

## Rebuilding Bridges December 14, 2014

Where, as far as you know, are you no longer welcome? Where can you not go back to because you did not leave on good terms? To where would you say, "I can't go back there, I burned the bridges"?

To burn your bridges is a phrase meaning to cut off all ties in a relationship. It means you can't go back to a previous relationship.

Maybe you can't go back to a previous job. You were angry when you left and told your boss off. Or maybe you badmouthed the company on Facebook. Maybe you slammed a door or broke something when you left. Is there a job you can't go back to because you burned your bridges?

Maybe you can't go back to a previous school. Maybe you got evicted from a school for bad behavior. You so alienated the principal and teachers that they don't want you back. Is there a school or college to which you can't go back because you burned the bridges?

Maybe you are estranged from a family member because of what she said and then you said or he did and then you did. Maybe they started it or maybe you started it. Maybe you are to blame for all the misunderstandings. Maybe you are to blame that things blew up and everyone got angry. And now you feel you can't go to the family get-together because you are afraid you burned the bridges of relationship.

Maybe you can't go back to a previous church. After what you said and did, they probably don't want you back. You figure that they would just ignore you, give you a cold shoulder. Is there a church you can't go back to because you have burned the bridges to that relationship?

Have you burned bridges in your life? Is it true of you that you can't go back to your hometown, you can't go back to that neighbor? Have you burned the bridges of a previous relationship?

You can't go back because you burned the bridges of good will, of cooperation, of mutual respect. You burned the bridges of humility, of friendship, of compassion. Even if you wanted to,... and you might want to,... you assume you can't go back.

And you may be right. They might not accept you back. They might not be willing to forgive and restore the relationship.

However,... even if no possibility of rebuilding a bridge to most relationships exists, I would hope that there is the possibility of going back to a church. There SHOULD always be the possibility of going back to a church. Why? Because...

**Bridge re-building is a key teaching of Christianity. This is called reconciliation.**

There are several word pictures in the Bible for salvation from sin. These words include redemption, pardon, and justification. Reconciliation is one of those picture words. It is the picture of a messed up relationship that is restored.

When God created mankind, Adam and Eve, those first humans enjoyed a special relationship with God. You can think of it this way:

At first God and mankind related to each other face to face. The Bible says that God walked in the garden in which Adam and Eve lived. They had some form of close relationship. Then Adam and Eve sinned against God, pictured as turning their back on God. This created a barrier between them and God.

We have offended God's glory by our sin. We have messed up the relationship that we could have with God. Our sin needs to be dealt with in order for us to be reconciled to each other. Jesus' death on the cross is God's solution to dealing with our sin problem. However, God sent Jesus and accepted Jesus' death as compensation, inviting Adam to be reconciled.

**2 Corinthians 5:18 (NIV)** ... God... reconciled us to himself through Christ...God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.  
(Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:20-22)

Now it is up to us to choose to admit our sin, humble ourselves before God, and be reconciled to God. This will restore the relationship. This is how we can re-build the bridge to a relationship with God.

All of this is summed up in the one word, reconciliation. This is one of the ideas we must communicate to lost people. They are alienated from God by their sin. They need to be reconciled to God.

So how do we communicate this truth? **How do we clearly communicate the promise of reconciliation with God to our lost world?**

**We must model reconciliation in the church.**

To communicate this truth correctly and sincerely, we must seek reconciliation in our relationships with each other here in God's church. God's church is built on this truth of reconciliation. In His church, God is overcoming the natural walls that people build up between themselves and others. We see this in the Bible in the early years of churches being formed. The first churches were all made up of Jews. But in His own time, God brought the message of salvation to non-Jews also. So churches were formed with both Jews and non-Jews as members.

For centuries there had been animosity between Jews and non-Jews. God had made the Jews to be a very different people from all the others around them. God made the Jews follow very different religious practices, different family customs, different national values, and a different diet. They were not allowed to marry non-Jews. They were not to form partnerships with non-Jews. Eventually they developed a hatred towards non-Jews. In return, the non-Jews hated the Jews.

Now they were members of the same group, the church. Now they had to learn to get along, even love each other. And they did. They did so because in Jesus Christ, they

had been reconciled to each other. Not only were they reconciled to God, they were reconciled to each other.

Previous to the gospel they related to each other based on their differences. Now, they related to each other based on what they had in common. They had salvation in Jesus in common and that ended the hostility they had before. Their love of Jesus was stronger than their old hatred for each other.

Paul writes about this in his letter to the church in Ephesus, made up of both Jews and non-Jews.

**Ephesians 2:11-22 (NIV)** Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles (non-Jews) by birth... were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Jesus tore down the wall of hostility and brought reconciliation. That means that those churches were made up of people who had been natural enemies. It had become ingrained in them to hate each other. Each generation passed on those hateful attitudes to their children. We seen the same occur in our day. Parents pass down hatred and prejudice to their children. Racial prejudice, ethnic prejudice, religious prejudice, political prejudice, even socio-economic prejudice are all passed this way from one generation to the next. Jesus breaks down these walls of hatred and prejudice.

Emmanuel Baptist Church has always tried to be a church that emphasizes reconciliation. We eagerly welcome all Christians to be a part of Emmanuel Baptist Church. It is true that outside of Jesus we might not have much in common otherwise.

That is true in families. Maybe there is someone in your own family that... if you were not related to each other, you wouldn't have a relationship. I have relatives that, if I wasn't related to them, and met them in my neighborhood, we would not develop a relationship with each other. We do not have much in common. Our faith is different. Our interests are different. Our values and lifestyles are different. About all we really have in common is that we are part of the same extended family. If not for that, we would not be drawn to each other.

This is true in churches. Outside of Jesus there might not be anything to draw us into relationship with each other. The idea that you are going to personally like every person in your church,... any church, is ridiculous. People are different, even in Jesus. Our different personalities, backgrounds, and maturity make it hard to like everyone. The potential is always there to offend each other and take offense at each other. We have in our church some who are republicans and some who are democrats. We have some PCs, and some Macs, we have some who favor iPads and some who favor other tablets. We have iPhone people, Samsung people, and Blackberry people. Just in our church, we have some Redskins fans, some Ravens fans, some Stealers fans, and even a Cowboy fan or two.

The solution to peace in the church among all these different kinds of people is to keep our focus on Jesus and the gospel. Jesus is what makes us one. We are reconciled to each other in Jesus. It is because we are all serving Jesus, trying become like Jesus, wanting to help each other obey Jesus, and worshipping Jesus that we come together. Jesus is what brings us together. Jesus is who holds us together. Jesus is who grows us together. **Jesus is the basis for reconciliation in Emmanuel Baptist Church.**

And if you ever get mad at me, or I get mad at you, our love of Jesus will be the motive for pursuing reconciliation with each other. Jesus doesn't want any of us to get mad and leave the church. Jesus wants us to honor His sacrifice for our reconciliation with God by pursuing reconciliation with each other.

Some people have left us in the past. We try to offer them the opportunity of reconciliation with us. Some accept and some don't. I hope and pray that all these will one day seek to be reconciled to us.

Reconciliation is what God has done in Jesus and it is what God wants US to do in Jesus, always. Reconciliation is the at the heart of Christianity.

**What will it take to live out God's message of reconciliation?**

**If I sin against you, I should seek reconciliation with you.**

**Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)** "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.

If you sin against someone, apologize. Rebuild a relationship bridge to that person. You might have to humble yourself towards them. You might have to say to them, "I sinned against you. Will you forgive me? Can we be reconciled?"

**If you sin against me, I should offer reconciliation with you.**

**Matthew 18:15 (NIV)** "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.

You might have to say to them, "I said I'd never forgive. God changed my mind. Like God was willing to forgive me, I am willing to forgive you." This action is the greatest witness to the power of God to save that you can show another person.

Notice that you can't make the other person responsible for reconciliation. You can't say, "He has to make the first move." If you are a servant of Jesus, it is ALWAYS your responsibility to pursue reconciliation.

Parents must set the example for reconciliation in the home by apologizing to their kids when the parents make a mistake. Don't just make them say they are sorry. Teach them how to feel sorry, to feel compassion for the other person. Teach them to imagine what the other person feels like and be sorry for making the person feel that way.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates well the power of reconciliation. It is a story about two brothers. They lived on adjoining farms, but they had a deep quarrel. They had often shared their resources, but that practice stopped; and there was nothing left but bitterness. One morning one brother, who we will call Andrew answered a knock at his door. It was a carpenter. The carpenter asked if there was any work to do.

Andrew said that there WAS something he could do. He took the carpenter to where the two properties met and showed him how the other brother had taken a bulldozer and created a creek where the meadow used to be. Andrew said, "I know he did this to make me angry. I want you to help me get even by building a big fence so I won't have to see him or his property ever again."

So the carpenter worked hard all day. When he reported back, Andrew noticed there was no fence. Instead, the carpenter had used his skill to build a footbridge over the creek instead. Andrew's brother saw the bridge and believed it to be an offer of reconciliation. He was moved that his brother would do such a thing, and was on his way over the bridge. The two brothers met on the bridge and embraced. They saw the carpenter packing his tools and asked him to stay a while and do more work. The carpenter replied, "I'm sorry, but I have other bridges to build."

God built a bridge to you through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Are you willing to accept it? Are you willing to admit your sin, put your faith in Jesus as your Savior, and turn your life over to Jesus as your Lord?