What Scripture Tells Us About Reconciliation

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1 Chronicles 21:1-17

A Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to count the people of Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, "Go, number Israel from, Beer-sheba to Dan, and bring me a report, so that I may know their number. But Joab said, "May the Lord increase the number of his people a hundredfold! Are they not, my lord the king, all of them my lord's servants? Why then should my lord require this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel? But the king's word prevailed against Joab. So Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came back to Jerusalem. Joab gave the total count of the people to David. In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who grew the sword, and in Judah four hundred seventy thousand who drew the sword. But he did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering for the king's command was abhorrent to Joab.

But God was displeased with this thing, and he struck Israel. David said to God, "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. But now, I pray you, take away the guilt of your servant; for I have done very foolishly." The Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David, "Thus says the Lord: Three things I offer you; choose one of them, so that I may do it to you.'" So Gad came to David and said to him, "Thus says the Lord, 'Take your choice: either three years of famine, or three months of devastation by your foes, while the sword of your enemies overtakes you; or three days of the sword of the Lord, pestilence on the land, and the angel of the Lord destroying throughout all the territory of Israel.' Now decide what answer I shall return to the one who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress; let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for his mercy is very great; but let me not fall into human hands."

So the Lord sent a pestilence on Israel; and seventy thousand persons fell in Israel. And God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it; but when he was about to destroy it, the Lord took note and relented concerning the calamity; he said to the destroying angel, "Enough! Stay your hand." The angel of the Lord was then standing by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, and in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces. And David said to God, "Was it not I who gave the command to count the people? It is I who have sinned and done very wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Let your hand, I pray, O Lord my God, be against me and against my father's house; but do not let your people be plagued!"

True Repentance

Think of a time when you said, "I'm sorry." just because you had to. Now, think of a time when you were truly sorry. What is the difference between these two experiences? There is a big difference between going through the motions of repentance and being truly repentant. For example, David sinned-although it is not clear to us why-by ordering a census to count his people. He accepted a consequence that he hoped would be the easiest. But when he saw the harm he had caused his people, he became truly repentant and accepted complete responsibility for his sin.

Repentance requires true sorrow and a change of heart. It leads to an active response to make amends to those who are affected by our sin. Such repentance is called reconciliation, and Catholics celebrate it in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

John 20: 21-23

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them," Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Reconciliation

In John 20:21-23, Jesus empowers his disciples to forgive the sins of others in his name. This is one of the Bible passages that the Catholic Church teaches is the basis for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Penance). Some may know this sacrament by the term confession, because we confess our sins to a priest. The priest serves as a representative of both God and the community in the sacrament. But confessing our sins is only one step in the reconciliation process. We must also be truly sorry and attempt to repair the damage our sin has done. By seeking true reconciliation through the sacrament, we restore the peace of the risen Christ.

1 John 1:5-10

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinners, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

Live in the light.

Do you ever find it hard to decide whether something is right or wrong? Instead of the sharp distinction between light and darkness described in John, you might see a lot of shades of gray. But be careful; you might simply be seeing what you want to see! Remember, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves". There are times when our choices aren't clear-but usually, they are. Listen to your inner voice of honesty and integrity, and courageously choose to live in the light!

1 John 2:7-11

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word that you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment that is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says, "I am in the light, while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or a sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.

Be Reconciled.

Sometimes, it's hardest to show your love to the people you are closest to. Maybe you get along great with all your friends but have disagreements with some family members. Or in your social circle, you are always tense around that one person with whom you had angry words several months ago. The author of John tells us that we cannot ignore a relationship with a brother or sister in the Lord who has been upset. The Hmong culture has the same tradition. If you frighten or hurt or offend someone, you have created an imbalance of spirits. It is your responsibility to go back and seek to re-establish harmony. It is the Hmong custom to go to a shaman (an elder of the community, a holy person) for advice and to perform a ritual for reconciliation.

The Catholic tradition has the sacrament of Reconciliation for the same purpose: to admit the imbalance in a relationship caused by sin, discuss ways to make things right. Express sorrow, and celebrate God's forgiveness and love.