

## Articles and Sermons :: Restoring Broken Relationships by Robert Wurtz II

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Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:31, 32)

Our text demonstrates that there is never a time in our Christian walk when it is OK to hold a grudge or an attitude of enmity towards our fellow man. When we are truly right with the Lord and filled with His Holy Spirit we desire reconciliation and peace among our associations. And though we desire this, it is not always possible. We read in Romans 12:18, If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (ESV)

### Getting Past Offenses

Most of the time when relationships are broken it has to do with some offense. Sometimes the offenses are trivial and sometimes they are very serious. Sometimes offenses are 'dramatized' and made worse than they are; other times they may be downplayed to seem less than they really are. The first step in reconciliation is for the offender to acknowledge the offense. In 1 John 1:9 we read, If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. I have chosen the Geneva translation to highlight the word 'acknowledge' in place of 'confess' in the KJV. Here our word for confess (or acknowledge) is *homologeō* (and it is in the present active subjunctive (i.e., if we keep on confessing). It is from *homō*, one and the same, and *logos*, to say. Hence, primarily it means to say the same thing as another, and, therefore, to admit the truth of an accusation. (A.T. Robertson, Marvin Vincent) This is the most difficult thing for human beings to do, to simply acknowledge what they have done. We have to have a settled attitude that we know and admit that we have done wrong. This is what God is looking for.

### Denial

What can be worse than to be wronged and then have the person deny or downplay what happened? We have a major example of this in the OT. When King Saul sinned he blamed the people. This is what is sometimes known as, 'passing the buck'. Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the Serpent, etc. No new thing under the sun. There can even be a flat denial that an offense even occurred. This tactic is never helpful. At some point we all have to face the music. It is better to do that sooner rather than later.

### Essential Sincerity

Sincerity is the most important thing when seeking reconciliation or forgiveness. We have this definition of sincerity from Webster, free from pretense or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings. Saying what we genuinely feel or believe; not dishonest or hypocritical. The worst thing you or I can do is to act cavalier, flippant or dismissive when we have caused an offense. This is a time to truly humble oneself. Pride goes before destruction. If we don't feel what we have done in a way that we should we need to get down and pray and ask God to soften our heart and help us see what we have caused. This will put us in a position to react in genuineness. If we don't allow the weight of our actions to rest on us we will never rightly repent. People can see through insincerity.

### How to Apologize

Dr. Gary Chapman reminds us that everyone receives an apology in a different way. Some people doubt the sincerity of an apology unless it targets what they are looking for. Consider these 5 additional elements that ought to accompany an apology:

- 1) I'm sorry.
- 2) I was wrong.

3) What can I do to make it right?

4) I really don't want this to happen again.

5) Will you please forgive me?

Since we have already examined 'acknowledgement' of our actions, let's look at each of these 5 more in depth.

1) I'm Sorry

'I'm sorry' are words that show a willingness to take responsibility for what happened. Sometimes the offended party wants to know that you understand or are at least trying to understand what you have done. They want to know you have thought about it. They want to know that you have put yourself in their shoes and really want to understand how the offended person feels. This is more than a few fake words. This is sincerity. This is a recognition that you caused suffering. In Proverbs 30:20 we read, Such is the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. She eats the forbidden fruit, after the similitude of Adam's transgression, and then wipes her mouth, that it may not betray itself, and with a bold and impudent face says, I have done no wickedness. (M. Henry)

2) I Was Wrong

Some people want to hear you admit that you were wrong. This also is a way of taking ownership of your actions. Sometimes people say they are sorry, but they really believe they were right about what they did. They think it was justified. Admitting that we are wrong when we know we are wrong will help the person receive the apology. This is like saying, "there was no excuse for what I did!" Excuses destroy an apology. Admitting fault is essential to a genuine apology.

3) What Can I Do To Make It Right?

OK! So you are sorry for what you have done and you know there is no excuse. The next question you need to ask is, "How can I fix what I have broken?" This also must be sincere. In the old days folk used to be expected to make some sort of restitution when they did wrong. Sometimes this is not possible, but there needs to be a willingness to either make an attempt or to state that if I 'could' fix this, I would. This is perhaps the greatest way of all to take responsibility for your actions. Some offenses cause physical or emotional injury. Other offenses can be helped by repaying damages. In any case there must be a willingness to make things right. In relationships some offenses take time to 'heal'. Some wounds are very deep and take time to heal. If you caused the problem, it is only right to do what you can to make amends.

4) I don't want this to happen again

Genuine repentance involves a desire not to commit the offence again. "I will do my best to make sure this will not happen again," are important words when a person has been offended. They must also be sincere. When you realize what you have done it should be your desire to make sure it doesn't happen again. An old-time preacher once asked, "How do we know David the King repented of his sin with Bathsheba?" He never did it again.

5) Will you please forgive me?

At the risk of being redundant, it is important to note that sometimes even Christians get careless when they offend others. Almost as if they 'expect' the other person to forgive them just because they are a Christian. This is the wrong attitude. We must remember that God gave man a free moral agency. If a person forgives us we need to know it was their conscious decision. They did not 'have' to forgive. Christians are instructed to forgive, but that is beside the point. An attitude of expecting forgiveness is a proud and evil attitude. You need to ask for forgiveness and when it is granted you need to be genuinely thankful. Remember the words of Jesus, "To whom much is forgiven the same loves much."

Before it is Too Late...

It's easy to be angry and hold a grudge when everyone is healthy and it seems we will all live forever. But life is full of surprises. Paul stated in Ephesians that we should be angry and sin not... don't let the sun go down on your anger. Anger grown old becomes bitterness. Some people waste their whole lives angry and bitter at someone that has offended them. Some go as far as to go to their grave with their anger. I have seen children refuse to visit their parents on their death

h-bed. "Call me when their gone", they say. They are willing to let mom's, dad's, children, wife's, husband's, friends and family die without trying to reconcile or releasing the person that offended them. They die and allow others to go to their death in unforgiveness. This is the brutality of bitterness. This is that hateful murderous nature of Satan that Ephesians 2 tells us about. This is a hardened human heart expressing its evil ways. What if God treated man this way? Paul shows us the heart of God; For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. When we get right with God and that sinful heart goes out- we also have a desire to reconcile with our enemies. It becomes natural to us as true believers. It becomes painful to know that someone may have something against us. When we are reconciled to God... God sets about getting us to reconcile with others.