

The Ministry of Reconciliation

The process of reconciliation

A friend of ours from a Hindu home, but who had become a Christian, married a man who too had converted from Hinduism to Christianity. He was from a different Hindu community from hers, and so her family excommunicated her cutting her off completely. Our friend kept writing letters to her family for a few years without any response. However, one day her mother contacted her and they met without her father knowing about it. Eventually her father agreed to meet her and then allowed them back into their home. The time came when their reconciliation was complete, even though her parents remained Hindus. As believers the effort for reconciliation always needs to come from our side.

Matthew 18:15-17 “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.”¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

1) Private engagement

- If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you.
- The world loves to blurt out the sins of others for everyone to hear.
- Before doing that, we need to remember the grace that we received from God.
 - As recipients of grace, we ought to be grace givers.
 - A grace giver puts themselves into the offender’s shoes and asks what that person would need at that point of time
- Before engaging think about pertinent questions to ask
 - Was the offense deliberate or unintentional?
 - Is the offender aware that they’ve offended you, or are they completely oblivious to it?
 - Is this an ongoing problem with that person, or a once off issue?
- These questions will assist us in our approach when we do engage with the offender
- The attitude of the world is that the offender must approach the offended person to make the situation right.
 - The Word of God puts the onus on the offended person to take the first step.
- Approach the offender and set up a time to meet
 - Don’t try to deal with the issue at a random time, and especially not on social media.
 - WhatsApp texting is probably one of the worst ways to resolve interpersonal problems. If anything, it’s likely to aggravate the problem
 - Meet face to face at a prearranged place and time to address the issues at hand.
- Broach the issue amiably, not aggressively.
 - An aggressive approach will only get a negative reaction from the person
 - If it was a matter of what was said then use “I” statements to let the person know how you felt, rather than “you” statements telling the person what they said.

2) Admittance of wrongdoing

- If they listen to you, you have won them over.
- For reconciliation to take place there needs to be honesty and an admittance of their wrongdoing.
- As long as there's denial of wrongdoing true reconciliation can't take place as the relationship would then be based on a lie that everything is fine while the foundations of the relationship are still unstable.
- We should be careful not to confuse a superficial tolerance to reconciliation.
 - True reconciliation takes place when all wrongdoing is admitted and dealt with.
 - A superficial tolerance is when wrongdoing isn't dealt with but the relationship has to continue for practical reasons.
 - The two people still need to work together
 - They still live in the same house
- If they refuse to admit their wrongdoing and persist in it then further action involving others is necessary.

3) Mediation

- But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church.
- Even with taking others with to deal with the issues has further steps that need to be taken with two possible approaches
 - The first approach is that the witness act as mediators to attempt to reconcile to two parties involved. This would be the preferable approach to the problem
 - The second approach is that the offended party confronts the offender in the presence of the witnesses.
 - If the offender accepts the rebuke, admits his wrongdoing, and reconciles with the offended person then the problem is solved.
 - If the offender refuses to listen, then the matter can be taken to the church for a decision to be made if the offender is a believer.
- If the offender isn't a believer and agrees for mediation then we can do what we can to help the two to reconcile their relationship.
 - As Christians we always point to Christ as the example of reconciliation when we mediate between two parties, whether they're believers or not.
- In the case where the issue is theft then apologizing and forgiveness isn't enough.
 - There needs to be a willingness of restitution.
 - Luke 19:8-9 Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."
 - ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham.

4) Cutting ties if necessary

- There are times when the offender is completely unrepentant and there isn't any hope of reconciliation.
- Reconciliation is only possible when both parties are willing to reconcile
 - If they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.