

## **WHEN YOU'VE BEEN WRONGED.**

### *Six Steps to Genuine Reconciliation*

In Matthew 18 and Galatians 6 we find six steps for genuine reconciliation. They are intensely practical and they are completely in order. Both are important to understand as we look closely at each step. These are the words of Jesus on the matter of reconciliation.

*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector. (Matthew 18: 15-17)*

#### **Here are the Six Steps.**

##### **1. Prepare Your Heart.**

Before you go to the other person, get ready. The first step in seeking reconciliation is to prayerfully prepare your heart. Look at the Apostle Paul's wise counsel in Galatians 6:1: "Brother's, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted." "Restore" is a verb that describes the setting of a broken bone. You are going to the other person in tenderness and with a gentle spirit.

*You must go with the full knowledge that you are capable of doing exactly what the offender has done.*

##### **2. Make the Initial Contact in Private.**

You go privately and confront the one who has wronged you. And you go with the intention of reconciling, not exposing what happened. Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you go and show him his fault." Too many people make the mistake of waiting for the guilty party to make the first move. Rarely will that happen. Jesus urged the one who has been sinned against to gently and humbly approach the other. By the way, that means resisting the temptation to talk about your

situation or the wrong done to you with others. That's gossip, plain and simple. And the Bible has one word for that: Sin.

### **3. Evaluate Each Response.**

As you proceed through the process, take time to prayerfully to evaluate the response of the one you confront. 9 out of 10 times you will find the person you want to restore does not even realize he or she has hurt you. At the end of the day most of us don't realize how we hurt other people by what we do or say. We fail to see them as they see themselves.

Remember, Jesus says, "If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."

If reconciliation is made, that ends the matter. Nobody else needs to know. If it's not, then another step is required.

### **4. Enlists the Help of Others.**

If after going privately to the offending individual you receive no recognizable response, you must consider bringing others into the loop. That's what Jesus meant when He said, "But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'" (Matthew 18:16). By bringing witnesses you can clarify the issues. It's possible an outside perspective might alone diffuse the situation and reveal your flawed perspective.

Pay close attention to this next sentence: "It would be better for you to play with forked lightning than to slander a believer and make false charges against a brother or sister in Christ."

I need to pause and make a very candid observation. There are many people who do not want to become members of a local body of believers because they prefer to be like a bottle without a label, easily drifting from place to place without ever dropping anchor. They don't pursue membership because they don't want accountability. Yet, that accountability is a blanket of security. Without it we can easily go astray.

### **5. Bring the Matter before the Church.**

When reconciliation does not take place even with others present, Jesus said that the next step is to “tell it to the Church,” and have them go and convince him otherwise.

This is perhaps the most difficult and painful step in the process of reconciliation. I hope you will never have to resort to such a dramatic and agonizing ordeal. But the provision is made for the stubborn soul who refuses to repent and be reconciled. Even when the matter goes public to the church, the individual may be so hardened by his rebellion that a more dramatic step must be taken.

## **6. Excommunication from the Fellowship.**

If after the above steps there is still no repentance, the sinning individual must be removed from the fellowship. He or she is to be treated and considered as a pagan—one who willingly refuses to acknowledge God. By putting someone out of the fellowship, you are removing them from the gracious umbrella of God’s protection—they become alarmingly vulnerable to Satan’s assaults. The goal remains reconciliation, but the means grow more dramatic and intense with each step.

Keep in mind two truths in moving to this final step:

- We do not excommunicate repentant sinners but only unrepentant ones.
- The person who has gone through the prior steps without repentance and has an attitude of rebellion, will come to this final step because his or her sin is affecting the church. This final step shows the church body that the church honors God’s commands and that unrepentant sin against the church must be resolved by removal from the church.

Sometimes the discipline of excommunication has the desired effect, but at times it is not effective. And that person dies in their rebellion or will spend years being disciplined by God. Either way, God’s will be done. God will deal with that person in His own way.

All the while, the path back is kept groomed and lighted 24/7, just in case the brother or sister decides to repent and come home—which leads us to the final step.

### **Continue in Prayer for Reconciliation.**

We must never give up hope that one-day reconciliation will be accomplished. Prayer keeps hope alive. No matter how bleak the situation or how long the wait, prevailing prayer is our best hope in bringing genuine reconciliation. If a brother is restored, tell the church. Celebrate. Rejoice. Ultimately, the work of restoration belongs to God and to Him alone.

However, when reconciliation doesn't happen, you must still forgive. Even when someone will not admit what they've done to you, that does not exempt you from forgiving the wrong. Even when reconciliation is impossible, you can still forgive.

**Next Week: The Cost of Reconciliation and when Reconciliation Fails.**