



# Helping a Disciple Reconcile With Others

*“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.” Rom. 14:19*

## I. Definitions:

- A. Webster Dictionary: *reconcile* means to restore to friendship or harmony
- B. The Greek: *reconcile* as used in Matthew 5:23 means to effect an alternation; to exchange mutual hostility by yielding to mutual concession.

## II. Important concepts:

- A. The disciple is:
    - 1. to “be reconciled,” which is a command of God and therefore, an obligation of every believer. (Matt. 5:23,24)
    - 2. to seek peace with all men, including fellow Christians and the unsaved. (Rom. 12:18; 14:19)
    - 3. to realize that the act of reconciling is not contingent upon how the offender “feels” or how difficult the prospect of obedience to God’s commands.
  - B. Forgiveness is sought of the offended party, thereby providing the *opportunity* for reconciliation and/or restoration to take place.
    - 1. *Reconciliation* takes place if the offended forgives the offender.
    - 2. *Forgiveness* is unconditional and is a matter between God and the offended person. *Reconciliation* is conditional, requiring both parties to come together to seek harmony by laying past or present sins to rest. However, the attempt must always be made according to God’s word.
    - 3. *Restoration* of the relationship to its former status (or even better status!) may or may not occur, even though forgiveness is granted, and therefore, reconciliation has taken place.
      - a. *Restoration* depends on the future responses of both people involved and may involve a rebuilding of trust.
      - b. *Reconciliation* may occur between two people who have engaged in past sexual sin, but often *restoration* of any form of relationship is not advisable.
- Note:** Not making a clear distinction between forgiving, reconciling and restoring is a common mistake that causes confusion and misapplication of biblical principles.
- C. Forgiveness is sought for *sin*, as James 5:16 instructs.
    - 1. The disciple is responsible for confessing his sin to another.
    - 2. He may have offended another without sinning against him. For example:
      - a. a person may be offended by a loving admonishment. The disciple is not responsible to seek forgiveness for offending someone by his act of obedience.

# HELPING CONTROLLERS

## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

- b. a person may be offended because of the disciple's unavoidable delay, causing him to be late for an appointment. In such a case, saying, "I'm sorry for the problems my tardiness caused you," might be appropriate.
- D. Forgiveness is usually sought for sins of which the offended *is aware* or is possibly aware, as indicated in Matthew 5:23, "If your brother has something against you..."
  - 1. The verse seems to indicate forgiveness is sought for overt sins.
  - 2. Therefore, generally forgiveness is not sought for sins of the mind, i.e.:
    - a. just, jealousy or envy, unless there are other indicators, such as innuendos, sarcastic or snide remarks.
    - b. gossip, unless the person who is the object is aware it took place. The disciple may need to seek forgiveness of those with whom he gossiped.
- E. The following are two sins that are commonly encountered for which forgiveness is usually sought:

- 1. Harboring bitterness over an extended period of time

Usually the recipient of extended bitterness is aware that there is a problem in the relationship, even if the offender believes he has "hidden" his resentments. Therefore, the disciple should be encouraged to seek forgiveness for it.

Caution him to not justify his bitterness. Do not say, "Will you forgive me for harboring bitterness *because* you did or were \_\_\_\_\_?" Instruct him to ask, "Will you forgive me for harboring bitterness?"

- 2. Committing adultery

This is a delicate issue. If the spouse is aware or has shown any signs of suspicion, then forgiveness is always sought. However, if there seems to be no suspicion or awareness in the spouse, the adulterer and the discipler should submit themselves to direction of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the timing of such a confession is not right because of circumstances in the marriage. In most cases, it is exposed because deceit is involved and guilt is great. On *rare* occasion, if the Holy Spirit directs (exclusive of motives of pride and fear on the part of both the discipler and disciple), this sin may not be acknowledged to an unsuspecting spouse.

If a confession of adultery is made to a spouse who is suspicious or unaware, please advise your disciple to *acknowledge* the sin first, expressing his sorrow. Then give the spouse assimilation time, saying "I will seek forgiveness for my sin, but I want to give you some time to adjust to this news that is probably a shock to you." This may be a tumultuous time of anger being expressed by the offended spouse. Give the Holy Spirit time to minister to the hurt spouse; often they become willing to reconcile and work toward restoration even though their first response is the opposite.

No matter what the initial response, set another meeting time for the guilty party to seek forgiveness, perhaps a week from the present date. The reconciliation list for the spouse should include sinful motives. In most cases, it would be wise for you to

## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

do a sexual sin confession with the offender so he is able to identify his motives and other sins before seeking the spouse's forgiveness. (Read *Helping a Disciple Confess Sexual Sin* and *Helping a Disciple Reconcile for Sexual Sin*, CTD, as your preparation.)

The adulterer must break off a present relationship and assure the spouse of his actions at the time of his attempt to reconcile. In most cases, you should be present to guide the spouses through reconciliation for adultery.

### III. Reasons for reconciliation:

- A. The disciple has sinned against another. (Jas. 5:16)
- B. The disciple senses disharmony and/or a barrier in a relationship.
  - 1. He is commanded to do his part to restore peace and harmony. (Rom. 14:19)
  - 2. He asks the possibly offended party, "Have I offended you in some way?"

### IV. Reasons for seeking forgiveness:

- A. "Will you forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_?" must be asked because it requires an answer.
- B. It is the only way *both parties* are aware if they are reconciled in accordance with God's command.
  - 1. "I'm sorry" does not require an answer from the offended and therefore, there is no assurance of reconciliation. Neither party knows where they stand.
  - 2. "Forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_" does not require an answer. Therefore, correct your disciple if he uses this statement.

### V. Common protests and suggested responses:

- A. Be prepared: reconciliation is one of the most resisted, ignored and feared commands, especially with difficult people in the disciple's life.
- B. Be prepared to respond to protests. The following are common protests and suggested responses:
  - 1. "*I don't want to be reconciled.*"  
Discipler: "*God wants you to be reconciled.*" (Matt. 5:23,24; Ps. 34:14)
  - 2. "*I am not sincere about feeling badly about hurting (name), so I don't have to seek forgiveness.*"  
Discipler: "Your seeking forgiveness is *not* contingent upon how you feel. None of God's commands are." (John 14:21)
  - 3. "*The person is not a Christian, so I don't have to seek his forgiveness. He won't understand what I'm doing.*"  
Discipler: "You bear the name of Christ and must consider your **testimony** before the person you offended by taking responsibility for your sin. Even the unbeliever can recognize the humility involved in seeking forgiveness." (2 Cor. 1:12; 1 Thess. 2:10)

## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

**Note:** God has used Christians' efforts to be reconciled with unbelievers as a means to reach them for salvation. Although there is no guarantee of this happening, at the very least, the relationship is usually impacted in a positive way. For some, **God** has opened the door to share the gospel in a gracious manner, but that should not be the **goal** when seeking forgiveness.

4. "I'm afraid because he \_\_\_\_\_"

-will think I'm crazy."  
-won't forgive me."  
-will go on and on about my sin."  
-won't know how to respond."  
-will use this as a 'weapon' against me."

Discipler: "Trust God with the outcome He ordains through your obedience. Remember He works all things for your good. Let's confess your fears and release them to the Lord." (Rom. 8:28)

5. "What (name) did to me is far worse than what I did to him/her."

Discipler: "God holds you just as responsible for your *sinful responses* as He does for his or her sinful initiatives."

6. "It won't change anything anyway."

Discipler: "With God involved, you don't know what He will do. You must give Him and opportunity to work through your obedience." (Eph. 1:11; Dan. 4:35)

7. "It is bringing up the past. We're just supposed to forget those things and move on."

Discipler: "God wants you to clear your conscience and to lay your past to rest by accepting responsibility for your sin and seeking forgiveness for it."

8. "But you don't know \_\_\_\_\_."

Discipler: "Yes, that's true. But God knows him and all about him. And He still commands you to go and be reconciled."

### VI. Root causes to address:

- A. *Pride* can thwart the path of obedience.
- B. *Humility* is required to seek forgiveness of those whom he has wronged. The disciple must:
1. overcome his pride and self-centeredness to seek forgiveness.
  2. be more concerned about the offended person than himself. (Phil. 2:3)
  3. not avoid this responsibility, which causes further interpersonal relationship problems.
  4. quit deceiving himself that his sin didn't impact someone else. (Ps. 32:2)
  5. not focus on others' sins rather than his own. (Matt. 7:1-5)
  6. not be so self-focused that he is blinded to how greatly his sin adversely impacts others.

## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

7. not excuse his sinful *responses* to others' sins initiated against him.
  8. make himself vulnerable to someone else by admitting his sins.
- C. *Fears* can thwart the path of obedience. The disciple
1. makes himself vulnerable to someone else by admitting his sins to them, which can be a threatening position for him.
  2. risks his vulnerability being used against him.
  3. fears the responses of the one he offended.
  4. fears being put in a position of loss of control.
  5. focuses on possible negative consequences or outcomes that could occur from this act of humility and obedience. (Helpful idea: *Making Biblical Decisions* diagram in *Making Biblical Decisions*, Book 2.)

### VII. Satan's only mission:

- A. **"The thief comes only to rob, kill and destroy..." (John 10:10a)** Refusal of your disciple to reconcile can:
1. destroy his testimony and his claim to be a Christian when he refuses to take responsibility for his sin against someone else.
  2. destroy human relationships.
  3. be destructive in the body life of the church.
  4. be destructive in his relationship to God.
- B. It is wise for you and your disciple to ask the Lord to rebuke Satan and his influence over the disciple.

### VIII. Scriptures to encourage the prideful, fearful disciple:

- A. Assign one of the following or a verse with similar meaning for homework:

***"...God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."***  
**Jas. 4:6**

***"I can do everything through him who gives me strength."***  
**Phil. 4:13**

***"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."***  
**Josh. 1:9**

***"I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you, so that we can confidently say, the LORD is my helper, I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"***  
**Heb. 13:5c,6 NASB**

- B. Instruct him to renew his mind with God's truth about his situation.
- C. Remind him that Christ used Scripture to deal with Satan's temptations. (Luke 4:1-13)

## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

### IX. Encouragement for reconciliation:

- A. Assign the *Reconciling Relationships* lesson in *CTO* before he seeks forgiveness to encourage and instruct him.
- B. Acknowledge that though he is fearful,
  - 1. he needs to obey God regardless of the outcome.
  - 2. show him the *Crossroads of Decision* and *Making Biblical Decisions* diagrams in *Making Biblical Decisions* Book 2, if he is resistant.
  - 3. Christ will never leave or forsake him.
  - 4. God will supply the power and ability to obey when he takes the step needed to go to the offended party.
  - 5. perhaps he will need to confess and pray through his worst fears with you as a witness. Use *Steps to Releasing Fears to God*, in *Releasing Fears*, Book 2.
- C. Give him hope that seeking reconciliation is usually another step
  - 1. towards his freedom and healing. (John 8:31,32; Jas. 5:16)
  - 2. towards being released from fear and control of an intimidating person.

### X. Steps of preparation:

- A. Your disciple should *forgive* the person to whom he is preparing to seek forgiveness, if that person sinned against him or hurt him.
- B. Your disciple should have listed his sins and confessed them to the Lord with you as a witness.
- C. Your disciple's confession list is used to develop a new list for seeking reconciliation with the offended person.
  - 1. If the offended person is presently in a *primary relationship* with your disciple, his list should be comprehensive, but not be overwhelmingly long! His list should include:
    - a. his sinful character traits; habitual sins.
    - b. specific incidents that he recognizes as particularly hurtful.
    - c. similar sins that can be grouped together in one question, i.e. "Will you forgive me for being self-pitying, complaining, negative and critical?"
  - 2. If the offended person is *not* presently in a primary relationship, his confession list should be consolidated.
    - a. Combine several similar sins from his confession list to form one question.
    - b. Include life-impacting, habitual sins.
    - c. Include any extremely hurtful incidents.
  - 3. For a person who is not presently in a primary relationship, 4-8 sins are usually sufficient.

## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

4. If there are multiple offenses, tell your disciple he can take his list to read to the person he wronged.
- D. Prepare the lead-off statement.
1. If your disciple recently has become a believer, direct the disciple to say, “Recently, I became a born-again Christian (or a follower of Christ), and I realize I have wronged you” or “sinned against you”.
  2. If your disciple has been a believer for some time, direct your disciple to make some type of statement such as, “I have been a born-again Christian for a while, but recently I realized how my sin against you must have impacted your life.”
    - a. When seeking forgiveness of an *unbeliever*, use the words, “I wronged you” which is less inflammatory than saying, “I sinned against you.”
    - b. When seeking forgiveness of a *professing believer*, use the words, “I sinned against you,” unless he believes that the use of the word, “sin” will cause a negative reaction.
  3. When preparing your disciple, caution him *not to say*, “I’m doing this *because* God commands me,” which implies lack of personal concern
    - a. about his own responsibility in the relationship.
    - b. about how his sin may have hurt the offended.
  4. When preparing your disciple, warn him *not to say*, “My counselor or discipler told me to seek your forgiveness,” which implies he is only doing it to please his counselor.
- E. Role play feared responses with your disciple and godly ways to handle them.
- F. Instruct him *specifically* to ask, “Will you forgive me for \_\_\_\_\_?”
- G. Instruct him to ask forgiveness for each sin individually, to look at the person and to wait for a response before going to the next question.
- H. Warn him not to justify/excuse his sin by naming the sin of the one from whom he is seeking forgiveness.
  1. Tell him he cannot mention the offender’s sin against him in his question, such as, “Will you forgive me for getting angry *when you try to control me?*”
  2. Just ask, “Will you forgive me for often getting angry?”
- I. Encourage your disciple that once his past is laid to rest, he must “keep current” by seeking forgiveness when he sins against others. It should become a lifestyle.
- Note:** See *Helping a Disciple Reconcile for a Sexual Sin, CTD* when sexual sin is involved.

### XI. Refusal to reconcile:

- A. Make sure you have followed the guidelines for equipping and encouraging him for reconciliation that are given in this study.
- B. Give him some “breathing space” of a few weeks, but *do not* inform him that you are allowing him more time.



## HELPING A DISCIPLE RECONCILE WITH OTHERS

1. Continue to assign the same reconciliation(s) as homework each week.
  2. Begin working through the forgiveness process with another person while you are waiting for him to reconcile with the previous person.
- C. Terminate the discipling relationship when your disciple repeatedly refuses to reconcile.
1. Reconciliations are a vital part of his repentance, spiritual growth, developing a clear conscience, healing and freedom, so to allow him to ignore this area of discipling
    - a. is a great disservice to him.
    - b. does not properly equip him experientially to become an effective discipler of others in the future.
  2. Encouragement should be given that although you must discontinue the discipling relationship
    - a. you are still his friend and will pray for him.
    - b. you will welcome him back when he reconciles, if you have time available.

### **Note for discipling a mature believer:**

When discipling more *mature believers*, who desire to be trained in CTO methodology, require them to write lists to forgive others and to confess their own sins just as completely as you would in directing a “needy person.” If they protest that they’ve already forgiven and confessed, respectfully ask them to proceed through the exercises they will be requiring of others; otherwise they cannot be effectively trained since CTO principles are largely learned *experientially*. In dealing with key relationships in this manner, most experience a greater understanding of their sin, healing and freedom than previously known.

Require them also to seek forgiveness of their spouse with a detailed list, even though they may have done so before. However, if they have sought forgiveness in other relationships, they do not need to do that again. Inquire if they actually asked for forgiveness. If they have, be sure to ask, “*What* have you sought forgiveness for in the past?” Find out if any additional sins, such as control strategies, is a reason to seek additional forgiveness. If they do not go through reconciliations, except for the spouse, during your discipleship with them, then **stress** that they must hold *their* disciple accountable for reconciliations or progress will be impeded. If at all possible, try to find some relationships other than the spouse, where reconciliation is necessary.

### **Note for your encouragement:**

It may be very difficult for you to persevere through your disciple’s resistance and protests to asking him to reconcile a difficult relationship. Recognize this act of obedience is difficult because Satan doesn’t want people to be reconciled. God often uses the act of reconciliation to bring down barriers, establish new warmth or restore broken relationships. Regardless of whether the relationship is positively changed, the disciple is usually set free from guilt, shame and bitterness because he has been obedient in doing what God has commanded him to do in accepting responsibility for his own sin. Therefore, don’t allow the disciple to convince you that it shouldn’t be done. The cost of humbling himself to seek forgiveness often pays rich and unexpected dividends!