

Sermon on the Mount
Part 3
The Christian and Relationships
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Now let me read to you from Matthew Chapter 5 and I am going to read from Verse 21 down to Verse 26. Matthew Chapter 5, and Jesus is speaking, and He said,

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Now those words of Jesus are part of the Sermon on the Mount, and we have been looking into these three chapters, 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew for three weeks or so, so far.

And the primary message of the Sermon on the Mount is that the Christian life is an inward spiritual life. It is not primarily outward acts. There are outward acts but they come from the life that is within, not the other way around.

And I suggest to you that one of the biggest temptations we face is that we find ourselves looking over our shoulder and putting on a front that we think is acceptable and compatible with other folks around us, but it does not derive from spiritual life and out of a walk with God that makes that outward action natural and spontaneous.

It’s possible to learn spiritual language – much easier to learn language than to experience the life. And Jesus talked about that in Chapter 7 in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7, where He says,

“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

They know the language; they’ve got the language right. And then He said,

“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’”

That is, they engage in all kinds of activity. They exercise seemingly spiritual gifts. They were ministering to other people, “but” Jesus said,

“Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you.’”

Because their spiritual activity originated in themselves and not in the life of God indwelling them. And that is the overall theme that comes through, right through the Sermon on the Mount.

And one of the worst things you can try to do is to try to live a life that you haven’t got, because then it will just be outward performance rather than the expression of the life of God, which He has implanted within us at the moment of new birth.

Chapter 5 focuses on the law of God, particularly the moral law, the Ten Commandments. We talked about that last week, and particularly the point when Jesus said,

“I have not come to abolish the Law. I have come to fulfill them.”

And the point we made was that the law – there were commands under the Old Covenant – are going to become promises under the New Covenant. He fulfills them. When it used to say, “You shall not steal” as a command, it now says, “You shall not steal” as a promise. It used to say, “You shall not commit adultery” as a command. It says, “You shall not commit adultery” as a promise, because the Spirit of God living in us never steals, is never covetous, never is unfaithful. And the Spirit in us now fulfills the law and the commands become promises. And it’s important that we grasp that.

And if I may be so bold as to suggest this, if you weren’t here last week, you might want to pick up a CD and hear what we said last week because what I am going to say this week and the next couple of weeks grow out of that.

You see the great danger in what we said last week is we might sit back and say, “Well if it’s Christ who fulfills the law, what do I do? Do I sit back, arms folded, and say, “Well it’s not me; it’s Christ doing this in me and so I just go into some passive quietistic mode?”

The answer to that is, “no”, because along with our dependence on God, Jesus talked about the need for disciplined living. Now discipline – and we’re going to talk about this, this morning and also the next couple of weeks – discipline is not to get godliness into our lives. That is, if you manage to behave properly, you will become the right person.

That was the big mistake that the Pharisees made. They thought that they could discipline themselves into holiness of life, into godliness of life. No. Discipline is to

allow the Spirit of God, who is indwelling you, to express Himself through a body that obeys orders, through a life that has become obedient. And that obedience is the discipline that I want to talk about. That's why Paul says in Philippians 2:12,

“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

So you work out the life that is in you. That life can stay dormant you see unless you and I are actively allowing the Spirit of God within us to express Himself through us in our disciplined obedience to what He tells us.

Now there are several areas where Jesus speaks about this in Matthew 5. And I want to talk today about the Christian and his or her relationships, and the need for discipline in relationships. That's the passage we read together. Let me read again in Verse 21 when Jesus said,

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement.’”

And what Jesus does there is go behind the murder to the cause of the murder, which is anger.

Now this is actually a very real thing. In a survey taken a while ago, people were asked this question – listen to this question: “If you could eliminate another person by merely pressing a button and suffer no negative consequence yourself, would you do it?”

Just think about that for a moment. If you could eliminate somebody by pressing a button and there's no negative consequence to you, would you do it? Who are you thinking of at this moment?

Sixty-nine percent of all males said, “Yes”. Fifty-six percent of all women said, “Yes”. That is over two thirds of all males and over one half of all females said, “If I could get rid of somebody with no negative consequence to myself, I would actually do it.” You don't know who you are sitting next to this morning.

Now Jesus didn't need a survey to discover that. He knows the heart of every human being. But that is what He talks about here when He says, “Hey listen, you think murder is the issue. Actually there is a cause behind that effect; it's anger.”

The very first murder in the Bible was of course Cain, who killed his brother Abel. Cain had offered a sacrifice and Abel had offered a sacrifice to God. And Abel's was accepted and Cain's was not. And it says in Genesis 4:5 that Cain was very angry and his face was downcast. So Cain responded in anger. And before he actually murdered his brother, in Verse 7, God spoke to Cain and He said this:

“Why are you angry? ...Sin is crouching at your door and desires to have you, but you must master it.”

But Cain did not master it; it mastered him and he became a murderer. And actually what God was speaking to Cain about was his anger. “Why are you angry? Sin is lurking at your door. And if you don’t master it, it will master you.” Anger is the cause that lies behind murder.

But Jesus doesn’t just speak about anger; He also talks about insults as well. Because in Verse 22 – middle of Verse 22 – He says,

“Again I say, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin.”

The margin of my Bible says that “Raca” was an Aramaic term of contempt (Aramaic was the mother tongue of Jesus). And it’s difficult for us to know exactly its meaning but most likely it was an insult of a person’s intelligence. It was sort of saying to somebody, “You’re a blockhead” or “You’re a twit”. And that’s what “Raca” probably meant.

And then He says,

“Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”

To call somebody a fool is not so much to insult their intelligence, as it was to insult their character. In other words, one of these statements insults the head; the other insults the heart. And they may only be verbal, as they are, but actually they are far-reaching.

My mother used to say to me when I was young, “Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.” What she was trying to do, of course, was to say, “Hey, don’t worry about what they said to you, you know, it won’t hurt you.”

Well, with due respect to my mother, she actually was not right. You have probably heard that phrase, haven’t you? “Sticks and stones will break your bones, but words will never hurt you”? Actually words penetrate where sticks and stones cannot, right into the heart. See, what is done in us is far more penetrating and potentially damaging than what is done to us. You can get over a broken nose but often we become defined for the rest of our days by some careless, insulting word, especially when it has been spoken by somebody that we love and we trust.

And Jesus talks about these insults in the same – I was going to say the same breath – certainly the same paragraph as talking about, it’s not just about murder; it’s about anger, it’s about insult that can be devastating in its consequences.

Now let me first talk a little bit about anger generally because clearly not all anger is wrong, as is evident by the fact that God gets angry. And the Scripture speaks of the wrath of God, which is His anger, which is always holy and pure as God is holy and pure.

There are many references to this. In Psalm 85, for an example, and Verse 4, the Psalmist says,

“Restore us again, O God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations?”

And here’s the psalmist saying to God, “God, are You going to go on being angry with us? Is this going to go on until the next generation and the next generation?”

We’ll leave aside the circumstances of that statement by the psalmist for the time being; I am just illustrating the fact that God gets angry. Please don’t sentimentalize God to being always loving, but a love which does not include in it His wrath and His anger.

God does get angry. Scripture makes that clear. At the heart of the Gospel is the cross of Christ, which demonstrates the wrath, the anger of God against sin.

There is such a thing as righteous anger – not just righteous anger for God, but there is such a thing as righteous anger for us as well. Paul, in Ephesians 4 Verse 26 said,

“In your anger do not sin.”

Anger and sin are not synonymous terms. He says, “In your anger, make sure it doesn’t take you into sin but in itself, intrinsically, it may not be sin. It may actually be a justifiable righteous anger.

I have a friend in Britain who wrote an article for a Christian magazine and he called his article, “Some Christians want to be nicer than God”. Intriguing title, made people read it, and it was about anger. And he is saying some Christians want to be nicer than God. They don’t want to ever get angry about things. But actually God does, and we are to as well.

When God’s purposes are prevented or thwarted or resisted He is angered. It is His righteous anger and we too, when God’s purposes are thwarted and prevented and resisted not only have a right to be angry; we have a responsibility to be angry at those things which are wrong.

But here in Matthew Chapter 5 He is not talking about righteous anger; He is talking about an anger which is illegitimate, an anger which is destructive, that if they could, the angry person would actually destroy the person.

Anger is a very powerful emotion. It comes most often from blocked goals, paths, things we want to accomplish and something stops it and we’re not able to accomplish it, and the response is that we become angry.

You will see that in a child of course, whose emotions are all on the sleeve and if a child wants something and you prevent it, the child may well have a tantrum because it's angry, because it's goal has been blocked. That's what anger primarily is.

And it is normally channelled towards other people. That's the implication of Jesus here. There may be circumstances of course that block our goals, there may be illness or poverty or all kinds of things, but the assumption here is that it is people. And actually that is where most of our anger is channelled.

I don't know if you know this, but 30% of all murders in Canada are people murdered by a close family member – maybe a spouse, maybe a parent, child, sibling, in-law – 30%. Because in the close family intimacy and relationship, that's where the anger has been provoked and some sad moment has broken out and led to death.

Now there are three things that we can do with anger. We can express it. That means we can lash out and punch somebody in the eye, and you might feel better for that. It probably won't solve anything but that's one thing you can do with anger; just let it out, express it.

The second thing you can do with anger is suppress it, or repress it. That is, bury it down into the subconscious and deny it. And we think that it is gone but of course here is the catch: it hasn't gone away from our lives; it's been buried and it'll have the habit of coming back.

Sometimes in the slip of the tongue – we talk about a Freudian slip; it was Freud who talked about the power of the subconscious and so when somebody lets something slip out unintentionally or unwittingly, we refer to it as a Freudian slip. This is their subconscious speaking and it may come out in that kind of form.

It may come out in dreams. Sometimes our dreams are always distorted a bit but actually our dreams will express what is going on in our subconscious very often in some form.

And if we leave it, it doesn't simply get better; it churns around and we start to become bitter and withdrawn and cynical and sceptical. Hebrews 12:15 warns:

“See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root may grow up and cause trouble and defile many.”

The root, that bitterroot is below the surface you see, but it's a root of bitterness and it springs up and it causes trouble, defiles many.

Sometimes – and there may be some of us here; in fact I have absolutely no doubt there are many folks here this morning and what I am talking about is very close to the bone, because life is like this, relationships break down. And you may have been hurt and the hurt may be very, very real to you. But pushing it underground and thinking, “I have

closed that door and I have put it in a little compartment, closed the door and it's not going to trouble me any more" is an illusion.

There's a third thing you can do with it. You can express it (hit him on the nose), suppress it (bury it), or the one I am going to use is you can confess it. What do I mean by that? You recognize the feelings and you are absolutely honest about those feelings and you bring them out into the open. That is exactly what Jesus says here to do, because in the next verse, Verse 23 of Matthew 5, it says,

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you...”

Let me pause there a moment. That's intriguing; you remember your brother has something against you. Why has your brother got something against you? There may be one of two reasons. It may be because he is wrong and he has something against you. It might be because you are wrong; that is why he has something against you.

So it is deliberately, I suggest to you, deliberately ambiguous as who's right and who's wrong; that is actually irrelevant. There is something between you and your brother. So,

“... You are offering your gift at the altar and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.”

So you are on your way to the altar – that would be in the temple in Jerusalem – and you remember, “my brother has something against me”. Not on your way home call in and do something about it; He says “put your gift to the side, leave it there. First be reconciled, then come and offer your gift.”

In other words, this is not any longer just about you and your brother; this is actually about you and God as well, because our relationships with one another have vital bearing on our relationship with God. That's why it tells us in 1 John Chapter 4 Verse 20,

“Anyone who says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother is a liar. Anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

And to try to detach one from the other (Well, I'm going to love God, I'm going to trust God, I'm going to be in relationship with God but I am not going to put right the relationship with somebody else), actually Jesus implies and John states, is to deceive ourselves.

So first put it right, he says. Well how do you do this? How do we do this? Well just turn over to Matthew Chapter 18, if you've got a Bible with you, because here in

Matthew Chapter 18 Jesus addresses what to do when somebody sins against you. Again, it's your brother – it's not just – it's somebody with whom you have a relationship. Let me read this to you in Verse 15. I'll read it through slowly because there are four stages that Jesus speaks about here that we need to go through in order to make sure we put this right. Verse 15 says,

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”

Let me just pause there. There are four stages He goes through but that's the first one. It's the simplest but it's probably the most difficult. “Go and talk to your brother.” Now that is difficult because few of us enjoy confrontation. And if you do enjoy confrontation, I suggest you have got a problem anyway.

So most of us start at a disadvantage that this is the last thing I really like doing, especially when it involves challenging somebody else about their faults. That is very difficult. It's almost as difficult when it involves confessing your own faults. That probably isn't quite as difficult as challenging somebody else about theirs.

But actually this is kindness to the other person. It is health to us, because the motivation is not to win an argument or to gain the superior position (“I'm right; you're wrong”). That's not what it's about of course. You'll see it's about restoring the brother.

So what is the concern behind this? I give you a piece of my mind? Well, that may help you but actually it's bigger than that. It's about restoring the brother. Where? Restoring them to yourself first, into a relationship with yourself, and then out of that, of course, there is a restoration to God if there has been something between you.

Now this is something most husbands and wives know about, I hope. If you don't know about this in your marriage, you're probably just pushing everything underneath when things aren't going well. And I know in some marriages it does take courage to talk openly because we are not in a healthy kind of environment where we can be honest and talk openly. Because when we start to do that then it becomes somebody, the other person sort of pinning us down and humiliating us or bringing back the last twenty years or five years, however long it's been, of ammunition.

But Jesus says, do this just between the two of you. Don't involve somebody else. He doesn't say, “Get some people to pray about it with you.” This will work without people praying for you; don't worry, Jesus already commanded it; He'll make it work.

Normally this will resolve the issue. You talk about it, bring it into the open. It may not happen straightaway. It may not be, “Yes, I'm wrong; you're right. I'm sorry.” It may take a while before you get to that and you might both need to say you're sorry because you may both be contributing to the issue that is the problem. But normally this will resolve it. And if he listens, it says, you have won your brother over (the end of Verse 15).

But what if he doesn't listen? Let me read you Verse 16, a second stage.

“If he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’”

Now if the first approach doesn't work, take one or two others along in accordance to the law of Moses who said don't ever listen to one witness; there should be at least two, preferably three, it says in the book of Deuteronomy. And so take one or two others along. Then that means, along with you, there are two or three of you.

The advantage of that is that the people you bring along with you are not themselves parties to this conflict and tension. They are objective and they can help to either re-enforce the wrongness of what has taken place. Or, in their objectivity, they may actually see that the way you are seeing it is a little bit exaggerated beyond the facts. And you actually are making this molehill into a mountain. Well, that will help as well, if they bring that perspective and help you to see it in a different light. Either way, the testimony of two or three others that are objective will help to clarify.

And if the first meeting with the person alone has not worked, well this probably will, and bring about resolution. But what if it doesn't? Well in Verse 17 – the first part of Verse 17 – Jesus said,

“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”

And what that presumably means is not make a public announcement about it but you take it to those you trust who are leaders within the local church to which you have an accountability.

And Jesus is looking ahead when He said this. There was no church when He taught this to His disciples because the church began the Day of Pentecost. So He was looking ahead. And in this there is some implicit teaching about the importance of the local church.

It's not just the place we go to, to express our worship and get some preaching and Bible teaching; it is also a place where we come into community with others and we have a mutual responsibility towards one another to help one another to grow in effectiveness. And part of that will involve, from time to time, the necessity and the opportunity to correct and to discipline. Again, never to score a point, never to humiliate anybody, but the purpose remains the same all through: to restore the brother.

Now, sadly, our understanding of the church seems to have moved a long way from the New Testament where it just becomes a place to go on Sundays and we pick and choose and we can float around. We can go here this week and somewhere else next week and somewhere else the week after and then come back again for a week or two and then we go off somewhere else, and we're not accountable. And we may receive lots of

information, we may have some good experiences on Sunday mornings, but actually our growth is going to be superficial unless we are imbedded in a local community of believers of which we are a part and of which there is not only the sitting in rows and listening, but there is the opportunity for the *koinōnia*, is a New Testament Greek word, “fellowship” – it doesn’t translate easily into English – community with one another. And in that context, said Jesus, this issue should be addressed and dealt with.

Now if talking to the person doesn’t work, bringing one or two others will probably resolve it. But if that doesn’t, take it to the church. That should resolve it. But what if it doesn’t? Middle of Verse 17:

“If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

That doesn’t mean have nothing more to do with him; that isn’t how we are to treat pagans and tax collectors. But treat him as someone who is to all practical intents and purposes, outside now of the church and needs to be brought to repentance and restoration.

There was an occasion in 1 Corinthians when Paul told the Corinthian church that they must do this in the case of a man who was clearly a believer, a member of the church in Corinth, but who, it was discovered, was sleeping with his father’s wife (presumably his step mother).

And in 1 Corinthians 5 Verse 2, Paul says about this incident,

“Shouldn’t you be filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?”

In other words, “Why aren’t you dealing with this?”

And then he says in Verse 5 – 1 Corinthians Chapter 5 Verse 5, he says,

“Hand this man over to Satan, so that the flesh” (I think what that means is his physical body there) “may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”

I think what that means is this: hand this man over to Satan, put him outside of the church, put him back into the world. His body will be of no use to God though his spirit will be saved on the day of the Lord. We won’t talk about that; that’s not the point this morning; but that is one of the strong verses for anyone who has doubts about the nature of eternal security.

And then Paul says,

“Don’t you know a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a batch without yeast...”

If you know anything about biblical symbolism, yeast, or leaven, is right through the Bible a picture of sin. And Paul says about this instant, “Get rid of the yeast” because yeast contaminates.

If you put some yeast into dough, it will go right through the whole dough of course. And he is likening that to the presence and influence of this man wilfully living in sin and rebellion and he’s saying, “If you want this church in Corinth to function well, if you want this church in Corinth to know the flow of the Spirit of God within it and through it, you had better deal with this.”

Please don’t think that the way you and I behave and the way we live our lives and the relationships that we allow to fragment and we don’t do anything about fixing them, especially with fellow believers, don’t have an effect on the impact of the church.

It’s a fairly consistent phenomenon that whenever there is great movements of revival in any part of the world, one of the features of that revival is people getting right with each other.

There are many stories. I began to look for some stories of that but I haven’t time to tell them to you anyway and there are just so many.

But I would think it’s likely there has never been any real movement of revival – that is, the unusual working of God and people coming to Christ where there haven’t been Christians who have been putting things right with one another.

And I ask this question: Is the getting right with each other the result of the revival or is it actually the getting right with each other one of the contributing causes of the revival? Because in 1 Corinthians 5 when Paul says, “Put this man out”, he is saying “Get rid of this yeast” and using the analogy he uses, “be unleavened bread, be a loaf without yeast, a church that is dealing with sin within it.”

Now I don’t know many churches that are doing that. We’re not. We live in a day of course in a society where we are very, very aware of our own rights. “How dare anybody else come and talk to me about things that are my business?” But actually we belong to a kingdom when we become part of the church of Jesus Christ that operates under the authority of Christ.

And Campbell Morgan, who was a great Bible expositor over a century ago; he writes this:

“Any church of Jesus Christ is weak in the proportion in which its members allow false pity or sentiment to prevent their being faithful to this great work of attempting to show an erring brother his fault in order that he may be restored.”

Any church is weak in the measure to which it allows false pity and sentiment to prevent it dealing with this important work.

You see the Christian life is about relationships with God, of course, first and foremost, and with others. Matthew 5 is primarily about relationships. We're going to look through the rest of that chapter and we're going to see in the next few weeks it's primarily about relationships.

You see it's relationships that feed and nurture the soul, to love and be loved. One of the things that Matthew 6 teaches is that you do not find meaning in material things. They are valuable and useful as they serve us, but if they become the objective of our lives, they never satisfy. It's relationships that satisfy.

And you know there are people who will sacrifice relationships for material things. They will neglect their spouse, they will neglect their children, they'll neglect their family, they'll neglect their friends for that which actually does not satisfy.

One day in Matthew 22 a lawyer came to Jesus and it said, "he tested Him with questions." In other words, you are always trying to think, "What's behind the question?" that you usually do with lawyers I guess. What are they really asking here? And he said to Jesus,

"Which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

"Now, Jesus," he said in effect, "there's ten of them. Which is the greatest? Is it 'you will have no other gods before me?' Do you think that's the greatest?"

"Is it, 'you shall not steal?'"

"Is it the sanctity of human life and so, 'Do no murder'?"

"Is it greed, 'You shall not covet'?"

"Is it sexual fidelity, 'You shall not commit adultery'?"

"I mean, which of these ten is the greatest? If You were to evaluate them, if You were to put them in order of priority, one to ten, what would You put at the top?"

And Jesus replied it says, by not quoting one of the Ten Commandments. He replied,

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and the greatest commandment."

It doesn't occur in the Ten Commandments; it's taken from Deuteronomy Chapter 6. And actually the Ten Commandments are given in Deuteronomy Chapter 5. There are

two accounts of the Ten Commandments. That was one – Deuteronomy Chapter 5. And then in amplifying these, God speaks to Moses – what does this mean, how is this going to work out? and He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind.”

Jesus quoted that. And then He said,

“And the second is like unto it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”

That’s a quotation from Leviticus Chapter 19 and actually the whole verse, how Jesus quoted it, is relevant to what I am saying this morning because He said,

“Do not bear a grudge against your people but love your neighbor as yourself.”

So the very context in which that was given was about not having a grudge against somebody, but love them. In other words, loving them is dealing with the grudge, dealing with the issue that has created this tension between you.

And then said Jesus,

“All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

You could hang them, you know, like a rail across the top and then the ten coat hangers underneath with all the Ten Commandments with “that’s about loving God, this is about loving your neighbor”. They all fit into one or other of these because the Christian life and life itself is about right relationship with God and right relationship with people. And we cannot detach the one from the other.

And if we’re going to take Jesus seriously, as we must, because these are the words of Jesus, then I want to say to you as we finish this morning, that if there is in your life broken relationships that you are not attempting to rectify, you will hinder the work of God in your life, you will strangle the spiritual life that is within you.

If you are, metaphorically, going to the temple, you are engaging in some Christian act, you may be coming on a Sunday morning, you may be engaging in some other Christian ministry or service of some kind, and you remember, “my brother has something against me”, first leave your gift, first go and be reconciled, then come. There’s a priority there, because your relationship with others will affect your relationship with God and your effectiveness with God.

And I want to say to you as we close that there may well be some folks here this morning and you need to go home and write a letter or make a telephone call, or pay a debt, or offer an apology, or extend forgiveness, or confess sin to someone, because without that, you will not grow and deepen in your relationship with God, and therefore in all the benefits and blessings that flow from that. This will be the point of blockage.

If you are offering your gift at the altar, remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift, first go and be reconciled, then come offer your gift.

Is God speaking to you? If He is, the person you need to get right with is probably in your mind right now. They will probably come to mind in the course of thinking about this, this morning.

It'll take courage but boy will you be glad, so glad, if you act on it and deal with it.

Let's pray together. Just in the quietness, if there is someone that you are angry with, if someone is angry with you, maybe somebody who has spoken a word that has been damaging, or you have done that. Maybe it's a spouse; maybe it's an ex-spouse. Maybe it's your children or parents, a colleague, a neighbor.

Lord Jesus Christ, we are thankful that Your Word is true and therefore we trust it. It's direct; it's unambiguous. It's not for everybody else but me; it is for me. And I pray, Lord Jesus, that in this place today there will be people who will know the joy of restored relationship, painful though the process may be, thank You that the end in most cases will be the end result of restoration and reconciliation and joy. But beyond that, it releases the Spirit of God who is otherwise grieved and quenched in our hearts. And I pray this morning, Father, that the Holy Spirit will lead and convict and guide us and give us the courage to obey. We pray it in Jesus' Name, Amen.