

FIRST Be Reconciled

By Daryl Wingerd



Have you ever discovered after-the-fact that you had offended another Christian? Maybe what you said or did was not intended in an offensive way, but you found out later it was misunderstood or taken out of context. Maybe you should have known at the time that your conduct was offensive, but you tend to be a bit dense and didn't recognize your fault until someone else pointed it out. Maybe

you knew your words or actions could be offensive, but since you tend to be more "thick-skinned," you assumed the other believer would overlook what you said or did—the way you would have if you were in his or her shoes.

Whatever the circumstances, and however you were made aware of it, now you know. Your brother or sister has something against you. What should you do now?

The worldly way of dealing with such things is almost always wrong. To say, "Oh well, she'll just have to get over it," or "Oh brother! Really? He knows I was just kidding." Another ungodly option is to ignore the issue and go on as though there were no issue. "Let time heal the wound" as they say. Even worse would be to talk about the offense with everyone but the person you offended, or the person who offended you.

As a follower of Christ, the first question you should ask yourself in this situation is, "What does Jesus expect me to do? And he addressed this scenario with clarity in the Sermon on the Mount. "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

As you can see, Jesus assigned an extremely high priority to the pursuit of reconciliation between believers following an offense. It must be sought even ahead of offering worship to him.

With Jesus' commandment speaking to our hearts, knowing that our obedience to him is the demonstration of our love for Him (cf. John 14:15), *your* obligation at this point is clear: Immediately make it a priority to pursue reconciliation with the brother or sister you've offended. Reach out to them. Meet with them. Listen to them. Talk things through. After understanding each other through honest and loving conversation, apologize and ask for forgiveness for any wrongs you've committed *even if you would have overlooked the same offense had it been committed against you*. Be reconciled to your brother or sister.

It's also clear that even though Jesus only addressed the offender in his commandment, there are two parts to this equation. The offended person must also be willing to facilitate reconciliation when asked. To enable obedience to Jesus' command (which every Christian should be eager to do), he or she must be willing to meet, talk things through, and extend forgiveness. It would seem unthinkable for an offended believer to decline or delay response to another believer's earnest and sincere request to pursue reconciliation. After all, if the worship of God is to be temporarily set aside for this purpose, surely there is nothing else that would justify refusing, ignoring, or unnecessarily delaying a sincere request to talk things through and be reconciled.

Sadly, here too the world's way is often defaulted to by professing Christians. The offender's request to meet and talk is ignored, rejected, or delayed. "After all, she's the one who caused this problem, not me, so we'll do this on my terms, not hers." Or, "He's the one who offended me, so he can just squirm a little until I feel like talking to him." Another worldly way of refusing to pursue reconciliation is to reply, "No, we don't need to talk any more. I'm over it now and willing to just let it go." In these and other ways, the offended brother or sister often can't resist the temptation to *return* a little offense. There can be no doubt that Jesus is grieved when his followers behave in these ways.

Whether you are the offender or the one who has been offended (and we've all been on both sides at one time or another), your highest priority must be to obey Jesus' simple command:

"First be reconciled to your brother."