

Becoming a Peacemaker Series

The Path of Peace in Sin Conflict (Mt. 18:15-18, 21-22)

By
Andy Davis

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

The Path of Peace in Sin Conflict

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Wayward Words

1. When I was working as a youth pastor, I was having a conversation with one of the parents following youth group. During the conversation, this parent confronted me with something I said that had offended them. I was completely surprised by this confrontation as I didn't even realize I had made the comment, and I didn't remember making it. I didn't know how the topic in which the comment was made even came up. While the comment I made was true and not made in malice, it was something that simply didn't need to be said. It might have put the friend of this parent in a bad light in the eyes of others, which is why they were confronting me about it, although that would not have ever been my intention.
2. I responded immediately by apologizing for my comment, admitting that I should not have said what I did, and I promised to correct it in the same context in which the comment was made. I thanked this parent for bringing this issue to my attention because I was completely unaware of it. The following week at youth group, I confessed my error in front of the entire youth group, made a few genuine positive comments about the individual who was mentioned in the previous statement, and communicated how my words were not pleasing to God.
3. Had this parent not been willing to come to me and have a conversation about what had happened, our relationship could have been negatively impacted by something that I wasn't even aware of. I am so grateful that this parent felt comfortable enough with our relationship and courageous enough to act in obedience to God to confront me on what I had said. This whole issue was able to get fully resolved in a short time so that it no longer affected relationships.

B. Reconciliation and restored relationships don't just happen automatically. It takes intentionality to create them. There is a Biblical process available to us that helps us correct the wrongs that are done and get back to harmonious relationships. We are now going to take everything we've learned so far and begin applying it to various types of conflict that will need to be responded to in healthy ways using the knowledge and tools we've gained. Our objective will be to establish a specific action plan for the various types of conflict; we will call this our path of peace.

C. To aid the learning experience we will move progressively from the types of conflict that are less complex to the more difficult types of conflict. Beginning with the easier types of conflict and dealing with the more challenging types of conflict later will help learn about peacemaking in a more effective and wise way. The easiest, in terms of complexity, and most straightforward type of conflict that we will be addressing here is conflict that results from a person doing wrong: sin conflict.

D. There is a specific and concrete six step Biblical path of peace for sin conflict. It is important to participate in each step if genuine peace and reconciliation is going to be experienced in our

relationships. Any shortcuts we attempt to take will greatly diminish the genuineness and depth of the peace we experience at the end of this process.

II. Confrontation (Mt. 18:15-18)

- A. The first step on the path toward peace when sin is involved is usually the most challenging and uncomfortable. When we have been wronged, the first step of peacemaking is the act of confrontation—also called rebuke or correction,

¹⁵ Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be confirmed. ¹⁷ And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, he is to be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. (Mt. 18:15-18)

- B. Disciples hold one another morally accountable for their obedience and faithfulness to God and His word (“show him his fault in private”, v. 15).¹ While this is contrary to our “live and let live” modern life philosophy that thinks other people’s choices and actions are none of our business, confrontation and accountability are essential to peacemaking. Other people’s actions affect us even if we pretend they don’t. Our modern hyper individualism occasionally gets us into trouble as in this case. An act of confrontation is done under a specific circumstance: when another person sins—usually against us personally but at least publicly in our presence (“if your brother sins”, v. 15). While occasional slip ups or in the heat of the moment type behaviors may be overlooked; ongoing, repeated patterns of behavior that flow from a person’s character that are harmful need to be confronted.

- C. How do we confront someone who is in sin? God has given us an effective tool that can be used in this manner when needed,

¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man *or woman* of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)

- D. This text describes Scripture, the word of God, as an effective tool for confrontation (“All Scripture is...beneficial for...rebuke”, v. 16). Confrontation is the same as “rebuke” which means the manifestation of the truth of a charge and the results to be reaped along with an acknowledgement of the truth of the charge, at least inwardly, on the part of the offending person.² In other words, the person being confronted with Scripture, knows in their heart the charge is accurate and true—they are the person in the wrong. The reason a person can confront another is because there is adequate proof of their wrongdoing.³ To confront and rebuke a person is not merely to accuse them of wrongdoing, it also includes the response of the other person through accepting and acknowledging the truthfulness of the charge being

¹ 1 Corinthians 5:11-13

² Spiros Zodhiates ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1991), 911

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 435.

made against them. This conviction can be brought about by the informed confronting of the other person with an accurate application of God's word which is used by the Holy Spirit in the person's conscience. If one rebuke from one person is not sufficient, another rebuke using more than one witness may be necessary (Mt. 18:16). Those that continue their same path, refusing to repent, are brought to the attention of the church (Mt. 18:17).

- E. Here is when we need to be very specific and make sure we are speaking truth accurately by confronting with Scripture and God's moral standards. If confrontation is going to be done effectively, we need to properly understand the Bible and the behavior it promotes as well as a clear perspective of the other person's behavior in question. We expose the conduct that should not be done (Eph. 5:11). This type of confrontation should be a regular and ongoing part of Biblical preaching (2 Tim. 4:2).
- F. The intended purpose of confrontation is twofold: conviction and instruction—to point the person away from sin to repentance and godly living (“if he listens to you, you have gained your brother”, v. 15). The charge of wrongdoing, using the appropriate application of Scripture, is persuasive enough to convince the other person they are at fault. During confrontation, disciples compare the moral standards for behavior from Scripture to the individuals' actions and point out the discrepancy. Conviction, when used in a moral sense, refers to the inner acknowledgement and acceptance of guilt for a wrong done or not performing a good that should have been done. Responsibility, fault, and culpability are accepted by the offending person. The purpose of confrontation is to show someone their sin and to encourage them to repent.⁴
- G. It is possible for the person being confronted to respond with justification, defensiveness, anger, or denial in the moment of being confronted, yet on the inside—in their soul—they know and realize their actions violated the moral standards of God's word. They may even admit as much to the person who confronts them later after they've had time to reflect on the conversation. It is also possible the person being confronted may reject the correction outright (Pr. 1:29-31). Here is where the peacemaking skill of speaking the truth in love and gentleness is so important. Confrontation should be done with an attitude of concern for the other person as a fellow spiritual family member, not as an enemy (2 Thess. 3:15). This means we should strive to protect the other person's reputation throughout this process which is why confrontation starts “in private” (Mt. 18:15).⁵
- H. The person who is being confronted should not merely be accused of wrongdoing, they should also be given help to choose a better path forward.⁶ Learning how God wants a person to act is the instructional part of confrontation. The offending person needs to be instructed in the proper course of action that should replace the wrongs they have done. They need a better

⁴ Friedrich Büchsel, “[Ἐλέγχω](#), [Ἐλεγχεις](#), [Ἐλεγχος](#), [Ἐλεγμός](#),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 474 from 2 Timothy 3:16 “rebuke”

⁵ There may be exceptions to this general rule of privacy, there may be times when public sins need to be confronted publicly within the same sphere that the offense takes place. The circle of people involved with an offense should not increase unless there is unrepentance on the side of the offending person.

⁶ Friedrich Büchsel, “[Ἐλέγχω](#), [Ἐλεγχεις](#), [Ἐλεγχος](#), [Ἐλεγμός](#),” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 474.

alternative to their current lifestyle. Those doing the confronting should also seek to be “the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way” (Jas. 5:20), “and those who lead the many to righteousness” (Dan. 12:3). Pointing out wrong is not enough to confront someone, we must also teach them the correct path and know how to correct the error that has occurred.

- I. Disciples need to learn how to apply Scripture accurately. Care and attention should be given to this first step because further steps in the peacemaking process will not be possible without confrontation firmly in place. We need to spend time praying and reading Scripture in preparation for confrontation. Confrontation helps us prevent negative and harmful feelings developing against other people; it can even prevent hate (Lev. 19:17). Notice that sin is likely to follow when rebuke and confrontation doesn’t happen. Those who are unwilling to confront others destroy their relationships and likely have strong negative feelings toward others. Complaining, criticizing, and slandering have become common replacement behaviors to confrontation. None of these sinful responses fix the problem or resolve the conflict, they only serve to make the situation worse.

III. Confession (Pr. 28:13-14)

- A. Once confrontation happens and there is a positive and appropriate response by the person who has done the wrong, the next step is for the offending person to openly confess to the wrong they have done,

¹³ One who conceals his wrongdoings will not prosper, But one who confesses and abandons *them* will find compassion. ¹⁴ How blessed is the person who fears always, But one who hardens his heart will fall into disaster. (Pr. 28:13-14)
- B. When confronted with our own wrongdoing God desires us to admit fault and responsibility (“one who confesses”, v. 13). Confession is where an apology takes place, a person who has done wrong communicates that wrong to God and to those who have been impacted by their sin. Confession is beneficial to everyone involved including the person who is at fault (“One who conceals his wrongdoings will not prosper, But one who confesses and abandons them will find compassion”, v. 13).⁷ The contrasting response to confession is denial and concealment (“One who conceals his wrongdoings”, v. 13).
- C. When confrontation takes place or when we become aware of a wrong we have done, there is a choice that must be made. Either confess and abandon the wrong or conceal and harden our heart instead. Will we confess or conceal? This is a significant choice that will have powerful effects on who we become as a person. The impact of our response will be either positive or negative (“will not prosper” or “find compassion”, v. 13; “blessed” or “disaster”, v. 14). Hardening our hearts will sear our conscience while the other brings about the joy of peace. The choice is up to us and how we respond when we are confronted. We will experience either life, compassion, and blessedness or a lack of prosperity, disaster, and hardness of heart in our soul. All this hangs in balance based on our response to being confronted.
- D. Sometimes this step of confession can happen at the initiation of the person who has done the wrong when they realize what they’ve done (Mt. 5:23-24). Confrontation isn’t always necessary

⁷ Psalm 32:1-5

to get to the step of confession in the peacemaking process. If a person's own conscience is bothering them or the Holy Spirit is bringing conviction for an inappropriate action toward another person, the person who did the wrong can initiate the peacemaking process themselves. Only a hard-hearted person waits to be confronted before making any confession.

- E. Confession to God alone or only a third party will short-circuit the peacemaking process without bringing full reconciliation. Confession needs to be directed toward ALL offended people if all our relationships are going to be restored. The full experience of the peace God intends for us to experience will not happen if we only feel the weight of our guilt but do not confess our wrongs to those we have wronged.
- F. While confession and admitting fault, realizing we are a sinner by nature, is a difficult truth to accept it is healthy for personal growth. We need to be honest with ourselves. Denial is very destructive. Thinking or pretending we are more moral than we are prevents us from becoming the type of person we want to be. The primary problem we face is not outside us but inside us just as Jesus testified (Mk. 7:21-23). Those who live openly and honestly with the reality that they operate in this world with a corrupted moral nature which causes them to frequently do wrong, receive a wonderful promise from God: when sin is confessed, Jesus will cleanse us from all our wrongdoings (1 Jn. 1:8-10).

IV. Repentance (Ac. 3:19)

- A. While confession is simply the admittance of being responsible for a wrong, it should naturally lead to a closely accompanied action of repentance,
 - ¹⁹ Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; (Ac. 3:19)
- B. While the context of this verse is in reference to someone's initial salvation, the same spiritual principles apply throughout the Christian life to any instance of repentance (Ps. 51:12). Living in sin, contrary to what is good, always has negative effects on us (Gal. 6:8). Always. Personal experience confirms this. God commands every person to repent and return to Him ("Therefore repent and return", v. 19). For disciples, this is an ongoing dynamic of their relationship with God. As soon as sin becomes known, confession and repentance occur. When individuals decide to repent, they will receive a positive benefit from God ("in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord", v. 19). Getting right with God has its rewards. In this passage, repent refers to having a change of self (heart and mind) that abandons former dispositions and results in a new self, new behavior, and regret over former behavior and dispositions.⁸
- C. Repentance is described by Jesus as a person coming to their senses, taking responsibility, and living differently as a result (Lk. 15:17-19). If a person truly changes the way they think and perceive their actions, it will inevitably be followed by a change of behavior (or at the very minimum an honest attempt at changing behavior) in the future. A person can't claim to be repentant and continue the same incorrect behavior at the same time—at least not with a clear conscience. Strictly speaking, repentance means to have a change of thinking and perspective—

⁸ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Acts 3:19 "repent"

a change of mind that leads to a change of behavior. Repentance means we become convinced that our past behavior was wrong and harmful.

- D. A more extended description of repentance can be found in 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. It is important for disciples to be familiar with genuine repentance so they can identify it in themselves and others to maintain a right relationship with God. There are seven important aspects of true repentance that flow from godly sorrow. While a full explanation of all the elements of repentance is not possible here, each person is encouraged to become familiar with these elements to develop a robust understanding of genuine repentance.

V. Forgiveness (Mt. 18:21-22)

- A. The order of this path of peace regarding sin conflict is of utmost importance. If the previous steps are not completed the next step becomes distorted, confused, and weakened. Following confession and repentance comes forgiveness from the person who has been wronged,

²¹ Then Peter came up and said to Him, “Lord, how many times shall my brother sin against me and I *still* forgive him? Up to seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy-seven times. (Mt. 18:21-22)
- B. Forgiveness, if it is going to be genuine and from the heart, is the result of the process of attempting reconciliation (“how many times shall my brother sin against me and I still forgive him?”, v. 21). There is an assumption of rebuke and repentance here as was previously mentioned in verse fifteen of this same chapter (see also Lk. 17:3-4). Without confrontation, confession, and repentance, forgiveness, will at best be half-hearted—partial and incomplete. Depending on circumstances, forgiveness can be quick, easy, and joyful or a long and difficult struggle. The ease or difficulty of forgiveness is significantly influenced by the attitude and behavior of the offending person. If a person continues in the hurtful behavior without showing any sign of remorse, it will be far more difficult to have a desire or willingness to forgive them if they should happen to repent. If the person who has been wronged is not convinced the other person is apologetic and repentant, forgiveness will be far more challenging. This is why we need to understand the difference between our internal willingness to forgive and the external relational extending the offer of forgiveness to the other person. Extra difficulties are created when we get these elements of forgiveness confused.
- C. We should not attempt to forgive a person who is not repentant. If a person is not truly repentant, proper boundaries will need to be established, when necessary, in our relationship with the offending person who continues in the same harmful behavior. While an internal willing attitude to give forgiveness to the offending party should exist, the external offer of forgiveness will not be extended to the other person until they are repentant. Otherwise, forgiveness is cheapened, and it will not have its intended effect. Telling an unrepentant person, they are forgiven will accomplish nothing regarding reconciliation. The relationship will be left in a weird limbo with issues unresolved but perhaps thought to be resolved. Full restoration should not be attempted with anyone who remains unrepentant.

- D. On the other hand, we should not attempt to forgive another person unless we initiate the reconciliation process through either confession or confrontation.⁹ Simply throwing out forgiveness without laying the foundation of the first steps of the path of peace does as much harm as the person being unrepentant. Forgiveness is also cheapened and distorted in this case as well. Telling a person they are forgiven before they even know that they did wrong is not helpful. Asking for forgiveness without confessing specifically the wrong we have done doesn't move a relationship toward reconciliation either. True forgiveness requires wrongs being admitted. A person who attempts to forgive another person without being reconciled to them usually maintains the hurt and negative feelings while thinking they have forgiven the other person. The reality is that the issues still exist and continue to infect the relationship. This is not true forgiveness, it is merely a fake version that attempts to avoid the uncomfortable process of reconciliation.

VI. Restitution (Lk. 19:6-10)

- A. Probably the most neglected, and least understood, aspect of peace when it comes to conflict resulting from sin is the notion of restitution,
- ⁶ And he hurried and came down, and received Him joyfully. ⁷ When *the people* saw *this*, they all *began* to complain, saying, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner!" ⁸ But Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I am giving to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I am giving back four times as much." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Lk. 19:6-10)
- B. Zaccheus is modeling the principle of restitution-compensating another person for a wrong done by paying them back. In this case, as a tax collector, Zaccheus was willing to pay back money that he had taken illegitimately from others ("if I have extorted anything from anyone, I am giving back four times as much", v. 8). A person who has done wrong, "shall make restitution in full for his wrong" (Num. 5:7) by paying back what was taken in the wrong. Sin creates a debt that is owed to others because it takes away something that was supposed to be given to the person that was wronged. Restitution corrects the wrong.
- C. Restitution is simply an attempt to correct and make up for the wrong done. There are two aspects of restitution. First, is a payment that covers the full price of what was taken away from the victim in the wrong. The loss resulting from the wrong is covered by the person who did the wrong. If someone stole \$100 then that same amount was to be given back to the person who was robbed. Second, in addition to the price of what was taken, an additional amount was added to the payment of the victim. This additional cost is intended to make right that which has been broken in the relationship. It is both punitive and restorative and functions as compensation for the wrong.¹⁰ Sometimes it was one fifth of the total cost, sometimes double, and other times five times the cost of the wrong—depending on the severity of the wrong.

⁹ Unless the wrong can be overlooked and covered by love without it creating issues in the relationship (Pr. 10:12, 17:9, 19:11, 1 Pet. 4:8).

¹⁰ Ex. 21:26

Restitution restores what was taken in the wrong and compensates the victim for their trouble, heartache, and pain (Ex. 21:18-19). Without an additional cost added in restitution, the wrong action itself is never addressed—only the loss is.

- D. The principle of restitution is found and described in the Law (Ex. 22:1-15, Lev. 6:1-7, Num. 5:5-8). Many specific examples of various cases of restitution can be found in the Law of the Old Testament. When sin occurs, a debt of payment is created toward the person who was sinned against, including God. This is where the sacrifices come into play.
- E. The difficulty with restitution is that not all sin is attached to a specific dollar amount. Restitution for theft is straightforward but restitution for anger or disrespect is not. Compensation for a wrong was decided by the victim, in agreement with the perpetrator, and sometimes imposed by a judge (Ex. 21:22). The compensation was to be fair and proportional to the wrong that was done.
- F. If we quickly say, “I’m sorry” and move on the person who we have hurt is usually left wondering if you’re really care about their pain and what was done to them. This is why restitution is so important, it confirms genuine confession and repentance. A person who is truly sorry for a wrong they have done will want to undo the damage they have caused through their actions. Restitution doesn’t minimize the experience of those who have been wronged so that genuine and full restoration can be possible. Without restitution, issues may remain unresolved even though the motions of confession and forgiveness have been done. A person who is not truly sorry will not be willing to make any sort of restitution efforts; they will simply want to move on as quickly as possible to minimize their discomfort.
- G. Each time we wrong another person it is a good idea to ask ourselves the following questions. What was owed to the other person that was taken away by the wrong? How can the thing taken away be given back to the person that was wronged? What compensation for the wrong needs to be given for the relationship to be healed and restored?

VII. Reconciliation (Mt. 5:23-24)

- A. If all the steps in this path of peace are completed in healthy ways, the final step of the peacemaking process will be guaranteed,
 - ²³ Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. (Mt. 5:23-24)
- B. Jesus emphasized the importance of reconciliation (“be reconciled to your brother”, v. 24). Reconciliation means bringing interpersonal relationships together again to a state of friendliness and harmony after an estrangement as an objective state of peace.¹¹ As sin is ceased and wrongs are righted, relationships change, and peace is restored. Through peacemaking efforts from both people in a relationship, reconciliation can be made possible.

¹¹ Charles Taliaferro and Elsa J. Marty, eds., [“Reconciliation,”](#) in *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* (New York; London; Oxford; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Inc; Bloomsbury, 2018), 237, William J. Woodruff, [“Reconciliation,”](#) in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 663, Stanley E. Porter, [“Peace, Reconciliation,”](#) in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 695.

- C. So significant is reconciliation, that those who have been reconciled to God by Jesus begin to live a lifestyle oriented around reconciling with others (2 Cor. 5:18-21). Disciples share Jesus' message of reconciliation with the world (v. 19) and we act in ways that bring reconciliation to others (v. 18). God uses those who belong to Him to bring other people into reconciliation with Himself (v. 20). Jesus Himself is the restitution for sin and all the wrongs every person has committed against God.
- D. Reconciliation as a state of peace will not be fully embraced the way God intends when this path of peace is not followed. A relationship can't be genuinely restored when people refuse to repent and cease to do wrong. Reconciliation will not happen when forgiveness from the heart is withheld from the person who did wrong. Peace will not be experienced when a person refuses to acknowledge the harm they have done and the pain it has caused to others. Reconciliation will be minimal when the person who has committed the wrong refuses to do what they can to compensate the other person for the wrong done—the person wronged will wonder if they are truly sorry and repentant for what they've done. Reconciliation will remain illusive when the person wronged refuses to confront the issue. Every step in this peacemaking process is important. Relationships will not be fully reconciled without each step.
- E. We need to be prepared for the reality that just because we attempt to use this six-step pathway toward peace doesn't mean it will always work. Other people may not respond to our peacemaking efforts the way they should. Not even Jesus was able to be reconciled to everyone in His life. However, the success rate of reconciliation should be much higher with people in God's spiritual family because we are empowered by God to live peacefully with others and we are given the ability to participate in the ministry of reconciliation. Even if our peacemaking efforts don't bring about reconciliation, this process is still the right course of action. Knowing we did everything that was in our power to do to live at peace with others is always good medicine for the soul.

VIII. Conclusion

- A. Use this six-step path of peace for the situations when others have violated God's word and wronged you by disobeying God's moral standards. Don't let issues fester as negative feelings are sure to follow any unresolved sin issues. Confrontation needs to happen so that peace may follow.
- B. Those who serve Jesus in a way that is pleasing and acceptable to God, will pursue the things which make for peace,

¹⁸ For the one who serves Christ in this way is acceptable to God and approved by other people. ¹⁹ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. (Rm. 14:18-19)