

May 13, 2017

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Conflict & Peacemaking: Life After Conflict

Jonathan M. Romig
CornerstoneWestford.com

Today we're finishing our sermon series on Conflict & Peacemaking. We've followed the Four Gs of Peacemaking from Ken Sande's book The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict, and are going to wrap up by looking at the last G.

G1: Glorify God

G2: Get the Log Out of Your Eye

G3: Gently Restore

G4: Go and Be Reconciled

Last week I asked you to recall to mind a name or relationship you are in conflict with and then apply what you're learning to that relationship. So let's assume you've done all those things. You've determined to glorify God in the midst of conflict with this person, you've done your best to examine your own sins and role in the conflict, and maybe even this last week you went out of your way to have a conversation with the other person. Let's say that went well. What should you do now? How should you and this other person interact? That's what our final G, "Go and Be Reconciled" is all about.

If you've ever gone through conflict with someone, you want the relationship to improve, right? You don't want it to stay uncomfortable or awkward forever, especially if that someone is close to you or around you all the time, like a family member or coworker. I hope today will help you with life after conflict. Let's **Pray**.

We can have a restored relationship with others, after conflict, not because of circumstances or how good we are, but because of how good God is. By experiencing reconciliation first with God, we can offer it to others.

What is reconciliation with God? (2 Cor. 5:18-19)

2nd Corinthians 5:17-21 uses the word "reconcile" five times. Ancient Greece used this word to describe the process of two people in conflict coming back into a relationship. It wasn't a religious word, but the New Testament takes this word and uses it to describe our relationship with God.¹ Last week I defined reconciliation as "to make peace." The need for peace implies a state of un-peace, of war. When Adam and Eve sinned against God in the garden, we all became enemies of God. *Reconciliation with God is:*

Removal of God's wrath (through Christ)

Like it or not, because of Adam original sin, and because I choose to sin everyday, we're enemies of God and deserve God's wrath. In our culture, that seems unfair, but the Bible describes God as perfectly holy and us as unholy. I'm reading Isaiah in my personal devotionals, and in it the prophet Isaiah gets a vision of God on

¹ Mounce's Expository Dictionary: MED, s.v. "RECONCILE," 566. [accord://read/Mounce_Expository#8954](http://www.mounce.com/ReadMounceExpository.aspx?ArticleId=8954)
All Scriptures are quoted from the New International Version (NIV®) unless otherwise noted.

his throne (Isa 6:1-4). Above the throne are angels called seraphim that have six wings, two to fly, two to cover their faces, and two to cover their feet. **Isaiah 6:3** says:

And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.” (NIV®)

These angels are sinless, but God’s holiness is too much for them. God is so holy they have to shield their faces so they can’t see him (c.f., Ex 3:5). When Isaiah has this vision, and comes into God’s presence as a sinful human being, he cries out, “Woe to me! I am ruined!”

Humans can’t survive in God’s holy presence in our sin. In fact, we broke all of creation with sin and deserve to be punished by God forever and ever. But instead of condemning us, God provides us each with a way of salvation. *God removes his wrath by pouring it out on himself through Jesus.* **Romans 5:8-10** says:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

We who are reconciled to God are no longer enemies with him. God poured out his wrath on Christ so he wouldn’t have to do so on us. When Jesus hung on the cross, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt. 27:46) so that you and I can cry out “My God, my God, you have not forsaken me.” This is why **2 Corinthians 5 v. 18** says God “reconciled us to himself through Christ” and **v. 19** says “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. *Reconciliation is the removal of God’s wrath (through Christ), but it’s not just a removal, but a bestowal, a presentation of a gift. Reconciliation with God is:*

Gift of God’s friendship (through forgiveness)

God doesn’t just remove his wrath, and our guilt, and walk away. He welcomes us into a relationship with him through forgiveness, **Verse 19** says, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them.” To **forgive** is to not hold someone’s wrongdoings against them. If you’ve confessed your sins and put your faith in Jesus, he forgives you and through that he extends something even greater. Friendship. True reconciliation isn’t just the end of conflict, but the beginning of a relationship, of peace enjoyed together. In **John 15:15**, Jesus says:

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

I want to take a moment and ask a vital question every human being needs to ask, “Am I a friend of God or an enemy of God?” We can know we are a friend of God if we experienced God’s forgiveness through faith in Jesus. Has Jesus taken the punishment for your sin? Do you know and love him? If you can honestly say yes to both of these questions, then you are reconciled to God. But if you can’t, **John 3:36** warns us:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.

This is why in verse 20 Paul says, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.” You need to be reconciled to God through Christ! I need to be reconciled to God through Christ! *Reconciliation with God is the removal of God’s wrath and the gift of his friendship.*

It’s because of this reconciliation that we experience with God that we know how to be reconciled with those that hurt us. God’s reconciliation to us serves as a **model** for our reconciliation with others. In Resolving Everyday Conflict, Ken Sande tells the story a man struggling to forgive his wife after adultery.

“I just can’t get over Pam’s adultery,” Rick told me. “She says she’s sorry and she’s begged for forgiveness. I said I forgave her, but I can’t forget what she did or be close to her again. It’s a huge wall between us, and I can’t get through it.”

“I’m sure you’re both in terrible pain.” I said. “But I don’t think divorce is going to end it. You’ll just trade one kind of pain for another. There is a way to keep your marriage together and to truly put the past behind you. But you won’t find it with the empty kind of forgiveness you’ve offered Pam.”

“What do you mean, ‘empty kind of forgiveness?’”

“Rick, imagine that you had just confessed a serious sin to God, and for the first time in your life he spoke to you audibly: ‘I forgive you, Rick, but I can’t ever be close to you again.’ How would you feel?”

His eyes widened. “I guess I’d feel like God hadn’t really forgiven me.”

“But isn’t that exactly what you’re doing with Pam?” I asked.

Rick looked at the floor, wrestling for an answer.

I continued, “Imagine instead that God said, ‘Rick, I forgive you. I promise I will never think about your sin again. I promise to never bring it up and use it against you. I promise not to talk to others about it. And I promise not to let this sin stand between us or hinder our relationship.’”

After a long silence, tears began to fill Rick’s eyes. “I would know I was completely forgiven.”²

The reconciliation we experience with God serves as a model for our reconciliation with others.

What is reconciliation with others? (2 Cor. 5:17, 20-21)

Verse 20 urges us to become “ambassadors for Christ.” In the ancient world, an ambassador is someone who travels around to foreign countries or states on behalf of the king, emperor, or ruling body. The Greek word is *presbeuō* (πρεσβεύω), which not only means “ambassador” but “elder.” This word shares the same root with word for “elder (son)” from the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:25), which I preached on several weeks ago. Pastor Timothy Keller, in *The Prodigal God*, showed me that in that culture, it’s the elder brother’s job to keep the family together. It’s his job to make sure the younger brother comes home. He’s an ambassador to the lost and so are we.

We’re to act as ambassadors, who go into a foreign world to tell lost sons and daughters how they can know God once more. Bernie preached a few weeks ago that one of the ways we help people come to faith in God is by extending forgiveness. We forgive others as a pathway for them knowing Christ. Conflict &

² Resolving Everyday Conflict by Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson. Audiobook. Chapter 8. 0:00-1:49 minutes.

Peacemaking isn't really about us, but about bringing the peace of God into a lost world. So what does it mean to be reconciled with those around us? *Reconciliation with others is:*

Removal of our anger (through forgiveness)

Reconciliation begins with letting go of anger and forgiving. Our foundation verse reminds us just how important this is. Would you say it with me?

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **Colossians 3:12-13**

The word grievance means complain. Instead of complaining about those who hurt us, God calls us to forgive them. In fact, Jesus tells us just how serious forgiveness is in **Matthew 6:14-15**. He says:

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Forgiveness for others is a fruit of those who have experienced forgiveness by God. Forgiveness is a decision to extend the same debt cancellation we have received from God to those that have hurt us. It's a decision to let God pour out his wrath and for us to not pour out ours (Rom 12:19). So what exactly should our **forgiveness** look like? Ken Sande gives us the Four Promises of Forgiveness:

1. "I will not dwell on this incident."

Just like God doesn't forget our sins, but chooses not to remember them or hold them against us, we can choose not to hold the sins of others against them. **Isaiah 43:25** shows us God's forgiveness:

"I, even I, am he who blots out
your transgressions, for my own sake,
and remembers your sins no more.

We model the way we forgive after the way God forgives. When we decide to forgive someone, it means when their sin comes back to mind, instead of dwelling on it and rolling it over in our mind, we'll pray and ask God to remove that anger from us. Is there someone you say you've forgiven, but you can't help think about it? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you move on.

2. "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 describes love to us. Notice love doesn't get mad easily or keep a ledger of sins.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

We can't really say we've forgiven someone for their sins if we keep reminding them of their sins, can we? Know this doesn't mean that if the sin keeps recurring, that we can't talk about a **recurring sin pattern** and use examples, but that's different than storing it in our back pocket for a rainy day. Are you holding onto someone's sin against you for a rainy day? Are you ready to bring it out if needed? The first two promises work together. If I don't dwell, I won't bring it up unnecessarily, but if I do dwell, I'll use it against you.

3. "I will not talk to others about this incident."

Pastor and author Paul Tripp, in his book Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, says, "When I gossip, I confess the sin of another person to someone who is not involved."³ Gossip doesn't stir up trust and a safe space to build a fresh relationship, it tears down and wounds. When we forgive, we need to make a commitment to not gossip about the conflict with others inside or outside the church. Who do you need to make a commitment with the Lord about to not talk behind their back? If you've dealt with the sin, this should be the end of it. But if you do struggle, you can always talk to God about it.

4. **"I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."**

This last promise is really the heart of the matter. When we forgive, we promise to not let sin rule our relationship, but the love of Christ instead. Have you made this commitment?

As I've looked at Ken Sande's peacemaking process, there's only one thing I've found I disagree with. He argues that our giving forgiveness is dependent on the other person asking for forgiveness. He bases this on **Luke 17:3b**, which says, "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them." There's a **tension** here between Jesus' other commands to forgive and only extending forgiveness after someone repents. I think the **key** is that we are to forgive someone in our hearts no matter what, but that we are not to cover up the sin or ignore it, and we shouldn't act as if everything is fine without going through the proper steps. *Reconciliation with others is removal of anger (through forgiveness), but there's also a second half that I do think is dependent on their recognizing their own sin and repenting.*

Gift of our friendship (through Christ)

I honestly believe a friendship that has experienced conflict and hurt and has worked through it can be sweeter than one that hasn't. The trust and love can be deeper, truer.

Maybe you're thinking, that's not possible. We'll be friends in heaven, but not in this life. Verse 17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" That means what Jesus has done, how he has reconciled us to God, in some way, heaven is already here. There's a mystery here. Jesus hasn't returned yet, so we're not in eternity yet, but Jesus is with us spiritually, so eternity is already here. Don't you want to try a taste of heavenly reconciliation now (Rev 21:4)?

This is made possible through the work of Christ. Verse 21 is the sum total of our passage. It explains how we can be reconciled to God and to each other—through the **gospel**. V. 21 says:

- **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,"** - The sinless one Christ Jesus, has taken my sins and your sins and the sins of any who trust in him upon himself. The innocent one pays for our guilt.
- **"so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."** - The sinless one gives us his own purity. We become righteous. We become holy. We become unforgivable because it's all been forgiven.

Look at how much Jesus Christ has done for you and me. This is the gospel. When I realize my sin is gone and I bear the righteousness of Christ, it helps me extend grace to those around me. Instead of seeing them as sinners, if they're forgiven by God, shouldn't I see them as perfectly righteous just like me?

We reconcile with others through forgiveness and friendship (in Christ).

³ Tripp, Paul David (2002-10-22). *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (p. 206). P&R Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Ken Sande includes this story towards the end of his book. I want us to close with it as well. It's the story of Ernest Gordon from his book *To End All Wars*. Ken Sande writes:

Gordon was captured by the Japanese during World War II and forced, with other British prisoners, to endure years of horrible treatment while building the notorious "Railroad of Death" through Thailand. Faced with the starvation and disease of the prison camps and the brutality of his captors, who killed hundreds of his comrades, Gordon survived to become an inspiring example of the triumph of Christian love against human evil.

This love shone especially bright one day one day when Gordon and his fellow prisoners came upon a trainload of wounded Japanese soldiers who were being transported to Bangkok. Here is how Gordon describes God's work of grace:

They were on their own and without medical care. . . . Their uniforms were encrusted with mud, blood, and excrement. Their wounds, sorely inflamed and full of pus, crawled with maggots. We could understand now why the Japanese were so cruel to their prisoners. If they didn't care for their own, why should they care for us?

The wounded men looked at us forlornly as they sat with their heads resting against the carriages waiting fatalistically for death. They were the refuse of war; there was nowhere to go and no one to care for them. . . .

Without a word, most of the officers in my section unbuckled their packs, took out part of their ration and a rag or two, and, with water canteens in their hands went over to the Japanese train to help them. Our guards tried to prevent us . . . but we ignored them and knelt by the side of the enemy to give them food and water, to clean and bind up their wounds, to smile and say a kind word. Grateful cries of "*Aragatto!*" ("Thank you!") followed us when we left. . . .

I regarded my comrades with wonder. Eighteen months ago they would have joined readily in the destruction of our captors had they fallen into their hands. Now these same men were dressing the enemy's wounds. We had experienced a moment of grace, there in those blood-stained railway cars. God had broken through the barriers of our prejudice and had given us the will to obey his command, "Thou shalt love."⁴

We reconcile with others through forgiveness and friendship (in Christ).

Pastor Jonathan Romig wrote and preached this message for the people of Cornerstone Congregational Church. [Click here to listen to more sermons](#) or [click here to read our story](#).

⁴ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*. Pages 254-255.