

“HEALTHY, BIBLICAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION, II.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Matthew 5:23-26 and 18:15-17

Prayer:

Introduction.

Last Sunday I preached the first part of two sermons on healthy, Biblical conflict resolution. That sermon caused a couple of people to wonder what big conflict I must be addressing in our church body. I had no specific conflict in my mind, but rather all the conflict that has been swirling around all of us this past year and a half. But I didn't even need that as an excuse.

As I said last week, in our fallen, sinful world conflict is inevitable and unavoidable. Our two texts this morning assume there will be conflict in our relationships and we all will have relationships that will need reconciliation.

You cannot have a significant meaningful human relationship without sin getting involved and you cannot maintain a significant meaningful human relationship without at some point having to take some steps toward reconciliation and forgiveness. That is a given. It is not strange, it is not abnormal, it is reality.

Jesus gives two examples or illustrations of what righteous reconciliation in His kingdom looks like. One is with a brother, and one with an accuser, presumably an enemy. One is in the church and the other is in the world, out in public.

Whether a friend or a foe these principles apply. Whether in the church or in the world Jesus means for us to learn and apply the same lessons. There are **five principles** in Jesus' teaching for seeking and pursuing healthy, Biblical conflict resolution and reconciliation.

We all need these principles. They apply to every person in this room and to every relationship we have. Please pay attention, write these down and please take them to heart.

You go.

You go quickly.

You go quickly to the person.

You go quickly to the person in person.

You go quickly to the person in person to be reconciled.

The first step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution and reconciliation is, you go.

You go, don't wait for the other person. Be a peacemaker, not a peace waiter. Seek peace and pursue it. Aggressively love your neighbor.

Real reconciliation is proactive. It takes the initiative. It doesn't say, "I will if you will" or "you go first." It desires what pleases God over what pleases self. It's willing to step out of the comfort of doing nothing and seeks to do good.

God shows His great love for us in that while we were sinners and while it was us who sinned against Him, yet He came to us first. He took the first step toward us to restore relationship.

Real Biblical conflict resolution means taking responsibility for actions, for thoughts and holds oneself accountable. It doesn't make excuses, it doesn't shift the blame. You go and you go first. You swallow your pride first, you be the Christian first.

The second step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution and reconciliation is, you go quickly.

Notice when Jesus says you should be reconciled. Upon remembering that there is something between you. When it comes to mind, that is the right time to deal with it. Real reconciliation is quick to listen, quick to action.

Why quickly?

Because two great things are at stake. Our relationship with God and our eternal soul.

First, our relationship with God is at stake. We are out of fellowship with Him as long as we are out of fellowship with each other.

To hate our brother or to hold a grudge against a friend is to pour contempt on the glory of God's great grace and the glory of His reconciling love and forgiveness. To say we love God and hold anger toward our brother is to make ourselves a liar. Anyone who is angry with his brother is liable to God's judgment.

James 1:19-20 Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Anger does not produce righteousness and without righteousness we will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Is there any greater danger?

Anger is a self-inflicting wound. Kill anger before it kills you or kills your relationship with God or kills your faith or your fruitfulness or usefulness.

Second, our own souls are at stake. Anger and hatred harbored in our hearts become a foothold for Satan, an open door inviting him to come in. Ephesians 4:26-27 says, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” Dealing quickly with anger is resisting the devil. Getting rid of anger is like an exorcism.

Don’t take so long that the devil begins to get a foothold and bitterness begins to take root. The longer we dwell on the conflict the more potential for it to grow out of proportion. Do let things escalate.

I don’t know how many times I have been afraid to confront a situation or deal with a problem and then when I do and it is quickly resolved I wish I had saved myself a lot of stress by dealing with it sooner.

As with all these principles we must apply them with mature, spiritual wisdom and discernment. Last week I talked about not being too hasty and taking time for self-reflection, and cooling down. The point is don’t take so long that your anger grows. Sooner is better than later.

The third step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution is, you go quickly to the person.

You go quickly to the person, not to family, friends and neighbors, but only to the person involved. We are all guilty on this one. I would say it is the norm, when we have an issue with someone else, we rarely tell them but we tell others. We have to break the habit of talking about people and start the habit of talking to people.

I talked to a teacher a couple of weeks ago who told me in all his years in teaching he has never had a parent come to him with their issue with him, they have always gone to the principal or superintendent. That escalates the situation and that says your goal is to win, not to resolve or reconcile or seek peace. Our goal should always be to make peace.

Let’s say that I go downstairs and take a cookie out of the refrigerator. And let’s say Pastor Mike sees me take it. What could Mike do? Maybe he is afraid to confront the pastor personally. He could tell Fred Ypma, the president of council. Or maybe he tells the cookie ladies that the pastor is a thief and can’t be trusted and they need to get a lock for the fridge.

What would you want done if you were caught in a sin? Would you want that person to tell lots of others or talk to you? Why is it that we want the Golden Rule applied to us but we don’t apply it to others?

Jesus says **Matthew 18:15** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”

According to Scripture Pastor Mike has two choices, he can talk to me about the cookie or he can talk to no one. That's it.

There is a corollary to this principle. If Mike comes to you to talk about me, you need to interrupt him and ask him if he has talked to me. If he says no, then you need to gently tell him to. In other words, one way to dry up the gossip supply is to remove the demand for it. If we won't listen to any before long there isn't any to tell. If I am not part of the problem and I am not part of the solution then it's gossip.

The only people who should know about the conflict should be those who are directly involved in it. Can any of you think of a time someone actually did this? Can you think of a time you did this? You didn't say a word about it to anyone else, and only to the person involved.

If someone did that to you, imagine how blessed and honored you would feel, that they didn't escalate it to others. This is so counter-cultural, so against the way most of us deal with offenses or hurts. Keep the matter as small as possible for as long as possible.

Again, this is a principle we must apply with mature, spiritual wisdom and discernment. There might be a conflict situation where you need some help, some wisdom, some counsel as to what to do or how to proceed. One way you could do that that says you are more interested in seeking peace than in winning, is you don't share who it is with, you don't poison the well. You aren't trying to win people to your side.

The fourth step to righteous relationships is, you go quickly to the person in person.

You go quickly to the person in person if possible, preferably face to face or by phone. Not Facebook to Facebook, but face to face. How often does social media make things worse. Don't deal with sensitive matters by text or email. Even by phone is not ideal. Be face to face, be in relationship. Jesus did this when He came to us in the flesh.

This is another application of the Golden Rule. Going to the person in person honors that person and protects your relationship from further injury or misunderstanding.

Generally it is not a good idea to write a letter or send an e-mail when dealing with a conflict. Why not? Because many times we will put things in a letter that we wouldn't say in person.

We had a man in a past church who was a master letter writer. He could craft the most articulate attacks for pages. In person he was as kind and gentle as could be. After several letters we asked him to stop writing letters and come to us in person with his issues or concerns.

If you don't think you will speak very well or will get tongue tied in the confrontation then write your thoughts down and then come to the person and read them. But talk to each other so

you can see body language and hear tone of voice, see kindness in your eyes. Talk to each other so you can ask questions and clarify and either explain or repent and ask forgiveness.

Go to your brother, go to your accuser in person. If you are afraid going to the person in person could escalate into a bigger fight, the fifth principle will help.

The fifth step to healthy, Biblical conflict resolution is, you go quickly to the person in person to be reconciled.

You go quickly to the person in person with the goal of being reconciled, not to get even or take revenge or attack or accuse. If you go with a goal of getting even or a pound of flesh, or pointing out all their sins, you have a certain demeanor and approach.

But if you have taken the first steps of self-reflection and preparation beforehand that I talked about last week, you will have a different approach. If you have humbled yourself before God, if you have looked for the log in your own eye first and confessed your own sins, if you honor the other person as created in the image of God and loved by God, if you have prayed for them and for your relationship, and have a sincere desire to be reconciled, *then* you will have an entirely different approach. You will go with an attitude of love and mercy and grace toward them. You will go assuming and expecting the best, go with the goal to give and receive forgiveness.

Then when we go, we aren't going to continue the argument, but to move on to understanding and clarity and reconciliation. We will avoid all those kinds of words hearsay, speculation, exaggeration, partial truths, gossip, slander, and all other unwholesome speech.

Ephesians 4:29, 32 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

As a practical matter in your conversation use "I" statements not "you" statements. Avoid saying always and never since they are always never true. Don't pile on or snowball, stay focused on one issue. Don't bring others into it. Be sensitive to timing, there is a time to speak and a time to be silent. And when you ask for forgiveness allow them time.

What do you do if you meet in person and you can't find reconciliation?

Jesus makes provision for not giving up and getting help, but getting help always with the goal of seeking peace, of finding resolution and being reconciled. So you bring another mature, spiritual godly person. And again you will show yourself to be truly seeking peace if you haven't poisoned the well ahead of time. In fact, you might not tell them much of anything about the situation until the three of you are together, so the other person knows you aren't ganging up.

Conclusion:

One thing we need to see in these Scriptures is how precious our fellowship with each other is in the sight of God. He cares deeply and strongly about us and our hearts and our actions toward one another. It breaks His heart to see our gossip and slander, our back biting and our criticism, our tearing each other down, our taking offense and harboring bitterness and unforgiveness.

Worship is where we come to declare publicly our love for God and our devotion to Him. But God sees our heart and He knows that if there is no love for our neighbor in our heart then there is not love for Him either. They go together.

Peacemaking is taking the Gospel we have received and applying it to our relationships. It is taking what God has done for us and doing it to others and for others.

Do we care enough to go, to go quickly, to the person in person and in so far as it depends on each of us seek peace and reconciliation?

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

Prayer: Holy Father, by your Spirit in us enable us to live worthy of the calling we have received, worthy of the reconciliation you have made with us. Enable us to do what the Apostle Paul calls us to do, to be “completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Thank you for showing us the way to restore what becomes broken through sin and misunderstanding. Make us hungry and thirsty for peace and reconciliation with you and with each other especially as we anticipate coming to your table next week. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and helps us this week.