

# Reconciliation with each other

Part 2 in a series of sermons on reconciliation

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## Introduction

Welcome! Last time we had the opportunity to hear the importance of listening to God's voice, and cooperate with him. Today we will continue our series on reconciliation where we have reached the second part. In the first part we talked about reconciliation with God. Today I hope that we will learn something about reconciliation with each other.

My name is Ola Wingbrant, and <NAME> and Sajjad will help by translating me into other languages.

In the previous part we saw that it is through Jesus that we may be reconciled with God. I said that God put man in a reconcilable position by offering forgiveness through Jesus. But reconciliation is achieved only when we seek that forgiveness and receive it. This is a pattern that is applicable between people as well. Forgiveness is unilateral, something done by one party, whereas reconciliation is bilateral, it requires participation from both parties.

As we will see, and what we need to understand is that:

*Forgiveness and reconciliation are a part of God's kingdom, and if we want to live in that, forgiveness and reconciliation have to become a part of our lifestyle.*

## Causes of need for reconciliation

So what causes the need for reconciliation? You can probably come up with many things, but I would like to start by diving into a passage in Matthew. It is chapter 5, verses 21-26. It is from a larger passage called the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus clarifies the values of God's kingdom by discussing six of the Ten Commandments. Our passage begins when Jesus brings up the fifth commandment.

21 “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

"Raca" is an Aramaic word used in order to show contempt. Literally it means "empty" or "empty one". It is comparable to our "blockhead", "numskull" or "pinhead". It is debated how severe it was.

It is *not* so that Jesus here make anger or insults equal to murder. What he says is that they deserve to be judged just as much.

It is also important to understand that anger in itself is not sin. We can read in other places that Jesus gets angry or feel anger. Anger is an emotional reaction or response. It is what we do in anger or because of anger that may cause us to sin. As we will see it is, among other things, unresolved anger that separates us from God.

Also, some of you probably, if you are anything like me, reacts on the severe judgment for calling someone a fool. It's next stop hell!

Why is it so bad to call someone a fool? Many commentators say that this is a case of hyperbolic language. It is a conscious use of an exaggeration in order to catch the attention of the audience. If that is the case, it is obviously working. Jesus got my attention! However, there may be an additional reason. The Greek word translated as "fool" is "moros". It was used in the religious language to mean godless, or ignorant of God. Then this becomes like a condemnation. And even worse, if we tell someone they are godless, we are judging their relationship with God. Only God can do that. So this is nothing short of pride, we claim the position of God. Pride leads to judgment, if we don't repent.

So, to summarize, in this first part we have three examples of "relating" that call for reconciliation. Anger, insults and condemnation. These are personal attacks, and much depends on our words.

## **A text conversation story**

Today we have unsurpassed possibilities to communicate with each other, especially when it comes to written words. There are numerous apps and services that let us deliver texts to each other, in particular short ones. Fantastic! But not always. Because what is it that we actually write to each other? A suitable proverb could be (Prov 15:1)

1A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

A while ago, when I was sitting on the train, I ended up having a text conversation that came to be about money. At one moment my partner delivered a message that felt like a punch in my stomach. I mean that literally. It was the same feeling of having difficulty to draw breath. It was the first, and up to now, the only time it has happened to me. Anyway, my opponent insinuated that I was stupid, ignorant, and ungrateful. I was stunned! I could not answer immediately, which was probably a good thing. I felt a whole lot of different things, none of which I am very proud of. It was anger, disappointment, and bitterness. Something along the lines "If you only knew ...".

Words hurt.

1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

The first thing I did when I got home was to fall on my knees in a heap on the living room floor. First in order to pray for forgiveness for all my antagonism, and then in order to pray for help to forgive.

## **The importance of seeking forgiveness**

Which incidentally leads us to the second part of our text. The importance of seeking forgiveness. (Matt 5:23-24):

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

It can be difficult, maybe impossible, to come before God and seek communion with him, when there is somebody we need to be reconciled with.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

In both 22-24 and 25-26 it is the hearer - that is us - who are responsible for someone else's anger, or grief etc. Why did Jesus put his words in that way? I think it is because it is much easier for us to put ourselves in the position of the offended one. As I did in my text conversation story. However, with his formulation Jesus turns the perspective around. We need to continuously evaluate our actions and what we say. Or put in another way, our words and works. Do we cause anger, or grief in someone else?

Both these paragraphs also expresses hurry. We are not to stop, not even to worship, but to immediately seek reconciliation. And we are to seek reconciliation while we are on our way - through life - before we reach - the heavenly - court. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians (4:26-27)

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Why are we to hurry? One reason may be that it becomes more and more awkward the longer we wait to seek reconciliation. It becomes easier for us to persuade ourselves that it was not so bad. The temptation to refrain becomes greater and greater. But also, the longer we wait, the more it affects our counterpart. In order to minimize harm, we are to resolve the situation without delay.

## **The sound of a proper apology**

But let us assume that we have done something stupid already. Something that requires an apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation. What does a proper apology sound like? I think a brilliant example can be found in Luke 15:21. It is "the lost son's" apology to his father.

For those of you who have not familiar with the passage, or cannot remember what it is about, it is Jesus telling a parable. It is about a son who has requested to get his inheritance of his father in advance. He has then left home and basically spent it all on wine and women. But he comes to his senses and goes back home. The first thing he says to his father is:

Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Why is this such a good example? For a start, he admits that he has done something wrong. But also note that he *does not* say "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, *but I wanted some fun really badly*", or "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, *but I really thought life would be much better there than here*", or something else. My point is that his apology does not contain any element of justification. It is extremely tempting, and extremely easy for us to add something like an excuse in a similar situation. Something along the lines:

"I am sorry. What I said was really mean, *but I was so angry.*"

Each such element, whether we realize it or not, is a step towards trying to justify our behavior, in order to make us feel a little bit better about ourselves. But

that also means that we don't take full responsibility for our actions. Instead we blame some other, external circumstance, outside our control. This is not a step towards reconciliation, but rather a continued offense. By attaching an element of excuse, we basically say that our behavior was ok, given the circumstances.

However, I am not saying the we should not consider the cause of our behavior. It is very important that we do so. Especially if we have done something that requires reconciliation. We don't want to end up there again. Besides, the person we are seeking reconciliation with may ask us "Why". At that point a "I don't know, it just happened", will not do. That is incredibly indifferent and it becomes hard to consider our apology seriously.

So, to summarize I think a good apology is one where we take responsibility for our actions, asks for forgiveness, and don't try to justify our bad behavior.

## **The importance of offering forgiveness**

However, to seek forgiveness is only one side of the reconciliation equation. It is equally important to be ready to offer forgiveness. Why? Because:

"Bitterness is like drinking poison and hoping that the other guy dies."

I think it was Carl Medearis that said this. But I love the quote. Bitterness kills! If you hold on to irreconcilability your life will be miserable. I think this follows from something Jesus says in Matthew 6:14-15:

14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

If we are not willing to forgive, we should not expect God to forgive us either. Why is that? Because holding on to the "right" to not forgive, indicate that we carry bitterness, and are longing for revenge, and an opportunity to judge and punish. Maybe we even refer to some Old Testament law to justify this. But what this verse tells us is that God then will apply the same norm to us. If we do not forgive others, we lock ourselves out from the Kingdom Of God, and our life will be miserable.

In Matthew 18:21-22 Peter asks Jesus how many times we should be ready to forgive. It says:

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"  
22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Jesus more or less says "stop counting".

*To offer forgiveness is not a rule to follow. Forgiveness is a part of God's kingdom, and if we want to live in that, forgiveness has to become a part of our lifestyle.*

## **Conclusion**

I am aware of that this sermon has lacked more concrete advice as to *how* to forgive, or how to seek reconciliation. Depending on the situation it can be a long process. But in many day-to-day situations I think a good attitude is to:

*Don't assume your counterpart has bad motives.*

Many of our strained relationships are caused by misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and invalid assumptions. We hear things that were never intended.

Another good rule of thumb is:

*Don't answer when angry. Postpone it if possible.*

Anger is not a good basis for responses. Especially not in sensitive and strained situations.

And one other thing, as I said in the beginning. Forgiveness is unilateral, reconciliation is bilateral. We can always forgive, even if our counterpart never asks for forgiveness. Forgiveness relieves us from bitterness, and opens the door to the Kingdom Of God.

*Forgiveness and reconciliation are a part of God's kingdom, and if we want to live in that, forgiveness and reconciliation have to become a part of our lifestyle.*