

Cherish Relationships

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Matthew 5:23-24

Sunday, February 12, 2023 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

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

- Introduction: relationships

The Lord Jesus seemed to place a higher value on relationship than some people. We may sometimes be too willing to fight with words rather than reconcile. I recently read a story about two bitter ex-friends at a social gathering. On "New Year's Eve at London's Garrick Club, British dramatist Frederick Lonsdale was asked by Symour 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."* Apparently he didn't understand the point.

- Set the stage

The point is that the Lord Jesus takes very seriously the language that we aim at each other. So much so that He told His disciples that when they brought their gift to the altar, that is, the sacrificial lamb to be turned over to the priest for sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, and they remembered that they said something rude to their brother, they were to go apologize to their brother and then return to the business at hand. He instructed them to be quick to admit fault, offer an apology and offer to make amends, especially when considering the significance of the gift that awaits to be given.

What does the gift represent?

One commentary (the New Commentary) puts it this way: "The picture," says Tholuck, "is drawn from life. It transports us to the moment when the Israelite, having brought his sacrifice to the court of the Israelites, awaited the instant when the priest would approach to receive it at his hands. He waits with his gift at the rails that separate the place where he stands from the court of the priests, into which his offering will presently be taken, there to be slain by the priest, and by him presented upon the altar of sacrifice." It is at this solemn moment, when about to cast himself upon divine mercy and seek in his offering a seal of divine forgiveness, that the offerer is supposed, all at once, to remember that some brother has a just cause of complaint against him through a breach of this commandment in one or other of the ways just indicated.

- Main Point: Be reconciled, then offer your gift to the altar

Application

What you do and say as an individual Christian reflects on all Christians, and on Christ. "Charles Templeton, in his book *Life Looks Up*, said, that the history of the world has been affected by two events that took place in two small rooms separated by thousands of miles and thousands of years. One room is found in a drab flat over a dingy laundry in the Soho district of London. In this small room, Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital*, a book that changed the face of communism. The other room was in Jerusalem. It was the place where Jesus ate the Passover with his disciples and gave them some meaningful instructions.

Just as Jesus was about to go to the cross, he bequeathed to his disciples a badge they would need to wear. It would be a sign that they were in face his disciples. ‘A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’” (John 13:34-35). ** The commands that Jesus gave His disciples here in Matthew 5:23-24 are simply an application of the command to love one another. Love requires that we value reconciliation.

What does it mean to be reconciled?

Cherish relationships

In order to take reconciliation seriously we need to cherish relationships and seek to keep them whole whenever possible. There's a story about the great poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning that shows she cherished relationships. “A childhood accident caused poet Elizabeth Barrett to lead a life of semi-invalidism before she married Robert Browning in 1846. There's more to the story. In her youth, Elizabeth had been watched over by her tyrannical father. When she and Robert were married, their wedding was held in secret because of her father's disapproval. After the wedding the Brownings sailed for Italy, where they lived for the rest of their lives. But even though her parents had disowned her, Elizabeth never gave up on the relationship. Almost weekly she wrote them letters. Not once did they reply. After 10 years, she received a large box in the mail. Inside, Elizabeth found all of her letters; not one had been opened! Today those letters are among the most beautiful in classical English literature. Had her parents only read a few of them, their relationship with Elizabeth might have been restored.”*** It wasn't but not due to failed effort on her part. Some people will not reconcile. Do your best. The following information is from Harvard University about how to apologize. Every Christian who takes this passage seriously must know how to apologize and be ready to do so when necessarily. Assume that, sooner or later, you will have to use this.

Know How and When to Apologize

How to apologize genuinely

1. Acknowledge the offense. Take responsibility for the offense, whether it was a physical or psychological harm, and confirm that your behavior was not acceptable. ...
2. Explain what happened. ...
3. Express remorse. ...
4. Offer to make amends.

- Conclusion

I don't know if the British dramatists who had a falling out every reconciled, but the Lord Jesus places reconciliation among the most important of matters, important enough to interrupt that all important Day of Atonement. To be His followers, we must cherish relationships and be ready to make amends when we damage relationships. He cherishes them, and expects us to do the same.

**Today in the Word*, July 5, 1993. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/r/reconciliation.htm>

**The Eleventh Commandment. p. 372 The Zondervan 2023 Pastor's Manual, T.T. Crabtree, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan

****Daily Walk*, May 30, 1992.

*****The art of a heartfelt apology - Harvard Health*

<https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-l-d&q=how+to+apologize>

