

Be Reconciled to Your Brother

Matthew 5:21-37 (v. 24)

Introduction

Do to others as you would have them do to you (Luke 6:31). Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18; c.f. Matthew 22:39). Love one another as I have loved you (John 13:34). Indeed, this is how we were created to live, in perfect harmony. God made each of us different. Life is not about all of us singing the same note or the same tune but blending together to make a beautiful Opus. The problem is, in our fallen nature, sin takes our differences and turns them off-key, making us clash with one another instead of being able to harmonize.

Harmony—Not Unity

Some act like we should be singing in unity. They find people who are just like themselves and stick with them. They insulate themselves from all others who disagree with them on anything or are different in any way. This makes for a very small world, with a simple, boring tune and a shrinking world, at that. For even in like-minded people, differences arise. Then that person must leave the community because they no longer sing the right tune.

Harmony—Not Diversity

For some, the watchword of the day is *diversity*. We live in a global community, so our group ought to represent every different ethnicity or type of person in the world, even if our community doesn't. But when the goal is just having different people in our group, everyone ends up playing their own song at the same time and what you have isn't harmony but dissonance. The tunes don't blend, it's just chaos.

Harmony—Not Solo

Then there is the monastic answer. "If I just avoid all people, I won't have any interpersonal problems." Martin Luther said: *For we are not made for fleeing human company, but for living in society and sharing good and evil. As human beings we must help one another to bear all kinds of human misfortune and the curse that has come upon us (LW 21:86).* The answer doesn't lie in fleeing from the problem and just playing a solo, either.

Being Able to Say, "I'm Sorry"

Jesus said, *"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).* Reconciliation is simple. But it begins with the hardest phrase in the English language, "I'm sorry." I'm not talking about the flippant, "Sorry 'bout that." Or the, "I'm sorry, but ...", or even the, "I'm sorry you feel that way." I'm talking about the heartfelt, gut-wrenching, from-the-knees, *mea culpa*, "I messed up and I am seeking your forgiveness, even though I know I don't deserve it." Jennifer Cavalleri had it wrong in *Love Story*. She said, "Love means never having to say you're sorry." In truth, the way of love is to be able to say you're sorry and mean it.

Being Able to Say, “I Forgive”

The other side of reconciliation is being able to say, “I forgive.” If saying you’re sorry is the hardest thing to say, “I forgive” runs a close second. Once again, I’m not talking about, “That’s Okay”, “Forget about it”, “It’s nothing”, or saying it and not meaning it. I’m talking about genuinely forgiving the person from the heart and going on from that point as if that offense had never occurred. When God forgives us, He removes our sin *as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12)*, to be buried in the deepest sea, to be remembered no more. Let’s remember that when we pray, *“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us” (Matthew 6:12)*. Apology plus forgiveness equals reconciliation. That leads to harmony.

What About When I Am Wronged?

But what do I do if I’m the one who has been wronged and the other person needs to apologize? Sometimes, we don’t even know when we hurt someone. Remember, the goal isn’t the apology, but reconciliation. Jesus said, *“Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34)* and died for our sins long before we apologized. Sometimes, the person who is wronged must take the first step. This reconciliation thing just keeps getting harder and harder, doesn’t it?

Reconciled by the Blood

(Read *Colossians 1:19-20*). Reconciliation isn’t something we can work out. It’s something Jesus has done for us. We are reconciled to the Father through the blood of the cross. Then Christ becomes the bridge of peace between each of us (read *Ephesians 2:14-16*).

Means of Grace

Every time we receive the body and blood of Jesus He works on that bridge of peace in our lives. He gives us the desire and ability to say, “I’m sorry” and “I forgive” and be reconciled with our brother or sister, so we can harmonize once again.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
