

Blessed are the Bridge Builders

Matthew 5:9

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Summary

Without a doubt, the most notorious family feud in American history was the dispute between two families – the Hatfield’s and the McCoy’s.

In fact, to this day, the Hatfield’s and the McCoy’s represent the idea of bad blood . . . carrying a grudge that just won’t go away.

The feud between the Hatfield’s and the McCoy’s was not make believe – it was for real. They were two wealthy families and their farms were in a place called Tug Valley – ironically named because that’s where the tug-of-war took place. Their farms were separated by a stream which actually represented the border of Kentucky and West Virginia. The McCoy’s lived on the Kentucky side and the Hatfield’s lived on the West Virginia side.

Trouble began in 1878, when a pig went missing from the McCoy farm. They accused the Hatfield’s and even took it to court but couldn’t prove it and the case was tossed out.

The bad feelings between the families simmered and deepened until 1882 when one of the McCoy’s ran for public office. On Election Day, he was insulted publicly by Ellison Hatfield. That did it.

Three of the McCoy boys slipped over the creek one night and shot Ellison Hatfield, who ended up dying. The Hatfield’s retaliated and after a gun fight, three McCoy’s were killed.

It only escalated from there. The feud grew beyond a family matter. It involved more and more people living in Kentucky and West Virginia. In fact, both governors had to call in the National Guard to stop the fighting between Hatfield’s army and the McCoy army.

Eventually, eight members of the Hatfield family were kidnapped and brought over to Kentucky to stand trial. But the states entered the legal battle, arguing about whether these men could be tried in a Kentucky courtroom.

Kentucky and West Virginia’s courts couldn’t settle it, so the case made its

way all the way up to the United States Supreme Court, who ruled in favor of Kentucky.

The trial went forward in Kentucky and eight Hatfield's were found guilty of murder.

The Hatfield family ringleader was hung publicly, which is interesting, given the fact that public hangings were, by then, illegal. The other seven Hatfield's were sentenced to life in prison.

When the dust settled, twelve members of the Hatfield and McCoy families had been killed. A century of hatred and resentment became a part of Tug Valley.



When have you carried a grudge? How far were you willing to take it? Are there still people you won't talk to or avoid because of a past conflict?

It wouldn't be the last time the human heart proved that it would rather burn bridges than build them.

In fact, the capability of the human heart to hate and murder and burn with resentment and revenge is as fresh as today's newspaper.

What does God's word say to us about this? How do you stop a feud from ever starting? How do you walk away when what you really want to do is get even?

Jesus would say that the person who gets the right answer is on the road to deep, genuine happiness. To get the answer wrong is to continue on the road marked by resentment, hatred and maybe even revenge.

It would mean moving in, as it were, to Tug Valley, and joining up with the Hatfield's or the McCoy's.

There are two passages that give us the answer. In fact, the Apostle Paul and Jesus used the same Greek word in giving the answer to how to let go of the resentment of having been wronged.

The first passage is in Matthew 5.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

The word "blessed" refers to genuine, sustained happiness. As we've seen as in our study of Matthew 5, Jesus turns conventional wisdom upside down regarding what supreme happiness really is.

- Blessed are the beggars;
- Blessed are the brokenhearted;
- Happy are the helpless;
- Happy are the hungry
- Happy are the helpful
- Happy are the holy.

And now, Jesus gives another radical definition of true happiness here in verse

9 which we could paraphrase to read, “Blessed are the bridge builders.”

Blessed Are The Bridgebuilders

Jesus makes it clear that happiness is the result of making the right choices. He continually reminds us that these are beatitudes, not me-attitudes.

Happiness is not when it’s all about *me*. Happiness is when it’s all about what you and I should *be*.

To play off the English words, Jesus isn’t giving us some me-attitudes, these are what we should be-attitudes.

Every one of these definitions of true lasting happiness has to do with dying to self.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

Would you notice that Jesus does not say in this passage “Happy are the peaceful; happy are the undisturbed; happy are those who never have anybody disturb their peace.”



What is the difference between someone who is peaceful and undisturbed, and someone who is a peacemaker?

Oh no. In fact, the Lord used a compound word which refers to the actions of a peacemaker.

Jesus is referring to someone who isn’t passive, but active. This word refers to someone who is negotiating peace.¹

You could translate peacemaker here: peace-dealer; peace-worker; peace-provider.

The implication behind the presence of a peacemaker is the fact that peace is missing. You need a peacemaker because peace has been lost.

How do we pursue becoming peacemakers? Does the Bible spell it out for us? Well, the Bible doesn’t spell out every possible scenario, but it does spell out the spirit of a peacemaker.

Let me warn you before we dive into the text — this isn’t going to be easy. The promise isn’t that you’ll be left alone or that you’ll be appreciated or heard or promoted. The greatest peacemaker to ever walk the planet got nailed to a cross. But in doing so, He was right before God in all things.

In fact, by His death:

He made peace for us through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20).

1 Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, The Sermon On the Mount (Crossway Books, 2001), p. 62



When was a time when you needed to be a peacemaker, but those involved in the conflict turned on you? How did you respond to that situation?

How do we look like the son of God in the way we respond to less than peaceful times? How do we negotiate peace with our personal lives and conversations?

The Apostle Paul spells out the spirit of the peacemaker in Romans 12. He used the same root word for peace that Jesus used in his sermon.

Three Practices for Peacemakers

Peacemakers refuse to get even.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone (Romans 12:17).

There are no loopholes in this statement.

Wouldn't it be great if God had provided a loophole here? Instead of **never**, how about, "most of the time?" Most of the time, don't pay back evil for evil. Or, "if no one gets hurt" or, "but if they deserve it, I'll get them back."

Notice further: Paul doesn't say, never pay back evil for evil to people in your

family, to your friends, to people you know.

Paul writes, never pay back evil for evil to anyone.

Really? Never?

Grace never gets even.

Paul is asking us to do something supernatural! This is supernatural living. You'd have to be Jesus to act like this. So, we'd better start praying to be more like Jesus.

But be careful with that prayer request. The truth is, we'd all like to be more like Jesus. It might be the number one thing on your prayer list – "Lord, I want to be more like you. Well, except for the betrayals, and the nails, and the spear."

What we mean when we say "we'd like to be more like Jesus" is that we'd like to have his perfections, not his sufferings.

In Philippians 2, Paul says, "Have this attitude in you which you see evidenced in Jesus Christ."

Here's the attitude in living color. It's so straightforward that we can't miss it, even though we might not like it. The practice of peacemakers is that they refuse to get even.



Is this practice easy or difficult to you?
Are you prone to forgiveness or revenge?
Is there someone you need to ask
forgiveness of for seeking to get even?

Peacemakers provide positive solutions.

Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all (Romans 12:7b).

The word translated “give thought” is a compound verb which means to think ahead of time.

The word for honorable is a reference to something that’s good or wholesome or something that makes a positive contribution.

Paul used this word often.

He told Titus to instruct the young men to “*in all things show [themselves] to be an example of good deeds*” (Titus 2:7); he wrote that every Christian should be eager to do good things.

A peacemaker gets ready for the day, thinking ahead of time about those situations where peace is missing and thinking of what he or she can possibly contribute in a positive, honorable manner.



What are some ways a person can get better at finding peace in the midst of conflict?

Peacemakers are willing to build bridges.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone (Romans 12:18).

I love the realism of the Apostle Paul.

Did you notice he adds two very realistic, real-life qualifications?

“If possible . . .”

Why write that? Because it isn’t always possible. I happen to know that every time I preach, I may make brand new enemies. In fact, I may have less peace with you now than I did fifteen minutes ago.

Jesus Christ said that His truth would not bring peace all the time, but a sword. It would not create unity among everyone; in fact, it would bring division to many.

In nearly every city the Apostle Paul went to, he incited a riot.

Paul writes “If possible” because it might not be possible. If it’s not possible, you’re not responsible.



When was a time when it was impossible for you to be at peace with someone? Have you met people who reject peaceful solutions? Who seem to thrive on being antagonistic?

If there's any doubt about that interpretation, Paul adds the second real-life qualification:

“So far as it depends on you . . .”

Why write that? Because it doesn't always depend on you!

It might be an ornery neighbor, or a stubborn relative, or an unreasonable co-worker.

A peaceful relationship is a two-way street. Paul is simply telling us to make sure that our side of the street is open; that we're not the ones holding out with a grudge or bitterness or refusal to forgive.²

Paul is saying, “If it's possible, and if the ball is in your court, don't hold back . . . offer peace!”

Peacemakers Shall be Called the Sons of God

Now back to *Matthew 5* and notice what Jesus says about peacemakers.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God (Matthew 5:9).

Note that there's not a promise here like with other statements the Lord made earlier. Promises like:

- Mourners will be comforted
- The Merciful will be given mercy
- The Hungry will be satisfied and on and on.

Notice here – ***Blessed are the peacemakers*** – because they will receive peace? That's what you'd expect Him to say. But no . . . ***blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God.***

In other words, what you're doing is so supernatural and so Christ-like, that even though the world might not build a bridge to you, and they might not love you, and they might not appreciate you when they see you refuse to take revenge and offer self-sacrificing solutions and offer them grace – they're going to know you must be a child of God.

They don't know what God looks like, but you're the closest thing they've ever seen.

The Lord uses the word *huios* (υἱός) for sons instead of the normal word, *tekna* (τέκνα) for children. *Tekna* is the tender and affectionate term for little children.

² John MacArthur, *Romans: Volume Two*, (Moody Press, 1994), p. 202

Huios is the term which speaks of the dignity and honor of a mature son.³

Peacemakers bear the honor and dignity of God to their world that knows nothing of peace and dignity and honor.

But notice again, peacemakers aren't given the promise of a life of peace.

Peacemaking can mess up your world. Living a godly life of self-sacrifice could lead to days of difficulty and suffering.

I've said it before, but everywhere the Apostle Paul went he either experienced a revival or a riot! The land of peace isn't earth, its heaven.



What have been some of your experiences with peacemaking? When have people appreciated your efforts? When have they despised your efforts?

And on the way there, we display the honor and humility of Christ as we do the unthinkable – the supernatural – the unlikely – we deliver to our world the grace of God.

Your Turn

Living It Out



I recommend to my seminary students the small biography of Robert Chapman, the pastor of a small church in 19th century England. He was single his entire life; pastored a small church his entire ministry yet made a deep impact on his community. Charles Spurgeon called him the saintliest man in England.

But not everyone liked Robert Chapman. A grocer in the community hated him; he would become so infuriated by Chapman's open-air preaching that, on more than one occasion, he would walk past him and spit on him!

For a number of years, the grocer would verbally attack Chapman as he came around. Chapman never retaliated – he never struck back.

Then, on one occasion, some of Chapman's wealthy relatives came to visit him. Since Robert was single, they insisted on buying the groceries and cooking the meals while they stayed with him for a week or so. He agreed.

They asked him where he would recommend they go to purchase a cartload of groceries and Chapman insisted they go to grocery of this man who had insulted him for so many years.

³ MacArthur, [Kingdom Living Here and Now](#) (Moody Press, 1980), p. 129

They didn't know anything about that drama, but Chapman was insistent that they travel to the other side of town and do their shopping. So off they went. They ended up purchasing more food than they could carry, and they asked that it all be delivered to the home of the Reverend R. C. Chapman.

The stunned grocer asked them to repeat the address and then told the visitors that they must have come by accident to the wrong shop. No, they said, "Mr. Chapman insisted that we come here." When the grocer arrived with the delivery and Chapman answered the door, he broke down in tears and Chapman ended up leading that man to faith in His Lord that very afternoon.⁴

A peacemaker lives according to these three practices:

- A peacemaker refuses to get even.
- A peacemaker provides positive solutions.
- A peacemaker is ready and willing to build a bridge.

Ultimately, the world will see that of you can say, "You must be related to the true and living God."

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⁴ Robert L. Peterson & Alexander Strauch, Agape Leadership (Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1991), p. 44