

“Reconciliation”

Matthew 5:21-24 & 18:15-20, John 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 & Revelation 22:1-5

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There are three major aspects of reconciliation, God and us, every person to one another and the entire cosmos. Initially, reconciliation is one sided. God alone reconciles the world to Godself. We have nothing to offer God for our reconciliation. Initially, we do not even desire to be reconciled. Until we experience God’s grace, we are unable to imagine the abundant, joyful, loving life of reconciliation. The first reconciliation is God reconciling us to God. Scripture explains, **John 3:16-17 NLT “For this is how God loved the world: God gave God’s one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. God sent Jesus into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Jesus.”**

The second reconciliation is each person being reconciled to all other people. The Apostle Paul explains the first and second reconciliation, **2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NLT “Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to God through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to God. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to God, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And God gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making God’s appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”** Following God’s example of reconciling us to God, we are to seek reconciliation with every person, even those who keep hurting us.

The third aspect of reconciliation is a promise, a pull, a complete transformation, that will happen in heaven. On earth, total reconciliation is an ultimate truth that exerts a continuous drawing welcome into complete, harmonious unity; but on earth, it is allusive, fleeting and incomplete. Revelation gives us a glimpse. **Revelation 22:1-5 NLT “Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. No longer will there be a curse upon anything. For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and God’s servants will worship God. And they will see God’s face, and God’s name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.”** The third reconciliation brings God, every person and the entire cosmos together in synergistic harmony.

Today our focus is on reconciling our self to others. Jesus said, **Matthew 18:15-20 NRSV “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”**

Each of us is to do everything possible to be reconciled with every other person. If after every known way to seek reconciliation fails, then we are to treat that person as a “gentile and a tax collector,” which might sound like a rejection, or avoidance, or harshness to the one who refuses reconciliation. Remember that Jesus lovingly sought out, forgave, and healed the Gentiles. Jesus enjoyed dinner with tax collectors. Even when someone refuses to be reconciled to us, we are still called to unconditionally love them. We are to never give up on anyone. Always reaching out to others. Always hoping for reconciliation. Each person is to do everything possible, to make every attempt to maintain relationships, keep community whole, avoid schisms and welcome back any who have gone astray.

The first step to reconciliation is to go directly to the person who hurt you. Always avoid triangulation. Triangulation is talking to a third party. Sometimes fishing for sympathy, other times for agreement and sometimes for action against the other person. An example of triangulation would be if I were hurt by Bill, but rather than going directly to Bill, I instead go and talk about the matter with Steve. Initially, the only time it is helpful to seek a third party is when one's safety is a concern then one does need to utilize a third party. Another example of triangulation would be complaining about a decision made at a meeting you attended rather than voicing your perspective at the next meeting. Triangulation is a destructive form of communication that every person should always avoid.

The first step is to go directly to the person that hurt you with a non-anxious, loving presence and concisely explain what hurt you. Most conflicts are unattended and begin with miscommunication. It has been said that, "twenty percent of all conflicts are due to a difference of opinion. Eighty percent of all conflicts are due to tone of voice."

Use "I" statements instead of "You" statements. Say, "I felt sad by what you said," rather than "You made me sad by what you said." No one can make you feel anything. We are responsible for our own feelings. "You" statements escalate the situation, make the other person defensive, and immediately cause them to formulate a response. "I" statements clarify communication, open the door to understanding, and enable both parties to identify the key issue.

"I" and "You" statements color one's reaction to situations. I am sad about the accident. I am hoping we can find ways to be more careful and avoid an accident in the future will be received better than, you idiot. You need to be more careful. Name calling is never acceptable. Always keep your focus on the issue and love the person.

Jesus said, **Matthew 5:21-22 NLT** "You have heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell." I define hell as any broken relationship. For me hell is not a place, rather any severed relationship. Heaven is when all relationships are loving and joyful. When one refuses to seek reconciliation, and refuses to forgive they are creating their own hell.

Marianne Williamson said, "Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness."

We were created to be in loving relationship with God, all people, and the entire cosmos. Whenever a relationship is damaged, we are broken and incomplete. Achieving reconciliation completes us and reveals the missing aspects of our life.

When you are hurt, go immediately, directly to the person who hurt you and explain what hurt you in private. Strive to fully reconcile. Unresolved hurts snowball quickly. Unresolved hurts distort perception. It is much easier to reconcile a snowflake of hurt than a snowball. Reconciliation can be agreeing to disagree on an issue, or way of doing things, yet loving and respecting each other.

If direct communication fails in achieving reconciliation, the next step is to take one or two others with you to seek reconciliation. Notice, it does not say complain until you find one or two people who agree with you then go and gang up on the other person. The intent is to find one or two neutral parties. Their purpose is to enhance the communication, to help both sides really hear and understand the other so together everyone is reconciled.

If reconciliation is still not achieved then the matter should be brought to the church so the entire church can pray for God's grace to mend the relationship. The church should strive to comfort and support the one wronged and to confront the one who did the perceived wrong and forgive them in a way that preserves their dignity and belonging to the church. True reconciliation is achieved when neither person, nor any person, remembers the injury. Remembering a wrong is a poison that will continue to cause pain. Our relationships with each other are fragile and holy. Yet, God's grace is an unstoppable force that will heal and harmonize every relationship.

Reconciliation opens heaven to us. Jesus commands us if we are hurt, to seek reconciliation. Jesus commands us, if we hurt another we are to seek reconciliation. Jesus said. **Matthew 5:23-24 NLT** "So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has

something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.” Reconciliation is more important than worship.

In this scripture, the roles are reversed. You are not the victim this time, but the perpetrator. In either case, Jesus' direction is pretty much the same for both parties. Whether you are the one who has been wronged, or the one who has done the wrong, it is your responsibility to swallow your pride, get up, and go to the other person seeking to be reconciled. There is none of this, "Why should I make the first move? It wasn't my fault. It's the other person who's got to reach out!" That's how feuds get started. Both sides are absolutely convinced it's the other person's fault. They're not going to budge. It can go on for years -- generations, even.

Whether you are the injured party, or whether you are the one who has injured another, never put it off. Go, mend the rift. Heal the relationship. In doing so both of us experience more of heaven.

Homiletics explains another way to look at it. "Two parties in a relationship are sitting on opposite sides of a table. It's the negotiating table. As long as they remain on separate sides of the table, it's "us versus them" -- from both perspectives. Each party says, "'Us' is on my side of the table. 'Them' is over there, and 'Them's' gotta make the first move!" Reconciliation's never going to happen, though, as long as it remains "us versus them." Somehow, a third element has got to be introduced. Let's call that third element "The Problem." The two parties have got to stop seeing the other person as the problem, and begin seeing the conflict between them as "The Problem." It's a problem they can only solve together. Imagine "The Problem" is like a box of jigsaw-puzzle pieces somebody just dumped out onto the table. Silently, unwilling to speak, the two start to examine the pile. Each one sees some pieces that fit together and connects them up. The two combatants bend to their work, creating little clusters of puzzle pieces -- a bit of sky here, a patch of grassy lawn there, the red siding of a barn over there. Eventually, they connect those larger clusters. Before that happens, though, the two get up and start walking around the table, to get a different perspective on the emerging picture -- or maybe to pick up a stray puzzle piece, to see if it belongs to the section they've been working on. They may even start talking to one another -- imagine that! "Hand me that piece of blue sky over there." Eventually, it no longer makes sense to speak of "my side" or "your side" of the table. There's only "The Problem" -- and it takes two parties, working together, to solve it. "Us versus them" has got to be transformed into "Us and Us."

One of Dr. Seuss' lesser-known children's books is *The Butter Battle Book*. The book begins with a wall. On the last day of summer, ten hours before fall ... my grandfather took me out to the Wall. For a while he stood silent. Then finally he said, with a very sad shake of his very old head, "As you know ... on this side of the Wall we are Yooks. On the far side of this Wall live the Zooks." Grandfather then explains the horrible difference that separates the two peoples: unlike the Yooks, the Zooks eat their bread with the butter side down! This just won't do: "You can't trust a Zook who spreads bread underneath!" Grandpa then recounts the long, sad story of escalating hostility between Yooks and Zooks. As the wall rose higher and higher, each side developed its own clever weaponry -- each terrible weapon intended only for defense, of course. There was the Snick-Berry Switch, the Triple Sling Jigger and the Kick-a-Poo-Kid. Most terrifying of all was the Bitsy Big-Boy Boomeroo. The book ends with a Yook and a Zook standing on top of the wall, glaring angrily at each other. Each one is holding a Bitsy Big-Boy Boomeroo, wondering who's going to drop the first bomb.

Conflict cannot continue without your participation.

In an old U.S. Army training manual, there's some practical advice for sergeants on how to handle the case of two soldiers from the same barracks who keep arguing with one another. Assign them both to washing the same window, the manual advises: one on the outside, the other on the inside. As they stand there with their cleaning-solution and rags, moving them in the same circular motion, they can't help but look at each other's faces. As they do, they realize they have more in common than they have differences. They may even start laughing, as the common problem -- the dirty window -- takes precedence over their conflict.

Joanna Seibert speaks of living reconciliation. "If you are having trouble with this idea, think about starting small. You start by connecting with those with whom you have difficulty that you may have the best chance of finding a healing relationship with. Start with members of your church that you may find difficult to work with. Now certainly there may not be people in your congregation with whom you have difficulty getting along. But just in case, try this. Sit down just the two of you, preferably over a meal, and tell your story and listen to the other person's story. ... Jesus tells us, do not fight fire with fire. Fight fire with water, living water. Evil is overcome with good, not with a stronger version of evil. Jesus calls us to break the cycle of evil and suffering. Let it stop with us. Break the cycle with the person sitting three pews ahead of you. "Break the cycle

with your estranged brother or sister. Break the cycle with your spouse or child. Break the cycle with the person you work with or your next-door neighbor. With God's help, we can do it. Christians are called to be Christ-like, to counter evil with good, to allow the power of Christ, the Spirit to live within and through us out to others."

Barbara Brown Taylor said, "Our life together is the chief means God has chosen for being with us, and it is of ultimate importance to God. Our life together is the place where we are comforted, confronted, tested, and redeemed by God through one another. It is the place where we come to know God or to flee from God's presence, depending upon how we come to know or flee from one another"

God has already reconciled you, and all of humanity, to God. God will reconcile the entire cosmos in the future. In the meantime, we are called to reconcile our self with all people. Amen.