

Burying the Hatchet

Matthew 18:1-35

By Doug Hamilton

“Bury the Hatchet” (Wikipedia)

There is an old adage from the American English colloquialism called “Bury the Hatchet”. It carried the meaning "to make peace." The phrase originated from the Native American Indians. They had a practice of putting away the tomahawk at the cessation of hostilities among quarreling tribes in the Eastern United States. Weapons were to be buried in a time of peace.

In the church, there is also an application of “Burying the Hatchet”, but with a negative connotation. Instead of “Burying the Hatchet” by making peace among our fellow Christians, we seek to “Bury the Hatchet” in the skull of one another out of revenge, envy and strife. It not only can hurt the Christian at the receiving end of the hatchet, but also the one slinging it, the rest of the congregation and even visitors.

There are many church families with many members who are still stinging from the hatchets wounds from the past. Perhaps they were scarred as a child by an unforgiving parent or sibling. Maybe it was from a supposed friend who turned out to be a grudge holder. Sometimes Christians will bury a hatchet like the two in the drawing to the right.



Imagine coming to a congregation for a first time visit and meeting people who carry the wounds of the hatchet. What if someone in a church family welcomed you as a visitor and had a hatchet sticking out of the skull? Would your defenses go up? Would you consider not coming back for a second visit?



The Church must always be a people of the buried hatchet.

We of the Lord’s church are defined by our ability to forgive and press on, being able to get past one another’s faults. That is what real families do. We are to be a people who can “Bury the Hatchet” and be at peace with one another.

- Philippians 2:1-2, If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ² make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.
- 1Thessalonians 5:13, “...Live in peace with one another.”

But as you know, a great many labors have been put to death because it is so difficult to bury the hatchet when someone gets on your nerves. You know the story! Someone said something or did something that hurts and you want to square off with them. Instead of making peace, we make war. Instead of dealing with a problem we end up causing one.

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This lesson is aimed at putting your mind in a position to be able to bury the hatchet and move on for the work of our common Savior Jesus Christ. We will be using the eighteenth chapter of Matthew to gain a better understanding. We will center on four thoughts in which to focus your mind and become an expert at “Burying the Hatchet” whenever the opportunity arises.

1) Pride is the hatchet which must be buried.

Matthew 18:1-6, At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, ³ and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ "Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ "And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; ⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea.

What is the greatest source of “hatchet power” in the church? PRIDE. It is one of the “seven deadlies” mentioned in Proverbs. It is what comes before a fall. It is what caused the devil to leave heaven. It is the hatchet that has destroyed more relationships in the history of the church than any other. Pride is the source of the hatchet.

When we fail to be humble in our attitudes toward each other, we cannot succeed as a family; therefore we must bury the hatchet of pride and make peace with our fellow saint. There is no winner when pride rears its ugly head, for a spiritual war always brings a spiritual death.

What happens when we do not bury the hatchet of Pride? The younger converts are swallowed up in condemnation and the older converts live with that thought the rest of their days. Both stumble in the end.

As a preacher I have often been exposed to the pain in the heart of a young Christian that has departed the faith because their feelings were hurt by a “more mature” saint. They might state, “They did not care about me” or “I cannot worship with hypocrites!” The logical misunderstood response of the “mature” saint might be, “They need to learn to get over that!” or “When are they going to grow up!” You can be right in doctrine, but yet still wrong in approach. You can be right in your intentions, but wrong in your actions.

We have to be able admit that the source of all our stumbling-blocks is pride. What would happen if we were quick to shed our pride concerning relationships with each other? What if we truly sought peace in our relationships? Satan could not get a foothold on us if only we were humble enough to do so. Let go and let God!

Remember to Forget It

A friend of Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, once reminded her of an especially cruel thing that had been done to her years before. But Miss Barton seemed

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not to recall it. "Don't you remember it?" her friend asked. "No," came the reply, "I distinctly remember forgetting it."

2) God is serious about burying the hatchet.

Matthew 18:7-14 "Woe to the world because of {its} stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes! ⁸ "And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹ "And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell. ¹⁰ "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven. ¹¹ ["For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.] ¹² "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³ "And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴ "Thus it is not {the} will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

Do you still think this is not serious? These words are pretty strong language from a very strong God. We find it absolutely impossible to imagine cutting off a hand, foot or eye and casting it from us. This is something that would be very difficult to do and would carry a great disability into the future, but this is how God feels about strife between brethren. We must consider this a viable threat to the work of the church.

- James 3:2, For we all stumble in many {ways.} If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.
- Romans 14:13, Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this-- not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way.

Why would God use this language if He was not serious about it? What if we bury only part of the hatchet with the handle sticking out of the ground, being ready to grab it again? Is that the forgiveness and peace which God desires for His church?



3) There is a way to force the burial of the hatchet.

Matthew 18:15-20 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ "But if he does not listen {to you,} take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷ "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. ¹⁸ "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done

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for them by My Father who is in heaven.²⁰ "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

The last verse of this passage is one of the more misquoted by members of the Christian community. One might say concerning group prayer, "Jesus is in the midst of us right now for where two or three are gathered, there He is in the midst of them." Nothing could be further from the text for it is referring to the lack of fellowship, not the prayer of fellowship.

What do you do when someone hurts you and there is a need to bury the hatchet with them and move on? Go to them and explain that you have been hurt and do your best to help them bury the hatchet. Sometimes they are not going to be willing to live up to the shared covenant of sacrificial living that they pledged at the waters of baptism. What if they do not listen to you?

They are to gather a couple of other members of the church family and confirm whether or not it is a legitimate hatchet that needs to be buried in order to move on. If it is examined by the two or three witnesses and found to not a legitimate, then the accuser must be willing to bury his own hatchet. What happens if someone in the church family was legitimately hurt by another? They must confront this person and persuade him to bury the hatchet of offense. But what happens if they refuse the opportunity to bury the hatchet or even decide to start lashing out with it?

The issue is to be brought before the entire tribe confirmed as a hatchet that needs to be dealt with. They are to point out the need to bury the hatchet and be restored to the wounded party. But what if this person still does not desire to be restored to the individual or the tribe? The tribe will turn their backs on that individual until he comes to his senses. Perhaps not being part of the tribe will sting enough to cause them to want to make the right decision. This is the pattern that God has set forth in dealing with those that are not willing to bury the hatchet.

4) God has already buried His hatchet against us.

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and [*bury the hatchet*] ~~I forgive him~~? Up to seven times?"²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."²⁴ "And when he had begun to settle {them,} there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents."²⁵ "But since he did not have {the means} to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made."²⁶ "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.'²⁷ "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him, [*burying the hatchet*] ~~and forgave him the debt~~.²⁸ "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and {began} to choke {him,} saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'²⁹ "So his fellow slave fell down and {began} to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'³⁰ "He was unwilling [*to bury the hatchet*]

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however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.³¹ "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened."³² "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I [*buried the hatchet*] ~~forgave you all that debt~~ because you entreated me."³³ 'Should you not also have [*buried the hatchet*] ~~had mercy~~ on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?'³⁴ "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him."³⁵ "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not [*bury the hatchet*] ~~forgive his brother~~ from your heart."

If you have entered a covenant with God, then He has buried His hatchet against you in the blood of Jesus Christ and now you have peace. *Colossians 1:19-20* For it was the {Father's} good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him,²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, {I say} whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Your sins have been cast as far as East is from the West, into the depths of the sea, behind His back and remembered no more. Your sins are washed away, your conscience cleansed and they are nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ. Peace be yours because God has buried His hatchet of judgment against you. How can we hold the hatchet of hate against another child of a God? This cannot be.



He died for us.

In Ernest Gordon's *Miracle on the River Kwai*, there is a story of great interest. The Scottish soldiers, forced by their Japanese captors to labor on a jungle railroad, had degenerated to barbarous behavior, but one afternoon something happened. A shovel was missing. The officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced, or else. When nobody in the squadron budged, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot . . . It was obvious the officer meant what he had said. Then, finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up a shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the bloody corpse and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time, no shovel was missing.

Indeed, there had been a miscount at the first check point. The word spread like wildfire through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! . . . The incident had a profound effect. . . The men began to treat each other like brothers. When the victorious Allies swept in, the survivors, human skeletons, lined up in front of their captors (and instead of attacking their captors) insisted: "No more hatred. No more killing. Now what we need is forgiveness."

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Closing Charge

Brothers and Sisters, the man-God Christ Jesus died for your sins and mine. Now is the time to be regenerated with that thought and to spread it like wildfire to the entire world. Put aside any anger you have for your fellow saints and bury the hatchet once and for all. There is no missing shovel, for Jesus is holding it right now and is willing to help you dig the hole and bury the hatchet that has crippled your emotions. Who are you holding that hatchet for? Your spouse? Your child? Your parent? Your fellow saint? Bury this hatchet today and forever!

