

RECONCILING BELIEVERS

Reconciliation between believers is necessary for everyone's spiritual growth (Ephesians 4:15-16). Our reconciliation is important in order to have a clear and powerful testimony to the world around us since our love for one another identifies us to the world as Jesus' disciples (John 13:35) and demonstration of the unity which God has created in the Body shows the world that Christ was sent by the Father (John 17:23).

Both the offender and the offended are commanded to seek reconciliation. We all will eventually fit into one or the other category. Practicing Biblical reconciliation often requires us to change previous habits, a process described in Ephesians 4:22-24 as stopping wrong actions, changing the way we think, and replacing the old habit with new correct ways of living.

I. Changing the way we think: three essential perspectives

1. Our ultimate focus and goal is God's glory and not my own well-being, nor my convenience, nor my plans.
In 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:1 Paul teaches that the supposed freedoms of the Corinthians to eat or drink anything were subordinated to the spiritual well-being of others and to the glory of God. How much more should the glory of God be our primary interest in this area of reconciliation where He has clearly commanded. I may not place my plans, convenience or well-being above God's glory.
Consider: In what manner do we place ourselves before God?
2. Obedience from the heart is more important than external forms of worship or conformity to what we imagine is "right."
King Saul is an OT example of this problem. He made sacrifice more important than obedience when he kept animals to sacrifice that God had commanded to be destroyed (1 Samuel 15, esp. vs 22). He made his own concept of what was "right" more important than obedience when he failed to wait for Samuel (1 Samuel 13). It cost Saul the kingdom. True worship is doing what God says (cf Mt. 4:9-10) and "right" is defined by God's Word.
Consider: In what manner do we elevate external forms of worship or our imagination of what is "right"?
3. We will give account to God, if we have acted justly, loved mercy and walked humbly before Him.
God told Israel through the prophet Micah that He required of them, more than sacrifice, "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). We should assure that our actions are just, that we are showing mercy, and that we are humble.
Consider: How have I shown mercy, guaranteed that my actions were just, and demonstrated humility?

II. Changing our actions – Four scenarios with which we may be confronted

1. When I have sinned, what should I do?
 - a. Seek godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:8-13) which leads to repentance.
 - b. Practice true repentance – a change of mind which produces changed actions.
 - c. Act quickly & resolutely: confess to God (1 John 1:9), go to the offended (Mt 5:23-24) in person.
 - d. Ask specifically for forgiveness, naming the sin and accepting the guilt.
 - e. When it is possible, attempt to make whatever restitution is needed.
2. When someone confronts me with my sin, how should I respond?
 - a. Remember that God is in control and is making you more like Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-29).
 - b. Thank the person for taking the initiative; remember that the wounds of a friend can be trusted (Pr 27:6).
 - c. Clarify the accusation, if needed, without arguing about it.
 - d. Correctly deal with whatever is true in the accusation. (See above steps.)
 - e. Humbly respond to inaccurate representations, i.e., with further questions, clarifications, etc.
3. When someone has sinned against me, what should I do?
 - a. Remember that correction has as its immediate goal the restoration of the brother, then the purity of the church, and ultimately the glory of God (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:6-7).
 - b. Examine yourself first of all. Does my own sin cloud my judgment (Matthew 7:1-5)? Am I susceptible to sin; how can I guard myself (Galatians 6:1)? Of whom am I thinking most highly – myself or others (Philippians 2:1-3)? Have I seen my own spiritual poverty enough to be merciful (Mt 5:3; Prov 18:23)?
 - c. Reflect upon the accusation you will bring. Be sure that you have all the facts correct. Cf Prov 25:8; 18:17. Be sure that you can substantiate an accusation of sin with Scripture.
 - d. Consider accepting being wronged (1 Corinthians 6:7).
 - e. Go to your brother and speak with him privately (Matthew 18:15-17).
 - f. If there is no repentance, than return with one or two others who have similarly prepared themselves.
 - g. If there is no repentance, bring it to the church, and treat the unrepentant as an outsider (1 Cor 5:11).
 - h. If a disciplined brother repents, restore such a one quickly to fellowship (2 Cor 2:5-11).
4. When someone confesses sin to me, how should I respond?
 - a. Remember that our purpose is restoration (Gal. 6:1) and never vengeance and that the penalty for all of our sin and for all of their sin has been paid by the death of Christ.
 - b. Clarify if necessary the offense, the request, and the issues involved.
 - c. Freely forgive, as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us (Eph 4:32).

The need to practice reconciliation permeates our lives. If you wish to grow spiritually as a child of God, you need to be right with God and to be right with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Consider: Have I sinned against someone? What must I do to get it right? When will I start? Has someone sinned against me? Will I choose to love mercy and try to get it right to the glory of God?