

RECONCILIATION WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

1 Peter 2:1-17

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Introduction

Here in the new year we've been doing a short topical study on relationships and reconciliation. We all know from experience just how messy relationships can be, whether it be your relationship with the driver who just caught you off; or your neighbor whose dog keeps pooping in your yard; or your co-worker who snacks loudly at their desk; or that acquaintance of yours whose always gossiping about other people to you convincing you they are probably gossiping about you to other people; or that close friend (at least you thought you were close) that you've recently had an issue with because of your kids; or with your spouse with whom you've been arguing recently or maybe just haven't spoken to in a while; or with your adult kids whom have been estranged or your parents with whom you've got baggage from childhood; or with just a group of people who look different from you and you just don't know how to relate to them. Relationships are hard and conflicts happen.

And so, we've been looking to God's Word for guidance on how to navigate relationships and what God desires for us in our every interaction with others. We began, though, with the single most important relationship that needs fixing, our relationship with God. Thus, our first week we looked at how a person can be reconciled with God but then also how reconciliation with God enables us to be reconciled to one another. Accordingly, last week we looked at how as Christians, then, those who have been collectively reconciled to God, are to be reconciled to one another. We discussed both the process and the attitude we must have in these situations.

This morning, therefore, we turn our attention to outside the church and ask how are we as Christians to pursue reconciliation with those outside of the faith. As we talked about over the last two weeks, true reconciliation requires the presence of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as we've

seen so much of the impetus and power for reconciliation between Christians come from the forgiveness and grace that we've personally received. Obviously, then, these things aren't true with the non-believer and so what does pursuing reconciliation with our lost friends/co-workers/neighbors/etc. look like?

Well, I'm going to be blunt this morning. I think of all the topics you're likely to get offended at or to just ignore, this one maybe the most because here's what I'm going to tell you to do this morning when a non-Christian sins against you, or hurts you, or offends you: Suck it up and get over it. Now I'm going to give you some Bible exposition to back that up, and I'll nuance it a bit, but essentially when a lost friend acts lost what are you expecting. Moreover, how can you hold a lost person to Christian standards when their lost? Like I don't expect my first grader to have mastered the quadratic equation; like, we're just working on multiplication tables right now.

And so, I just want to let you know up front that when it comes to being hurt or offended or whatever by a non-believer we're going to hold at the very center of our vision that of Jesus' enemies crucifying Him and Jesus willingly enduring and even praying for them. That's the posture Jesus took and it is the posture we are to take. As we see in 1 Peter 2, Our calling as Christians is to bring God glory, and one of the ways we do so is through our right conduct among non-Christians. Our peace with all people is of the utmost importance in the mission of God.

1. We offer the world by our conduct glimpses of the Kingdom of God v. 1-10

Our passage begins with the word, "Therefore," meaning we pick it up in the middle of a thought. In light of something, we are, therefore, now to do something else. The "therefore" in verse 1 refers back to verse 22 of chapter 1 where Peter commands Christians to show brotherly

love for one another. Our love for one another is paramount in the witness we offer to the world. As Jesus told the disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another,” (John 13:35). So, first, Peter calls us to show love. Now, he shows us the *way* we do so.

We show love for one another and we offer a witness for God by ridding ourselves of malice, meaning evil intentions or harmful actions; deceit, meaning harming others through trickery or falsehood; hypocrisy, meaning masking inward evil with an outward show of righteousness; envy, which is the opposite of thankfulness for the blessing that comes to others; and slander, meaning any speech that intends to harm another person’s reputation. By putting these things away we can instead reorient our affections and our desires to the things of God.

This is what Peter means when he calls us to, “... desire the pure milk of the word, so that you may grow up into your salvation,” (1 Peter 2:2). Peter doesn’t mean we should be immature like newborns in our faith. Rather, that we should be constantly longing (eagerly and frequently) for the Word of God like a newborn eagerly and frequently longs for milk. We mature as followers of Jesus and citizens of the Kingdom by putting away from ourselves the things of the City of Man and replacing them with the things of the City of God.

You see, there’s this distinction that now marks us as Christians. We are no longer of this world and so our thoughts, our words, our affections, our actions should be different. In a moment we’ll get to how this is paramount to our witness to non-believers, but Peter begins simply by reminding his readers of this new creation, this new identity and being, which they have and are. I think this is where we first get into problems when it comes to our conduct, and especially our conflict, with non-believers. We forget who and what we are. We act like the world and we respond like the world even though in Christ we are no longer of the world.

Our interactions with non-believers tend to be the very last place we demonstrate our new identity in Christ. We may demonstrate that identity on Sunday mornings, perhaps with some of our choices, certainly with our morality, in all sorts of places. But in our engagements with persons outside the faith, our new identity in Christ is something we either completely neglect and forget or we just keep hidden out of sight.

I mean let me just ask you, in every word you speak and every interaction you have with non-believers do you consider yourself to be representing Jesus in those moments? Would you be comfortable with those around you assuming that the way you are is the way Jesus is? Right, like I'll give you an example. About three years ago or so, it was a Sunday afternoon and I was picking up some sound equipment that had been borrowed from the church and bringing it back. But I was running super late to get it back to the church and so I was flying in my car, well over the speed limit, going so fast that a cop coming from the other direction didn't even need to clock me; just in passing me he could tell I was speeding.

So he zips around and pulls me over. I was so embarrassed but I had this problem. You see my car was packed full of all this sound equipment and so naturally the cop thought I had stolen it and was trying to get away. My conflict was that I was too embarrassed to tell him I was a pastor and that this was the church's sound equipment because I didn't want my recklessness to reflect poorly on the church, and especially on Jesus. Of course, it came to a point where I was either going to go to jail or 'fess up and so I reluctantly told him who I was, apologized, and told him my conduct was not representative of my faith.

But my point was that in that moment of breaking the law I was keenly aware of how that didn't just reflect poorly on me but on my savior. And, well, it's easy to recognize that in those kinds of obvious moments and miss all the other times we fail. For example, if the waitress at the

restaurant were to find out at the end of the meal that you were a Christian, what impression of Jesus and of Christians in general do you think she would get? If the cashier at the store were to find out you were a Christian, what impression of Jesus and of Christians in general do you think he would get from the interaction he has had with you? What do your neighbors maybe think about Jesus because of the way you act? What about your co-workers? A while back I was dealing with a conflict with another Christian and I was told by a third-party not to worry about it because this other Christian has a terrible reputation at their workplace and no one likes working with them. I thought, ‘How terrible is that!’, because it’s one thing if just nobody likes you, but as a Christian your reputation reflects poorly on all of us and most of all on Jesus.

Peter says that Jesus is a living stone and, therefore, you are living stones. Your identity is Him, which is why we are to put away the conduct of this world and put on the new. Whereas the Temple had been built with literal, dead stones, in Jesus, we are now the very Temple of the Holy Spirit, and as that Temple we now have not only a new identity but a new mission. We are redeemed by God, integrated into Christ, and consecrated as priests for worship. As priests we lead the world in the worship of God and we represent God to the whole world.

Of course, the world rejected Christ, but God chose and anointed Him, which is now reflected in Christians. This is where conflict and our need for pursuing reconciliation with non-believers comes in. We are called to lead the world in the worship of God but the world is still resisting Him into rebellion. Thus, we are naturally going to find ourselves in times of conflict, facing opposition and/or persecution. But Peter’s point at this present moment isn’t about persecution or in warning us about opposition. No, his point is that Because the world is estranged from God, and we are God’s representatives to the world, it is all the more important, therefore, for us to live rightly and conduct ourselves honorably. We give the world a glimpse of

what it means and looks like to live in the presence of God. The question is are we giving a favorable glimpse or one of not-so-much?¹

As those who have been united with Christ through faith, who have been made a holy priesthood that stand in the full presence of God, declared to be His people, citizens of His heavenly city and kingdom, we now have the ability to offer glimpses to a lost and dying world of what new creation looks like. The question simply, then, is whether or not we are doing so, both individually and corporately, for as we read in verse 11, Christians are “strangers and exiles” in this world. This is the same language used to describe Abraham in Hebrews 11. Abraham and his family are described there as foreigners and temporary residents. In other words, in the life of Abraham we have this typological picture of living in a place but not being of it. Abraham neither lived like all those around him nor lived completely away from them with his head in the clouds. He represented the City of God to the City of Man.

2. We must pursue peace, love, and humility with non-believers v. 11-17

Thus, if this is our identity and our calling, then we must as Christians pursue peace, love, and humility with non-believers. Peter says, “Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits,” (1 Peter 2:11-12). We see here that living in a way that reflects our identity and calling in Christ is a blessing to those around us as it points them to Jesus. And this is especially true, Peter says, *when* non-Christians slander you. Good conduct in the face of unkind actions or words may in fact lead to the salvation of the unbeliever!

¹ Greg Beale argues, “During the present age, the very being of the church as witnesses of an invisible temple conveys the presence of God to others, either in blessing or judgment,” (G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004], 332).

And so, the point is simple, in every interaction our goal ought to be the salvation of the non-Christian, which is what brings God ultimate glory.² Think about that and imagine every interaction you had with another human being shaped around the ultimate goal that others would come to faith in Christ. Specifically, again in our present context, imagine every *conflict* you had with a non-believer being shaped around the ultimate goal that the person would come to faith in Christ. How might your reactions, words, attitude toward that person be different if you're ultimate focus was on this person who was upset with you coming to faith? I'm guessing we'd all probably act a whole lot differently than we do.

Our problem is that we don't think about that person coming to faith. No, maybe our focus is on defending ourselves and showing that other person all the ways they are wrong. Maybe our focus is on cutting that person out of our lives so we never have to interact with them again. Maybe we're a bit more passive and we hate confrontation so we just say whatever we can to get out of the situation. We all respond in a lot of ways to the offense and anger of others; rarely do any of those ways involve intentionally thinking about how we can help them come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Our culture is one of outrage and easy offense. Everything offends us; everything makes us outraged. We are so self-consumed that at the drop of a hat we're angry at someone and eager to make our anger known. And the thing is, often, according to the standards of the flesh and the world we're justified in being angry. We're justified in holding a grudge. In other words, maybe that other person really did wrong you. Maybe they were really hurtful. Maybe they really don't deserve to be loved and forgiven. In the City of Man, you're probably right and you shouldn't have to find a way to make things right.

² Grudem writes, "Christians living in an unbelieving society must avoid sinful desires and continually maintain exemplary patterns of life, so that unbelievers will be saved and God glorified," (Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 117).

I like to joke my wife because she's a little stick of dynamite. If you've spent any sort of quality time with her you've probably heard her threaten to cut someone. I mean, here's the thing. Teresa may be this tiny little white girl from the suburbs, but she can be straight-up gangsta. This cutting board that sits in our kitchen sums her up pretty well. And I joke, but it's her passion and her fire which attracted me to her and it complements me really well. We balance each other out. If you've spent any quality time with me you know it's really hard to offend me; I don't lose my cool or my composure easily. Now, my kids know how to bring it out of me, but that's another topic for another day. But Teresa and I balance each other well; she can light a fire in me when maybe I need to be stoked and I like to think I stop her from committing felony assault.

In all seriousness, though, we're human beings. We get hurt; we get offended like anybody else. And so, we have to figure how to work through that stuff. Someone will do or say something hurtful and Teresa will get pretty heated over it, especially if someone has done or said something hurtful to or about her husband or kids. Watch out, 'cuz here comes mama bear! She and I will talk about it and pray about, and, of course, it ultimately comes down to me saying, 'Sweetheart, you know you have to forgive; you have to still love that person. Even though you're right and they're wrong, you have to pursue reconciliation.' She doesn't like that and at times will say, 'Yeah, but it's not fair; they don't deserve it,' to which I reply, 'Yeah, but what part of the cross was fair; who among us deserved that.'

You see, it goes back to what we've been talking about these last two weeks. It is only when we ourselves have been graciously loved, forgiven, and reconciled to God that we can then do the same for others. It's only with the cross as central to our lives that we can take any offense or slander that comes our way and respond with grace and love. Peter says that this is how, "...

you silence the ignorance of foolish people,” (1 Peter 2:15). Again, we say that this is unfair? Well Peter reminds us, though, that as citizens of the Kingdom we have a higher calling. We are not our own, but instead must, “Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God’s slaves,” (1 Peter 2:16).

Conclusion

Thus, Peter says in conclusion, “Honor everyone,” (1 Peter 2:17a). Whereas last week we talked about how reconciliation between two Christians involves a confrontation of sin, of confession and repentance, we cannot expect the same from a non-Christian. Sure, you could prove your point and ‘show’ that other person where they have truly wronged you and sinned against; you could be ‘right.’ But in these situations, we have to ask ourselves, ‘Does beating someone down into submission likely bring them closer to knowing Jesus or not? Might it even push them further away? Might I be winning the battle but losing the war for their soul?’

Now, we do need to use wisdom; we need to consult fellow Christians as well. When someone is being verbally abusive, it is not the command of Scripture to stay in that situation. Same thing is especially true in the home, where there is verbal or emotional or physical abuse, Jesus does not call us to stay in that dangerous situation. You can pursue reconciliation, you can show grace and love, while also protecting yourself from further abuse. Taking a punch from your husband doesn’t win him closer to Jesus! And so, in these conflicts that we have with non-believers, use wisdom and get counsel from fellow believers. Pray and seek God in His Word about the matter. Trust that the Holy Spirit will lead you and convict you as to the proper course of action.

You see, I want to be really clear here with everyone listening. What we’re trying to do here on Sunday mornings is offer a broad picture of the principles of biblical reconciliation. The

reality is that your situation may not fit neatly into what we've been discussing. Last Sunday I had the chance to speak with a number of people whose situations are just that, not neat. This past week I spoke with more of you. In each case I was encouraged that in your heart you want to honor God, but it's not clear how to move forward.

Some of us in the room today have had relationship breakdowns where there has been sin and there needs to be reconciliation, but some of you are in dangerous situations right now, maybe physically or emotionally. And so, listen. Sometimes reconciliation is not possible. As followers of Jesus we should pursue forgiveness, but in prayer you and those closest to you may conclude that reconciliation is not safe or warranted. I have counseled many people in this very way. Women who were being abused; people who were simply in unhealthy friendships. You can forgive someone, but restoration of that previous relationship may not be wise or possible, and that's ok. That doesn't mean you're not obeying Jesus. That just means you're walking by faith asking Jesus to guide your every step. And I just want to make it clear this morning, whoever you are. God will honor you when you seek Him and please know that your pastors and elders are here for you, will support you, and will seek your safety and well-being above all else. I'm so grateful that so many of you have approached me over the last week to ask for shepherding through your relationship challenges; please continue to reach out. Don't work through this alone.

In prayer, in the Word, in Christian community and counsel we can discern how to approach each and every situation. But above all else, let's recognize this morning that it's at the cross where our minds and emotions must be. I realize this is a complex issue, but I know for most of us, praise God, we're not in an unhealthy, dangerous situation. Praise God, most of us

are ok. Unfortunately, we're not looking at the peace God has blessed us with as an opportunity to share His peace with others.

You see, friend, God has put you in your specific neighborhood, at your specific workplace, to shop at your specific routine of stores and restaurants in order to use you as a reflection and glimpse of His Kingdom. Do your words, your actions, and your demeanor reflect well on your Saviour and King or not? Before you come to the Lord's Table this morning, is their forgiveness in your heart that you need to show someone else? As you celebrate the grace and mercy shown to you, have you sought to show that same grace and mercy to others? Let us make ourselves ready and let us submit to our Lord and to one another.