



THOUGHTS ON COMMUNION AND RECONCILING CONFLICT

Let us see what the Bible says about this. Matthew 5:23-24 says:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

The message is clear, practice what you believe. Don't bring a gift of reconciliation to God if you have not set straight something that a brother has against you. It is your duty to set that straight!

In Matthew 5:23-24 Jesus says: “If you realize someone has something against you, (that is, if it's **your fault**), then you go to them and settle it.” He addresses the other scenario as well. “If your brother sins against you, (that is, if it's **their fault**), then you go to him...!” (Matthew 18:15 NIV). Whether we like it or not - when a relationship breaks down, regardless of who is at fault, Jesus puts the burden on you and on me to initiate reconciliation. Why?

1. As a witness to the world

- “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35 NIV)

2. As we are forgiven by God

- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32 NIV)
- “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15 NIV)
- “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matthew 18:35 NIV)
- “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.” (Mark 11:25 NIV)

You can't be forgiven by God if you can't forgive others! You can't harbour ill feelings towards others and then pray for God to bless you. The whole gospel message can be summarized by one word: Forgiveness. If we can't forgive others, we have not understood the gospel message!

3. To follow Jesus' example

- “Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.” (Acts 13:38-39 NIV)
- “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13 NIV)

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE FORGIVE OUR BROTHERS?

- “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him.” (Luke 17:3-4 NIV)
- “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’” (Matthew 18:21-22 NIV).

In other words, if you have Jesus in you, you will be enabled to forgive others all the time.

James offers us some practical advice. “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” (James 1:19 NIV).

EXAMINE YOURSELF

Communion is a time to examine your own heart. This discipline includes – when necessary – exclusion from participation at the Lord's Table when there is unforgiveness toward another.

Foremost in our minds, however, when preparing for the Lord's Supper, should always be the state of our own relationship with God. Is there personal sin that you are cherishing in your heart (Psalm 66:18), of which you must repent? Spend time in personal confession of sins to the Lord and then rest in the promise of His forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9).

STRIVE TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS

Scripture places the irrevocable duty upon believers to make every human effort to resolve the conflicts they have with others,

When anger is left to turn into resentment then ground is given to the devil for his destructive work, and bitterness defiles many people (Ephesians 4:26, Hebrews 12:15). Biblically speaking,

there simply is no acceptable, justifiable “out” for the person who claims to know Christ but also refuses to forgive.

But what do you do if a person who professes to know Christ refuses to be reconciled to you? What do you do? Must you abstain from taking communion until that person is willing to resolve the conflict biblically? Must you put your own Christian life “on hold” while they remain unwilling to heed God’s command?

Scripture answers, no. If you have made multiple attempts to resolve a conflict, but the other person refuses, you must pray for your enemy (Matthew 5:44) and rest in the truth of Romans 12:18-19:

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”

If you have tried everything to be at peace with that person, as far as it depends upon you, then you need to rest in the fact that God knows the steps you have taken, He knows your heart’s desire to be reconciled, and you must let God be God by leaving room for Him to carry out His work.

PREPARE YOUR MIND AND HEART

Here are a few practical suggestions:

- Read one or more Gospel accounts of the crucifixion in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John.
- Read Psalm 22 or Isaiah 53, meditating on the prophecies concerning the Messiah’s suffering.
- Sing a cross-centered hymn or worship song, thinking deeply about the truths conveyed in the lyrics. Here are few suggestions: In Christ Alone, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, At The Cross, At The Table, Lord I Need You, Resurrender, and many more.
- Spend time in prayer. Pray specifically for God’s best and blessing in any person’s life that you may be unreconciled with.
- Make a phone call, have a coffee, write an email or a letter and own your part of the conflict. Make no excuses. Have no expectations.

The early church was most identified by their “enemy love”. It’s the most cited command by early Christian writers in the first 300 years of the church’s existence. Why? Because when we love our enemies, how we see them changes. They become our neighbours. And it moves everything towards love of God and love of neighbour.