

## New Year; New You 6) Reconciled in Your Relationships

Matthew 5:21-37 • 2020-02-16 • Epiphany Series: New Year, New You



Every now and then we lose one of our glass dishes or cups. And if you've ever lived in a home with a tile floor and little children you know how that works. When something fragile meets the floor, the tile floor wins every time. The glass shatters into tiny pieces and another cup is lost. We don't even bother to replace them anymore because we know fragile things are doomed in our house. We just shrug our shoulders, "There goes another one." Is that sometimes the way that we might be tempted to treat our relationships with people around us? Do we sometimes just shrug off broken relationships saying, "that's life"? This morning we continue our series, "New Year; New You." As those who have been made new in Christ, we now have a whole different perspective on our relationships with others.

Jesus teaches his disciples the importance of having loving relationships with others. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.'" It would be easy for someone to just say "I've kept that command." But God is concerned about more than preventing murder. He wants there to be love. "Anyone who is angry...will be subject to judgment." We might be tempted to think that just because we are not as bad as a murderer that we get a free pass to let our anger boil in other ways. Should we ever be comfortable calling someone a derogatory name? Is it acceptable for a disciple of Jesus to slight a person by refusing to greet them, by embarrassing them, or attacking with their words? Jesus' warning is clear. Seeking to hurt someone in anyway -even in thought or words, is a grievous sin. "Anyone who says, 'you fool' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Relationships crumble. It happens. But what should we do about it? Sadly, we don't always see a broken relationship as a serious problem needing attention. When we are upset over something, we might try to draw up battle lines instead of seeking peace. And if we don't draw battle lines maybe we are comfortable just writing off a person as a loss as if they are merely a smashed jar only good for the trash. "Well I'll never get along with that person." But we can't ignore a broken relationship. Can a brother or sister in Christ come to worship and partake of the forgiveness, even shoulder to shoulder as they are at the Lord's table, all the while refusing to reconcile with someone? It is easy to think, "I'm covered, I may be angry with her, but I'm still going to church." But going to worship doesn't automatically heal broken relationships. Jesus calls for us to prioritize making steps toward healing. He says, "If you are offering something to God and then remember that you are angry with someone -first apologize and forgive, be at peace with that person. Then offer your gift to God."

And Jesus wants us to deal with broken relationships right away! Isn't it sometimes that we don't like to admit wrong, don't like to repent, don't want to settle problems until we know that we can't win and must face the music? It's like a person going to court that refuses to admit any wrong until it's too late. Then payment is demanded and it's too late to apologize and reconcile. Relationships crumble. And our old self is left in a broken mess.

Relationships can even be broken with those close to us. "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'" The world recognizes at least that cheating is wrong. And all believers must acknowledge it is wrong to have any sexual activity going on outside of marriage. But what good is it if you remain faithful outwardly, but not in the heart? "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." The world doesn't understand lust as wrong. Many Christians fail to grasp that truth. But Jesus makes it clear: there is no difference between open adultery and adultery in the heart. What lies at the heart of adultery? Is it not a heart that desires and lusts outside of a marriage bond? "But it's only natural to lust," the world clamors. Does that make it right? It's also only natural to lie, to cheat, only natural to get revenge, to hurt, to be selfish. Natural is not right. Natural is what our old self of sinful flesh wants. And God doesn't care if we claim, "I'm not hurting anyone." Lust does hurt everyone involved. Whether it be a current spouse, a future spouse, or the person lost or exploited by sin to pose for pornography. What should God care if we are afraid of getting caught so we don't cheat, but still have hearts that cheat and want to lust? Impure thoughts destroy male and female relationships, destroy marriages, and destroy homes. Lust causes hearts and relationships to crumble. And our old self is left in a broken mess.

This is a matter of life and eternity! "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell."

A broken relationship isn't okay just because some paper outside of the Bible says it is okay. "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." The letter of the law is to simply get the necessary papers and divorce. But as Jesus points out divorce is never God pleasing. Despite dotting the I's and crossing all the T's one is still getting a divorce even when a certificate is obtained. As far as it is possible marriage should be kept. In fact, the only thing that ends a marriage is marital unfaithfulness. God's solution is to repair the marriage; mankind's solution for the one who is unfaithful in marriage is to start a new one by tossing out the old like a smashed cup that hit the tile! A certificate doesn't fix the broken relationship. Does a piece of paper really hide

the pain and mess behind divorce? Does a piece of paper really say things are as they ought to be? Ask the countless broken families that there are today! Relationships crumble. And our old self is left in a broken mess.

Next Jesus deals with one of the biggest problems we have in our relationships. People don't trust people. So, instead of honoring God some will drag him into an argument and swear by his name. Instead of using his name in love they use it to assure others they aren't lying. The problem with lies: tell a lie once, and everything you say afterwards is under suspicion. Have you ever told someone something and failed to follow through? We can't always be trusted. Our falsehoods and lies cause our relationships crumble. And our old self is left in a broken mess.

When it comes to broken relationships the smallest mistakes do matter. It might seem like a trivial thing, spelling the word "Wisconsin." Is it Wiscons-I-n or Wiscons-O-n? It is supposed to be I-n not O-n. Mistakes happen. But should that mistake be found, like it was in 1988, on thousands of diplomas awarded to graduates of the University of Wisconsin? The fallout from that mistake was embarrassment. But bigger mistakes have been made. In the 1632 edition of the King James Bible the omission of the word 'not' gave whole new meaning to the sixth commandment which was written as 'Thou shalt commit adultery'. The printer of this error was fined a hefty sum for his mistake. Sometimes it isn't enough just to get the job done. You have to get it done right. And there are times when messing up isn't really an option. Jesus wants us to go beyond the letter of the law. He calls for absolute perfection here. Astronauts know that it is a matter of life and death that they must get things right. They don't just follow the letter of the law and of protocol, they do it exactly as needed because they know to fail is to die. That's why they practice their space-walk procedures over and over and over in an underwater environment. To fail, to get it wrong, is not an option they hope to fall back on. The smallest leak, smallest missed angle, or smallest error will lead to their death. That's the case for broken relationships.

If to hate is murder, if to look in lust is to commit adultery, if to break the truth or break a promise is to lie like the devil – how could we ever claim to have a good relationship with anyone not to mention with our God? All this brings us the punishment that Satan is consigned to –fire everlasting. The danger is far more real than just an embarrassment for a typo, for more real than a fine for a misprint, and far more deadly than a leaking space suit or tumbling orbit. It is to be thrown into God's judgment. Jesus repeats that many times here. We can't just shrug our shoulders at all the broken relationships around us. Jesus says our broken relationships make us fit for hell.

But God is a reconciler. He restores what is broken -even the most damaged relationships. He doesn't leave us shattered and lost on the floor. He restores us fully and makes us new. Jesus, you see, went beyond the letter of the law. Every word, thought, and action of his heart was to heal, help, and build up others according to their needs. Jesus came to live a perfect life in your place. Your keeping of the 5th commandment is as good as the time Jesus kept it for you. His holiness, love to others, is yours. He didn't come to fulfill the law for his own sake –but for your sake and mine! Jesus never looked lustfully at anyone. For all the times you've lusted or had an impure thought, Jesus never did. He valued woman as God's creation, made in the image of God like man. He honored marriage. His thoughts, his words, and his actions were of complete sexual purity. He didn't just keep the letter of the 6th commandment –he exceeded it in with all his heart. And Jesus never failed to keep his word, never tried to fix things with lies. He is always trustworthy. When he said or promised something –he did it. He had no need to swear on any oath to keep his Word. As true God his word was always good when he lived in our place. He is true God and lived on this earth as the only truly honest man. I know that all my failures to back my word, to keep my word, and to speak in all truth are now covered by his life. So are yours!

Someone might wonder at this "I have Jesus' perfect life credited to me? That's too good to be true?" Read Matthew's gospel and you will see very clearly that this is exactly why Jesus was tempted by Satan, why Jesus lived on this earth –to take our place. This is why Jesus was born and this is why he lived. To help us see that righteousness is not something we can accomplish as God requires, to help us see that we are deserving of hell. And also to do what we could not! The Christian church is full of people "holy and right in God's eyes" because we look to Jesus who did it all for us! Live by, breath by, and rejoice in this central message of Scripture: Jesus came to keep God's requirements and he kept them not only outwardly, but even to the standard that he mentions here. He did that for you! He wants you to know his love! He takes our shattered relationships, our misspelled passports to heaven, and gives us his perfect new passport to heaven!

But what about all the wrongs and the things that we did do to make us deserve the punishment of hell? God has taken those thoughts, those words, and those actions and has placed them on his Son Jesus. He suffered the fire, the pain, and took upon himself the torment that we deserve. On the cross as Jesus suffered, he suffered not for his own sin –but ours!

Now we have his Spirit in our hearts. With thankful hearts we offer not just our outward actions, but our very selves to God for righteousness. We call him Lord because we belong to his kingdom and are his –ready for his service. Every believer here is now an instrument tuned for praise to God –not only in actions, but in your words, and your thoughts.

When did they notice the misspelled Wiscons-O-n on those diplomas? The diplomas here handed out. No one noticed. They were placed in frames, on walls, in offices. No one noticed. In fact, six months passed before anyone picked up on this blunder! I don't know if they issued new ones or not, I'm guessing they were still valid diplomas. Our passport to the kingdom of heaven exceeds all requirements. God has given us one made by his own Son –and it is spotless and forever valid. You are made new, reconciled in your relationships.