

Reconciliation with Others

Healing Streams, Savannah, GA. All scriptures are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

If you have taken this course and done the forgiving, then the Holy Spirit may raise in your heart a desire to recover some lost relationships. Or you may now find yourself in situations of conflict and want to become a peacemaker and restorer of others—rather than run away. How to go about it? First of all, we need to know that it doesn't all depend upon us.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18

Are you reconciled to God?

If you or I are holding any blame or judgments against someone in our hearts, we are not yet fit candidates for the work of reconciliation, because we are ourselves un-reconciled to God. This does not mean we cannot be used, but we need to go forward in brokenness and contrition over our failings, well aware of our own need to be shown mercy by all concerned, especially the Lord. Being aware of our own great need of correction actually enables us to speak to others from a position of humility, rather than censoriousness.

Check list for a would-be agent of reconciliation

- Are you reconciled to all the people involved?
- Do you honestly want their good above your own?
- Are you playing favorites, championing some and bashing others?
- Can you honestly pray blessing for everyone and mean it?
- Do you fear anyone that is involved?
- Are you holding hurt yourself?
- Are you driven to resolve other people's emotions, or drawn to it?
- Have you made your peace with God over His allowing of the wounds?

The necessity of a pure heart

Only a heart that is purified of the contaminations of bitterness, accusation, blame, anger, fear and self-righteous offense can speak the truth in love to another person by the power of the Spirit. For it is especially in the context of reconciliation where there is so much opportunity for miss-cues and miscommunication that the spirit of the enemy takes advantage of every sinful attitude in our own heart to derail the process of healing.

- If I am laden with fear, I will beat around the bush when there is only a small window of opportunity opened for dialog. Trust is often so slight that only words of simplicity and directness can be heard or received--if they are not spoken up front the window may slam shut.
- If I am in any way carrying blame, it will seep out, but what seeps out is always sniffed out! With situations that need to be reconciled the accuser is always at work and no one likes the way it feels on the inside. Self-blame already abounds. To add even a little more is to ask for an explosion of self-defensiveness.
- If I am carrying offense and anger, very likely I will not be able to contain it. The things I have not made my own peace with before God will find me out, despite my best efforts to hide them and if I am not well-guarded my tongue will set loose what my heart has been storing.

The snare of hidden motives

One of the difficulties of reconciliation is that we often have to engage in it with very impure hearts, because we need to talk things through with the other(s) involved in order to get our



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own cleansing. This should never be because we think that they owe us something and we want to make them pay. They may have indeed sinned against us, but this is an issue which the Lord says belongs to Him and needs to be settled with Him. We go to another because we need to offer our own apology or because we held back something that really does need to be shared for their sake, not ours. A good rule of thumb is if we just can't wait to tell them what we think we had better wait; if we are reluctant to risk spoiling our relationship with them, it just may be time to move forward. Nevertheless, we would be wise to be aware of the danger of rushing things too quickly to resolution.

Sometimes a rush to resolution presses us to attempt reconciliation with others before we have really come to terms with the underlying issues of our own loss of inner peace. If we cannot live with unresolved situations, it is because we have not yet learned how to make our peace with God—who lives with them all of the time all over the world. We would do well to learn by His example and seek to receive for our self the peace He desires to give in the midst of any conflict, so as to place our self under His sovereign rule, rather than at odds with what He has allowed. The peace of God does not keep us from being involved—it allows us to act with great freedom in very tricky, emotionally laden situations.

What is forbidden us

- It is not allowed to force another's will.
- It is not allowed to condemn, cast blame, accuse or judge.
- It is not allowed to hold hurt or bitterness or anger after the day of injury.
- It is not allowed to bind someone to their sins.
- It is not allowed to sow division and further discord.
- It is not allowed to take justice into our own hands.

What is allowed us

1) Effective prayer. We simply must come to the place where we realize that the most powerful thing we can do about situations needing reconciliation is to bring our own hearts in prayer to God. The necessity of getting our hearts restored and cleansed, so that we can be fully trusting and fully obedient to God (the 1st commandment) and fully loving of all involved (the 2nd commandment) should be reason enough to see the importance of prayer. But with this cleansing comes the transfer of the burden of our heart into God's Hands. This is true spiritual power and one of the keys of the kingdom. When our deepest concerns are translated into genuine praise and thanksgiving, the actual reconciliation is only a matter of time, now eagerly and expectantly awaited. Until then our prayers often have the unrecognized character of a complaint against God's sovereignty. The burden for any wrong is the Lord's who knows exactly why He allowed those very situations which grieve and vex us, and unless we give it to Him, the weight of it will throw our efforts to remedy things out of balance.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. Hebrews 5:7-8

2) Speaking the truth in love. In my experience people usually say they have tried this and it didn't work, but the reality is that it is by no means easy to accomplish. Nevertheless, learning to do it is a command and not a suggestion of scripture. We have not "grown up" until we master it (Ephesians 4:15). Speaking the truth means speaking the whole truth which is never separated from the truth of God's love and compassion for the person we are at odds with. Speaking the truth means saying what we believe Jesus would want us to say without



fear or favor—and in a way that would honor Him. Speaking it in love means our whole desire in speaking it is to help the other person hear something they may really need to hear for their own sake. The Spirit within us does this all day long. He leaves us free to reproach His inward counsel, neglect it, or even argue with it. Yet, we couldn't bear it if He tried to force truth on us, or badgered us, or condemned us. Ultimately, we listen and turn. Speaking the truth in love actually works to change people—that's why God does it!

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4:15-16

3) Sharing the hurt of our heart. This also is divinely powerful. Did you know that the Spirit of God not only speaks the truth in love inside of us daily, He also grieves at times within us as a way of calling us back to our right mind? So, likewise we are allowed to express our grief and pain to one another as a way of eliciting change. When we see how what we have said or done has actually hurt someone in ways we never intended or comprehended, we begin to change. The tricky part is to share our heart without dumping our negative emotions on the other person. If they sense blame or accusation very likely their walls will go up and their defenses will keep them from hearing our pain or seeing and taking responsibility for their part in it. Yet, it is just as much a hindrance to reconciliation to pull back from letting our hurt be known, either because we don't want to be hurt again or because we have misguided sympathy for the other person and don't want to "burden" them with our pain. Because Nathan wisely opened David's heart first to feel the pain and injustice of a wrong done by a certain "man," David was finally able to see his own sin in the light of the harm he himself had done.

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man, and he said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" 2 Samuel 12:5-7

4) Loving unconditionally. If we imagine that this in any way comes naturally to us, then Jesus died in vain. Through faith in His death and resurrection, God has given us a new heart and a new spirit so that we can learn to live and love as He does. The sad truth is that by nature our love is selfish and self-centered, so much so that the perfect love of the Father is genuinely hard for us to understand, even though we experience it and believe in it. We spend our Christian lives trying to figure out why He loves us so much, even though we "know" that unconditional love is a gift that has nothing to do with the recipient and everything to do with the One who unstintingly pours out such an overflow of love. Accordingly, unconditional love is highly attractive. It is so completely foreign to our usual experience that it always works to arrest the attention of the one receiving such undeserved care and affection. That is why it is written that love never fails—this love can break through hardened hearts and minds like nothing else. But all lesser forms of love can and do fail, since love that is not truly unconditional is mingled with the selfish desires of our fallen nature.

Love is patient and is kind; love doesn't envy. Love doesn't brag, is not proud, doesn't behave itself inappropriately, doesn't seek its own way, is not provoked, takes no account of evil; doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 WEB

5) Living sacrificially. Dying to self and embracing the cross for the sake of how God will use our submission to Him and obedience to Him for the sake of the one who is wounding us is the



most radically effective way to position our self before God for change. Again Jesus would not have led the way if it were not effective.

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. Luke 9:23-24

Love's desire

To pray effectively, to be able to speak the truth in love, to kindly disclose the hurt of one's own heart, to love unconditionally and to be willing to live sacrificially bring us into true Christ-likeness, a goal that is the heart desire of all true Christians. But we didn't want to become Christ like through such wounds and battles! Still it remains true that by patient perseverance we receive what is promised for God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). To accept these constraints is to enter into the glorious liberty of the sons of God to pursue Love's desire to seek and save those who are lost and to be positioned to act and speak in such a way that the un-reconciled ones may be enabled to hear what they need to hear so that, if it is possible for them at that time, they can give a right response to God through us.

Dealing with a root of bitterness

Most of the emotional hurt and pain people carry beyond the day of injury is self-inflicted and self-sustained. This is not our normal way of seeing it, but the Bible has a different perspective. If I hurt you, regardless of how I hurt you (whether it came out of my sin or out of my obedience to Christ), you are given one day to deal with the hurt and anger. Once you let the sun go down on your anger, it becomes your sin. You then become the one responsible for holding on to your own pain to your own continual hurt.

Therefore, putting away falsehood, speak truth each one with his neighbor. For we are members one of another. "Be angry, and don't sin." Don't let the sun go down on your wrath, neither give place to the devil. Ephesians 4:25-27 WEB

I am required to repent to God and to seek to make amends with you (if it was indeed my sin originally) and to seek reconciliation in any event. But your peace and painlessness do not at all depend on me. Whatever is in your heart is under your sovereignty entirely and you are responsible for it before God to bring it to Him. He wants to restore you to His peace—regardless of what I do or don't do. This ensures that no one's interior life can ever be controlled by the actions or inactions of another. This is very good news for those who want to live continually in the peace of Christ. Nothing and no one can ever do anything to separate us from the love of God or the peace He gives to those who are willing to put their trust in Him and forgive as He requires.

Does this leave us defenseless—with no recourse to change those who hurt or offend us? By no means. But it does mean that if we want to be agents of reconciliation we have to understand God's justice system. The person bound by bitterness over pain and offense is not an innocent victim (see Matthew 18:21-35). Our place is to have compassion for them, to show them sympathy and understanding, and to seek to help them be delivered from that snare of the enemy by which they have become bound.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled. Hebrews 12:14-15

It needs to be said however that there are always some people, so ensnared by sins of bitterness and accusation that they defy every honest attempt to reconcile. Having failed at reconciliation, we may feel so inwardly accused by the hurt we feel for them that we still feel pressured to do something to lift the burden of their pain. If they will not respond to us or take the first steps themselves, we may cast around to find someone whom we can prod into being the catalyst for change. This may work at times. But often what we need is discernment about what the Lord is asking of us in the moment. Often all that can be done can only be done through prayer, because the root of such problems lies with the one who has become bitter and unless their heart opens to grace there is nothing anyone can do to relieve their misery. God uses effective, believing prayer to work wonders.



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