

Reconciliation Obstructed

2 Samuel 19:40-43

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-6-2014

Introduction – hopes for reconciliation were high (v. 40)

David had been working diligently on reconciliation in this chapter, and in the previous verses, it sure looked like he had been successful. I'm sure there was a lot of rejoicing. We saw that he had followed some wonderful peacemaking steps. But now an angry fight blows it all up and brings everything back to the bad state in which it was in before. And we wonder, "Why?! We had peace, and now we are fighting again." And this paragraph gives great lessons on some of the most common obstacles to reconciliation.

I am convinced that too frequently what we call peace is not really peace, but a truce; a cessation of hostility. Now, that's good as far as it goes. Obviously for peace to be achieved, hostilities do need to be put off. But peace goes way beyond that. It doesn't just put off sinful behaviors. It also puts on supernatural graces that result in oneness.

In Ephesians 2:14, Paul defines peace this way: "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation." Hostilities have been put off, Christ's grace and character have been put on, and the result is that two hostile parties have been made one. There is no longer separation. Until the two have been made one, we don't have peace; we don't have genuine reconciliation. You might agree not to fight, but that is not yet God's peace. In a sermon on Ephesians, Ray Stedman said,

...what we call peace among nations never lasts – because it isn't really peace. It isn't oneness at all. It is only a weariness with warfare, an agreement to stop it for awhile until we can all recuperate and re-arm. Then it breaks out all over again, because nothing is ever settled.

Does that sound familiar? Some people think, "If only I could get rid of the irritations, everything would be great in our marriage." Or, "If only I could get rid of the church irritations, everything would be great." I don't remember where I read about it, but there was a monk in the olden days who constantly got furious with other monks. And of course, it was always the fault of other monks. And they finally sent him off to experience some solitude for several months. And one day he reached for a pitcher to pour himself some water, and knocked the pitcher onto the ground. When he filled it and tried to pour water a second time, it fell out of his hands. And he

flew into a rage, but he had no one to blame. And it finally dawned on him that it wasn't the irritations and it wasn't the other monks who were at fault – he had brought the problem with him. There was something inside that Satan was taking advantage of. So today we will look at the irritations, at the flesh, at the world, and at the devil, and we will see how each one can contribute to peace breaking. But I hope to also give tips to peacemakers on what they can do, even if the other party is blowing it on every level.

I. Potential obstructions to reconciliation (v. 40 & context)

A. The spirit of rebellion had never been repented of (context; 20:1)

And before we get to verse 40, I want to look at a couple of things in the context. The spirit of rebellion mentioned in point A is an inward disposition that magnifies the irritations enormously. The irritations were already there, but they probably would not have broken the peace if at least *this* element was not present. Look at chapter 20:1.

2Sam. 20:1 And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said: “We have no share in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!”

I want you to notice that God characterizes Sheba as a “rebel” before his rebellion had even begun. He already had the disposition of a rebel. And previously we saw that the spirit of rebellion had been at work in *Absalom's* life long before *his* rebellion. And Satan was using Absalom to spread this spirit of rebellion throughout Israel. The spirit of rebellion was so pervasive, that all it took to manifest yet another rebellion was a leader to coalesce the rebels.

And here is the point for the purposes of today's sermon: when a rebel heart is not changed, the best that you can hope for is cease-fires and truces. And even then, it is easy for Satan to quickly get things stirred up again if the rebellion has never been dealt with. And a spirit of rebellion hangs on worldview issues, heart issues, and demonic issues. And I want to focus on the demonic, because it is often ignored.

If the rebel, Satan, and his demons can find a rebel heart, they are instantly drawn to each other like magnets. By the way, this is one of the reasons why teenage rebels can find each other in a room within minutes. There is a magnetic attraction. Any time we allow inward rebellion to be unconfessed, it gives the demonic a foothold in our lives - always. Where rebellion is, we have no power to resist the wicked one. And I'll prove that

point in a moment. Rebellion gives him legal ground to stick around in our lives. That's why when we are opposing the GLBTQ bills, or opposing centralism, socialism, and other issues, we must not oppose those things as rebels. We want to oppose those things as the loyal opposition and give helpful suggestions rather than angry tirades. We want to be respectful to authority. Lawful *resistance* to tyranny is not dangerous, but civil *rebellion* is. The attitudes involved in civil rebellion can open citizens up to demonic influence. A wife's rebellion to her husband opens the door to the demonic. A child's rebellion to parents does the same thing. A church member's rebellion to church authority opens them up to demonic influence. So let me spend just a couple of minutes explaining this concept.

1 Samuel 15:23 says, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft..." Everyone knows that witchcraft opens us up to demonic influence, but rebellion does so just as much. It is within the same sphere as witchcraft. He says, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft..."

Prov. 17:11 says, "An evil *man* seeks only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger will be sent against him." The word "messenger" can also be translated as angel, and the Jewish Septuagint translation does indeed translate it that way - as "evil angel." Demons are fallen angels. They are the cruel angels or the evil angels. Those are all synonyms. And so Matthew Henry rightly says about this rebellious and stubborn person, "Satan, the angel of death, shall be let loose upon him, and the messengers of Satan."¹ In other words, when we give in to a rebellious spirit, we open ourselves up to demonic influence. If demons see rebellion, they are drawn to it like a magnet. They are sent by Satan to take advantage of that.

Well, what happens then? Once a demon starts gaining legal ground through our heart rebellion, we lose the Holy Spirit's discernment, and we begin to be spiritually blind. We fail to see life as God sees it. The discernment that rebels have may well be a discernment from cruel demonic messengers. And so Ezekiel 12:2 says,

Ezek. 12:2 "Son of man, you dwell in the midst of a rebellious house, which has eyes to see but does not see, and ears to hear but does not hear; for they *are* a rebellious house.

Why can't they see? "...for [or because] they are a rebellious house." One expositor said,

¹ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume* (p. 993). Peabody: Hendrickson.

In the above verse, it is important to notice how it also emphasizes that [this] rebellious house has eyes, but cannot see. Rebellion allows the god of this world (which is Satan, who works through his network of demonic spirits) to blind our spiritual eyes. When our spiritual eyesight is blinded, our discernment suffers greatly. This is a dangerous position for anybody to be in.

So let's trace through what we have seen. 1 Samuel 15:23 says that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. And actually, the Hebrew is much stronger. There is no "as." It is the sin of witchcraft; it is imitating the devil. And when this rebellion is not immediately confessed (as Samuel begged king Saul to do), we can have a demonic spirit sent against us just like king Saul did. It was after Saul's rebellion that the evil spirit came against Saul. That's what Proverbs 17:11 guarantees. This in turn leads to lack of discernment.

Now, all of that is to say that until a spirit of rebellion is dealt with, peace making will only amount to temporary truces and cease-fires. Many pastors spend all their time putting out fires. They put one out and another one starts up over there. A rebel like Sheba can appeal to that rebel spirit in other people's lives. In fact, it's a weird thing – people who have this spirit of rebellion seem to recognize others with the same spirit and to have a connection with them almost immediately.

And that rebel spirit will focus in on all of the irritations of life and will be unable to see the blessings. Why are they blind to the blessings? Because Ezekiel 12:2 says that a rebellious people, even if they have spiritual eyes, will not be able to see clearly with them. 2 Peter 1 says that this can be true of believers, who have become "shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (v. 9). So that is the first major obstacle – a spirit of rebellion.

B. Ungodly weeping, self-pity, selfishness, lack of desire for reconciliation, Absalom's poisoning of people's minds through misinformation, vindictiveness, the deaths of many, hurts, etc. (context)

And let's look at all of the irritations that this spirit focused Sheba upon. And there were plenty of irritations. Point B lists some of them. We saw in an earlier sermon that David's ungodly weeping was a source of irritation. The very temporary self pity and selfishness of David could have irritated Sheba even though Sheba had his own selfishness. But he is going to be blind to his own. All he is going to see is David's. Also, David has not been able to deal with every false rumor and slander that Absalom had

spread about him, and so there could have been any number of irritations dating all the way back to chapter 15 on why David was not a great king. Irritations don't have to be true to be irritations. They can be based on gossip. But they can be based on true faults as well. All human leaders will have their faults, and those faults can lead to irritations, and if there is a spirit of rebellion that is poisoning the vision, it can lead to anger and rejection of that leader. But genuine hurts can also lead to rebellion. They had already experienced the loss of 40,000 soldiers in the battle of chapter 18, with 20,000 being killed by the sword and more than 20,000 being killed by the treacherous forest in ways that are not known. Well, those families could easily hold a grudge against David, even though it was David who was the injured party. The point is that there could have been any number of irritations that Sheba could have appealed to. It's impossible for any group of people to exist for any length of time without some potential irritations arising. But if you are quick to latch on them, it is an indication that something is not right inside. It's not the irritations per se that are the problem.

C. Suspicions of why David is going south to Judah without checking with all the elders.

I won't go over points C-E in detail, but look at verse 40:

2Sam. 19:40 ¶ Now the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him. And all the people of Judah escorted the king, and also half the people of Israel.

There were three potential irritations there. Why didn't David wait for all the elders before going south to Judah? And their questioning implies that they felt that David needed permission from them to do so. It's a bit of a controlling spirit.

D. Envy over Chimham's reward?

Though the text doesn't say so, taking the young Chimham with him might have aroused some envy and suspicion as well. What's so special about Chimham? What has he done to deserve this? Just because he is related to Barzillai shouldn't make him special, or so some might think.

E. Suspicions over the disproportionate representation from Judah

And verse 40 indicates that there may have been a disproportionate representation from Judah.

II. Anger fuels more anger (vv. 41-43)

But whatever the irritations were, they gave vent to anger. And as we read through verses 41-43, I want you to notice how anger fuels more anger, which in turn inflames even more anger. There are no soft answers here to turn away wrath. There are self-justifying and accusatory answers, and it gets a word fight going. Beginning to read at verse 41:

2Sam. 19:41 Just then all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, “Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David’s men with him across the Jordan?”

2Sam. 19:42 ¶ So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, “Because the king *is* a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king’s *expense*? Or has he given us any gift?”

They are feeling accused of favoritism, but they don’t help matters by claiming special rights to him since he is their relative. It’s almost like they are affirming out of one side of their mouth what they are denying out of the other side of their mouth. Verse 43:

2Sam. 19:43 ¶ And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, “We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more *right* to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?”

¶ Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

We aren’t told what further fierce words they said, but that last phrase gives the impression that things got out of control. So there is anger, anger, and even greater anger. And anger must be under control for reconciliation to work. Anger makes people irrational. To us this argument sounds pretty childish and petty. At least it does to me – it sounds very childish and petty. But when you are angry, you don’t care how you sound and you don’t care how you might hurt others with your words. Right? You just let your feelings gush and use your words like swords.

No wonder David wrote Psalm 37 on this trip, which admonishes us, “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret – it only causes harm” (v. 8). And it caused great harm here. Will Rogers once said, “People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.”² And there was no good landing from this argument. Even if a rebellion had not resulted under Sheba, it still would have produced hurt in each other. They weren’t attacking the problem; they were attacking each other – which is a form of heart murder and verbal murder. Scripture clearly identifies it as a violation of the sixth

² Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (p. 132). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

commandment. And later I am going to be giving you some tips on how to avoid that.

But many scholars have pointed out that there were prejudices between North and South long before this day, going all the way back to the period of the Judges. And the argument on this day spawned further bad feelings that led to a split under Rehoboam. It's so easy to allow irritations to make us get angry. And as people in my grandma's generation sometimes said, Anger is only one letter off from danger.

So a spirit of rebellion is the first problem. Unresolved anger is the second. And both problems existed before this explosion. That is so important to understand: both problems existed before this explosion. C. S. Lewis once said,

Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is. If there are rats in a cellar, you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me ill tempered; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am.³ You've got rats in your cellar if you find yourself flying off the handle. And until those rats are exterminated so that they no longer exist in the dark, they will keep appearing every time an irritation happens. And the problem is not the irritation. The irritation is just the turning on of the lights. The irritation is a providential testing to see what is already in your cellar or in your heart. If you get mad at the irritation and destroy the light bulbs, you are being foolish. That does not get rid of the rats. God's grace must flush out the rebellion and anger at the heart level or the rats will always be there. So a spirit of rebellion and anger are two wretched enemies to genuine reconciliation.

III. Pride fuels more anger and rebellion (vv. 41-43)

But there is one more horrible rat in this passage. Our last point shows an even deeper enemy that fuels both rebellion and anger. It is the great enemy pride. And I want to show you eleven things that happened in this passage that would have been hard for pride to take. But instead of allowing those things to crucify the pride, they allowed the pride to fuel anger and rebellion. The rat of pride must be dealt with, not simply the irritations that

³ Zuck, R. B. (1997). *The speaker's quote book: over 4,500 illustrations and quotations for all occasions* (p. 14). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

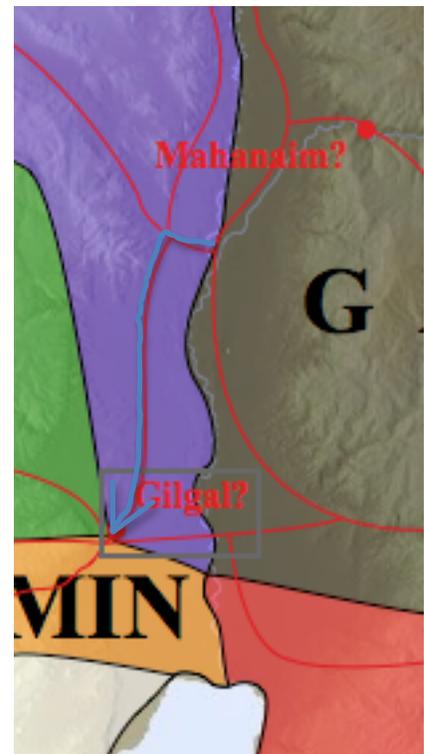
expose the rat. Does that make sense? Well, let's look at each of these irritations.

A. Feeling slighted by being left behind and being left out of the decision to cross the Jordan (v. 41a)

The first is feeling slighted and feeling left out of the decision making process. Verse 41 says,

Just then [and the “just then” refers to just when they got to Gilgal] all the men of Israel came to the king, and said to the king, “Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David’s men with him across the Jordan?”

There are two things that point A highlights as potential hits to their pride. The first is that David’s group hadn’t waited for them at the Jordan, and they had to really hustle to catch up to the group in Gilgal. If you look at the map, you will notice that the roads are in red, and I’ve added a blue arrow to show their route to Gilgal. From the Jordan River they had to travel 2 miles west and then 16 miles south to catch up with the first group at the town of Gilgal. If you have ever been late to something that you really wanted to celebrate, you know the frustrations that can arise internally. These guys had probably worked up a sweat, had cross words with themselves for being late, and cross words with the others for going on without them. And the frustration with being late made them more irritable than normal. Maybe some of you have kicked the proverbial flat tire and been in a foul mood when that flat tire has made you late to a party. Being late is never fun. That in itself had the potential for making them frustrated with David and the other men.



But there is a second thing that added to it. The word “stolen” implies that the king was being taken without their permission. Some translate that as kidnapped. But clearly they are irritated that the others had proceeded without their permission. Now, it’s not an entirely fair statement. In one sense they had not been left out of the decision making because (as they themselves admit in verse 43) they had already agreed to bring the king back. So David had permission. They had already voted on it. This had

already happened in previous negotiations. And we know from the discussions that had taken place already at the Jordan, that David's group must have been waiting for a long time for others to show up, and had just decided to move on. "They haven't arrived, we've waited quite a while; let's just move on." I'm sure both sides had good reasons for their frustrations. The Sheba group felt slighted that they hadn't waited longer. Perhaps they felt dismissed. Who knows? But for sure, that word "stolen" indicates that they thought David shouldn't have traveled on without their permission. That's their perspective. Now, David may have felt that they had already given their permission, and anyway, he was the king. Did he really need to get their permission to cross the Jordan and go back to his own home? Come on, guys! But you can see from these different perspectives, why an argument could easily ensue.

But in any case, a soft answer by David's group could have averted a disaster. They should have noticed that these guys were hot and bothered with having missed the show. Having noticed that they were flustered, they could have easily apologized and explained why they went on. "Please forgive us. We did not intend to slight you. After waiting for some hours, we thought you were providentially hindered from coming. We are glad you are here." A soft and humble answer would have been so much better.

Likewise, the second group should have used words less likely to arouse anger. To imply that David needed their permission to cross the Jordan seemed a bit unreasonable. To imply that they should have waited for more hours also seemed unreasonable. And the inflammatory words seemed totally unreasonable.

B. Inflammatory words ("stolen" v. 41b)

And that's what point B is about - inflammatory words. "Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away..." To accuse of stealing or kidnapping was a moral accusation. In fact, kidnapping carried the death penalty, so it was an especially inflammatory word. And it also implies that they were up to something, because it implies secrecy. There is suspicion being expressed, which would immediately make David's group feel defensive. If they had simply asked, "Why didn't you guys wait for us?" it would have been a discussion of facts. It still might have made touchy people somewhat angry, but it would have been less likely to have done so. Or better, "We feel badly that you guys didn't wait for us." Or even better, "Sorry that we are late to the party," and there would have been a much more friendly discussion.

But since their questions were moral accusations of kidnapping and hiding something, the words were an attack that almost guaranteed a response of self-defense and possibly of counter-attack. And this is what gets so many arguments into a downward spiral – they use words that are deliberately designed to hurt or to offend or to attack or to show moral blame. Those words can be name calling, or they can be throwing psychological labels at a person, or they can simply be hurtful words such as “I hate you,” or “You disgust me.” Inflammatory words rarely solve any issues. Each of those inflammatory words is a brick being laid to establish a wall between us. And that means that all inflammatory words need to be repented of, because they violate Ephesians 4:29, and verse 30 says that they grieve the Holy Spirit. And they grieve the Holy Spirit because those words are swords designed to tear down and hurt a person that the Holy Spirit loves. With your words you are attacking a person whom God loves. And they don’t work anyway. They either tend to make the other person close down, leave, or go on the attack in like manner. And the more quickly we can repent of words designed to hurt, the better. They are obstructions to reconciliation. Let me begin reading in Ephesians 4:29. Paul says.

Eph. 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Eph. 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Eph. 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Eph. 4:32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Eph. 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

Eph. 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

If we imitate Christ in these ways, we will not throw those obstructions to reconciliation in the way.

C. Exaggeration (v. 41b)

Paul also tells us to put off all untruthfulness. He wasn’t just talking about the big fibs. He was talking about exaggeration as well. Exaggeration is a huge obstruction to peacemaking. And verse 41 of our chapter contains two exaggerations. Starting in the middle of verse 41:

...“Why have our brethren, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king, his household, and all David’s men with him across the Jordan?”

The leaders in verse 41 exaggerated in two ways. They labeled what was done with David a kidnapping, when it was really David's idea in verse 38. Second, they acted like it was only Judah (the southern tribe) that had taken David across the Jordan when in reality verse 40 says that half of the army of Israel was with them as well. So there was representation from both the south and north. That means that they were exaggerating.

And exaggeration is a major obstacle to reconciliation because it starts an argument over the truthfulness of irrelevant information rather than trying to deal with the issue itself. "Why do you always leave the toilet lid up?" What's the response to a statement like that? It's not apology over leaving the toilet lid up one time. It is an argument over whether he always does it. You see, the issue has been deviated from the specific act today to whether he always does it or not. And that argument goes nowhere good. "You never show me respect." Generally, we ought to avoid always, never, or labeling the person as if he is always characterized by the bad behavior. Let me give you an example. It is better to say, "Son, that was clearly a lie" (which looks at a specific action) rather than saying, "Son, you are a liar." I know that Ray Comfort likes to make label generalities such as "That makes you an adulterer." "That makes you a liar." But Scripture says that all liars have their part in the lake of fire. All liars. Christians do not have being a liar as their identity. A former liar has a new identity, and even if he falls into lying (like Abraham did), it is individual sins of lying he is putting off, not the nature of a liar. We should not label fellow Christians with such things. Their identity is as a saint, and they have individual sins that need to be put off, not a nature of lying or a nature of adultery. Those labels can be a form of exaggeration. So there are many ways in which we can exaggerate, and by exaggerating, we tend to attack the person rather than the problem or the individual sin.

And when you are so labeled, it is hard to defend yourself. You feel helpless. I can deal with an accusation that I lied. I can repent of that specific lie. But how do you deal with the accusation of being a liar. It's impossible. The label just sticks with you no matter what you do. I'm trying to help you to recognize key obstacles to reconciliation, and exaggeration is one of them.

D. Being criticized in public (vv. 41-43)

The fourth thing that could have raised the hackles of their pride was that they were being criticized in public. It is always harder to acknowledge sin when being publically confronted. That doesn't excuse our pride, but if your goal is to solve a given problem, you are making it harder for yourself

to do so when you confront the person in front of others. So Scripture encourages us in Matthew 18 to confront a person privately – one on one. Our tactics of peace making need to be designed to assure maximum success. And you are not going to have maximum success if you violate Matthew 18.

E. Taking the bait (v. 42)

But having shown how the Sheba crowd was not approaching the problem of being hurt properly, we turn now to verse 42 to see how the David group did not respond to this attack appropriately either. Satan was dangling bait designed to get them angry, and they took it hook, line, and sinker. They were playing right into Satan's hands. Look at verse 42:

2Sam. 19:42 ¶ So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, “Because the king *is* a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter? Have we ever eaten at the king's *expense*? Or has he given us any gift?”

On every level this response is designed to escalate the conflict, not to resolve it. Rather than starting by asking questions and trying to look at things from the other side's perspective they did four things wrong: First, they got angry themselves. Granted, that's the easiest and most natural response. But it's bad enough when one side is not thinking clearly; it makes it almost impossible when both sides are not thinking clearly. The downward spiral away from reconciliation begins to happen. So they took the bait by getting angry.

Second, they let the other side define what has and hasn't happened. By answering, “Because ...” they are implicitly giving credence to the accusation. “Why did you do such and such?” “Well, because...” “Because the king is a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter?” Why would they answer a fallacious accusation when God Himself says that the accusation is not true in verse 40? In reality it wasn't just Judah that was taking David; it was Judah plus half the army of Israel. This was not a North versus South thing, like Sheba was trying to make it out to be.

But they bite on that accusation anyway. Why? Well, it's the same thing that happens in arguments all the time. When angry words come along, it is easy to take a “So what?” attitude and to hurt rather than to take away hurt. And I have seen this happen quite frequently when emotions kick in. Rather than desiring to truthfully answer, it's easy to say something that will put the other people in their place and hurt them. And what better way to do so than to not care about the thing that the other person is angry over? It's weird, but I have seen this too many times. People will implicitly admit to

what is being accused out of anger and in order to punish. Not helpful. And this explains why even the northerners who had sided with David previously ended up getting upset as well. Suddenly it's no longer an irritation about not waiting for them. It's blown into a huge North-South conspiracy.

The third thing that went wrong is that they deny that the other side has any right to be angry. They say, "Why then are you angry over this matter?" That's not a good thing to say to a person who is angry: "You have no right to be angry." You see, if David's men had seen these guys running to catch up, flustered in their faces, they should have immediately tried to look past the emotion and try to understand what was going on. They maybe had no reason to be frustrated with David, but sometimes if the reaction is sympathy for the inconvenience caused rather than defending yourself, an argument can be averted.

Fourth, they get defensive over the implication that they are being self-serving in this. "Have we ever eaten at the king's expense? Or has he given us any gift?" You can understand why they *want* to defend themselves, but those who are experts in conflict management point out that the best approach to harsh and unreasonable accusations is to ignore the personal attack and try to refocus the conversation on the specific issues that have started the attack. And let me give you an ordinary workday example. Jagoda Perich-Anderson wrote,

Some years ago I had a client who regularly criticized and attacked others' abilities and intelligence. One of my first assignments was to draft a presentation for him based upon a general list of bullet points. Lacking details, I knew the first attempt would not be right. Rather than focusing on specifics, he threw up his hands and told me the whole thing was crap and we'd have to start all over.

When he paused, I asked him to look at the power point slides with me, and began to re-order them into the sequence that made more sense to him, checking for his concurrence along the way. We then looked at the content of a few specific slides and made changes to those. He left that meeting satisfied.

I left that meeting relieved, and with more insights on how to work with him in the future. Don't get me wrong, I didn't enjoy being harangued and was glad when that assignment ended. However, by not losing my cool or just giving in to him, I met several key goals:

1. I kept the revision task relatively small and manageable.
2. I earned his respect, and retained a lucrative contract.
3. I preserved my self-respect.

4. I leveraged my insights about him to create a working relationship that diminished his attacks during future projects. They were neither as numerous, nor as vociferous as that first time.⁴

The reason it is so successful to ignore the attacks and try to sympathetically help the other person work through the issues, is because (as Jagoda words it), personal attacks are rarely about you, the target of the attack. You may think it is about you, but they already had the rats of anger inside of them. The problems are in the attacker. The attacker has perhaps learned bad habits of intimidation, exaggeration, or other attack modes, and if you are going to successfully solve the problem, you will have to ignore the fact that you have personally been attacked and try to focus the other person on the real problems. We don't like to do that because it doesn't seem fair to have to endure such attacks, but that is often the cost of being a peacemaker. You have to swallow your pride. And pride is one of the most frequent reasons why reconciliation has been obstructed.

Now, some people have a hard time thinking of the right things to say on the spur of the moment. Well, let me give you a secret – so do I. That's why I write things down. If I know there is going to be a difficult meeting, I write out potential responses to potential attacks so that I won't make a fool of myself by being defensive. And I would encourage you to do the same. Write down transition statements that can take both of you from the attack on you and transition it to an attack on the problem. A transition statement might be something like this: "I am so sorry that you guys feel hurt. Let's talk about what happened and see where we went wrong." And as you talk about what went wrong, it can be a bit easier to identify mistakes on both sides. David could perhaps have said, "I'm sorry for not being more specific. I should have made clear what time we were going to leave the Jordan." Or if there was a peacemaker on the other side, he could have said, "I'm really sorry for our frustrated outburst. We've been frantically trying to catch up, and we just feel bad that we missed the party." So that would be one transition statement: "I am so sorry that you guys feel hurt. Let's talk about what happened and see where we went wrong."

Another transition statement that David could have used would be, "I can see that this has been frustrating for you. Let's sit down and see if we can figure this out." Then you could start by affirming your desire to include the other party, and explain why you didn't wait. In this case, it was likely because they didn't know if they would show up.

⁴ <http://www.conflicttango.com/the-secret-to-handling-personal-attacks/>

Or here is another possible transition statement: “It looks like you have different information than we do. We want to hear your concerns. Maybe we were misinformed.” These approaches still allow you to explain your own assumptions, information, and motives, but it stops the anger in two ways: it affirms your respect for the other person and your desire to hear from them and to make amends if need be. And secondly, you are giving a soft answer. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Yes, they were attacked in an ungodly way by anger, but their own ungodly anger shows that they needed to study conflict management ahead of time, and probably deal with the rats of rebellion, anger, and pride before a crisis situation came up.

F. Social differences (v. 42a; 43a)

That same verse shows how it is easy for regional differences or cultural differences to make us process information differently. It can also make us assume things about the other person that may not be true. The first few years of our marriage, I would jump to conclusions about why my wife had done something and get into an argument. And often my assumptions were totally wrong. I should have been asking clarifying question. Now, if two people as close as Kathy and I can have the husband making wrong assumptions, it’s going to be even easier for people who aren’t so close. Commentators say that these verses hint at the longstanding tensions that already existed between Northern Israel and Judah. Verse 42 says,

So all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel,

Verse 43 starts,

And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, “We have ten shares in the king;

And the way it is worded is interesting because there were northerners with David, but the debate is not between that group and the late northerners. It became a north-south debate. And everyone agrees that there were huge differences of culture and even accent between the north and south. There always were tensions and these tensions would lead to a permanent split under Rehoboam, David’s grandson. Similar differences still exist in different regions of America. Men and women will sometimes look at issues from different angles. Sometimes artists and engineers will approach things differently. I really struggled with this when I was assigned books to understand the difference between the way Chinese and Americans look at life. I grew up in a different culture in Africa, so I am used to cultural differences, but it still blew me away at how differently the Chinese mindset

is from the Western mindset. Even after having read a number of books that would help me not to make faux pas, I still made quite a few mistakes that would have been irritations to them. The more pronounced those social differences, the more important it is to ask questions, be patient, be apologetic, and learn communication skills for talking through stressful issues. Sadly, neither side seemed interested in doing that on this occasion.

G. Acting like you have rights that others do not (v. 42b) and pitting rights against rights (v. 43a)

Look again at that phrase in verse 42: “Because the king *is* a close relative of ours. Why then are you angry over this matter?” The implication is that we have the right to be closer to David and to spend more time with David than you do. We are related to him, so get off our back.

Of course, in verse 43, the northerners are pitting their rights against the South’s rights. They say,

“We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more *right* to David than you.”

The whole issue of looking at the conflict through the lens of my rights and my needs and my desires hinders reconciliation rather than helping. As we have emphasized before, Mark 10 calls us to quit looking at life in terms of my rights and to start looking at life as a steward who has God-given responsibilities. How does *God* want me to relate to this person in this situation? It doesn’t mean we will be a rollover. But it does mean that pleasing God in a situation will be more important than getting my rights fulfilled.

The book, *His Needs Her Needs*, when looked at from the perspective of “How can I please my spouse” does have some decent ideas, though some of them are over the top and even humanistic. But when looked at from the perspective of, “Why is my spouse not serving my needs,” that book has been a disaster. It has become a tool of manipulation. Americans are preoccupied with rights, and it makes them selfish and without a servant’s heart. It is foreign to the Biblical call to be a steward of all that we are and have. And a preoccupation with rights is an enormous obstacle to reconciliation. If this is your problem, I have a one-page piece of homework that you can daily implement that will crucify this and transform your perspective.

H. Being defensive rather than listening (v. 42c-d)

Point H has already been dealt with to some degree, but being defensive rather than listening is the eighth problem. Do you have a listening heart, or are you more preoccupied with convincing the other person of your viewpoint? Now I will be the first to admit that it is easy to make this mistake. We are so intent on winning that we are thinking more about our next response than we are about listening to the other person's heart and asking follow up questions to clarify. Verse 42 ends with the southerners saying,

Have we ever eaten at the king's *expense*? Or has he given us any gift?"

They were not listening to the Northerner's issues. That's not really an answer. They were not asking clarifying questions. The moment we go into defensive mode, we end up missing the opportunities to solve the problem. We are so focused on not being misrepresented that we miss opportunities to tone things down and deal with the real issues that have come between us. Philippians 2:4 says, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

I. Feeling despised (v. 43b)

On the *North's* part, they felt *despised*. In verse 43 they complain, "Why then do you despise us?"

The south probably had no intention of despising the North initially. After all, half of the northern army was with them. Right? But once they got angry, it did come out. It was the *way* they were talking that led the North to feeling despised. And this would have been the perfect opportunity to tell them that we value you and do not despise you. But the escalation of words was beginning to get out of control.

J. One-upmanship on who is right and feeling bad that our own contributions have been neglected (v. 43c)

The latecomers knew that they were late to the meeting place, but they fail to acknowledge that they don't have a basis for anger. Instead they insist,

...were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?"

This whole argument is about who is right and trying to make ourselves look better than the other party. But if we are to be successful peacemakers, we need to put off defensiveness, anger, accusation, inflammatory language, allowing our hurt feelings to drive the discussion, or

giving in to the urge to get even. We have to put those things off. Arguments almost always degenerate into one-upmanship.

K. Fierce words (v. 43d)

The fierce words in verse 43 seem to be designed to score pain, not bring peace. It says,

...Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

And the result was predictable – breaking fellowship. All it took was one person to take advantage of these harsh words, and everything David had worked so hard to achieve was totally blown apart. And there are too many Shebas in the church who make matters worse in the way that they listen to the offenses of others. They don't help people to process their pains Biblically; they just enflame the pain. They are trying to be sympathetic, but in the process they are guilty of peace breaking. Chapter 20:1-2 says,

2Sam. 20:1 And there happened to be there a rebel, whose name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjamite. And he blew a trumpet, and said: "We have no share in David, Nor do we have inheritance in the son of Jesse; Every man to his tents, O Israel!"

2Sam. 20:2 So every man of Israel deserted David, *and* followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah, from the Jordan as far as Jerusalem, remained loyal to their king.

I want you to notice that every man of the north forsook David. That means even half the army of the north that had gladly accompanied David, was now poisoned to David. That's the way rebellion, anger, and pride work. They infect others who would have otherwise been just fine. Children can be poisoned to a parent. Members of the church can take on an offense.

What a vivid example of the damage done by anger unrestrained, rebellion untamed, and pride unchecked! I read a quip that Billy Sunday made one time. A lady was rationalizing to him about her angry outbursts. She said, "There's nothing wrong with losing my temper. I blow up, and then it's all over." "So does a shotgun," Sunday replied, "and look at the damage it leaves behind!"

You may think that your involvement in the obstacles we have seen in this paragraph don't do any damage to your family, your business, or to your other relationships. But they do. Please, let the horrible outcome of chapter 20 sink into your hearts. Let the horrible outcome make you resolve to be peacemakers. Since Christ died to reconcile all things to Himself and all

things to each other in Him, we must be diligent in putting off all obstacles to His great work of reconciliation. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.