

The Commands of Christ

Sermon # 5

Be Ye Reconciled

Matt 5:23-24

The next command of Christ is found in Matthew 5:24 here the Greek word for “reconciled” (*diallasso*) is an imperative. The word translated reconciled means “to change thoroughly” and it involves restoring a relationship that was broken.

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your offering before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” (Matthew 5:23-24).

Lets look at four questions that this command presents us with.

1. What Are We Command To Do?

The command to reconcile is the conclusion of a discussion on anger. Having established the principle that anger is as much a sin as murder, the one being the source and the other the symptom, Jesus gave a very practical application relevant to nearly everyone.

If anger is sin, and if sin affects one’s relationship with God, then one cannot truly worship God while harboring anger in his heart. The one who remembers a grievance between himself and another should deal with it immediately, even before his acts of worship and devotion. What is interesting in this passage is that the assumption is that someone else has a grievance with us. Even though we may harbor no ill feelings toward this brother, he has hard feelings against me. If I am to take the initiative in healing this situation, surely I must act to bring reconciliation and restoration in situations where I am the one who feels wronged.

2. To Whom Are We To Be Reconciled?

The verse says that you, *“remember that your brother has something against you.”* Remembering what our brother has against us is different from remembering what we have against our brother. The implication is that this is something that you know this person is angry with you about. Obviously, there can be people angry with you that you do not know about and it is impractical to run around asking everyone, “Are you mad at me?” We are to go to those that we know are angry with us and attempt to be reconciled. If they don’t forgive you there is nothing you can do about it, and you are free to return to worship God.

The author of the book of Romans (12:18) states it this way, *“If it be possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”*

3. Why Are We To Be Reconciled?

Regardless of who is responsible for the break in relationship – and often there is guilt on both sides – we should determine to make reconciliation before we come before God to worship. *“True worship is not enhanced by better music, better prayers, better architecture, or even better preaching. True worship is enhanced by better relationships between those who come to worship.”* [John MacArthur. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Matthew 1-7. (Chicago: Moody, 1985. p. 297)]

Every Jew was familiar with the ritual of offering sacrifices in order to atone for sin. They knew that sin separated them from fellowship with God. The offering of the sacrifice restored that fellowship and brought them back into a position of right relationship with God. What Jesus is pointing out is that a right relationship with God depends on our willingness to maintain a right relationship with one another. If we are not willing to live in right relationship with our brothers and sisters, then we are not fit to come and worship the God in whose image they are made.

We may have many things we want to give God – our adoration, our abilities, our money, our time, or our service. Yet, the command says, to leave our gift at the altar and *“first be reconciled”* to the brother whom we have wronged and then come and again offer the gift. Our tendency is to compensate for personal guilt by doing greater service for God. Jesus said that the process of giving of our gifts should be interrupted not superseded by the act of reconciliation.

4. We Chose Whether Or Not We Want To Be Reconciled?

The ultimate question, of course, is whether we are willing to be reconciled. Some people are angry and are enjoying being angry. Someone has wronged them, in their opinion, and they are cultivating a long-term anger and contempt against that person. I have met people like this. The anger is like a pet sin to them. They do not want to repent, or turn away from that sin. It is as if the anger or hatred energizes them. If they didn't have it, they wouldn't really know what to do. So they hang on to it, pretending that it is justifiable anger.

They are like the man I read about, *“One New Year's Eve at London's Garrick Club, British dramatist Frederick Lonsdale was asked by Seymour Hicks to reconcile with a fellow member. The two had quarreled in the past and never restored their friendship. “You must,” Hicks said to Lonsdale. “It is very unkind to be unfriendly at such a time. Go over now and wish him a happy New Year.”*

So Lonsdale crossed the room and spoke to his enemy. “I wish you a happy New Year,” he said, “but only one.”[Today in the Word, July 5, 1993. as found in www.christianglobe.com/illustrations/reconciliation]

We are told in Romans 12: 2, *"And do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* Our minds must be renewed if our attitudes are to be changed. Those things on which we allow our minds to dwell, will determine our attitudes of heart. *"The closer the offense is to our eyes the bigger and uglier it looks."* If we dwell on the negative in people - their faults, mistakes, imperfections, hang-ups, even sins - we will come out with wrong attitudes of heart. But if we dwell on the positive, we may begin to see them as God sees them. That does not mean we do not see the negatives. But it means we do not *dwell* on the negatives. Rather, we dwell upon the positive.

Listen to what the Lord says to us in Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." These are the things on which we are to dwell. When we look at another person, we are to look for things that are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute. We are to try to find things of excellence and things worthy of praise.

Everyone has good points. We should seek them out, and when we find them we should choose to dwell on those things. As you do, you will find that by so doing you are dealing one death blow after another to the murderous attitudes of pride, arrogance, anger, and hatred. It should be clear from Jesus' evaluation that our attitudes are vital.

I want to close with a rather lengthy story but I think it is worth the time, *"Shortly after the turn of the century, Japan invaded, conquered, and occupied Korea. Of all of their oppressors, Japan was the most ruthless. They overwhelmed the Koreans with a brutality that would sicken the strongest of stomachs. Their crimes against women and children were inhuman...."*

One group singled out for concentrated oppression was the Christians. When the Japanese army overpowered Korea one of the first things they did was board up the evangelical churches and eject most foreign missionaries.... One pastor persistently entreated his local Japanese police chief for permission to meet for services. His nagging was finally accommodated, and the police chief offered to unlock his church ... for one meeting. It didn't take long for word to travel. Committed Christians starving for an opportunity for unhindered worship quickly made their plans. Long before dawn on that promised Sunday, Korean families throughout a wide area made their way to the church. ... As they closed the doors behind them they shut out the cares of oppression and shut in a burning spirit anxious to glorify their Lord.

The Korean church has always had a reputation as a singing church. ... Song after song rang through the open windows into the bright Sunday morning. ... It was during a stanza of "Nearer My God to Thee" that the Japanese police chief waiting outside gave the orders. The people toward the back of the church could hear them when they barricaded the doors, but no one realized that they had doused the church with kerosene until they smelled the smoke. The dried wooden skin of the small church quickly ignited. Fumes filled the structure as tongues of

flame began to lick the baseboard on the interior walls. There was an immediate rush for the windows. But momentary hope recoiled in horror as the men climbing out the windows came crashing back in -- their bodies ripped by a hail of bullets.

The good pastor knew it was the end. With a calm that comes from confidence, he led his congregation in a hymn whose words served as a fitting farewell to earth and a loving salutation to heaven. The first few words were all the prompting the terrified worshipers needed. With smoke burning their eyes, they instantly joined as one to sing their hope and leave their legacy. Their song became a serenade to the horrified and helpless witnesses outside.The strains of music and wails of children were lost in a roar of flames....The bodies that once housed life fused with the charred rubble of a building that once housed a church. But the souls who left singing finished their chorus in the throne room of God. Clearing the incinerated remains was the easy part. Erasing the hate would take decades.....

In the decades that followed, that bitterness was passed on to a new generation. The Japanese, although conquered, remained a hated enemy. The monument the Koreans built at the location of the fire not only memorialized the people who died, but stood as a mute reminder of their pain....

It wasn't until 1972 that any hope came. A group of Japanese pastors traveling through Korea came upon the memorial. When they read the details of the tragedy and the names of the spiritual brothers and sisters who had perished, they were overcome with shame. Their country had sinned, and even though none of them were personally involved (some were not even born at the time of the tragedy), they still felt a national guilt that could not be excused. They returned to Japan committed to right a wrong. There was an immediate outpouring of love from their fellow believers. They raised ten million yen (\$25,000). The money was transferred through proper channels and a beautiful white church building was erected on the sight of the tragedy. When the dedication service for the new building was held, a delegation from Japan joined the relatives and special guests.

Although their generosity was acknowledged and their attempts at making peace appreciated, the memories were still there. Hatred preserves pain. It keeps the wounds open and the hurts fresh. The Koreans' bitterness had festered for decades. Christian brothers or not, these Japanese were descendants of a ruthless enemy. The speeches were made, the details of the tragedy recalled, and the names of the dead honored. It was time to bring the service to a close. Someone in charge of the agenda thought it would be appropriate to conclude with the same two songs that were sung the day the church was burned. The song leader began the words to "Nearer My God to Thee."

But something remarkable happened as the voices mingled on the familiar melody. As the memories of the past mixed with the truth of the song, resistance started to melt. The inspiration that gave hope to a doomed collection of churchgoers in a past generation gave hope once more. The song leader closed the service with the hymn "At the Cross." The normally stoic Japanese could not contain themselves. The tears that began to fill their eyes during the

song suddenly gushed from deep inside. They turned to their Korean spiritual relatives and begged them to forgive. The guarded, calloused hearts of the Koreans were not quick to surrender. But the love of the Japanese believers --not intimidated by decades of hatred -- tore at the Koreans' emotions.

One Korean turned toward a Japanese brother. Then another. And then the floodgates holding back a wave of emotion let go. The Koreans met their new Japanese friends in the middle. They clung to each other and wept. Japanese tears of repentance and Korean tears of forgiveness intermingled to bathe the site of an old nightmare. Heaven had sent the gift of reconciliation to a little white church in Korea.

[Tim Kimmel, Little House on the Freeway, p. 56-61.
www.christianglobe.com/illustrations/reconciliation]