

Last week... in our study through the Book of Judges... we continued with a narrative that concerned itself with spiritual confrontation. God calls you and I sometimes to go to an erring brother or sister in the Lord... out of love... and with a desire to see them have full fellowship with God.

Israel saw such a need to confront. ... In Judges 20:1-17... we saw how the Israelites... through the graphic instigation of a Levite... assembled 11 of Israel's 12 tribes... to decide how to respond to the rape of the Levite's concubine... while he was traveling through Gibeah (a city that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.)... The other 11 tribes... who had assembled... believed the testimony of the Levite... even though it was filled with lies and half-truths... and came out with an overbearing force against the whole tribe... instead of just the city of Gibeah... or better yet... just the men who committed the rape... from that city. As a result... the tribe of Benjamin... I'm sure... felt backed into a corner... and came out ready for swinging... and slinging stones. War became inevitable.

Through last week's passage... we saw several principles about spiritual confrontation. ... These are important lessons for us... because the spiritual life of a church is crippled... and eventually destroyed... when the congregation shuts its eyes to sin... and will not discipline offenders. ... There can never be unity among the people of God... as long as there remains a willingness to cover up sin and allow it to infect the body.

Two lessons we observed from our passage last week was about overbearing confrontation... that uses too much force... and confrontation that rushes to judgment and action... before a proper evaluation. The

Apostle Paul... centuries later... put it very succinctly in a letter he wrote to the Galatian church...

Galatians 6:1 (ESV)

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

Today... as we continue with our narrative... we have several more principles to learn about proper spiritual confrontation. As we see how this confrontation by the 11 Tribes of Israel plays out... against their brother tribe of Benjamin... we will be considering what happens when it *doesn't* go well. ... Proper spiritual confrontation is never easy... it often explodes in your face... even when you do the right thing. ... What do you do... when disaster happens... because you did the right thing...? Would God ever lead you to take a certain action... and then allow you to experience devastating consequences... because of it...?

Several years ago... I became familiar with a situation that a pastor and his family faced... which took a turn like that. ... I won't share his real name... because some of you may know him... or have heard me refer to him on other occasions. I will call him "Pastor Ernie."

Pastor Ernie had a youth in his church... William... who seemed to be crying out about something in his life... and in his family... that he was not free to talk openly about. He would drop certain clues as if to say... "*Please follow up... investigate... I have something you should know... but I cannot tell you directly...*" For example... William gave Pastor Ernie a video tape of his family's Christmas celebration... and insisted the pastor watch it. ... When Pastor Ernie watched it... after a few more urgings from the youth...

Ernie saw William's dad videotaping several inappropriate sexual gestures. ... Also William would hang around the church office... get onto the computer when no one was around... but then leave pornography on the secretary's computer. (He was acting out in a way that seemed William wanted to be caught.) It was clear that he had been the only one around the computer. ... Then William began to act out in other ways. There was inappropriate touching of younger girls in the church AWANA program... and uninvited sexual touching and talk with girls in the High School Youth department. ... Pastor Ernie became aware of it one day... because his daughter began to cry for three days straight... and simply would not tell him or his wife what was bothering her. Finally she did. William... had been touching and touching and touching her... at many youth events... even though she would scream at him to stop... he wouldn't. William had also passed a letter to her with lurid and sexually graphic content. He was also calling her on the phone with the same substance. Finally Pastor Ernie's daughter broke. ... She held it in for so long... because she did not want to destroy her father's ministry. You see William's own father was the chairman of the deacons for the church.

Ernia went to the youth pastor (Peter) and asked if he was aware that this behavior was going on. ... Peter revealed to Ernia that he had been aware for some time and mentioned two other girls in his youth department who had been victimized by William.

Pastor Ernie and Pastor Pete prayed intensely every morning together for three days... seeking God's direction for how to best handle the matter. Ernie contacted a Christian psychologist friend... (Dr. Mike Olsen) who told Ernia that he was mandated to file a report with the police. The Christian

psychologist said from what Ernie told him that he was 99.9% certain that William's entire home had problems for which they were seeing only the tip of the ice burg. The youth pastor thought that filing a police report might be too heavy handed... although he conceded that they both might be mandated reporters by law. So... to be sure... a few days later... Ernie went to see a lawyer. Collette had been part of the Los Angeles County District Attorney Sexual Abuse Division. She listened to Ernie... and then said, *"Now I want to talk to your daughter."* She met privately with Pastor Ernie's daughter for two hours... and then called Ernie to return to her office. When Ernie returned... Collette demanded that he go directly to the police department... and file a report. She told him that she would call the police and have him arrested if he failed to do so... because by law... he was a mandated reporter.

After filing the police report Ernie returned to his office and called every one of the church's elder's and deacons (except the chairman) and explained his actions. The leaders asked him to write down everything he knew and present it to them at a specially called meeting following church the next Sunday. The meeting was tear-filled. Every leader... one-by-one... affirmed that the pastor did the difficult - but right thing. The youth pastor (Pete) added... *"If what happened to your daughter had happened to my daughter (Amanda)... I would be sitting in a jail cell right now for murder..."*

Eventually the police went to the home of the chairman of the deacons... because they were required to do so... because of the report. ... Of course the chairman and his family left the church... but not before writing letters to the other church leaders... denying all allegations and claiming that Ernie

was being vindictive about not having a salary increase over the past nine years.

Over the next six weeks... the Pastor Pete... who served on the Elder Board as a church elder... surprised Ernie by calling special meetings that he led. Every meeting was an inquisition to have Pastor Ernie admit that he over-reacted... acted with too much force... that he rushed into filling out a police report on the chairman of the deacons without proper consideration... and that he must have had an ulterior motive.

Six weeks of special meetings... broke Pastor Ernie and his family... All the pressing and pressing for Ernie to confess something that he knew was not at all true... the pastor felt like he had been punched in the gut because of what had been happening to his daughter... and then for six weeks the men who he had served with for more than ten years were hatefully kicking him the face while he reeled on the ground in front of them. None of it made any sense – whatsoever!

Have you been so certain about God's leading... because everything pointed to it... and you took the time to carefully and prayerfully check things out... and then BOOM ! - Devastation happens because you did what you knew was right...? ... It can easily happen with any spiritual confrontation... and it is what happened to the 11 tribes of Israelites.

The 11 tribes were ready to do battle against the mustered forces of the tribe of Benjamin. And notice what the 11 Israelite tribes do... just before the fight.

Judges 20:18

Now... let me remind you that this was during the period of the Judges... everyone did what was right in their own eyes. ... The nation of Israel has not been righteous at all... by what we have read throughout the Book of Judges. ... They were very worldly... and following after the repulsive gods of the surrounding nations. ... So when we read how they took this action... it is very refreshing. They do the right thing. They turn to the Lord... they seek Him out... and they ask for His direction for the battle.

But did you notice what they left out...? They have already made up their minds what action they will take – to fight against the Benjamites. They do not ask God if what they are about to do... is the right course of action. They don't seem to need God for that. ... They simply assume that their action is right and that they are righteous for taking it. All they want to know is the proper battle strategy.

Sometimes we can be so certain about our need to correct someone... that we don't think we need God either. ... *Pfffft! Why ask God if I should point out this person's error...? Isn't it obvious...?* ... And we might even ask God for battle strategy... when we should start by asking Him if we are the one to engage in this battle. Perhaps we do not have the right motive. By the way... any and all spiritual confrontation is to be motivated by a love that wants to see the other person in proper fellowship with God. If that is not your motive... then you are not the one to confront... or at least until God gives you the right motive.

Before we plan the strategy... we need to know if it is God's leading... and if we have the proper motive. ... The Israelites assume all of this is settled... so they ask God only for the strategy plan. ... And God gives it to them! ...

Does this mean that He favors their intentions...? By giving His answer that Judah shall go up first... is God saying it is His will for them to fight their brother tribe...? Maybe. But not necessarily. ... Someone can build a case that perhaps God knew they were going to fight the Benjamites... *“and since you are... lead off with the Judaites...”* ... Personally... I am not sure that it was God’s perfect will for them... but God is going to use this event for a greater purpose... that we are about to see.

Judges 20:19-21

Despite the eagerness of the Israelites for the attack (they rose early)... the results proved disastrous. ... The vastly outnumbered Benjamites struck down twenty-two thousand Israelite soldiers — almost one for every Benjamite that went out into the field. That is a lot of casualties! If the battle lasted for 10 hours... that is 2,200 Israelite deaths every hour... or 37 fallen soldiers every minute. This was just in ONE DAY. To put it in perspective compare this **one** single day where 22,000 lives were lost... to a spread of 7 years... or 2,555 days where America lost 58,000 soldiers in Viet Nam from 1964-1973.

It was **not** a good day for the Israelites. Evil often seems to have the upper hand in conflicts of good and evil.

Now let me go back to the story I just told about the pastor. Here is the rest of the story... the pastor moved to LaPine Oregon... and stands before you now. I have been using my middle name... ... All of the other names, except the Christian Psychologist and the Lawyer... were changed. ... I am so grateful to Living Water for it’s continuous healing love. (You didn’t

know that we came here to heal... did you...?) These events that happened 12 years ago were not a good period of time for me and my family.

God's leading could not have been any more clear. ... The Christian Psychologist AND the lawyer both told me that I had no option. It was not something that I wanted to do... and I only did so after much prayer and professional advice. ... But I felt devastated. ... Why would God so clearly lead into such devastating circumstances...? ... Does God punish us for following His will...? ... Thankfully... by the grace of God... I knew He wouldn't. ... And I am certain that it was the same grace of God at work with Israelites as well. Look how they respond...

Judges 20:22-23

This time... they get the question right. "***Should we go up and fight against our brother tribe...?***" They came in a spirit of brokenness... they wept until evening... before the Lord. They took their sorrows to Him... they didn't turn away from Him... and they came broken and contrite.

We didn't see that when they came to God the first time... did we...? ... You know... in our spiritual confrontations... we need to come to the Lord beforehand... and we need to come with broken and contrite spirits. ... We are not happy about the condition we need to confront... "*Brother Wally slipped up, God. Bless me now... Lord... as I go show him the error of his ways... Which of his faults shall I attack him with first... God...?*" Instead... there needs to be broken contriteness that sorrows over the sin and broken fellowship the brother/sister has with the Lord. There also needs to be a humility that recognizes that – only by the grace of God it is them... but could very easily be me... who needs to be confronted.

So... they come in the right spirit... and they ask the right question. ... They are maturing... aren't they...? ... And this time... God gives them a direct answer. ... This time God makes it very clear that it is His will for them to go fight Benjamin. ... Let's take a look at the result...

Judges 20:24-25

WHAT !!! ??? ... In just two days of fighting... the number of casualties... is almost the total of what seven years in Viet Nam produced in American deaths. But - God said, "Go up against them."

Doesn't this remind you of the old Charlie Brown cartoon... where Lucy holds a football and entices Charlie Brown to come kick it. Charlie Brown takes a running start... and just he is about to lay his foot into the ball... Lucy pulls it away. Charlie Brown flips onto his back. Cartoonist Charles Shultz... many times through the years... set this same scene of Lucy enticing Charlie Brown to come kick the ball... and every time... Lucy pulls the ball away... just as Charlie tries to kick it.

Isn't this what God did here...? Did he just entice the Israelites and pull the ball away... making them land hard on their backs...? Maybe you have felt as if God has treated you that way in your past. Perhaps you have tried to confront someone with their wrong doing. God's leading was clear to you... but you ended up flat on your back staring at the sky. ... "*What happened, Lord...?*" ... Why would it ever seem as though God pulled the ball away at the last second...? ... Let's continue and see if we can find some answers...

Judges 20:26-28

When the Israelites first came to God... before the initial battle... they were not contrite. In their pride of thinking they knew what they were supposed to do... they asked God the wrong question. ... The second time they came... they came with the right spirit... and they asked the right question. But they still lost. ... Now they come to God again... and they come a little differently. ... This time they approach God with prayer... fasting... and sacrificial worship.

Why does God say “Go!” and then allow them to loose...? ... The answer may be the result we are seeing. ... During this time period... the period of the Judges... everyone did what was right in their own eyes... Israel as a whole did not follow God... But here we see that the Lord was refining them. God was using the awfulness of the situation... which Israel created for themselves... to redeem them to Himself. ... Each time... the Israelites pull closer and closer to the Lord.

I cannot say for sure... that whenever it seems God has pulled the football away from you... that this is what He is doing for you... But I will say that it is not unlike Him. ... This is one of the take-home truths of our passage today. ... So use those situations to draw closer and more dependent on Him. ... I think that is what He was doing for the Israelites in our narrative this morning.

Also... remember how the Israelites got here. They rushed to judgment without hearing more than one witness... and then they over-reacted with unnecessary force... and pushed Benjamin into a corner. God may have some disciplinary action taking place here as well. Hebrews 12 tells us that God disciplines those whom He loves. (Therefore... we would be wise to

consider this option for our “flat-on-our-back” situations also... and repent of anything God *might* be trying to show us.)

Pulling closer to God... the Israelites fasted. ... What exactly is that... and would it be useful in our own efforts...?

In the Old Testament God sometimes told Israel that they needed to consecrate themselves. These times came before an important battle... and just before He handed down the Law to them through Moses. Part of consecrating themselves included fasting. ... It was used to heighten their attention to what God was doing.

Prayer and fasting is carried over into the New Testament... by John the Baptist’s disciples... and later... after Jesus ascended... by the apostles. Why...? What does it do...?

First of all... it is not a magical ritual... and it is not a mechanism for obligating God to do something that we want. When we fast... it is not that we are laying it on extra thick... so God is more inclined to answer our prayers. ... Fasting is a form of worship... by which we give up something that we have regular access to... so that we can have a greater sense of our total dependency on God. ... In most cases it is food that we give up. The internal hunger sensation that we feel when we do this... reminds us of our need and dependency on something that must come from outside of ourselves... and our greatest dependency is on the Lord. We worship God by a sustained physical act that reminds us of who we really are – dependent beings. (There is no way we can sustain ourselves.) We are helpless in... and of ourselves... We need the Lord. ... Fasting is worship... and when we increasing the level of our worship... it usually heightens our

perception of God... and increases the likelihood of our hearing His direction.

We are not commanded to fast... and fasting is not for those who have medical conditions that prohibit it. ... But if you have a desire to try it... start slow... by only missing one meal... or two. ... And do it as an act of worship... not as an attempt to manipulate God.

The Israelites fasted... and they sacrificed... and they asked God again... if they should attempt another battle. ... This time... God gave them an answer they had not heard before. God reveals that they will be victorious over Benjamin.

What have we learned so far about spiritual confrontation...? 1) Don't rush to judgment 2) Don't over-react with unnecessary harshness 3) Go to God with contriteness first... and ask the right question – "*Lord, should I go at this time?*" 4) Faithfully draw closer and closer to the Lord, even in apparent defeat. ... Our "flat-on-our-back" experiences may not be proof that God did not lead us.

There is a fifth and final element that we see in our passage today. This is one that we do **not** want to ignore. But do you know what...? We often do.

Judges 20:29-48

The 11 tribes of Israel were *indeed* victorious. ...And they were very zealous in their victory. ... Might I even say... they were too zealous and too victorious..? They slaughtered men... women... children... and animals... in every city that belonged to Benjamin. ... We have no indication that God commanded this. In fact as we read a little into the next

chapter... they weep bitterly because of their over-zealousness. They knew that they did wrong...

Judges 21:1

They are still laying it on thick... to punish the whole tribe of Benjamin. No one wants their daughter to marry a dirty Benjamite. But then they come to a realization.

Judges 21:2-3

When the battle raged... their zeal took over. They wiped out an entire tribe... their own brothers... and now they are very... very sorry.

Whenever we seek to administer spiritual correction in someone... it is crucial that we have an end goal in mind... before we start out. Israel went to battle and let their emotions take over. Before long an entire tribe of Israel was wiped off the face of the earth.

We simply must have the clear goal in mind that all we are after is a restored relationship with God... whenever we confront someone with a spiritual issue. ... Our effort is not to punish or to seek revenge in any way. ... It is to see that our brother or sister is in a right relationship with the Lord.

I'd like to end today's message with an example of what proper spiritual confrontation looks like. I want to read from an author I quoted last week... Gordon McDonald... in an article he wrote about Church Discipline for Leadership Journal.

A single man in our congregation was behaving inappropriately toward women. He badgered some women with unwanted phone calls. His conversations were reportedly marked with sexual

suggestiveness. The situation required rebuke, and, if that was not effective, discipline. I asked this man to meet with me.

"I have been made aware," I said, "that a number of women in our congregation are offended—some quite angered—by things you have been doing. Let me be specific. You have raised inappropriate sexual subjects in conversation. Women have reported that you have phoned them in a manner they consider harassment. I'll be glad to give specific examples if you feel you need them."

The man cautiously admitted there was substantial truth to the reports. Then I went on. "I want you to hear me very carefully so there is no misunderstanding between us. I have thought about this for several days. I have asked God to give me wisdom, and I want to speak in Christian love and respect to you.

"But I want you to know I am one who has a responsibility for the spiritual leadership of this congregation. Your behavior has been unacceptable according to Scripture and according to the covenantal life of this church. People have been hurt, and you have lost your credibility in their eyes.

"Christian men do not, as they say, 'hit' on women. They treat them with respect and honor. And if you do not understand how this is done, I will be happy to team you up with a man who can provide instruction for you.

"If there is one more instance of inappropriate behavior of this kind, I will immediately bring your name before the board of elders and ask them to put you under discipline. Have I made myself clear?"

The man assured me that he understood. I concluded our meeting with prayer, acknowledging God's presence in the conversation.

Later he took me up on my offer to connect him with a mature man who could provide guidance that he clearly had not received from other sources. I never got another adverse report about him.

As we have acknowledged through our passage this morning... it doesn't always end so clean. We sometimes get hurt in the process. But keep pulling closer and closer to the Lord. Learn whatever He wants to teach you... and kick the football through the uprights! Because...

The spiritual life of a church is crippled... and eventually destroyed... when the congregation shuts its eyes to sin... and will not discipline offenders. ... There can never be unity among the people of God... as long as there remains a willingness to cover up sin and allow it to infect the body.