

**Matthew 5:21-26**  
**Beyond Forgiveness-Reconciliation**  
February 12, 2017

Whenever I read these verses I always think of my old roommate in Seminary named John. He wanted to be like Jesus; and do what Jesus said to do, like visit in prison; so he signed up to go to visit in the City Jail in Dallas.

Well with a bit of fear and trepidation having never visited in a jail or prison before in his life he walked in and filled out all the paper work and handed it to the officer at the front desk. The officer went back read it all over and then came out and said to John, “Stick your hands out.” John being a bit startled did so. The officer then slapped a pair of handcuffs on him and put him in a cell.



You see John had some outstanding parking tickets he never paid; so a warrant was issued for his arrest. No matter what he said his reason for being there they wouldn't let him go until he paid ever last cent.

This week and next two important questions need to be answered in terms of “Forgiveness”. **First, what is the relationship of forgiveness and reconciliation?** In other words what is beyond forgiveness? And **second, does forgiveness mean someone should escape justice?**

I will address the first question today, and the second question next week. These are both extremely important questions with real life ramifications physically, mentally and spiritually.

Today, in our scripture passage is a call for reconciliation in the context of a discussion of the Old Testament prohibition against murder. It seems for Christians that Jesus is upping the ante on what constitutes murder.

It seems at first glance that Jesus is either downgrading the seriousness of murder by saying that calling someone a fool is the equivalent of murder, or we are being held to a much higher standard of behavior, that now for Christians includes our thoughts. It's the latter.

**And in the midst of this, Jesus is calling for us to reconcile with our accusers.** I want to help us sort this all out in the best way I can in a few minutes here on a Sunday morning.

So now let's examine the passage in more detail. It is actually divided into two parts. **"The first half is verses 21-22 which says in effect that all anger and hostility are outside the bounds of God's Kingdom.**

**The second half, verses 23-26, admit that Christians do get angry and suffer through broken relationships and tell us what to do when that reality occurs."** New Interpreter's Bible Commentary on Matthew

Now the issue here is "anger" and how we take it out on others from "attitude" to "name calling". "The anger that Jesus speaks of here in the Greek is **"Orge"**, which is an inward brooding anger as compared to **"Thymos"** an anger that flares and is gone." Mounce Commentary of Matthew p. 44-46

Eph. 4:26 it says, **"Be angry but do not sin, do not let the sun set on your anger."** Perfect advice for couples, but the point is don't brood on anger, nurse it and build it for it will lead to sin even the sin of murder.

"Jesus here is dealing with relationships within the religious community rather than laying down rules for human behavior in general." Ibid. "We see this in that "the term 'brother' occurs 4 times in verses 21-24." Ibid. But I believe the wisdom Jesus speaks of here is applicable to other situations including husband and wife and our wider society, which currently seems to be nursing anger and hatred.

Jesus here in these verses is as one scholar put it, **"forbidding the anger which broods, the anger which will not forget, the anger which refuses to be pacified, the anger which seeks revenge.** If we are to obey Jesus, all anger must be banished from life, especially that **anger which lingers to long."** Barclay Matthew Volume 1 p. 116

At one of the churches I served I met a woman who was very unhappy. I as the new, young pastor on the staff was sent out to do the impossible and that was to mollify her, soothe her ruffled feathers. I did not know it at the time that was impossible. Her last words to me at the end of the visit were, "I forgive but I never forget." I knew then just by the way she said it she had never forgiven the situation and time proved me right.

She was so vengeful, so spiteful she engendered the first time I ever heard a preacher cuss. She was engulfed in "Orge" an anger that was always simmering and had a perfect memory. She did not know that even God promises to forget our sin. Jeremiah 31:34 says, "for I (the Lord) will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." She was chained to an angry type of behavior that forever held her prisoner.



Now Jesus here is not replacing one standard of legalism with another of his own. He is not listing gradation of punishment that needs to be taken literally. He is speaking in hyperbole to make the point that "reconciliation, overcoming alienation and hostility is more important than worship at the altar."

Jesus is not instituting another legalistic demand that we abandon our offerings at the altar and come back later to offer them when we remember someone has something against us. Jesus is pushing us to creatively seek reconciliation with fellow Christians." New Interpreter's Bible Commentary on Matthew

This in many cases is very hard to do, and I believe in some cases, is possible only through the intervention of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Today I am going to give you an example of this. It comes from WWII. Forgiveness and reconciliation were achieved, but it wasn't easy.

In fact, before I go on, I want to emphasize again that we are only able to do some things because God has first done them for us. As the Bible says, "We love because God first loved us." We are able to forgive, because **while we were yet sinners Christ died for us and forgave us.**

**And we are enabled to be reconciled with others only because we were first reconciled with God through Christ.**

Now we would define reconciliation as **"The act of establishing friendship and peace by removing animosity and then the resulting state of oneness."** This is how it worked in the life of a woman called Corrie Ten Boom.



Corrie Ten Boom, who many celebrate her and her family as examples of putting faith into action for hiding Jews during the Holocaust of WWII, is also a tremendous example of putting forgiveness and reconciliation into action.

For hiding Jews, Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. Betsie died there starved, beaten, and abused shortly before Corrie was released Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, 1944. Three years later in 1947 Corrie was back in defeated Germany preaching the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. It is funny how God gives us opportunities to practice what we preach.

After one of her talks she was approached to her horror by one of the former prison guards.

*She wrote this about that meeting.*

*The former prison guard said, "You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk, I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.*

*"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like*

*to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ..." his hand came out, ... "will you forgive me?", he asked.*

*She wrote, "And I stood there – I whose sins had every day to be forgiven – and I could not. Betsie had died in that place – could he erase her slow... terrible... death simply for the asking? "*

*It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.*

*For I had to do it – I knew that. **The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us.** "If you do not forgive men their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." ...*

*And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But **forgiveness is not an emotion** – I knew that too. **Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the feelings of the heart.** "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand, I can do that much. You supply the feeling."*

*And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.*

*"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"*

*For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love; so intensely, as I did then."*

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I never have and pray you never have needed to forgive someone over such a horrible crime, but that former prison guard did what Jesus

commanded him to do. He remembered someone who had something against him and he went to be reconciled with her.

**The burden is on us even when the sin is on the others part.** Dr. Barclay put it this way, “Apologize sooner rather than later. **It may mean that, even if we were in the right, we have to take the 1<sup>st</sup> step toward healing the breach.**” Ibid.

Now remember the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of our scripture today deals with the fact that we as Christians do get angry and suffer through broken relationships. It tells us what to do in those situations with the warning and hope that the Judgment Day is coming. It is a reminder of the prayer we pray so often **“Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”**

It is a reminder that unforgiving hearts hold us in a prison of our own making and we won't get out until we have paid the last penny of forgiveness. It is hard to do and we are often failures at it or struggle with it which is why later in Romans 12 Paul wrote:

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everybody...”*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

**The work of forgiveness, healing and reconciliation takes time and often extreme acts of courage and will.**

Forgiveness like love is an act of the will. Anger is also a choice and act of the will. In this giddy, emotional week of Valentine's Day we forget that love, true love is an act of the will. It is a commitment to someone. It is the same with forgiveness and reconciliation. We must decide to do it, than do it. We must decide to not harbor and nurse our angers and hurts, but let them go.

For some, I know, reconciliation will never happen in this world, because the person that needs to be reconciled with has died, moved

on, disappeared, or doesn't want to participate. And for some it truly is beyond our human capacity and only the power of the Holy Spirit will bring it about.

But as Romans 12:18 says, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everybody.”*

God calls us to peace and assures us of a final judgment and justice in a New Heaven and a New Earth. In that New Heaven and Earth, Revelation 21 promises, *“God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away.”*

This means all the effects of sin will have passed away. All the anger, all the hurt, all the broken relationships will be gone and I believe even forgotten. The pain of our time here on earth will be completely wiped away. In its place we will be reconciled with God, each other, and all who are in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

The Judgment to come, which is hinted at in our scripture today, will have occurred and will wipe away all that has harmed us.

In the meantime though, *‘as far as it depends on us, we need to live at peace with one another.’* This means in a moment I will give you some time to pray and think and in your heart seek to forgive another.

If they are still alive, if it is possible, I encourage you to reconcile with that person or persons, or maybe even an institution like the church. That is the hope and the challenge for peace I lay before you this day.

When I came to Christ in the deepest way when I was 20, I sought out at the time all who I thought might have something against me. I sought reconciliation. It was one of the most humbling, humiliating times of my life but once I did it, I was free. Christ offers you the same freedom today, this moment if you follow his teaching in this passage today you can be reconciled.

Now most of us need God with skin on. We need to hear with human lips the declaration of forgiveness. We need to hear it so we can pass it on.

I teach my Huddle class that in God in Christ has given us the power to forgive sin. You can look it up in Matthew 18:18. Anyway, one of the most powerful things I experience when I lead the sacrament of Holy Communion is I say, **“In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.”** And then you reply, “In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.”

I want you to experience that forgiveness today so I want you to turn to the person on your right, look them in the eye and say, “In the name of Jesus Christ you are forgiven.”

Now turn to your left and do the same!

You are now the forgiven and reconciled children of God. If there is someone who is not here you need to be reconciled with make the decision to go and ask for forgiveness and if someone asks give it.

I know for some this is about the hardest thing they will do in their entire life.

In Jesus' name. Amen.