**Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Matt. 6:14-15

Introduction:

1. The Sermon on the Mount speaks both to forgiveness and reconciliation.

2. We long to be forgiven. We are called on to forgive and then reminded that our being forgiven is condition on our forgiveness of others. Powerful statements, to say the least!

3. But that’s not all the Sermon on the Mount says about relationships. 5:24-26 says that if we are making a sacrifice and remember that we have sinned against someone we should leave our offering and “first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”

4. Failure involves being thrown into prison to pay for our sin.

5. Hard sayings!!

a. When I am injured I must forgive.

b. When I am the one causing injury I must seek reconciliation.

6. But we often get these processes confused. We wrongly believe that if I forgive someone then I will have to make myself prematurely vulnerable to them again and they will hurt me again. So, we withhold forgiveness demanding repentance.

7. We all know that the Lord would have us not only forgive, but also to be reconciled. But how do we get there?

Discussion:

I. Forgiveness and reconciliation are related but two very different processes.

A. Forgiveness may be defined as the conscious deliberate decision I make to not hold the

person condemnable for the sin they have committed against me.

1. Forgiveness is not about me giving up the hurt that I feel as a result of the sin.

2. It is not about me saying that that hurt doesn’t matter.

3. Forgiveness means I pardon or cancel the debt that is owed as a result of the sin.

B. Reconciliation may be defined as bringing estranged persons together again in

friendship.

1. Rom. 5:10 says, “While we were enemies (of God) we were reconciled to

God by the death of His Son.”

2. Moses tried to reconcile his brothers who were fighting. Acts 7:26 says he tried to

reconcile them in peace and asked, “Why do you injure one another?”

C. When we forgive we give up the right to hurt back the one who has hurt us. We give up

the right to make them pay for their sin.

D. Forgiveness is a prerequisite for reconciliation. In other words, I have to forgive you

before we can be reconciled.

1. If I haven’t forgiven you and you seek reconciliation I will continue the breach by

inflicting hurts on you. One of which may be the withholding of forgiveness.

2. Thus, it is impossible to reconcile without forgiveness.

E. But it is possible to forgive without reconciliation.

1. I may no longer hold you condemnable for the sin you committed against me, but …

a. You may not want to reconcile with me.

b. I may be afraid to make myself vulnerable to you for fear that you will hurt me

again.

2. Certainly, the ideal is that there would be both forgiveness and reconciliation.

3. But the reality is that sin creates a breach in a trust relationship, and trust

relationships are not easily healed or repaired. I think this is recognized in the fact

that Scripture mandates forgiveness. “If you do not forgive others, then your Father

will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:15). But reconciliation involves a

process of persuasion.

II. Both forgiveness and reconciliation are made possible by the sacrifice of Christ.

A. Sin creates a breach in relationship and necessitates payment.

1. Often we tend to underestimate the severity of sinful violations. Especially is this the

case when we are the one who sins against another. For us it is not so severe,

because we are not the one experiencing the consequences. It is the innocent that

experiences the pain of sin.

2. And it is the innocent who must carry the pain of sin in order to forgive. Thus we

give up the right to inflict pain or make the sinner pay.

3. This is the principle behind turning the other cheek and it is the foundation of grace.

Grace involves giving kindness when the sinner deserves punishment.

4. And so God has sacrificed His Son for our forgiveness. He paid the penalty that we

deserved and now no longer holds us condemnable. We are free from the wrath of

God.

5. This same sacrifice is the means for reconciliation or our becoming friends with God

(Rom. 5:6-11).

B. This sacrifice is the mechanism by which we can be restored to relationship with one

another. This is what Paul is saying in Eph. 2:11ff as he speaks of the breaking down of

the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles.

1. He is our peace.

2. He reconciles us into one new man.

3. The cross pays for the sin. It pays both for my sin that I have committed against you

and your sin that you have committed against me. Thus, if I want to be forgiven it is

appropriate and right that I forgive you. It is not right for me to receive the blessing

of forgiveness while withholding it from you. This is the basis of what is said in Matt.

18 in the parable of the servant who was forgiven, but then choked his slave saying,

“Pay back what you owe.”

C. So forgiveness and reconciliation are dependent upon the price for sin being paid by

the death of Christ.

1. So God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

2. Paul was preaching the gospel which was the word of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19.

3. And his ministry of preaching a ministry of reconciliation.

D. Let me remind you. Forgiveness is mandated. Reconciliation involves a process of

being persuaded. It is a process that allows for the development of trust. There is no

statement of Scripture, to my knowledge, that says, “Unless you are reconciled you

cannot be reconciled to God.” Instead Scripture says, “So far as it depends on you, be

at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

III. The responsibility for forgiveness is on the one who has been sinned against. If you have sinned against me I have the responsibility to forgive you, without conditions.

A. Forgiveness is my end of the stick.

B. I can’t make you repent. I can’t demand that you apologize as a condition under

which I withhold forgiveness. I can’t make you do penance. I can’t make you pay.

C. Certainly repentance and apology is appropriate but that is on your end of the stick.

D. Forgiveness involves me not holding you condemnable and therefore not punishing

you. I let you off the hook and willingly bear the pain for your sin. You can accept it or

reject it. Forgiveness is my decision. It takes place within me.

IV. For reconciliation to take place the sinner needs to accept responsibility for their offense.

A. If I have sinned against you I need to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23ff). I need to

apologize for the harm I have caused. Is this not the godly sorrow of 2 Cor. 7:10?

B. In cases where I can I need to make restitution. I need to work to make things right.

1. If I have stolen from you I need to repay (Ex. 22:3-14).

2. Lev. 5:16 refers to making restitution + 1/5 in cases of unintentional sin.

C. When I humbly repent, confess, acknowledge my responsibility, and work to make

things right this creates opportunity for the restoration of relationship.

D. We confess our sins to God and repent as appropriate responses to His forgiveness.

F. Forgiveness is the responsibility of the one sinned against. Reconciliation is the

responsibility of both the sinner and the forgiver.

V. I can forgive you whether I trust you or not. I can’t be reconciled with you without establishing trust.

A. The building of trust takes time and evidence.

B. A sinner’s repentance, confession, accepting responsibility reveal this direction. On-

going evidence of this direction builds trust and reconciliation.

C. For example, a husband has betrayed his wife. He repents, confesses and asks her

forgiveness. His wife forgives him and determines not to punish him for his sin. But he

continues to betray her. Trust is undermined and instead of reconciliation there are

more breaches in the relationship. The situation is intolerable. Cf. Matt. 19:9. Is this

situation being described in this text?

VI. When sin is committed injury results. Along with this injury is severe pain. Betrayal. Disappointment. Anger. Sometimes our pride is injured.

A. All these emotions can get in the way of forgiveness.

B. They get in the way of reconciliation.

C. Accusations and defenses get in the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.

D. Sometimes Matt. 18:15ff is interpreted in anger and in the midst of accusations and

defenses to justify oneself and condemn another.

E. That is not the intention of this text. The objective is to produce good relations.

F. But what if I believe someone has sinned against me and they don’t believe they

have. If you believe they have sinned against you your job is to forgive. It is not to

punish privately and then with witnesses and then with the congregation. It is to win

them.

G. Our tendency is once we believe we have been sinned against to now sin against the

one who sinned against us. This does not result in forgiveness, nor reconciliation.

When this happens we may need to forgive AND ask for forgiveness. We may need

to seek reconciliation and be reconciling.

H. We need to face the hard facts. No ifs and buts! Accept personal responsibility for

whatever harm we have caused. Forgive, AND in humility and vulnerability work to

build trust.

Conclusion:

1. Both forgiveness and reconciliation are hard.

2. There are hurts to be carried.

3. Emotions to be processed.

4. Raw wounds to be healed.

5. And Christ has died to make it all possible.