

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 25 June 2023. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **First Be Reconciled to Thy Brother**

### **Matthew 5:23-26**

In the year **1814**, in **Schweinfurt, Germany**, a company called the **Wilhelm Dye and White Lead Company** began to market a green dye, which quickly became the rage—especially in England. It was a very beautiful, bold green hue; and it was used in the fabric of evening gowns, hats, hair ornaments, artificial wreaths and flowers, gloves, wallpaper, and carpet. It was especially popular in women’s fashion. All the young ladies wanted to show off their attractive green gowns at the community ball.

However, there was a big problem with this dye: it was deadly! You see, this beautiful green pigment was made from a mixture of copper and **arsenic trioxide**. Yes, you heard right: these fabrics were laced with the highly toxic chemical **arsenic**! Everywhere these green cloths went, people broke out in horrible blisters and ulcers; hair fell out; people vomited blood; and oftentimes, people died quickly. Babies in nurseries died from green wallpaper, or from green carpet. Poor factory girls, who made artificial flowers and wreaths with this arsenic, and who were touching and breathing in the powder all day long, often had faces that were so covered with sores, that they nearly went blind. Stories abounded of young ladies who had gone to a ball in a green dress, and who ended up dead within a few days. One particularly sad story, which made headlines, was about a once strong, healthy 19-year-old artificial flower-maker named **Matilda Scheurer**, who died on November 20, 1861. In her final hours, she vomited green bile, convulsed, and foamed at the mouth. The whites of her eyes, and her nails, turned green; and she told the doctors that everything she saw looked green.<sup>1</sup> (The doctors concluded that arsenic had shut down her heart, liver, and lungs.) Doctors estimated that the average lady’s gown, made of 20 yards of fabric, was laced with a whopping 900 “grains” of arsenic (a grain being about 64.8 milligrams), and that on an average evening, a woman’s dress emitted no less than 60 grains of arsenic into the air!<sup>2</sup> The slang word “killing” came to refer to “an attractive young woman”; and it was coined as a direct result of this green dye, which literally killed the women who wore them, as well as the people around them.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, the amazing thing about this arsenic-ridden fabric is that even though everyone knew that arsenic was deadly, people continued to buy it, and wear it, for decades! They would try to convince themselves that “they’d be safe, provided they did not lick the fabric or wallpaper.”<sup>4</sup> They were willing to take the risk of becoming terribly sick and dying, rather than to wear those dreadfully dull greys, browns, and yellows. Their *pride* literally was the death of them!

Pride has been destroying lives ever since the Garden of Eden. Pride is the root of anger (which we talked about last week); and pride is what keeps people from seeking reconciliation with those whom they have offended (or who have offended them). Tragically, even many citizens of the Kingdom refuse to seek reconciliation with a brother or sister. They refuse to take off the fleshly garment of anger and unforgiveness, and to put on the garment of forgiveness: and their bitterness is blocking their fellowship with God, poisoning their relationships, and destroying them inside. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had much to say about the dangers of refusing to reconcile with a brother, and this morning, we will be focusing on this subject. The title of this message is ***First Be Reconciled to Thy Brother***.

**Read Matthew 5:21-26.**

## I. The spiritual consequences of refusing to be reconciled (vv. 23-24)

In the passage that we just read, there is a truth that stands out like a flashing neon sign—something that you cannot miss. You’ll notice that Jesus does not place any of the responsibility for reconciliation on your *brother*. He places it all *on you!* Jesus didn’t give His disciples a cotton-candy, inspirational pep-talk, to make them feel good about themselves. He didn’t say, “You don’t need negative people in your life. If people have a problem with you, then you don’t need all that toxicity. Just move on, and surround yourself with people who will lift you higher!” No, Jesus places the onus on *you* to get things right—whether your brother be a “toxic” person, or not!

Let’s read **verse 23** again. (**Read verse 23.**) Please notice: Jesus commands you to seek reconciliation with your brother if “*thy brother hath ought against thee.*” Now, think about that statement. Did Jesus say that you must seek reconciliation only if *you* be the one who has done wrong? No. He simply said, “If your *brother* have *ought against you.*” In other words, “*If your brother have a problem with you.*” That puts it in perspective, doesn’t it? What if your brother *think* that you have wronged him, even though you *haven’t* wronged him? Are you off the hook, then? No! You see, in *your brother’s* mind, you *have* wronged him. This means that there is a breach between you and him; and according to Jesus, that breach, if left unaddressed, will hinder your relationship with God. Therefore, you need to seek reconciliation with your brother, ASAP!

Folks, this is really important to understand! If Jesus were instructing us to “Seek reconciliation only if *you* be the guilty party,” then you could easily excuse yourself from trying to get right with your brother, couldn’t you? You could say, “Well, *I’m* not the guilty party. *I’m* not the one who did wrong; so it’s *his* responsibility to get right with *me*. He *thinks* I did him wrong, but I didn’t do him any wrong. I’m not the one with the problem. *He* is. *He* needs to come to *me* and get things right.” You *could* excuse yourself from the responsibility—if this were what Jesus was saying. However, that is *not* what He was saying. Jesus’ point is that *if your brother have a problem with you*, and there is something between you, then you need to do everything you can to make reconciliation—and quickly! Whether you *actually are* at fault, or whether your brother *think* that you are at fault, you are *still* responsible to seek reconciliation with him! As Oswald Chambers put it, “Jesus does not mention the other person, He says—*you* go. There is no question of your rights. The stamp of a saint is that he can waive his own rights and obey the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

Now, maybe this sounds crazy to you. If so, welcome to Kingdom Righteousness 101! This is how citizens of the Kingdom should live. Perhaps you are wondering, “Why would *I* be responsible to seek reconciliation, when I’m not the one at fault?” There are a couple reasons.

**For one thing, you might be blind-sided by some fault of your own!** Perhaps the other person is 95% in the wrong, and you're 5% in the wrong, because of something relatively minor that you did to provoke him (which *is not* minor to him), or because of the sinful way that you have reacted to him. Perhaps it's 98% his fault, and only 2% your fault. Does the fact that he bears the majority of the blame excuse your fleshly reaction? No, it doesn't!

Folks, God's Word says that ***"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"*** God says that our hearts are treacherous! That is why, whenever I'm counselling a couple that is having marriage problems, I challenge each spouse to evaluate how much of the fault is his own. Is it 1%, 5%, 10%, 25%, or even 50%? When the husband, or the wife, says, *"I don't have the problem. It's all his fault (or her fault),"* alarm bells go off in my mind! I think, *"Red alert! Red alert!"* Rarely is the problem 100% one person's fault. The very fact that someone is not willing to consider whether he might have contributed to the problem in even the smallest way reveals a self-righteous attitude—which means that sin is lying at the door!

There's a saying that is popular these days on Facebook and other social media; and it goes something like this: *"My attitude is the result of your actions; so if you don't like my attitude, blame yourself!"* Folks, this saying is 100% unbiblical, ungodly, and fleshly! Did *Jesus* have that kind of attitude when the mob came to arrest Him in the Garden? When Malchus got his ear sliced off by Peter, did Jesus gloatingly say, *"Serves you right! And if you don't like my attitude, take a look in the mirror, pal"?* No. In love and compassion, He bent down, picked up his severed ear, and placed it back on his head. By the way, there is no record in Scripture that Malchus even thanked Jesus for healing him. Most likely, Malchus continued to play his part in arresting Jesus. Yet, Jesus, in love, reached out to him, and offered him reconciliation to Himself. And remember—Jesus, being the sinless Son of God, was 100% in the right, and Malchus was 100% in the wrong! Yet, Jesus reached out to Him, anyway.

Brethren, if *Jesus*, the sinless Son of God, offered reconciliation to an *enemy* who had come to arrest Him without a cause, who are we to think that we don't need to offer reconciliation to an offended *brother*—even if the fault lie mostly (or perhaps even entirely) with him? Approach your brother or sister with a humble and sincere heart, and say, *"Brother, there is something between us, and it needs to be made right. First of all, is there anything that I have done to hurt or offend you? If so, please let me know, because I want to make it right!"* Let your brother tell you his grievance; and let the Lord open your heart to what he is saying. Before you even go to confront your brother, say, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me."*** If there be any merit to what your brother is saying, ask his forgiveness for whatever wrong you might have done (even if it be small). Then, state *your* grievance plainly, yet humbly, without angry, cutting words, and with a readiness to forgive. *"But, Pastor, what if you know he's going to commit the wrong again, even though he apologized to you?"* If so, leave that for the Lord to judge. Jesus commands us to forgive a brother, even for multiple repeat offences!

**Read Matthew 18:21-22.**

Why did Jesus say that we should forgive until “*seventy times seven*”? Is 490 the point where you can put a “cap” on the forgiveness thing? Is He saying that you should keep a tally, and once your brother has reached his 491<sup>st</sup> offence, you don’t have to forgive him anymore? Obviously not. His point is, “Keep on forgiving! Forgive the brother who asks for forgiveness, even if you doubt his sincerity!” Folks, this takes a righteousness that is not natural to us. It takes *Christ’s* righteousness to forgive in this way! It takes *Christ’s* love and longsuffering. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*Charity suffereth long, and is kind.*”

Why are *you* responsible to seek reconciliation with your brother? First of all, because you just might be blinded by a fault of your own! What is the second reason? The second reason is that until reconciliation is sincerely sought, **your fellowship with God will be greatly hindered!** Reconciliation isn’t merely about “me and my brother”: it is, *first and foremost*, about *God*. As in *every* situation in our lives, **it must always start with God!** Ultimately, it’s about Him! Remember when Jesus summarised the Law in two commandments? The first one was, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*”; and the second commandment was just like the first: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*” These are two distinct commands: yet, you can’t separate the two! You can’t say, “I’m right with God,” while letting a relationship with a brother burn to the ground. If you are right with God, then you *must* seek to be right with your brother. Jesus said, “*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.*”

Folks, this spiritual principle can be found throughout the Bible. *Your relationship with God will always be hindered* if you are not doing your utmost to be right with your brother. The same is true in marriages. In **1 Peter 3:7**, God charges the husband to “know” his wife’s spiritual and emotional needs, and to “*honour*” her; and the consequence of *failing* to do these duties toward her is that your prayers will be hindered! Peter said, “*Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.*” Perhaps, in your mind, you are protesting, “But, Pastor, what if my brother refuse to get right with me, even though I’ve done my best to make it right? What then?” Then forgive him in your heart, and pray that God will soften his heart, and get right with you one day. In the meantime, you are able to go to bed with a clean conscience, and with the load of bitterness and unforgiveness lifted from your heart! There may be a certain heaviness on your heart, because you are grieved that your brother won’t get right with you; yet, there is no *guilt* in your heart. *That* is worth all the treasure in the world! You cannot replace a pure heart, and a clean conscience!

Let’s look again at **Matthew 5:24**. (**Read Matthew 5:24.**) Folks, do you see how serious reconciliation with a brother is? God doesn’t even want your *gift to Him* until you do whatever you can do to reconcile with your brother. If *you* have wronged your brother in some way, and you’re not making it right, God won’t accept your worship. If you *don’t think*

you've wronged your brother, yet your brother has ought against you, and you're not doing anything about it, God *still* won't hear your prayers. Your pride is like a wall, blocking your prayers. David wrote, "***If I regard iniquity in my heart, the LORD will not hear me.***" "**Pride**" may be what the world is celebrating this month: but to God, pride (whether being proud of your *sin*, or being proud of your "righteousness") is absolutely disgusting and despicable! Let's read what Isaiah said about this.

**Read Isaiah 1:11-18.**

The people of Judah were good at keeping the outward ordinances of the Law. They were really good at observing "worship" rituals. They did all the oblations and sacrifices to a "T," and kept all the feasts and new moons scrupulously. Yet, there was a problem: there was blood on their hands! That's why God wouldn't hear them when they lifted up their hands in prayer. To God, their prayers were an abomination: and, as you'll notice, His grievances toward them all had to do with *how they were treating (or mistreating) their fellow man!* They didn't care for the poor, the needy, the widows, and orphans—the people that were the "outcasts" of society. Worst of all, they were guilty of actual *murder*. Their hands were filled with blood. We know that God is speaking literally, because in **Ezekiel 23**, God rebuked the people of Judah for sacrificing their own children to idols, and, in the very same day, going to the Temple to worship God! It was hypocrisy to the extreme! Perhaps you say, "But Pastor, aren't you taking this a bit far? You're talking about *murder*, here! How can you compare infanticide to failure to reconcile with a brother?" Well, what did we read in **Matthew 5:21-22**? Didn't Jesus compare anger to the sin of murder? Yes, He did! That's why, in **James 4**, James said, "***Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.***" Was *literal* murder going on in the churches? No. But *murder in the heart* was going on. In God's eyes, their fighting and anger was like murder; and He wouldn't answer their prayers, because they asked "*amiss*." Let's take a look at another **Isaiah** passage.

**Read Isaiah 58:1-9.**

This passage is similar to **Isaiah 1**—except that in this passage, we are told that the people not only *prayed*, but *fasted*, while sitting in sackcloth and ashes. That sounds like real devotion, doesn't it? Yet, God still wasn't impressed: and He wasn't hearing their prayers. Why? For one thing, while they were fasting, they continued to treat it like a regular workday, and even had fun and recreation. Secondly, even while they were fasting, they were filled with "***strife and debate***," and were smiting each other "***with the fist of wickedness***." It sounds as though they had *unresolved issues with their brethren*, doesn't it? God wasn't impressed with this kind of "fasting." God said that the kind of fast *He* was looking for was to *do right toward your brother*. God commanded them to *treat their brethren with justice*, and *then* He would hear their prayers.

Sad to say, many Christians realise that it is hypocritical to go to church to worship God while there is unresolved anger in their hearts; and therefore, they choose to *stay out of church*, rather than be reconciled to their brother! I've known Christians who stayed out of church for *years* because of anger toward a brother: and it caused serious spiritual harm to their whole family. They justify their refusal to go to church by saying, "Well, at least I'm not being a hypocrite." Brethren, God is no more pleased with your staying away from His house than He is with your *going* to His house with anger in your heart! Either way, you are willfully out of fellowship with God. In the one case, you are out of fellowship because of your *anger*, and your hypocrisy in *going to church* with that anger; in the other case, you're out of fellowship because of your anger, *and your refusal to go to church!* God's command in **Hebrews 10:25** still stands: "***Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.***"

Jesus' point is clear: you must get things resolved with your brother as fast as possible, so that you can be right with God when you go to worship Him. Staying away from church is *not* an option: you must get things right, so that you *can* go to church with the right heart! God doesn't even want a *gift* until you get things right. If you are planning to go to church with an offering, yet there be anger in your heart, God says, "Nope. I don't want your offering right now. I can wait. Put your gift down right now, and go try to be reconciled to your brother."

Brethren, this is why the Lord's Supper is such serious business. That's why we don't do the Lord's Supper every week; and that's why, when the Lord's Supper is approaching, I give plenty of notice, so that we can have time to prepare our hearts. The Lord's Supper can easily become "just a ritual," which we perform carelessly, with little thought to whether our hearts are right with God. To take the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin in your heart can lead to sickness, and even *premature death!*

### **Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.**

When there is unresolved strife in the body, God does not to hear His people's prayers; and sickness or death can ensue. That's why God gives the rules of church discipline in **Matthew 18**. If someone in church have seriously wronged you, and there be a breach, go to your brother, without telling anyone else about it, and get it right. If he won't listen, then take one or two witnesses, so that every word will be established. If he still won't listen, the matter must be brought before the church; and if he still won't listen when reproved by the church, then he must be removed from membership, until he repents. Why is the Lord so severe? Because anger affects *the whole body*. It isn't just an individual matter: it is corporate. God wants His church to be pure, reflecting *His* holy character.

## **II. The temporal consequences of refusing to be reconciled (vv. 25-26)**

**(Read verses 25 and 26 again.)** In verse 23 and 24 (which we just studied) Jesus' words could apply one of two ways: it could apply to a situation in which *you* are actually in the wrong, or to a situation in which your brother *thinks* that you are in the wrong. However, we now come to **verses 25 and 26**; and in these verses, Jesus is clearly talking about a situation in which *you* are in the wrong. In fact, Jesus isn't necessarily talking about a "brother" now: he's talking about a confrontation with an "**adversary**"—an enemy. He's also talking about a situation in which you have, in some way, caused actual harm to someone's physical property—whether out of anger, or because of foolish neglect. Perhaps you rear-ended someone's car. Perhaps, in anger, you threw something, and caused damage to his property. Perhaps it involves a *loan*, which you are unable to pay. Perhaps you agreed to be the *co-signer* on a loan: and your "friend," whom you were helping out, has proven to be *an enemy*, and has left you "holding the bag." The book of **Proverbs** has a lot to say about this!

### **Read Proverbs 6:1-5.**

In this passage, Solomon is talking about a situation in which you foolishly agreed to secure someone's debt, only to be left "holding the bag" when your friend couldn't pay it. Even worse, he mentions a situation in which you agreed to be security for a "**stranger**"—someone you don't even know very well, and with whose character you are not well acquainted. The Bible calls this "being surety" for someone. (Today we call it "being a co-signer on a loan.") God does not absolutely forbid that we ever, in any situation, be a co-signer for a loan: but He does warn us to do so with the utmost caution and wisdom. Your word of agreement is a "**snare**"; therefore, you'd better be very, very sure that your friend is a *true, honest* friend, who is diligent and wise with his money, and who will not fail you. It's best not to enter into suretyship at all! God's Word commands us to "owe no man anything." Thus, we should do our utmost to wait until we can pay for something in full, without putting it on credit.

Nevertheless, even believers sometimes make foolish decisions, and are left with a debt that they can't pay (whether because *they* incurred the debt, or because they were *surety* for someone's else's debt). If you find yourself in this situation, what do you do? Both Solomon and Jesus give the same answer: humble yourself! Don't do *fake* humility, either. Use sincere, humble words, and plead for mercy. **Proverbs 15:1** says, "***A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.***" Ask for leniency, or for a grace period, or even for absolving of the debt: but do not use harsh, self-justifying, or accusatory words. Agree with the creditor, or with the person you've caused a financial loss, that he is right, and that you are wrong (even if he is not the nicest person in the world); and be willing to make it right. If you start shooting off your mouth, and getting angry, and trying to lay blame at others' feet, you will end up in big trouble—perhaps in a courtroom, or with a whopping fine, or in prison! Worst of all, you will be a poor testimony for Christ. If drivers-by see you yelling at the Garda officer, and at the person whose car you rear-ended, and trying to lay the blame elsewhere, instead of talking responsibility, and they remember that you are a Christian, what will they think of your Lord? The name of Jesus will be evil spoken of, won't it?

Debt in this world is an awful thing. Liability for damages done to others' property is an awful thing, as well. That is why we who know Christ as Saviour must always remember that we are *Christ's* representatives in this world. We are citizens of Heaven, and of a Kingdom that Christ will set up on this earth one day; and our words and actions can either attract people to our King, or cause them to turn from Him in disgust. We must guide our affairs with discretion, so that we do not put ourselves in debt, or cause harm to others; and when we *do* find ourselves in the wrong, we must humble ourselves, accept responsibility, and use soft, kind words, so that we do not bring shame upon ourselves, and reproach to the name of Christ.

Before we close, there are two more kinds of “debt” that I would like to talk about.

**Read Matthew 18:23-35.**

What was Jesus teaching in this parable? Well, let's start with the clearest part of the parable. In this story, a lord forgives his servant of a debt of 10,000 talents. In today's money, 10,000 talents would be about \$4,000,000,000! That is an impossible debt! It is obvious that the lord's forgiveness of his servant's debt is a picture of salvation. When a man is saved, Christ forgives that man of a debt that he cannot possibly pay—**the debt of his sin.**

Now, let's move to the next part of the parable. What does Jesus mean when he says that this same servant, who refused to forgive his fellow servant of a much smaller debt, was given over to the “*tormentors*” until he should pay what he owed? How could the servant's debt of 10,000 talents be revived, when his lord had already given his word that the debt was cancelled? Is Jesus saying that God can *cancel* His forgiveness—that a saved person can become lost again, because he failed to forgive others? No, that is *not* what Jesus is teaching, because He promised that He will *never* cast out those who come to Him for salvation.

Jesus isn't talking about the *old debt of sin* being revived. When you are saved, the debt of your sin is cancelled forever. You will never be condemned to hell again. What *is* Jesus saying, then? Jesus is saying that this servant now had **a new debt.** Because his lord had forgiven him of such a great debt, he now had a *moral* debt of *love and gratitude* to his master, and of *love and forgiveness* toward others. Remember—*it always starts with God!* When you remember that *God* has forgiven you of all your trespasses, it's hard to hold a grudge against someone else. In fact, you now realise that you have a *debt to your brother*—the debt of love.

**Read Romans 13:8-10.**

Brethren, when you are angry at someone, you are failing to pay that person the debt that you owe him; and you will be “*tormented*” by your guilty conscience *until* you pay him what you owe him—which is love and forgiveness. Anger truly is a tormenting thing! Too many



Christians are living miserable lives, because they refuse to forgive someone. Anger eats you up on the inside; and it is cruel. Think of the fierceness with which this angry servant attacked his fellow servant. Jesus said that he took his fellow servant **“by the throat”**! This servant’s action was not that of a humble man: it was that of a *proud* man. Pride is the root cause of all anger. When there is pride in your heart, an offence (or a *perceived* offence) by someone else *wounds* your pride; and anger is the result. The solution to anger, then, is to humble yourself before God, and to remember the great debt that Christ has paid for your sin. **Ephesians 4:32** says, **“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”**

**Conclusion:** Brethren, it’s time to put off the toxic “green arsenic” garments of anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness, and to put on the garments of **“bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any.”** Just as Christ forgave you, do the same to others! If you need to reconcile with someone, do it as quickly as you can! If you have done injury to someone’s property, humble yourself, take responsibility, and seek to make things right, with a Christ-like attitude. **Perhaps you are not sure that you are saved.** If so, please realise that you cannot possibly pay the debt of your sin. The full debt for your sin has already been paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross; *but you must ask for it!* Just like the man in the parable pleaded with the master forgiveness, so *you* must humbly ask God to forgive you of all your sin for Jesus’ sake, and to make you a member of His Kingdom. If you will do this, Jesus will save you! You will then have the power to *forgive others*, just as He forgave you!

<sup>1</sup> Alison Matthews David, “The Arsenic Dress: How Poisonous Green Pigments Terrorized Victorian Fashion,” November 4, 2015, <https://jezebel.com/the-arsenic-dress-how-poisonous-green-pigments-terrori-1738374597>.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Wright, “The History of Green Dye is a History of Death,” Mar 17, 2017, <https://www.racked.com/2017/3/17/14914840/green-dye-history-death>.

<sup>5</sup> Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1935), September 26 reading.