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Broken relationships restored

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III. B. AO-1977E--7, [17: Broken Relationships.
Restored Edited

AUTHOR: Bishop Festo

THEME: "Broken Relationships Restored"

TEXT: ^{Ephesians} 2:14-18

PLACE:

DATE:

NOTE: Tape #112

OUTLINE:

- p. 1. Greetings and introduction - mentions centenary of Church of Uganda.
His time in exile
- p. 2 Message
- p. 15 Closing prayer

...I want to bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in my home country of Uganda. You have been told that there are men and women, boys and girls to whom Jesus Christ has, means now so much. Yet indeed there are millions of them and this is our centenary year. The year we remember when the message, of the light of the Good News cross over from Europe, Britian in particular, into Uganda, by means of missionaries, men and women quite ordinary, but in whose hearts, the love of Christ, had opened new ways of understanding of the needs of men and women. And had enlarged the horizon so that instead of seeing the comforts of their country, the love of Christ as it were, ushered them into the human arena of need, exactly in the same way as when God broke through the barriers we sinful men and women had built up between us and him. And stepped in human terms, in a human body into our confusion. And actually, died in order to arrest that confusion, which had dehumanized men and women, all through, centuries and centuries and centuries, so those men under the compelling love of Christ, they came to Uganda, in 1877. So this is our hundredth year, since the gospel reached Uganda. And I simply couldn't tell you what that means, except in a very simple, rather humble, limited way, to tell you that, I simply don't know anything. That is more exciting, more profound, much deeper than the influence that Good News has had on lives in my country. It has humanized a dehumanized society, although seen as a factor, still is carrying on, actively, its dehumanizing activities on that continent, once known as that dark continent although actually, it enjoys more sunny weather than any part of the world. But there were other areas and there are still other areas, in a human existance, in human experience which are still very dark indeed. On of them is the fact that I was Introduced to you as a bishop in exile. I have got my home in Uganda, I have got plenty of room to leave, I am a Ugandan full blooded, why should

I'd be here as an exile? I have never been involved in politics, in any form. I am quite content to go on preaching the Gospel, I don't aspire to the presidency, why should I be here as an exile? It is because the dehumanizing elements of the evil which the bible calls sins, which simply means, when humanity lost or missed its target, because that is what sin is all about. When men and women miss the target for living. Man created in God's image, is not just a simple statement of a religious fanatic, it lies at the very roots of your human person. Take it away, you can never be the same human person again. Am not suggesting that you can't try to be a human person, that is embedded in the human person to try and try and try again. And when you do that, there is nothing extraordinary, you are simply repeating what others have done. But having tried, again and again, and again, still the problem remains, after trying desperately, with all the power that is given to you as a human being, have you got there. If you can answer that realistically, then we take off our hands. Have you got there? Now what do I mean by that? Have you got to the place where there is an assuring inward assurance of voice, saying, "You have now reached the person you are meant or you were meant to be." So that is what we were created for, and that what the image is all about. Having been created that way, once we step from that base, or common denominator, a criterion which makes me a human being, which is not this color, this is what I put on. Given to me by God, I am sure. You are not that color I am looking at now, that the category externally of your particular set up. In, inside, all these external categories, underneath our external differences, lies the person you are. You are not money, you are not cars, you are not politics, you are not ideologies, you can use all those but you are much deeper, much greater, much higher, than the categories you enjoy. You are not even youth, that is just a category, you are not old age, those are just

categories we use to communicate. You are that unique person created in a special way, what is the special way? In simple biblical terms, the special category in which you are a human person are made that way. You are the only creature created for fellowship. Which means, every other category, every other thing that we value is relative. The only ultimate unchangeable standard is that you are created for fellowship with for, that is God. Once I miss there, what remains of me is a shell at the base, a living death at the worst. No wonder, humanity has become increasingly a realm of estrangement, and the world the planet in which we live is increasingly becoming a huge refugee camp. United States not exempted for you all know the history which brought you to this country. You didn't come here by accident, your history says, you came as refugees, at least primarily. That is something that America should never forget no matter how much profanity you have, you should always remember the circumstances under which you came here. I know there are others who did not come as refugees, for example the blacks didn't. They came here not as refugees, they came here to contribute to America. To work, but even there, why were they sold as slaves? Not simply because the white people were greedy, but the African chiefs were greedy. It was the African kings who sold their brothers to slave traders, there we go again, same old game. So you see, where we are, no community can point a finger, we are all in the same boat, we need a recovery. That is why I am here, I am regarded as a threat to President Amin, and yet I love him. I am bound to love him, because I have reached a conclusion that having been loved by the Son of God, for whom I didn't have anything to do, but whom because of out, because of his outgoing love, considered me one of those who needed redemption and came my way. Having done that for me, I owe a debt to every person in the world.

What debt? To love them, because love is creative, hate is destructive and we are not here, to play the game of destruction, there is plenty of destruction already, and you don't have to contribute to it. So now tonight we have a mission. There are Ugandans there, they love you in Christ, the Gospel came, it dehumanized, rehumanized or brought back people, it brought us back into a completely new relationship. And now tonight as we start our mission, I want to talk with you, as you heard the reading in Ephesians chapter 2: verse 14-18. A wonderful passage. The words came from a man who knew what I am talking about. A man by name of St. Paul, or Paul of Tarsus, a Jew by birth. A pharisee by training, a Roman citizen by upbringing, a religious zealot by faith, there are not many people who can fit into that category, only very few. He is saying, according to the right relationship between a man and God, which a man can achieve by fulfilling the law, I was perfect, how many of us can say that? How many Episcopalians can say that? He said it, it is written in Phillipians chapter 3. According to the kind of righteousness, and by righteousness Paul always meant right relationship between him and God, and ultimately between him and the neighbor because that was Jewish too. He said according to that kind of standard of living which may be reached by keeping the ten commandments plus, plus, meticulously. I was blameless, that is the man who is now talking in Ephesians chapter 2, having gone, undergone a terrific change, a revolution. Know how it started? If you have read your New Testament you know how it begun. In most unexpected circumstances. When the man was up in arms to destroy, throughly bitter, just near Damascus, an unexpected interview took place, between him and Jesus Christ whom he persecuted, and that was when the change came. And then in Ephesians, he talks in picture language realistic portrayal of what is going on in society. He spoke at the time of his own age. But if you bring that scripture closer you can see our own age in 1977. When Paul spoke

there were categories of men, the Romans, the governors, the Jews, the religious, the pharisees, the conservatives perfect ones, separatists, the Greeks, the philosophically minded ones, the rational ones, the publicans, the outcasts of society. The women, the despised group, sexually, you name it, the categories were all there. They even had a special one called Barbarians, people who can speak good Greek, they also presented a category, so you see you had all these functions, and classes of people and fences went up, and relationships were up to zero. Because you know christianity that is faith in Jesus Christ, when Christ came, the only purpose of his mission was to restore broken relationships between these human beings and this God from whom they came. And having restored their vertical relationship with the father God. Then the horizontal relationship between man man and man were healed, that's christianity, not wonder the cross is like that. Look at that, you look at that, what do you? Whenever you look at the cross. The vertical God came to restore broken relationship with man, God so loved the world. The horizontal God in eternal and undefeatable, love, opening his eternal embrace to embrace the unembracable, to receive the outcasts, to forgive the sinner, that is the cross. Are you there with me? I am going to use a little passage from the old Testament in order to bring the New Testament into the Old Testament, sometimes the old testament being hebric speaks in picture language and helps us to get there. It brings historical events into the spiritual experience so that you can see the spiritual in the historic. I am going to take you to Genesis 45, I am talking about restoring broken relationships tonight, as the first night of the mission in this beautiful church. Restoring broken relationships, vertically first, horizontal as an out come. I am sure you all are there with me. So let us begin by looking at this beautiful passage, the story is very simple, I am going to tell you with simple language. It

about Joseph the young man, the son of Jacob, grew up in that desert country, later became very spiritual and perhaps a little bit sentimental, and was simple enough to share the dreams and visions of his life, which angered his brothers who became increasingly jealous, and they determined to put an end to this dreamy young man. They became extreme, they became scared, by the dreams, they became insecure, as long as Joseph was there, the same old story, and when Joseph was sent by his father, to^{go and} look after them, it is beautifully stated here, the old man says to Joseph, "Look here Joseph, your brothers are away looking after sheep, I am little bit worried, would you like to go and look up, and look them up?" And so Joseph went looking for his brethren, and scripture says, he got lost in the wilderness, he met a man and a man said to Joseph, "What are you looking for?" And he said, "I am looking for my brethren, for my brothers." He got to them, they took him, they said, "Let us put an end to these, to him not to make us feel uncomfortable." Jealousy, is that a strange thing? Can you say that jealousy was only a peculiar weakness among the Hebrews? And that it doesn't take place in America? Don't you know there are people who have murdered other people's characters, murder, murder is not just taking a gun, the tongue is the best murderer. And there are men and women in society wounded to the core by tongue. Even in the church. There are hearts bleeding because the tongue, cut deep, oh unhealed wounds. So Joseph suffered, he came to his brothers, they took him, threw him into the pit, actually they intended to kill him, and Ruben protested, gently they sold him as a slave. God changed it round, Joseph is a wonderful type of Christ, through the tomb as it were, the grave, the open pit. Through prison, for nothing, terrible temptations in the end, he ended becoming a prime minister, and when he was the Prime Minister of Egypt, he is the experience, how do you restore, broken relationships? The brethren of Joseph, they tried the best they knew how, to forget this nasty experience,

of selling their brother alive, of rejecting his crying, and although this man was as good as dead, he was always alive, in the hearts of his fellows and betrayers. They simply had no way of getting rid of this fellow, for we read here. Joseph now is a big man, they come for food and he many times did two things, which I want to remind you of, one, there was no possibility of restoring the relationship as long as his brothers evaded the issues, they tried, you remember the confession, before him, he said, who are? You are spies, "No no, your servants are not spies at all. We have one father, that's right, we are twelve brothers, that's right. The young one is back home, one is not, or rather the young one, they never said, he is home, they said, we are brothers here and you know we are ten, one is with the father, and the youngest is not. Whenever they came to the point of confessing the truth, they always put on a false word. The young one is not, is where? I mean the young one is back home Benjamin, but the other one is not, where is he? And do you know that that was the key to right, to the relationship? In order for them to be cured of the smashing guilt, which haunted them and haunted them, they had to come to terms with the truth, no matter how painful the truth was, as long as they evaded the truth, they evaded peace. There was no possibility of healing that relationship until, they faced the exposure. And so Joseph came, kept bringing them back carefully. Not unlovingly, because we read, in the end he couldn't hold himself, and I am reading the last part. Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood before him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me, so there was no man with him, and Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and he wept so loudly, that the Egyptians heard him, and the household of Pharaoh had of it, then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph." A boom shell. "I am Joseph." And you can imagine these dear ten men standing there, they never suspected

a Joseph. They were in the presence of a strange Egyptian ruler, who spoke to them through an interpreter, and immediately tears and all, a bomb shell, "I am Joseph."

(Flip over for the remainder of the message)

"I am Joseph." My! what a shock? One would have had a heart attack. It was a terrible revelation. But remember, he spoke that revelation with tears streaming down his cheeks, the heart weeping loud. So although it was a bomb shell, it was a bomb shell of love. It was love weeping, love bleeding, therefore love redeeming. It was not the voice of condemnation, sending them into, prison and execution, it was weeping love, therefore able to restore the the broken relationship. I am Joseph, let me ask you. I know many of you christians wonder how you could restore, broken things in you, broken relationships between husbands and wives. Not in a good man's office, how can you restore relationship between blacks and whites in Africa? In December, in the city of Nairobi Kenya, I saw a South African white Afrikaaner professor, giving a paper before 800 African leaders, christian leaders, that he was presenting a paper, the spirit of God came upon him, he was a christian man, an Afrikaaner, the present mix up; in South Africa, and he broke down and wept, as he presented this christian paper on the healing of relationships. And as he wept from the platform, walking sobbing, a professor, brilliant man, tall six feet, six feet two, and Afrikaaners are not emotional. They are very tough. The love of Christ had penetrated this man's heart and as he came sobbing from the platform I shall never forget the sight, I was there. And I saw African leaders, black brown, from Egypt, from everywhere, jumping up to their feet and meeting this man and embracing him weeping. I was among them. What happened there? He still was a South African man, an Afrikaan

by background, coming from a segregationist society. All these Africans should have looked at him as a very resented man, yet what has happened? He did embrace hundreds of them, all weeping together, what has he given them? Nothing, love has broken the barriers down. Reconciliation, restoration of broken relationships has begun because of Christ. Joseph wept, revealed himself to them, and that is a criterion for healing relationships. Only that tonight, a greater than Joseph is here. You don't now talk about Joseph, Joseph was only meaningful in the life of the ten brothers who were there. You and I, have a brother, Jesus Christ, the one who was rejected, the one who was crucified, whose cross we remember. On that cross, a voice comes out saying, I am your brother, I am Jesus. Immediately the shock, runs through you, but that is how, relationships can be healed. Let me just read the last two sentences. Then he asked a question, is my father still alive? But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. Thoroughly dumbfounded, guilt strungling them, they froze in the presence of him who wept in love. Listen how Jesus liberates the prisoners.

This is a beautiful passage, verse four, "then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come closer to me, " isn't that tremendous? "Please come closer to me." They were at a distance, and at a distance, you never know the heartbeat of another man. As one writer said, "unknown, remains unloved." As long as there is that distance, I remain a strange black man, you remain a strange white man. And Joseph said, "Please come closer, feel the heartbeat," don't you hear the New Testament words, the Lord Jesus saying, saying to his disciples on the day of the resurrection, in Jerusalem, "come, touch me, feel my wounds, that I am he. And don't be afraid." Same thing, only this is a small picture. So he invited, "come near, come closer to me please." And then listen to the

sentence, "I am your brother, Joseph, I am your brother Joseph whom you sold into Egypt." At first he said, "I am Joseph." Now he adds a little word in the middle, I am still your brother Joseph. The fact that you sold me hasn't changed that. The fact that you were mean, and you were almost murderous, hasn't changed it, undefeatable love. The same love, which made the Son of God on the cross of calvary cry when they were driving nails in his hands, "Father forgive them, they are my brothers, they don't understand what they are doing." The craterion for restoring broken relationship, lies in the wounded heart of Jesus Christ. All other things will not get you there. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am your brother, Joseph. You sold me to Egypt, but that has not changed the fact, and you meant it for evil, but God has meant it for good, that I may save some of you from starving. What a beautiful gracious interpretation of an evil act. Instead of saying, you are condemned, you were mean, you were horrible sinners, no, no. "You sold me, meaning it for evil but God has changed it round and he now has turned it into good so that I may save you from famine." The same way of expression as Jesus said, "Father forgive them, they simply don't understand." He looked for an excuse to cover them, the terrible action. That is love. And when love is like that, you know what the New Testament calls that kind of love? When love is like this love of Joseph, it changes words, and the New Testament, coins a new word and it calls that kind of love, grace. When love, loves radically, it becomes grace. The kind of love, uncalled for, unearned, undeserved, unexpected. Have you ever been loved like that? Do you know why the Gospel is exciting? It is because you are absolutely shocked into love. That God should have loved such people like us, that Joseph should have reacted the way he reacted, that is the greatest shock. And that is what the New Testament calls, radical love. The love which refuses to give up, which refuses to give in, which refuses to be defeated. Which is victorious love. And now let me tell you, this is the greatest thing that has happened.

In my country, if I had time to tell you story after story, of men whose lives had been shattered. The arena of their human experience was it were just scattered with bones of broken relationships, misery. Just one big area of conflict, when men and women are a walking civil war. Then God in His grace, brings his son and the son steps into that confusion, destructive as it, full of all the meanness of sin, jealousy, envy, hatred, resentment, meanness, you name it, all there. And the entire vicious cry, gathered upon the heart of Jesus Christ, and he in that radical love, lifts the burden and the arrows and the knives, of men and women and he takes the whole load to calvary, and there deals the final blow, to the things which break human relationships. And says, "It is finished." So that you who were strangers, can now come on the bridge of the cross. The cross is beautiful. It crosses out all the things which have broken relationships. And then it does something, it becomes that by which we cross over, because God crossed over to us. So that we may cross over to him, and then to each other. Have you crossed?

Tonight, God is expecting you to act radically, the word radical does not mean destruction, it can mean constructive, activity, at the price. My Archbishop, Janani Luwum who was shot dead on the 16th of February in my capitol of Uganda Kampala, and he was taken from in front of me, and taken in a room, I was thinking, do you know how he loved? He loved his Lord radically. He loved Ugandans radically, he knew what it would cost him it he spoke against the evil forces which were dehumanizing lives in Uganda. He knew what it would cost, and he still spoke. That is radical love, and when men and women act like that, they are liberated. They are no longer captives of self-centeredness. They are more human, they are wide open, America needs that. And tonight, you my dear Episcopilians, and other

christian brothers coming from different traditions, what sort of christianity do you profess? Where does it lead you? Do you still sustain broken relationships? Let me tell you what I mean. Early this year, on Good Friday, sitting in a church in London, after I had escaped from President Amin, listening to the meditations on the word from the cross, and the first sentence was "Father, forgive them." And immediately the Holy Spirit whispered into my conscience, "Festo, you are hard in your attitude towards President Amin, you owe President Amin a debt of love." I merely shook my head, and then he rubbed it in a little bit better. "Supposing the President of Uganda, from whom you have run, was one of the soldiers with a hammer and nail, driving it in my hands on that day, when I said, "Father forgive them". Would I have added, except President Amin?" And that was all I needed, I bowed my poor little head, I didn't ask to forgive President Amin, I asked for forgiveness, and then I asked for a special radical love, so to feel this poor heart, liberating me so that I may love President Amin, not because I am wonderful, as some of you may think when you hear this. By loving President Amin, I am just an ordinary christian. If my Lord loved, and loved me that much, what right have I to act otherwise. It is not a question of choosing to love him, I am stuck with him. And because my Lord acted that way, and I am a follower of Jesus, that is, that is my option, I don't have two. I have only one option. One commandment he said, "I give you, that you love one another," and before that, "love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you from the bottom of your heart." That is the New Testament, it is his words. We need grace, do you sustain a broken relationship tonight? As we start the mission, the mission has one message for you, that tonight you bow your heads and you say, "Lord Jesus, I have someone I have refused to forgive, I am suffering from a kind of struglement, spiritually I can hardly breath. Lord Jesus, so feel this poor heart of mine, forgive my fumes of hatred and resentment. Clean me up, accept me,

so that I may experience that liberating love because you know, that passage I read to you, it says, after Joseph had said that, he kissed them, fellowship. Then we read, and they began to speak to him. Restored relationships, start tonight. Then the mission is going to be meaningful in this part of your United States. Then the Episcopal church is going to experience new life as members cross the road. Mr. Brown, to Mr. Smith, and Mrs. Brown to Mrs. Smith and you cross to each other and you ask each other for forgiveness, and you heal each other's relationships, and you husbands go and speak in your bedrooms and let the spirit of God, make those bedrooms really holy.

My wife and I have been together for 33, 34 years now, and we can't tell you what God has done between me and that dear lady in teaching us how live for Jesus together. The home has become a school, and I speak about revival in the kitchen, revival in the bedroom, where you sit together and sort out the messes which came yesterday, those nasty relationships which become tight. Oh you know them, those of you who are married, those of you who have not yet married, you can shut off. (laughter), and those of you who are married I want to tell you, there is a secret, I can't tell you how many times when something funny, most of the things which spoil relationships which poison homes are not necessarily big. They are just mean attitudes, sharp words, wrong reactions, suspicions of all sorts, when those come in, then I begin to become critical, and once you are critical, you can't see anything. A critical attitude is a frozen attitude. It never can heal, Immediately I become critical of my wife, I put here in a quarantine, have you ever put any one there? Shut them up, and then you turn away, and if you are a good christian man, you look for activities for a cover. If you are a bishop like me you take your bible, you write your notes, you are going to preach. You are too busy, may times I have taken this Bible, with my evangelical notes,

to go and preach, and the spirit of God has whispered gently, "Bishop you are going to preach," I said, Yes Lord they are waiting for me, "but your wife you have left in the kitchen, standing there lonely, cold because of your words which you said, what about that situation?" I said, "But Lord I am too busy, people are waiting for me there, you know, we look into that later." And then the spirit of God seems to tell me, "Alright go ahead and preach, I am going to stay behind in the kitchen with your wife." (laughter) And if you are a christian man, you can't really go beyond that, unless you want to commit spiritual suicide. So reluctantly you have to go back, and do you know what I am telling you, don't think it is the bishop just telling you nice things. Jesus said, "You, when you have reached the alter with your gifts, and you are a good Jew, a serious one, and you remember that there is some one in the community who has go something against you, leave that gift on the alter, first go and be reconciled to your brother then come and give your gift. That is Jesus." Then I got bac, to my, to my dear wife in the kitchen, and reluctantly asked her to forgive me, and sometimes, it takes a little while before she forgives me, she is human, and then after, many times she forgives me, and then we ask each other for forgiveness. Estranging one another, making things difficult for each other, then we embrace as christians people and we sing together in the kitchen. We look at each other with amazement. Do you know what I call that, particularly you who are married, listen to this carefully, we call that, we call those times, reweddings, don't miss them. Go and start tonight, if you have got an occassion to do that, they are wonderful times. So tonight as I conclude, we are going to sing, we are going to pray, there is a special place over there, so that anyone tonight who felt, that the spirit of God quietly, gentely firmly clearly has whispered something in your heart, that up to this moment, your relationship with your father are still broken up, you have never experienced, the healing of that:

experience, as one with God, child of God, and you want to mean business tonight with your God, so that you can go home praising him, because Jesus has given you the key for fellowship and love. He has said, "come closer don't fear," we are going to give you a chance, so that when we disperse, those who want, a little word of council, prayer, encouragement, some people may want just to ask one or two questions, for a few minutes please avail yourself for the opportunity. This is your mission. May God bless you, let us bow in a word of prayer. (short pause) let us be silent before God, asking him to be our guide, let us ask the spirit of God so graciously to lead us to Jesus our brother, to lead us to those wounds which can forgive our sins, to witness in our own heart, that we have entered into a new relationship in which we are sons and daughters of God. Listen to him, then when you listen, do respond, to him, he loves you, even if you may feel pain, he love you.

Oh you, the balm of Gilead, the loving physician, the wonderful Savior, come, come by your Holy Spirit, enter the arena of each heart, pick up the broken pieces master, and out of the broken pieces, recreate a new man, a new woman, bring your people home tonight, that they may experience the unspeakable love in which humanity has a new chance. Thank you Lord that you came the way you came. Encourage them to come to you, those who lost their faith, restore them, those who are doubtful like Thomas, give them another chance. Thank you Lord in Jesus Name. AMEN.

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