

What joy in the presence of the angels, and what peace in one's own heart to take the initiative, to phone a brother and with openness and humility ask his forgiveness for the way I have acted, and ask his prayers for us to be able to discuss and to resolve constructively our diverging or clashing opinions.

And how sweet the forgiveness God has waiting for us! "But If anyone sins, we have one to plead for us with the Father - Jesus Christ who is righteous. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." I John 2,1.2.NET

And how intense His evangelical admonition:

"Dear friends, I am not writing you a new commandment, but an old one which you had from the beginning. This old commandment is the word which you have heard. On the other hand, I am writing you a new commandment, one that is verified in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the genuine light is already shining.

Anyone who says, "I am in the light," but hates his brother is still in darkness. Anyone who loves his brother remains in the light, and there is nothing in him that causes someone else to stumble in his faith." I John 2, 7-10 NET

Dear savior, let my response exalt You for lifting me up not only to sonship and priesthood to show forth Your praises, but also for entrusting me with a call into Your public ministry in these crucial times, and keep me mindful that you have charged me to set an example by doing what is good. Titus 2,7.

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