



Reconcile with One Another

Matthew 5:21–37

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar.

First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

February 12, 2017

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 2: 6-10 • Matthew 5: 13-28

I have, on occasion, reflected on what life must be like for those in prison: day after day life must seem boringly the same. What must it be like for a person to wake up every morning knowing that tomorrow and the next day and the day after that will be much the same until the sentence is finally served? To make life more bearable for them and to help make time pass with less of a burden, some people have made arrangements with publishers to have periodicals sent to inmates in prison.

Prison sentences, of course, are the result of breaking the law and there are doubtless many reasons why individuals break the law; nonetheless, a law was broken and consequences must be served.

Fortunately, I can say that I have never been imprisoned. That does not mean, however, that I have not broken the law (driving over the speed limit for instance) on a number of occasions nor does it mean that my conscience has not suffered for such violations.

That brings us to the question the scriptures set before us at this time: Why are laws necessary at all? Given that life on this planet would be nearly unbearable, there obviously needs to be certain rules of conduct that will help us live at peace with one another. That's the answer!

Unfortunately, of course, even the laws that are already in place do not prevent us from taking advantage of one another and the community at large. I imagine it must have something to do with our personal assumption that we are not responsible for the life of those around us or for life in general. In that case we obviously pay the price for what we do.

Let's then take a look at the scriptures and see what the biblical authors have to say about the necessity of laws.

The Jewish wisdom scribes, often speak of life as a succession of human choices: "If you choose," writes Sirach, "you can keep the commandments. Before us lie life and death; whichever we choose will be given us." Unfortunately for most of us, we do not usually reflect on the consequences of our individual actions; the choice lying before us may be based on the false assumption that it will not affect anyone else. At the same time we may simply decide to take the risk assuming that, generally speaking, no one will know and no great harm will be done. It may even seem to us that the choices we make will have no great effect on the world at large.

Nonetheless, the principle still seems correct and true: we live in a world alongside millions of others: what we do, the decisions we make somehow affect life on this planet whether we are cognizant of it or not. The fact that we do not notice it

does not mean that something harmful has not occurred.

Turning to the second reading, Paul, in his pastoral letter to the Christians in Corinth, insists that the sacred word he preaches is not the wisdom of this age nor of the rulers of this age. "What we utter is God's wisdom, a mysterious and hidden wisdom planned by God before all the ages for our glory."

Following up on Paul's words, it may often seem to us that the current ways of the world, the customs of the times bear a certain wisdom but often it may simply be a shallow, thoughtless wisdom, whatever appears to work best in the short run. Paul would claim that this is not true; only decisions that flow from deeper thought and honest reflection, only such decisions have true and lasting value.

Finally, Jesus in the gospel tells his disciples (and us) that merely keeping the law, whether the Ten Commandments or the common law upon which our every day life depends, all this is necessary and profitable, but it is not enough, not nearly enough. "Unless your holiness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees" Jesus says, "you shall not enter the kingdom of God."

Translating those words of Jesus into our own times, Jesus might suggest to us that keeping the Commandments, the moral law of the land even the laws of the church may well be only the first step to holiness, only the beginning, the obvious and the expected, but also the superficial. It's only the decisions that rise from the heart out of honesty and generosity; only these choices offer the promise of eternal life in God's kingdom.

Finally, imagine the pure joy one can experience when we realize that law should not really be all that necessary, at least when the heart rules supreme.

Reconciliation

A Vital Part of Christ's Message

Jesus Christ began His public ministry by declaring the gospel of the Kingdom of God to the people in Galilee. What He said and did during His three-year ministry was so incredible that it just couldn't be ignored. Jesus called people to repentance and gave them hope. He gave them encouragement and healed their diseases. Even more, He possessed the power to forgive their sins.

Christ's countrymen were astonished that He spoke with such authority, and people excitedly crowded about Him everywhere He went. The popular response to His message was remarkable.

But His teachings weren't always warmly received. Sometimes they clashed with long-held traditions and ideas of men.

Part of His message, after all, was that all of mankind could be reconciled to God. Christ's own disciples were shocked to find Him talking with a Samaritan woman (John 4:27). Jesus had acknowledged to the woman that He was indeed the Messiah and that eternal life was available to all through Him (verses 10-14, 25-26). He explained that salvation wasn't offered to the Jews only; it was extended to gentiles as well.

Some accepted this as great news, but others felt threatened by it. Some had fallen into exclusivism in their worship of God and were not about to share what they viewed as their God-given right with just anyone, and especially not with gentiles.

Some who heard Jesus preach the gospel in the synagogue in Nazareth became so angry when He brought up the subject of God's dealings with gentiles that they even tried to kill Him (Luke 4:24-29).

It was a tumultuous time as Christ continued His public ministry to prepare for establishing His Church. That God would offer salvation to all, Jew and gentile alike, eventually sank into the disciples' understanding and grew evident in their teaching after Christ's death. Then, as their range of influence expanded, so spread hostility and opposition to this part of their message.

The apostle Paul addressed the breach between the Jews and gentiles in Ephesians 2. The Jews had gone so far as to erect a wall in the courtyard of the temple to keep the gentiles away from them while they worshiped. As everyone learns to

live according to God's law of love (Romans 13:8-10), proper relationships among human beings will develop and grow. This is a vital part of the message Jesus Christ preached to the people of Galilee, and then to Judea, and that's the message the disciples began to spread throughout the world. It's as timeless a message now as it was then: We need reconciliation. We can be thankful that God allows us not only to experience it, but also to share it with others as He proceeds with His plan to offer salvation to all of mankind.