

# Reconciliation with Others!

## **THIS IS YOUR MINISTRY**

Matthew 5:19-24; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

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Some time ago I was at a church meeting that held some awkward moments for me. The exwife of a minister was there. It was the first time I had seen her since the divorce, and it was clear that the brokenness continued. Also present was the estranged husband of a woman pastor. That husband told me that the pastor had just served him with divorce papers. It all seemed so incongruent. Here we are, ministers of reconciliation, unable to reconcile. I trust the faith and integrity of the two pastors I mentioned. They are good friends. Yet before my eyes were their ex-spouses who also appeared to be walking with Christ.

Does that seem ironic to you? It does to me. Reconciliation is the chief work of God. Reconciliation is the main work of Christ Jesus. Christ came that you and I might be reconciled to God. That is the heart of the gospel. How, then, can two people, whom the Spirit of Reconciliation is leading, be unreconciled? Christ also came to reconcile us with each other.

The other day I visited with a pastor who served as a hospital chaplain for many years. This man was with people in some of the most hideous situations. He was there as people's bodies quaked in pain. He was there as parents learned about the death of their children. He was there countless times as people crossed the threshold of death. He observed, however, a greater pain in many of the patients he visited. The greatest pain people suffer in this world is not that of a broken or diseased body. The most debilitating and unrelenting pain comes from a broken heart, from a crushed spirit. The ache of broken relationships is piercing. We are crippled most by the pain and separation that we feel in our relationships with God and others. Such separation goes counter our nature, for we were designed to be partners. We were designed for relationships.

We read what is commonly known as the love chapter today in 1 Corinthians 13. Do you know who Paul wrote this chapter to? He wrote it to believers who were fighting each other, suing each other in court, and destroying one another in their family life. Paul told

them that though they might be super spiritual, they are totally defeated. What they were doing was absolutely contrary to the nature and love of God. The love they expressed was shallow and could not stand the test of conflict. Whatever it was, it was not the love of God.

The love of God forgives people. The love of God keeps no record of wrong. The love of God is patient with people. It does not demand its own way. Instead, it never gives up, never loses hope. It always endures. Is that love at work in your attitude and actions toward others?

I've found that a believer can be very spiritual and committed. He or she can study the Bible, pray, worship, serve with dedication and yet be utterly estranged from God and that kind of love. I've also found that a couple can appear close. They can eat at the same table, sleep in the same bed, work in the same business and still be strangers. They can be polite to each other but remain distant. That parallels many of us in our relationship with God. We are polite but distant. We believe in divine love, but we don't really taste it.

Earlier this summer, I spoke on reconciliation with God and exposed *the myth about confession*. Saying "sorry" does not necessarily lead to reconciliation. It often is a quick way to escape unpleasanties. Like children, we think we'll escape discipline if we say sorry quick enough. Instead of a quick confession, there is a path we must follow to be reconciled with God. I've discovered that path often leads us to confront broken relationships we have with others. You see... there's a second myth. *It's a lie that we can be close to God and distant from others.*

When Jesus spoke to his disciples and the crowds on a mountainside in Galilee, he said:

***You have heard that the law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God*** (Matthew 5:21-24, NLT).

Do you get the idea that your relationship with others affects your relationship with God? You ought to! Jesus warned that a mere insult given in anger puts us at risk of damnation. Jesus stressed that our treatment of others is not only important, it is pivotal. In Matthew 25, Jesus told his followers that how they treated the least and most unattractive people is how they treat him; and how they treat him is how they treat God. Thus, Jesus says you may be tending to your relationship with God by offering some gift in the temple, but if

somebody has something against you... that's the priority! Go there. Take care of it. Reconcile with him or her. Then your gift and prayers will make a difference. Not before.

Imagine parenting two kids who each Christmas lavish gifts upon you, but never are with you at the same time. They refuse. They won't speak or even look at each other. No matter how your children express love to you, they still break your heart, don't they? They break your heart because your heart is with each of them.

Jesus wants us to know that this is true of God. Your relationships with your spouse, your parents, your children, your neighbors are pivotal. Broken relationships fracture the heart of your heavenly Father; and we can walk only a short distance with Christ before we are sent by God back to mend what is broken with others. Many believers stall out right here. They can't go any further with God, they can't feel any closer to God because they can't face the pain in their broken relationships. Only the one, who *faces* the brokenness, experience reconciliation.

Christ gives us clear direction for reconciliation. The steps of reconciliation can be summarized in the word "**f-a-c-e-s.**" Reconciliation is possible for only the one who **faces** the person, who **faces** the problem, and who **faces** the pain. So listen to these steps.

**F - Face the person and the pain in your broken relationship.** Don't write a letter. Go eye to eye if at all possible. Face the person and then face the pain. Use the telephone only when there is no other option. In most broken relationships there is no completely innocent person, so even if you feel you are the victim, ask how your actions have hurt the person; and listen. Let your heart be broken. Hear the pain, all the pain, until there is no more pain the other can share. Let your eyes weep. A broken and contrite heart invites grace.

**A - Acknowledge your hurtful actions.** Take responsibility for specific actions and attitudes that wounded the other person. Don't focus on their actions. Face and admit your own. (Don't worry about the wrong actions of the other person at this point. A time will come when you can deal with them.)

**C - Commit yourself to corrective action including restitution.** Ponder and discuss (with the person when appropriate) what you can do to heal your relationship, change your behavior, change your attitude, whatever is necessary. Be utterly honest. Moreover, think of restitution, of what you can do to restore what has been taken. If it is money, that's easy. If it is trust, that's more difficult. Commit yourself to work at whatever is needed to restore the one you've hurt. (Understand that reconciliation may require more than one contact and more than one difficult change.

**E - Express your need for forgiveness.** Ask for forgiveness. When it is offered, receive it, and forgive yourself. When it is not offered, go back and ask more about the pain you caused. Only when the other person fully tells you about their pain can they fully forgive you. You want full forgiveness... so pay the price of seeking it and listening to the hurt.

**S - Start building a new relationship.** Begin with total honesty and let them know that you value their friendship. Give them the right to speak the truth to you in love. Ask them to help you understand when you are doing hurtful things and what behavior of yours builds the healthy friendship you want.

As hard as this all seems, and it is extremely difficult, this is our ministry. As believers you and I are given the ministry of reconciliation. Every breath you take, every day you spend on this planet has been given so that you may further reconciliation. You and I are to heal the breaches we have with people, and we're to help others do so as well. It doesn't happen easily. We can't force it. We can partner with God in seeking it.

Everyone of us has a broken relationship. Even as you think of some persons you may feel resentment. Probably they have something against you as well. Let's stop and pray about it. Let's ask God to identify the individuals you need to meet with and to give you wisdom and courage to face the person and the pain in the coming days. For your health, your life, for your very soul, this is pivotal. Let's pray.