

SIBLING RIVALRY

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A family was all together. There were uncles, aunts, cousins, parents, in-laws, all there. They were at mom's house and while the adults were trying to talk, the kids were fighting and arguing over everything imaginable. The mom's son's kids were right in the middle of this and so he got up to go take care of the problem. As he got up, he heard his mom say, "I enjoy watching my grandkids fight all the time because Shawn is being 'paid back' for all the times he and his brother fought. But then all of sudden she said, 'I really am not glad they fight because I know siblings who fought all the time growing up and as adults they hate each other'.

This mother will tell you that the one good thing that came from her mom having Alzheimer's so long was the fact that her brother and her became friends again. It had gotten to the point that they couldn't stand in a kitchen together without fighting; but through this difficult situation not only can they spend time together without fighting but they go out of their way to see one another and talk to one another.

I have seen good people fight with their siblings over things like inheritance to the point that they never speak again. Unfortunately, I have also seen Christian brothers and sisters fight so bad that they didn't want to ever see them again. See, as Christians we are all members of God's family which makes us brothers and sisters. Why then do

we hurt each other? Isn't family supposed to love one another, forgive one another, and help one another? If our family can't do that for us, who can?

Does God Himself have problems that He finds difficult to solve? How could Someone both omniscient and omnipotent have any kind of difficulty? Isn't everything in this universe easy for Him? He has infinite resources, an innumerable "staff" of willing, capable servants, the holy angels.

If I understand Islamic theology, I think the answer would be No, God has no really difficult problems. And if I understand strict Calvinist theology (which may be more strict than Calvin himself was), again the answer would be No; His sovereign will just gets done, that's all. And in either case, it's up to you and me to submit to Him, if we want to be happy. That's all.

But when we kneel down at the feet of Jesus and listen, and "abide" in Him, and identify with Him (which is what it means to be "in Christ" experientially), we begin to sense that He has burdens that are heavy for Him. Although He invites us to "come" and find "rest of soul" because His "yoke is easy, and [His] burden is light" (Mt 11:28-30), we find that He has not yet found that "rest" Himself. He still can't keep Sabbath. His burden is heavy.

Whether or not we identify with Him, He identifies with the human race in starkly genuine sympathy—"believers" and so-called "unbelievers" alike. "In all their affliction He [is] afflicted" (Isa 63:9). Incomprehensible? Well, it's time we should begin to realize reality. He carries an enormous load of

pain as He feels the agony of all on earth who are in pain of any kind. The “all power” He has is to feel for others.

In our finite judgment, probably the most severe problem He has is what to do about the “sibling rivalry” that has wounded His “body,” the church. It began with the conflict between Cain and Abel, and ran through all the millennia of the history of God’s true people on earth right up to the “sibling rivalry” that exploded within the “Israel” of Christ’s day when the majority rejected and crucified Him. God knows that the only solution is *agape* (Jn. 13:34, 35). But how does the Holy Spirit “shed that *agape* abroad in our hearts” (Rom. 5:5) if we are unwilling to surrender to it? Can we get out of the kindergarten and begin to share His burden?

Are God’s hands ever tied so that He cannot do what He wants to do? How could that be if He is omnipotent?

The Bible as a whole makes it quite clear that He cannot force the human will, any more than a man by brute force can make a woman love him. The Old Testament reveals how God tried every way possible to get His people Israel of old to receive the blessings He longed to give them. Jesus said to them: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Mt. 23:37).

God tried every method except forcing their will: “The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes, and sending;

because He had compassion on His people, . . . but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, . . . till there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:15, 16).

He tried sending calamities, letting them be oppressed by the Philistines, sending famines (no rain for three and a half years in the time of Elijah), the conquest of the northern kingdom by the Assyrians, and finally letting the Babylonians destroy their magnificent Temple and Jerusalem itself, and take them captive to a heathen land (vss. 17-20).

If fear is a valid motivation to produce repentance, how could fear be made more effective? Imagine walking in chains for 500 miles to Babylon, driven like cattle! Princesses and princes alike! No luxury buses.

You may say, “It worked! After those disasters and 70 years of captivity in a pagan land, they never again worshipped idols! God finally found the right method.” Yes, that’s a mark in favor of using the fear motivation.

But did it truly reconcile Israel to God? After they came back and rebuilt the city and the Second Temple, what did they do? Matthew 26, 27 tells us: they crucified their Messiah. The old covenant had finally run its full course.

There are famous examples of sibling hatred in the Bible:

(1) Cain’s hatred of his brother Abel, which forever defines this deep-rooted feeling as cold-blooded murder if it runs its course (Gen 4:8; it is the same principle as “road rage,” but was “garden rage”).

Near the end of the Bible we find the same message as we found near its beginning: “Whosoever hateth his brother [her sister?] is a murderer” (1 Jn 3:15). Makes one tremble!

(2) Ishmael, “born after the flesh,” wanted to persecute his brother Isaac, “the child of promise,” “born after the Spirit” (Gal 4:29-31).

(3) Esau wanted to kill his “younger” (by a few minutes) brother Jacob (Gen 25), and face it, Jacob gave him what we would say was reason for his hatred.

(4) Jacob’s ten sons hated Joseph and wanted to kill him or at least ruin his life by selling him into slavery (Gen. 37).

(5) David’s older brother Eliab tried to make life miserable for him (1 Sam 17:28). He despised his pure, honest, open hearted, youthful faith.

(6) Jeremiah’s brothers despised his God-given ministry, the house of [his] father,” and added to the pain he was forced to endure (Jer. 12:6). If you want to follow Jesus, often the bitterest opposition you have to meet comes from your own family. God give you grace to endure it with a Christlike spirit, as did Jeremiah!

(7) Finally, the Son of God Himself came, “Immanuel, . . . God with us,” “born of a woman.” He had siblings—at least six (four older step-brothers whose names are given, plus step-“sisters,” Mk. 13:55, 56). And they ridiculed Him (Jn. 7:3-5). But here a bright light shines: Jesus won at least some of those unbelieving siblings (Acts 1:14). The victory didn’t come until after His death, but it was worth while, wasn’t it?

Well, let’s thank Him for sharing what is one of the most painful experiences we humans endure!

A “sibling” is a brother or sister; the Bible tells of many “sibling rivalries,” jealousy and even hatred within the family circle, including the pain the boy Jesus endured in His own earthly family (Jn. 7:5; Mt 13:55, 56). Could “sibling” also refer to a “brother” or “sister” in the church?

Sin got started in heaven itself when Lucifer, the “bright and morning star” angel became jealous of the Archangel, the Son of God. Was Lucifer’s hatred the source of painful “sibling rivalries” the Bible speaks of?

To try to give a reason for Lucifer’s (Satan’s) rebellion is to try to justify it. But we need to understand the implications involved:

(1) In wanting to “be like the Most High” (Isa 14:14), Lucifer actually wanted to murder God and take His place as Ruler of the universe.

(2) He proved this by crucifying the Son of God. His original jealousy became hatred, and hatred is always murder in essence. At least, the seed is there.

(3) God’s character is love, in the original, *agape*, a love that perfectly denies self. That divine self-denial found ultimate expression at the cross, where Satan’s hatred also found ultimate expression. We must understand the dimensions of that event.

(4) Now the entire world is involved in this cosmic conflict; “every man” taking sides, to stand ultimately with the “mark of the beast” or with the “seal of God.” No fence to sit on.

(5) Do we choose today to deny self “in Christ”? Or join Lucifer’s rebellion?

How do we relate to someone who obviously enjoys gifts from God that we don’t have, yet we are bound in that “sibling” relationship that makes the contrast painful? It seems to say, “God loves so-and-so more than He loves me!” Sometimes a twin has a bright, scintillating personality, while the other seems dull in comparison. “He that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast,” while another just doesn’t have that constant picnic—through no fault of his or hers (Pr. 15:15). “Why does God favor the other instead of me?”

“Why does so-and-so enjoy love in marriage, and I have divorce? Why does so-and-so revel in health, and I must carry sickness-laden genes?”

Be careful before you condemn the apparently short-changed one and tell him/her, “Just *be* merry!” “Just *get* well!” “Just *be* happy in your loneliness!” It wouldn’t be kind or loving for an eagle to taunt a chicken, “Just *fly*!”

The usual counsel from well-meaning people is, “Just *pray*!” And even that can be like Job’s “friends, because the apparently short-changed one *has* been praying. It’s a heavier taunt now to carry: “God answers so-and-so’s prayers and not yours!”

There is comfort and encouragement in an unlikely Bible story for those who suffer in “sibling rivalry.” In fact, this individual’s story is usually neglected: I speak of Jeremiah. He gets very bad press so that people actually turn away from his story, because he has been dubbed “the weeping prophet.”

Depressing! Why read a story so sad that the author wishes he had rivers of water in his head so he could cry endlessly! (9:1; Lam. 2:11). Jeremiah is not a comedy drama; he belongs in the tragedy category. Leave his musty book in the attic.

But the man is so important that people thought that Jesus was Jeremiah (Matt. 16:14). God permitted an avalanche of persecution to fall on him; not just ten years or so of it such as Joseph and David endured, after which both were exalted to glorious honor. No, poor Jeremiah gets no reprieve from endless physical and spiritual torture:

(a) Dumped into a deep mud hole and left there to die had not an African gentleman at the court taken pity on him and saved his life (Jer. 38:6-13).

(b) Locked up in the stocks where common criminals are displayed publicly (20:2, 3). Yet he was God’s chosen prophet from his prenatal experience in his mother’s womb (1:5). It seemed as though the God who called him had now abandoned him!

(c) The king himself had contemptuously cut up and burned the book that the Holy Spirit had inspired Jeremiah to write (36:21-23). How can an author be humiliated any more shamefully?

(d) But the most cruel blow the prophet is called to suffer is the “treachery” inflicted by his own personal family who should have been loyal. His brothers knew him, that he was sincere and genuine; but they organized a bitter campaign against him, complete with flattery to his face and a knife in his back (12:6).

But no, it's not tragedy; Jeremiah is now revered as the greatest of the prophets, and he shares his life story with Jesus. If you are called to suffer, rejoice with Him.

Sometimes you find a nugget of pure gold lying almost on the surface of your Bible reading, a treasure of Good News truth you never saw before.

That's what happened when I decided to check into the meaning of the word "meek" as it is in Numbers 12:3. I have always been perplexed the way the word is used there. Verses 1, 2 tell us of the painful heartache Moses must have felt when his two siblings, Miriam and Aaron turned against him—a cruel blow for him to endure. Having to contend with Pharaoh, ruler of the world's greatest empire and all his courtiers—that was peanuts compared to this heartache. Also, enduring all the trials the unbelieving Israelites heaped upon him on their way to the Promised Land—all that he could endure more easily. But when his own siblings, older than he in his own family, turned on him, that was agony!

Why does the Bible writer then say immediately in parentheses, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth"? Seems an irrelevant thing to say just then! Did he just take it all lying down?

And then I looked up the real meaning of the Hebrew word *anav* that is translated "meek." It does *not* mean to be a floor-mat, someone who is a wimp, always hanging his head. The word has built-in to it the meaning of one who has endured many set-backs, many humiliations, many oppositions,

many put-downs, and yet has stood firm and said "No!" to discouragement. It is a very active word, not a passive word, not "taking what's dished out to you" like a weakling, but triumphing over it all.

It's a word that denotes strong, beautiful character, trusting God when everything seems to be against you. It's the pearl character, having to endure the irritations that have come so close to you and transforming it all into a precious jewel.

Have you met trials and even persecutions, mysterious set-backs? Take heart!

Jesus did *not* say, "Come to church, or come to a Christian college, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and it will give you rest." I am sure He would be happy if that would give you "rest unto your souls," but often you meet stress and heartache there just as you do out in the cold world. Sometimes we can find ourselves, as Jesus said, "sheep among wolves" in a religious setting.

What Jesus *did* say was, "Come unto ME, . . . take My yoke upon you, and learn of *me*, and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:28-30; 10:16). No matter what the pressure may be that you find in church or in school, there is a path from where you are at this moment direct to the throne of grace where Jesus is "nigh at hand" to give you peace of heart in the midst of storms. He is an expert in enduring heartache in "church."

The pagan world "outside" gave Him no persecution except (at the end) when the "church" of that day instigated it. When He said, "They that hate Me without a cause are more in number than the hairs on Mine head," "they" were church people.

“I am become a stranger unto My brethren, . . . I became a proverb unto them. . . . They that sit in the gate speak against Me” (Psalm 69:4-12). They were Abraham’s descendants, not pagans!

To all who suffer pain in church “fellowship” Jesus urges, “Come unto Me.” But let’s be sure: He does *not* say “come out of church fellowship”! No! In the midst of His suffering, Jesus was invited to leave “Israel” and go to Greece and find “rest of soul,” but He refused. He would stay in fellowship with God’s professed people, no matter how painful it might be, and bear His cross there (John 12:20-28).

In these last days there is lukewarmness in the church, there can even be “apostasy *in* the church.” Leaving the church is not the solution. The basic idea of the Bible truth of the Day of Atonement is the “cleansing of the sanctuary,” not destroying it. “Come unto Me,” says Jesus; and the closer you come to Him the more your heart and your life will be bound up in fellowship with Him and you will realize that the honor or the vindication of His name is bound up with the repentance of His church. He must win the heart of His church or “the marriage of the Lamb” can never come (Rev. 19:7, 8). Stay in the church; bear your cross “with Him.” Cooperate with Him; let Him use you as one of His agents to help somebody else who is “weary and heavy laden.” Help the church get “ready” for the wedding.

Have you ever wished you had had the courage to speak up for truth when you didn’t? What’s written in the Bible is there “for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11). Can we learn from those who in the past failed?

Do you repent for letting Eve cajole you into eating the forbidden fruit when you knew better (she didn’t!)? (Gen. 3:6; are you better than Adam?)

. . . for not standing up alone and publicly defending Noah when he was persecuted while he was building the ark alone? We’re being tested today! (7:1; Matt. 24:37-39).

. . . for not believing and defending the inspired Joseph when his ten brothers hated him? (Joseph did have some real faults, hooks on which to hang doubts. Gen. 37:5-8).

. . . for not standing with Caleb and Joshua when “all the congregation bade stone them with stones”? Were you ready to be stoned with the two? (Cf. Num. 14:10).

. . . for not standing up for David, telling King Saul “you’re wrong for hunting David like you do. He’s a prophet!”? (1 Sam. 23:9-15; the court were loyal to Saul).

. . . for not supporting Jeremiah in his dungeon when Kings Jehoikim and Zedekiah “shut him up” and the national leaders wanted to kill him? (38:1-13).

. . . for not confessing publicly you too believe in Jesus of Nazareth when the Jewish national leaders “took up stones to cast at Him”? (John 8:59).

. . . for being a believing “chief ruler” too cowardly to confess Jesus publicly when “the Pharisees” said anybody who does “should be put out of the synagogue”? (12:42).

. . . for not speaking up for Jesus when you wanted to warm yourself by the fire, and this girl

was taunting you; it's so hard to take ridicule from her, isn't it? (Matt. 26:69-75).

Thank God He gives us a new day today, a new opportunity to repent and overcome!

Do you know how to tame a wild horse? A wild mustang that could kill you in its violent resistance?

Monty Roberts as a boy watched his father capture and tame them by using violent methods; Monty has developed a method that uses gentleness, and what he says is horse language. In other words, he has put himself in the place of the wild horse, thinking as the horse thinks, and understanding the feelings and perceptions of the wild horse, by gentle means he can tame the wildest mustang in a very short time. I watched him do it on a video.

I thought: the wild mustangs are like us wild sinners. We are alienated from God, afraid of Him, we want to get as far as we can away from Him. Paganism, and also apostate Christianity, uses the methods of violence in order to "win" or "tame" wild sinners, using threats of eternal torture in everlasting hell fire, or threats of execution by God in order to secure compliance with the will of God. Monty Roberts says if you "tame" a wild mustang by violence he will do what you want him to do because he is afraid not to; but if you use the right methods he will do what you want him to because he wants to. In other words, if you could say that the horse has a heart, the heart is won.

God wins us by learning our language, like Monty Roberts has learned the language of the wild mustang. God became Immanuel, which being

interpreted is, God with us. In Christ, God became man, one of us; came close to us; reconciles us to Himself, wins our heart, not with terrifying threats, but as Psalm 18:35 says, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Paul says to the Thessalonians, "We were gentle among you" (1 Thess 2:7). The church on earth is to represent Christ to the world; if we were to understand wild sinners, we could win more of them. The Good News is that it's our privilege to share the joy of the Lord in winning them!

"Lowliness and gentleness" are rare character traits, even in some church work. But the ministry of the humble ones is far-reaching and lasting. These are Christlike character traits, and therefore we must expect that Satan opposes those who have them and will even persecute them. But those who are close to Christ will constantly strive to bring people into harmony with each other.