

## The Passage That Can Transform Every Relationship Focus Press, August 26, 2014 by Jack Wilkie

*"He started it!" "She's just making me really angry." "Well if he hadn't..."* The *"Blame Game"* is one of the first things most humans learn after developing the ability to speak, and it's not exactly something we grow out of as we get older. We get better about the way we phrase our attempts to put our wrongdoing on others, but we're still playing that same old game. As we all well know, there are two sides to every conflict, and I've had more than my share of experiences to let me know that I am rarely without blame.

Conflict is something that happens to all of us, but part of being a Christian is learning to find ways to live at peace with those around us (Romans 12:18). How can we fix these interpersonal conflicts? How can we peacefully make amends once we find ourselves in these situations? How can we avoid them altogether? There's a brief, simple answer given to us in what has long been my favorite passage in the Bible.

*"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross"* (Philippians 2:5-8 NASB)

When someone wrongs us, makes us angry, or gets on our nerves, it's merely instinct to act in what we perceive as our own self-interest. However, Paul, in writing to a Philippian church that was dealing with an internal quarrel, reminded them that as Christians they aren't supposed to seek their own self-interests anymore. They are to seek what God wants from their lives. How would it change us if we submitted our responses to those who frustrate us to the model Christ left for us?

**Would we respond in anger?** Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Peter 2:23 point to the fact that Jesus remained silent in the face of false accusations, physical pain, and unjust death. He did not revile in return. He did not snap at His accusers with insults or anger. No, Jesus knew that His purpose was not to seek His own revenge but to glorify God. When someone gets on my nerves, my first concern is for my rights and how I feel. If I *"have this attitude in myself which was also in Christ Jesus,"* I won't respond with anger.

**Would we look to retaliate?** When His opponents came to seek Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter offered His services to stand and fight for Jesus when he cut off the ear of Malchus. Jesus reminded Peter that if it was about retaliation, Peter's sword would be totally unnecessary as tens of thousands of angels were ready as soon as Jesus said the word. But He never did. How silly is it, then, when I let myself get offended at something someone says to me and look for my revenge? *"Have this attitude in yourselves"* means humbling myself to realize I don't have the right to strike back, to stand up for myself in anger and retaliate against what is said or done. No one is ever won to the Gospel by Christians who fight back, exchanging eye for eye and tooth for tooth (Matthew 5:38-42). When I look to retaliate I ignore God's command, I ignore the mission given to me as a Christian, and I ignore the soul of the person I look to hurt.

**Would we withhold forgiveness?** It's far too easy to hold a grudge against someone for years when they slight me or go out of their way to hurt me. Even if I did nothing wrong to deserve their rudeness, though, what right do I have to hold a grudge when Jesus begged *"Father, forgive them"* while He was still hanging on the cross? Any time we refuse to forgive a person or hold past offenses against them, we set ourselves up as a higher judge than Jesus Christ, who was ready to forgive the moment He was slighted. To have His attitude in ourselves is to see those who have wronged us as souls in need of forgiveness.

The fact of the matter is, any conflicts we have in personal relationships are almost always exacerbated by our pride. To be truly like Jesus, we have to remove such pride and humble ourselves before Him and before others. After all, we're only humbling ourselves from the high horse we create for ourselves by thinking ourselves to be in the right. He humbled Himself by leaving heaven, washing feet, being falsely accused, being beaten, and being put to death in brutal fashion. Who am I to let my pride lead to anger, retaliation, or an unforgiving spirit? You want to improve your relationships with your spouse, your coworkers, your friends, and even your enemies? Have this attitude in yourselves...