

ALPHA COUNSELING SERVICES

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Dear Friends,

Over the years, while here at Alpha, I have found a consistent misunderstanding among Christians concerning the practical application of reconciliation. Frequently Christians lump forgiveness, reconciliation, and trust together, get confused, and don't do anything constructive. This leads to spiritual atrophy, social illness (revenge, family conflict, and divorce), and to stress related physical illness.

I frequently say in counseling: "You can forgive someone and never be reconciled to them." To forgive takes one person in obedience to God, but to reconcile takes two people, or groups of people, working to solve a mutual disagreement. Then trust must be earned, by the one who lost trust, and that will take time. I have written numerous times about forgiveness and want to delve into reconciliation more deeply.

Matthew 5:23-24 simply states, as you approach God with your offering and remember someone who is upset with you, leave the offering and go fix things with the person hurt by you. Here we find Christ in His 'Sermon on the Mount' teaching reconciliation should come before worship! The other person is the one offended, not you! Clearly I am to take the time to remove his displeasure of me by seeking forgiveness and hopefully bring about reconciliation. Many refer to this as 'Making Amends' for the wrongs we have done.

Romans 12:17 tells us: *"if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men"* (and women). If there is no peace, you may need to try more than once.

Matthew 18: 15-17 gives an example of the extent we should go to be reconciled with our adversary. Especially if it is a relative! If your brother sins (against you), go and tell him about the offense in private; try to resolve the problem one on one. But if that doesn't work, take one or two mature adults with you and try again. I've done this on several occasions in Church work and it once saved my reputation. Lies were told, and there was no reconciliation, but because of the respected witnesses involved the lies were successfully refuted. Without the witnesses it would have been his word against mine.

If this second attempt fails try one more time. This third step makes the issue public, this can be unpleasant but hidden issues never heal or go away!

If the person who has wronged you will not hear this last effort, then the issue can not be resolved and Jesus says exclude that person from further activity in your life. Tough love is frequently messy but continued unresolved conflict is even worse and problems resurface repeatedly.

As we approach a new winter season please continue to pray for Alpha and the people looking for help. Many people are struggling with anxiety being concerned with the conflict in the government and what it means for friends and family. Thank you for your prayers and support for Alpha your prayers are being heard by God!

Richard