

BE QUICK TO ADMIT GUILT

In parabolic form, Christ lays down yet another principle to getting right with your brother. And that is when you have done something wrong as illustrated in Matthew 5:22 (verbal abuse), then deal with it quickly and preemptively instead of just sitting on it.

Matthew 5:25–26 (NKJV)

25 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison.

26 Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

The picture here is that of a person who has wronged someone (here called an adversary). By the way, the quickest way to make an adversary is to wrong someone.

In Christ's day, under Roman law, if someone didn't pay a debt they owed, they could be brought before a judge. And the judge would then order them to be thrown into prison until the debt was paid. This was called "**debtors' prison**".

People, even God's people, are often very reluctant to admit guilt! Again, our ego always seems to be in the mix. In the form of this parable, Christ is saying if you are wrong, be quick to admit it and make things right. If you remain unrepentant, things are only going to get worse. You cannot just wait this out and think the consequences will eventually just go away.

We sometimes tend to think, "**If I just wait long enough, it will go away.**" It won't – not in the case where you have a clear adversary that you clearly should get right with.

Now realize there are all kinds of situations in life where you can't do anything about the situation because it really isn't your problem.

Romans 12:18 (NKJV)

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

You can't help what other people do, but you are responsible for your own actions. In this illustration given by Christ, the person clearly knows they have wronged a brother, and they clearly know what they should do to get

right. The onus is on them! In this case, the offending person needs to move on it. They need to take the initiative to get right and not put it off.

Footnote: Roman Catholic theology bases the concept of purgatory (in part) on these verses here in Matt. 5:25-26. They believe that in the after-life people can finish paying for their sins through a suffering experience in purgatory. The problem is that the Bible does not teach this. In death, Christ said, "***It is finished!***" Jesus paid it all! It is FINISHED! To say otherwise amounts to a works salvation and not salvation purely by GRACE (What Christ did on the cross) through FAITH.

The Bible is clear that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone! All glory to God alone!

Let's make some application of the principle laid out by Christ here in Matt. 5:25-26. The unbeliever is guilty and on the way to judgment day to face the Judge, who happens to be the HOLY God of the universe. The most sensible thing to do is to "settle out of court" (so to speak) and get right with God through repentance and faith. God invites the sinner saying...

Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)

18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.

Isaiah 55:1 (NKJV)

1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.

The time to repent is NOW. If you wait until death, it will be too late. Then you will be paying for it for all eternity (cf. Heb. 9:27).

Now, let me make an application in relation to believers who are the real target of Christ's teaching in this context. As believers, when we get off track and things are not right between a fellow believer and us, what should we do? Well, we should realize that we too are headed for judgment – disciplinary judgment and beyond that the judgment seat of Christ.

We, too, should "settle out of court" (so to speak) and get right with each other and thereby with God.

1 Corinthians 11:31–32 (NKJV)

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

James 5:16 (NKJV)

16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

When we have done wrong as followers of Christ, we should seek reconciliation as quickly as possible. Our relationship with each other is intertwined with our relationship with God. To be right with God, we have to be right with each other. This is God-honoring and in keeping with “kingdom ethics”.