

KEEPERS, FAKERS, BREAKERS, AND MAKERS

*Romans 12:11-12, 16-18 and **Matthew 5:9***

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September 30, 2018

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” Matthew 5:9

INTRODUCTION: A PERSONAL CONFESSION

I want to come before you today in a spirit and tone of humility. I am not by nature a peacemaker. My personality is one which, believe it or not, wants to avoid conflict.

That doesn't mean I don't want things done my way; I just don't like having conflict over it! I would rather have everyone like me and just do it my way because they like me. As I mature, I realize more and more just how much fantasy both of those thoughts actually are. Still, I dislike conflict.

So... I ignore conflict. I try to change the subject unless of course I feel like I can have the upper hand in the conversation. But that's mostly about differences of opinion. When it comes to ongoing, relational conflict, my natural inclination is to hold my feelings inside until I can't stand it anymore and then BAM. Explosion of emotion. As I've matured – hopefully – I have begun to recognize several problems with this strategy, or lack thereof...

1. Very rarely do the people I'm upset with the most feel the heat of the explosion.
2. The shrapnel injures everyone around me, usually those closest to me.
3. My physical and emotional health suffer.
4. The problem that is the cause of the explosion seldom gets addressed.
5. I am not following the Example of Jesus Christ, who I claim to be my Lord and Savior.

He was called “the Prince of Peace” by the prophet Isaiah and declared to be our Peace by the Apostle Paul. He is our peace with God and one another.

follow Jesus' example

As disciples of Jesus, we know that we are called to follow His example, to live out the values of heaven in our lives on earth. Because of Christ, we are heirs and subjects of a kingdom that is out of this world. The values of the kingdom of King Jesus seem very upside-down compared to the values of the kingdoms of this world. Yet it is our citizenship in this Kingdom that forms our identity and guides us to our destiny.

series review

I don't know about you, but I am challenged every time I hear preaching on the beatitudes and this series, "Living Heaven on Earth" is no exception.

Week 1 Pastor Richard reminded us that we must acknowledge our spiritual bankruptcy because when we acknowledge our brokenness we will find that there is so much more to gain in God.

Week 2 Darrell reminded us that those who mourn their own sin and the impact of their sin on others will experience the comfort of God deep within their souls.

Week 3 Darrell helped us see that those who walk in the ways of meekness are rich because they walk in God's success story.

Week 4 We learned together that we need to starve our addictions, burn our lists, and train our appetites to desire and hunger for righteousness given to us only by Christ.

Week 5 Pastor Richard shared with us that mercy is shared abundantly with us by God, and so it should not be strained in us when we apply it to others.

Week 6 last week Pastor Richard reminded us that none of us are perfect. We all need to examine our hearts, recognizing that we are blessed as we yield to the Holy Spirit's purifying power in our hearts and lives.

And so we come back to examine the seventh beatitude today. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."

I believe that the first part of our discussion needs to be the realization that

CONFLICT IS REALITY

persecution vs. peace

If peace were always always possible with everyone, the eighth beatitude would never have been spoken. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness." Persecution is certainly not a peaceful situation for those who are persecuted. And if they are persecuted for Jesus' sake and the Gospel's, did they fail to be makers of peace? Apparently, Jesus would say, "No."

From Cain and Abel in Genesis to the shooter we had on the Northeast side of Bakersfield two weeks ago, conflict is woven into the fabric of our history and in many tragic and well-publicized cases unnecessary violence springs from the conflict.

Church in Corinth

In other situations, conflict foments in arguing. Soon there develops an inability to work together toward a common goal or even to get along. Paul said that “there must be factions [divisions] among you.” (1 Corinthians 11:18-19) Why? So he could see a good fight? No! But when people disagree and take sides, divisions arise. Some divisions and factions are based on preferences and are unnecessary divisions. Disagreements can be worked through. However, sometimes disagreements arise over issues that are more foundational: perhaps moral or doctrinal. Good Christians can be found on either side of an issue, and sometimes for surprisingly valid reasons. However, when those issues are foundational and conflicts arise, sometimes even good Christians can’t worship and serve together without coming back to repeated arguments over unresolved conflict. Instances like those are what I believe Paul was referring to when he said this, and sometimes separation may need to take place, even among good Christians. But that does not mean that Christians on either side of an issue cannot seek to make peace with each other.

conflicts throughout church history

[If you don’t know the story of the conflict of Paul and Barnabas, please read Acts 15:36-41 and also 2 Timothy 4:11.] From Paul and Barnabas to the great Reformers to influential Christian leaders of our day, there was and even still is conflict in the Church as well as in our culture. Mistakes have been, are being, and will be made. But victories of peace have also been won, are being won, and can be won in the Spirit and Name of Jesus. *Not with swords’ loud clashing, nor roll of stirring drums, with deeds of love and mercy, the heavenly kingdom comes.* As we seek to understand, to heal, and to love, even those who don’t want to understand, heal, or love us back, we become instruments of peace and we look more and more like our Father, who is in heaven.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Ken Sande

There are lots of resources out there about being a peacemaker. Some of the more practical material I drew from in preparing this message come from a book by Ken Sande, “The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict.”

JD

I have a very wise – sage, in fact – friend who is fond of saying, “The guaranteed result of any attempt to communicate is misunderstanding.” (JD Vaughn)

“does that make sense?”

That’s one of the reasons I laugh at myself whenever I try to explain something to someone and catch myself asking this question as I try to wrap up, “Does that make sense?” Well OF COURSE IT DOES. It makes sense that if I nod my head you’ll stop talking. 😊 But does that make the same sense to you as it did to me? Perhaps two questions are better than one:

[New Slide: Two Questions to Engage Conversation]

1. “What did you hear me say just now?” and
2. “How do you feel about that?”

tech pulls us apart

Once again, our technology and social media that was designed to bring us closer together pulls us further apart. When three-line posts and sarcastic reactions replace conversations, why shouldn’t we expect more conflict and not less?

4 ways of dealing with conflict

As the title I chose suggests, there are a variety of ways to deal with conflict.

- When faced with conflict, the peacekeeper clings to stated guidelines, procedures, and the rule of law to enforce a very fragile truce. When conflict comes, peacekeepers often hide behind tradition, position, rules, and/or formality.
- Peacefakers deny the conflict! Or, if they admit to a conflict, they will deny the seriousness and scope of the conflict, often putting their heads in a dark place they think is the sand... until it starts to stink.
- A peacebreaker, of course, runs right into the conflict. Energized by the fight, peacebreakers will shatter the peacekeepers’ truce and usually will not care that they leave in their wake many people wounded by their words and actions.
- Peacemakers acknowledge the conflict. They face it boldly and prayerfully, asking for the presence of God in the situation, and the Spirit of God to control them as well as others in the conflict. They seek to balance righteousness and mercy.

Peacemakers practice healthy communication.

1. They keep short accounts. (Ephesians 4:26 – “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.”)
2. They identify and attack the problem, leaving personalities alone as much as possible.
3. They speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15, “Instead [of being driven about by every new fancy teaching – the Irvin paraphrase], **speaking the truth in love**, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”)

Peacemakers realize and remember: **Jesus’ reputation is affected by the way I get along with others.** If the only Jesus people around us see and hear is us, that’s huge.

While I’m at it, this beatitude and the others remind us that we can claim we are Christ’s disciples all we want, but it doesn’t ring true if we are not becoming more like Christ. Do we really suppose that we can genuinely worship the Holy One without being transformed through holiness? Do we really suppose that our most deeply cherished beliefs aren’t translated into our actions, choices, and words?

IT’S UP TO ME

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with [everyone].” (Romans 12:18, NASB)

5 reminders from Romans 12

In the verses preceding this, the Apostle Paul lays out a framework for being at peace with everyone, as far as it depends on you. Please consider these components in peacemaking:

1. **Serve God wholeheartedly and enthusiastically.** (Romans 12:11-12) If I’m leaning into service for God with my mind as well as my hands, if I’m focused on building up the Kingdom of God, I’m not going to have too much time to stir up conflict.
2. **Have empathy.** (Romans 12:15) If I’m constantly putting myself in other peoples’ shoes, I will be able to see a conflict from a few different perspectives, and I won’t be so entrenched in “my way.”
3. **Jesus and others FIRST.** (Romans 12:16)
4. **Be humble.** (Romans 12:16) Humility and empathy can teach me how to speak from “beside” another person, rather than “above” or “in front” of them.
5. **We are called to pay it forward.** God will **pay back.** (Romans 12:17)

conflict pie

In a great sermon on the subject of conflict in marriage, Pastor Andy Stanley explained conflict like a pie. Except that this is not the kind of pie I talked about the last time I was up here. Conflict pie will give you heartburn every time.

Anyway, you need to look at the whole conflict and you need to honestly identify which part of the conflict you're responsible for, and cut out your slice of the pie. Make it a generous slice... cut a bit outside the edges that you drew for yourself. That's the part of the pie for which you're responsible. It may be 70% of the pie. It may be 30% of the pie. That doesn't mean that the other part of the pie is the responsibility or fault of your spouse. YES, they have a slice of the pie for which they are solely responsible. But then the rest of the pie could easily be misunderstanding or negative circumstance. It all begins, though, by asking yourself a tough question:

For how much of this difficult situation am I responsible? And an honest answer will most likely be, "More than I want to admit."

2 peacemaker questions

As Peacemakers look at offenses or conflicts, they ask themselves questions. Here are a couple that stand out to me:

1. Can I overlook this offense? Or are there some pieces of this conflict pie I can overlook and discard?
2. [Slide: How am I treating others?] Am I treating the other person or people in this conflict the way I want to be treated?

the hard work

Making peace isn't easy. Inherent in the term "peacemaker" is the idea that there wasn't much in the way of peace to begin with until the peacemaker came along. But God is bigger than our circumstances. God can do the impossible. And as I lean into Him, He can even change my attitude, if I let Him.

- I can choose to rejoice in the Lord! How much have I been forgiven? How much then can I risk in being gentle toward others?
- Is God big enough in my life that I can replace my anxiety with prayer and trust?
- Can I trust in Him to protect me enough that I can put my jaded lenses away and think about what is good and right in others?

- Can I believe that He will take care of me and look out for my good, so I can humbly seek reconciliation with others who have wronged me or whom I have wronged?

IT'S WON IN JESUS

world injustice vs. personal change

“Andrew,” you might want to stop me, “why are we talking about personal peacemaking in the face of a culture that is polarized! Have you seen the news this week? Are you aware of injustice here at home and around the world? Don’t you know that there is war and fighting everywhere?”

A great preacher, preaching on this very subject, asked, “When Jesus spoke of being a peacemaker, do you think He was unaware of the atrocities committed against His own people, both by Rome and even with the tacet consent of His own national leaders?” Do you think He didn’t know that people were being unjustly taxed by a corrupt government? Do you think He didn’t know that citizens of Judea were obliged to serve Roman soldiers and if they didn’t they were routinely beaten, whipped, or worse? [John Piper, “Blessed Are The Peacemakers,” March 9, 1986. desiringgod.org]

Yet when He was asked about these things, He always turned the table to point out that the real need is not as much societal change as much as an individual’s at peace with God. Once an individual is transformed by the grace, love, and power of Christ, she or he can be used of Him to be catalysts for change greater than your imagination.

Who do you think built the first hospitals and provided medical care for all regardless of their ability to pay? Who do you think were the first to advocate for the rights of women? Who do you think created a school system that was accessible to all? People transformed by Jesus Christ, that’s who! And if you think God is finished with His people, if you think He can’t use members of His body to do even greater things, if you think an age of miracles is over and faith can’t move mountains then think again! God can do great things! The Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost! (Romans 14:17)

personal invitation

Two thousand years ago this Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. And the angel choirs sang “Glory to God in the highest and PEACE TO ALL THOSE WHITH WHOM HE IS PLEASED.” This Jesus lived a sinless life, taught and performed miracles on the earth and then did what no

one else could do: [“Christ Himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ... and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility.” Ephesians 2:14, 16] As God and man He died on a cross so that all humanity, naturally alienated from and at war with God, could be reconciled to Himself. In doing so He swept away dividing walls of all humanity: race, gender, class, and any other brand of identity for **EVERYONE WHO CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD MAY BE SAVED. (Romans 10:13, Acts 2:21)**

Through the cross Jesus Christ took away the sins of the world and made a way for all to be born again, not of human conception, but born again of the Spirit of God.

And how will you know that you are born again of the Spirit of God? How will you know you are a follower of Christ? Because you will love one another. (John 13:35) This love will drive you onto the way of peace.

And so, to turn this around a bit, Jesus said to the multitude, restless with division, aware of their separation from God, and boiling with anger against an oppressive foreign government,

“Do you want to be called a child of God? Be a maker of peace.”

It starts in here. It spreads out there. Where does it stop? That’s up to you and God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

AT RENEW, LEAD IN PRAYER.