

Relationships: The Reconciliation Factor
August 15, 2010
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2 Corinthians 5

What if you overheard someone saying things like this?

“I gave them everything good I had...and they rejected me!”

“I wanted a relationship with them, an intimate, close, LOVE relationship...but they just threw it back in my face.”

“I invested in them, I taught them the truth, and they turned away from me to others whose teaching was shiny and new and interesting...but NOT the truth.”

“They’ve pushed my love away so hard that now their actions have caused a “gulf” between us.”

“A gulf, a chasm, that seems too wide to be bridged.”

“Once it was closeness and love and intimacy. Now, all I get from them is resentment, rebellion, and distance.”

- Those words could be spoken by many parents about a wayward child.
 - For example: The father in Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son.
- Those words could be spoken by a friend who’s been betrayed and rejected by another friend.
- Those words could have been spoken by the Apostle Paul about the church at Corinth.
- Those words could be spoken by the Heavenly Father about his creation, mankind.
- How should a parent of the wayward child respond to such rejection and rebellion?
- How should that friend respond to that broken relationship?
- How should the Apostle Paul have responded to such ungrateful treatment?
- How should a loving God respond to such rebellion by his own creation?
- How DID God respond?

Romans Chapter 5:

6You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- The Heavenly Father took the initiative to make a way for RECONCILIATION.

- He should have given us all what we deserve for such rebellion...instead, he gave us LOVE.
- God took the initiative; the first step to RECONCILE our relationship with Him.
- He MODELED for us what RECONCILIATION is all about.
- He gave to those of us who have trusted in Christ, THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.
- A ministry not only to help others be reconciled to Him but to EACH OTHER.
- That's what 2 Corinthians 5 is all about.

2 Corinthians 5:11-13

The Ministry of Reconciliation

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.

New International Version (NIV)

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- Verse 11 says "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord we try to persuade men.
- To put verse 11 in context look back at verse 10 which we covered last week:

10 For we must all appear before the (WHAT?) judgment seat of Christ, that each one (WE'RE TALKING BELIEVERS HERE) may receive what is due him (REWARDS) for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- Last week what effect did we say the Judgment Seat of Christ should have on believers? MOTIVATION for service.
- Back to verse 11 Paul says it's MOTIVATION to PERSUADE others...Persuade them about what?
- THE MESSAGE paraphrase says it this way:

It's no light thing to know that we'll all one day stand in that place of Judgment. That's why we work urgently with everyone we meet to get them ready to face God.

- Paul goes on to say God knows what I'm all about...and I hope, based on what I've done for this church... YOU DO TOO.
- I'm not trying to DEFEND myself to you...but I AM giving you AMMUNITION against those who are ATTACKING my ministry.
- In fact, look at verse 13, what were these false teachers accusing Paul of being?
 - Crazy. Nuts. On taco shy of a fiesta. They said the cheese had slipped off his cracker!
- Why did they say he was out of his mind?
 - Could have been that story about the light on the road to Damascus

- Maybe it was his emotional preaching
- Perhaps it was this CRAZY message he had about GRACE ALONE and that keeping the law doesn't bring salvation

Acts 26:24 tells us when Paul was preaching to Festus:

24At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

- Paul says, "You think I'm crazy...a fanatic?" "If I'm crazy...I'm crazy for Jesus!" "But, one thing I'm ABSOLUTELY IN MY RIGHT MIND about is YOU the Corinthian church!"
- Paul comes to this church with absolute OPENNESS and TRANSPARENCY
- Question: Humanly speaking why would we be afraid to be TRANSPARENT and VULNERABLE to initiate RECONCILIATION?
 - Fear of being taken advantage of
 - Anger at having been hurt
- But there is a MOTIVATION that is stronger than the RISK of being taken advantage of or hurt: the fear of the Lord.
- Paul comes to them to RECONCILE for the same reason He shares the Gospel: The fear of the Lord...the clock is ticking for the Judgment Seat of Christ.
- Paul knew that ONE DAY Christ would look him in they eye and ask WHY. "Why didn't you make the first move to patch things up with that church?"

Statement: If we FEAR the Lord and don't want to explain WHY we didn't RECONCILE broken relationships...we'll MAKE THE FIRST MOVE in openness.

- We're not only motivated by the FEAR of God and the judgment of Christ...

2 Corinthians 5:14-16

14For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

16So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

- Verse 14 Christ's love COMPELS us...to RECONCILE with God and with others

WORD WEALTH

5:14 compels, sunecho (soon-ekh-oh); Strong's #4912: From sun, "together," and echo, "to hold"; hence, "to hold together," or "to grip tightly." The word describes people who are afflicted with various diseases and pains (Luke 4:38) or paralyzed by fear (Luke 8:37), crowds hemming Christ in (Luke 8:45), an army surrounding Jerusalem (Luke 19:43), soldiers arresting Jesus and holding Him fast (Luke 22:63).

In every use of the word, there is a sense of constraint, a tight grip that prevents an escape. The love of Christ leaves us no choice except to live our lives for Him.
Spirit filled life study Bible. 1997, c1991 (electronic ed.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

- ...look at what we're told elsewhere in scripture:

1 John 4:7

7Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Then in verse 19 John writes...

19We love because he first loved us. 20If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

John quoted Jesus' words in

John 15:17 (New International Version)

17This is my command: Love each other.

- Why should I reconcile with my Christian brother or sister?
- Jesus commanded it
- Why should I MAKE THE FIRST MOVE to patch up the relationship?
- God modeled it...HE MADE THE FIRST MOVE to reconcile the relationship with SINFUL PEOPLE
- Verse 15 says He died for all so that BELIEVERS should no longer live for OURSELVES but for HIM!
- Verse 16 says BECAUSE OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN US we no longer look at other people in a "PURELY HUMAN" way...
- QUESTION: If we don't look at them in a PURELY HUMAN way how do we look at others?
 - The way Christ looks at them
 - Christ LOVES them...even the DIFFICULT PEOPLE...the GRUMPY, SPITEFUL, CHIP ON MY SHOULDER kind of PEOPLE.
 - God made the first move to RECONCILE with them.
- Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers talked about God making the first move.
- In a moment we're going to look at verse 20 which says we are AMBASSADORS for Christ PLEADING on His behalf with sinners.
- About that verse Spurgeon writes:

Notice how the text puts it: "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us." This thought staggers me. As I came along this morning I felt as if I could bury my head in my hands and weep as I thought of God beseeching anybody. He speaks, and it is done; myriads of angels count themselves happy to fly at his command; and yet man has so become God's enemy that he will not be reconciled to him. God would make

him his friend, and spends the blood of his dear Son to cement that friendship; but man will not have it. See the great God turns to beseeching his obstinate creature! his foolish creature! In this I feel a reverent compassion for God. Must he beseech a rebel to be forgiven? Do you hear it? Angels, do you hear it? He who is the King of kings veils his sovereignty, and stoops to beseeching his creature to be reconciled to him!

- The God of the universe who owes NOTHING to ANYTHING or ANYONE because He made it all... “stoops” as Spurgeon put it, to make the first move for RECONCILIATION.

Statement: God made the first move to RECONCILE with sinful people. So, because of the LOVE OF CHRIST in us, we can and should make the first move to RECONCILE our relationships. Humanly we can't...but the LOVE OF CHRIST can!

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21God made him who had no sin to be sin[a] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- If anyone is in Christ...he/she is a NEW CREATION!
- Let's use an example. If we were talking about working on an old house and I told you it was a “new creation” what would that mean?
- Not just paint and wallpaper...we torn down the house and built a NEW ONE.
- The old stuff has gone and the new has come.
- Verse 18: What is the source of this NEW CREATION?
 - All this is from God
- Also Verse 18: We not only got a NEW NATURE what else did he give us?
 - A job...the MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION
- Verse 19 says that God was reconciling the world to Himself HOW?
 - By not counting their trespasses against them
 - And committing to us the MESSAGE of RECONCILIATION
- So, verse 20 what is our new job title?
 - AMBASSADORS for Christ
- Also, verse 20, what is our job description?
 - God is appealing THROUGH US
 - We plead on Christ's behalf for people to be RECONCILED to GOD
- Verse 21, how are we possibly QUALIFIED for this job?
 - He made Christ TO BE SIN for US so we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- Now let's pause a minute and take all this in
- First, Christ became SIN for you and me so that we could become RIGHTEOUS
- That's GOOD NEWS...that's why we call it THE GOSPEL...THE GOOD NEWS
- But what does that have to do with patching up broken relationships with others?
- Consider this new job you and I just got...
- What is an AMBASSADOR? A representative or messenger for a king. The king says: "This person speaks for me...they have my message and my authority."
- Hypothetical example:
 - Let's say I'm an Christ's Ambassador and I'm out doing all my AMBASSADORIAL duties of sharing the Good News of the Gospel with people. And I'm out with one of my fellow AMBASSADORS and we're handing out tracts and we're sharing the Gospel. And people are watching us closely.
 - Pause for a moment: Why would people watch an AMBASSADOR closely? They represent the king...so what they do REFLECTS what the king is all about.
 - So people are watching us closely and we're spreading the king's message. Then we take a break for a Coca Cola and me and my fellow AMBASSADOR are sitting in the snack bar talking.
 - "You see old 'so and so' over there? That other AMBASSADOR? We haven't spoken in five years. She made me so mad...let me tell you about her!
 - Meanwhile, people are watching.
 - Hmmm, five minutes ago they were telling me about the LOVE OF CHRIST and that if I BELIEVE and CONFESS I can be like Christ...JUST LIKE THEM.
- Let's try ANOTHER hypothetical:
 - Unbelieving friend says to Christian: "You mean that person hurt you that way and treated you like that and YOU just LET 'EM OFF THE HOOK and FORGAVE them.
 - Not me! It would have be a cold day in YOU KNOW WHERE before I would have reached out to patch things up with that kind of person.
 - Christian says: "I know...and five years ago I would have been throwing rocks through their windows; letting the air out of their tires; and putting rattlesnakes in their mailbox."
 - "But, I HAVE to make the first move to RECONCILE"
 - "I don't want to get to the Judgment seat of Christ and have him say... 'look at the BIG SCREEN' and let me show you how many people DIDN'T COME TO BELIEVE IN ME because of how YOU acted!"
 - "I HAVE to make the first move to RECONCILE"
 - "If God loved ME enough to make His own SON come and die to forgive me of all my sins...I HAVE to make things right with others."

John 13:35 (New International Version)

35By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Peter Scholtes wrote the hymn "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love" while he was a parish priest at St. Brendan's on the South Side of Chicago in the 1960s. At the time, he was leading a youth choir out of the church basement, and was looking for an appropriate song for a series of ecumenical, interracial events. When he couldn't find such a song, he wrote the now-famous hymn in a single day.

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

What's the Takeaway?

- The Takeaway this week is a question:
- This morning as we've been talking about healing a broken relationship...did a face of some person flash on the screen of your mind?
- Maybe they were wrong maybe you were wrong...maybe both.
- By all HUMAN standards you may feel you have a right to fold your arms and say it will be a cold day you know where before I make the first move.
- But as we've been studying this scripture...did God put someone in your mind's eye and say "make the first move" "get it right" "patch it up".
- We're AMBASSADORS for the KING...people are watching
- RECONCILIATION is our job
- How can we tell others about the LOVE OF CHRIST if we don't practice it with each other?

"They'll know we are Christians by our love..."