

"How To Seek Peace and Pursue It?"

The theme verse for the series is **1 Peter 3:10-11**. *Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.* Sometimes peace just happens – that's nice. But in the real world with real people, we will most likely face conflict. Conflict can surface in every human relationship. It can undercut friendships, fracture churches, tear at families and turn workplaces into toxic swamps. We don't always handle it well. How do you handle conflict? Well, uh, how did my dad deal with it? How did my family handle it? What's my natural temperament? Sometimes we just go after it according to our natural habits and reactions. We handle it emotionally and in a pretty sloppy and unscriptural manner.

In **Matthew 5:9** when Jesus says, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.* He's telling us that it matters to God that we handle conflict God's way. What is your first reaction when you face conflict? Most of the time, we either want to fight, or we just want to escape. For some people, the priority is to win the argument. For others, it is just to escape the drama. But, if God's blessing is your priority, what will you do? You will want to be a true peacemaker. There is a great ministry devoted to this called "*Peacemaker Ministries.*" Here's how they state one of their fundamental principles: *Peacemakers see conflict as an opportunity to solve problems in a way that not only benefits people but also honors God.* Do you hear that? **All conflict is an opportunity to resolve problems in a way that benefits people and honors God.** Would you agree that that is a very different perspective on conflict? Can you see how it ties into our theme for this little series?

So let's start here.

I. TO SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT, WE HAVE TO MAKE GOD'S BLESSING OUR PRIORITY.

Now, there are implications to that. First,

A. If God's blessing is a priority you can't just give in to anger.

1 Peter 3:9 *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a*

blessing. The truth is most of us, when it's our priorities or, worse, our pride that's attacked, our response to conflict is to attack back. We're often more committed to defending our pride than to being a peacemaker. Strong self-confident people may vent their anger in a verbal assault. More fearful, less-confident people may just launch a cold war of resentment, bitterness and passive aggressive sulking. *If God's blessing is your priority you can't just give in to anger.*

And second ...

B. If God's blessing is a priority you can't just run from conflict.

In the novel *Jayber Crow* by the wonderful author Wendell Berry, he describes a character from the fictional town of Port William named Ray Overhold. He describes him this way,

"I don't think he fought with [his wife] or made much of an argument in his own favor. When she raised the pressure, he just escaped. He just quietly shifted off into one of the many innumerable precincts of Port William or the surrounding outdoors where she disdained to go... As a rule, when the pressure was on, Roy eased away. He was not by nature a man who was very much in evidence." (pp 73-74)

"He was not by nature a man who was very much in evidence." Sometimes it is right to avoid conflict. It's good to ask ourselves, *"Is this issue worth bringing up and confronting?"* Every cut doesn't need stitches. **Proverbs 19:11** says, *Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is [one's] glory to overlook an offense.* Some offenses are minor. They happen because someone is under unique stress or pressure. But there is a problem if we avoid conflict, *not* because it is right to do so but just because it's easier or we think it is. Sometimes we just don't want to deal with it, so we drop the friend, leave the church, quit the job, file for divorce, or just grow bitter on the inside. When Jesus says *blessed are the peacemakers*, he's not talking about avoiding issues that should be addressed or refusing to talk when there are principles at stake, or running away from problems that need to be discussed!

C. If God's blessing is your priority, you have to face conflict and work to resolve it.

It is easy to *break* the peace, and it's easy to *fake* peace. Those are the two ways most people deal with conflict, but if your priority is God's blessing, you will do a third thing. You will work to make peace. You will never be a peacemaker if you let your feelings rule you. You can't

just look at things in light of the same old self-centered questions that dominate the world: *"Is this fair to me? Am I getting what I deserve? Is this what I want?"* How does this make me feel?" To be a peacemaker in this world, you need to make God's blessing your priority - even in conflict.

So, that's where we begin -Then...

II. TO SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT, WE HAVE TO OBEY THE PRINCIPLES GOD GIVES US IN HIS WORD.

What are those principles? Let's look at several Scriptures and focus on a few that are basic.

A. The first principle is, "Glorify God."

In **Matthew 5:9**, Jesus says, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.* Jesus wants us to think about conflict in relationship to God. What would it be like if, in every situation where there is conflict, we ask this question: *How can I focus on God in this situation?* In **1 Corinthians 10:31**, Paul is writing to a church that has a lot of problems. There were all kinds of conflicts not being addressed from the right perspective and priorities. They were arguing about foods to eat and how to observe the Lord's Supper and spiritual gifts and which leaders were best. They were all focused on their feelings and imperfect human perspectives. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul gives them an all-inclusive principle to live by. He says: *"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God"* Our default response to conflict when feelings are involved is to focus on ourselves. It changes everything to ask, *"How can I glorify God in this situation?"*

The first principle is "glorify God."

B. The second principle is, "Get the log out of your eye."

Later in the Sermon on the Mount, he says this, **Matthew 7:3-5**, *Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.* Clearly the point in **verse 5**, is this: until you face *your* problem, the issues in your life and heart, you won't see clearly to help others. You are blinded by your own issues. Before you talk to others about their faults, be sure you have faced your own. Jesus does not say, don't ever talk

to others about their part of a conflict. He says, first face the truth about your part. Maybe I am only 20% responsible for the conflict, but - I am 100% responsible for that 20%. That's what I have to face about myself *before* – *before* I go to work on others. So I have to ask the question: *How can I own my part of this conflict?*

The second principle is to get the log out of your own eye.

C. The third principle is, "Go and seek reconciliation."

What does Jesus tell us to do in **Matthew 5:23-24**? He says, *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First, be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Go means take the initiative. Act on it. In **Matthew 18:15**, Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."*

In an online article Tim Keller addressed all of this in the context, not only of our personal conflicts but with all the potential for conflict between Christians over politics, over race, over how to view and how to act in the pandemic. So yes this is important in friendship and in marriage but it is important for the church and how different would things be if we so lived. He summed it up like this:

Christians in community are to never give up on one another... never "write off" another believer and have nothing to do with them. We must never tire of forgiving (and/or repenting!) and seeking to repair our relationships. Matthew 5:23–26 tells us we should go to someone if we know they have something against *us*. Matthew 18:15–20 says we should approach someone if we know that we have something against *them*. In short, if any relationship has cooled off or has weakened in any way—it is always your move. It doesn't matter who started it. God always holds you responsible to reach out to repair a tattered relationship. A Christian is responsible for beginning the reconciliation process, regardless of how the distance or the alienation began. ¹

As we said before, sometimes you can just overlook an offense. But on the other hand, we have to ask God for wisdom because sometimes something needs to be said, or people will be hurt, and problems will grow worse. When that is the case, the goal is to *gain your brother*. The goal is not to put people in their place or score points but to help

people who are hurt or broken. Our contemporary culture has equated a sort of blanket tolerance with love. It isn't love. Honest, compassionate correction of another person's sin or another person's part in a particular conflict is not judgmental. It is compassionate and imperative for true peacemaking. **Proverbs 27:6** says, *Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

How do you work for restoration and reconciliation? The Peacemaker's ministry offers a helpful acrostic in their literature. It's, "**P.A.U.S.E.**"

1.) **P- Prepare for it.** Pray, get the facts right, get your heart right. **Proverbs 18:13** *If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. Verse 17, The one who states his case first seems right until the other comes and examines him.*

2.) **A- Affirm the relationship.** Christ calls us to love and love, according to **1 Corinthians 13**, among other things, *perseveres*. In a marriage, it makes all the difference to say, "I love you, and I don't want this to come between us." In a friendship to say, "I value your friendship, but I want to talk about this." With a co-worker, I want us to work together well and help each other and not have this kind of strife between us. Affirm the relationship.

3.) **U - Understand the interests.** **Philippians 2:4-5**, *Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus. Do you understand and look out for the interests drivin the other person?*

4.) **S - Search for the wisdom of creative solutions.** The book of **Ecclesiastes, 2:13** *Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.* Have a conversation that isn't just about placing blame but fixing problems and finding solutions.

5.) **E - Evaluate the options carefully, prayerfully, objectively, and reasonably so that you can reach the best solution for all involved.** **Proverbs 3:13** *Blessed is the one who finds wisdom and the one who gets understanding.*

If in the face of conflict, you will seek peace and pursue it, you will have a much greater likelihood of positive results. **Peacemakers see conflict as an opportunity to solve problems in a way that benefits people and honors God.**

True forgiveness is not easy when you're hurt, frustrated, or treated unjustly. Here's what we have to understand.

III. TO SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT, YOU HAVE TO MAKE GOD'S LOVE YOUR SOURCE OF POWER.

Listen to **Colossians 3:12-13**. *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* When we read Scripture like that sometimes all the things we are supposed to do and be jumps out at us and stands out so clearly. But notice – really notice how **verse 12** begins it all: *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.* That's how we are addressed. Is that how you see yourself? Is that your identity in faith? This is where you have to start - you have to start not with what you are supposed to do for God or others but with what God has already done for you and with God's love for you. Look at **verse 13** *forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you.* You will miss God's plan for you if you think of the gospel only as the key to eternal life. God intends for the gospel to completely transform every aspect of your daily life. Including your relationships.

Think of those words: "*as the Lord has forgiven you.*" This ties into something Jesus said to his disciples. He gathered them together at the last supper - **John 13:34**, and said, *A new command I give to you.* Think of the disciples. They have been with Jesus for three years. They know he is the Son of God. They have seen him heal the sick, raise the dead, and walk on water. Now he's going to give a new commandment. They all lean in to listen closely. What is Jesus going to say? *Is there a new dress code - something they are all going to wear to represent Him? Is there some new ceremony to observe?* No. He says, *Love one another.* But the disciples would have thought, "*that's not new!*" John might have thought - *Mom has been telling James and me to love each other since we were kids!* How is this new? But Jesus goes on, *that you love one another - here's the new part - just as I have loved, you also are to love one another.*

Think about this, how does God forgive and love us?

1. His love goes first. Does God wait for you to be lovable before he loves you? No. Does he wait for you to get your act together? No. Even when you are sinful, ugly, angry, petty, ungrateful and selfish, and stubborn, he loves and forgives you. When you believe that you find power in that to love people in spite of their flaws and sins.

2. His love takes responsibility. He takes responsibility for things that are not his fault. Your sin is not his fault, but he took responsibility to solve your problem and pay for your sins. When you treasure this truth, you can love others when they are at fault. And since Jesus knows your sins and has paid for them, you can admit your faults also.

3. His love doesn't demand fairness. He doesn't dole out his love based on how fair it feels to him or on how fair it is for him! If he did, you would not be reconciled to him or at peace with him ever. When you know this, you can love and forgive others even when what you get back is not fair. You can love others as he loved you.

CONCLUSION

In Jesus Christ, God himself revealed the depth of his love for us. Jesus suffered and died on the cross to pay for our sins so God could justly release us from our debt to his holiness and justice. Jesus suffered for us and then rose again to be Lord and Savior for everyone and who turns to him and trust in him. Turn to Him and receive his grace for your salvation and then live in the strength of his love and presence as you follow him in all of life. Learn to deal even with the conflicts of life through the love of Christ.

Amen.

¹ <https://www.cardus.ca/comment/article/the-fading-of-forgiveness/>