

# Becoming a Peacemaker Series

## The Path of Peace in Diversity Conflict (Gen. 31:45-53)

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By  
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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.*

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# The Path of Peace in Diversity Conflict

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Dallas Documentary

1. Spiritual lessons can be learned in surprising places. If disciples direct their attention to God and His kingdom (Col. 3:1-2), even watching TV can become an opportunity for spiritual growth. Many of you know that I am passionate about and love football. In anticipation of the upcoming season, I have recently been watching the Netflix series, *America's Team: The Gambler and the Cowboys*. I know talking about the Cowboys and calling them America's Team are fighting words in Wisconsin, so I apologize for the title—I didn't create it.
2. This documentary showcased the importance of conflict resolution and what might be at stake when we can't get to peace. The Dallas Cowboys had spent several years building their team (with the help of the Vikings through the Hershel Walker trade) and won two Super Bowls in a row. They were going to attempt to be the first team in NFL history to win three consecutive Super Bowls. The Cowboys, due to their success, were making a lot of money.
3. Behind the scenes, however, conflict had been mounting between the head coach Jimmy Johnson and the owner Jerry Jones. These two longtime friends, who went all the way back to their college days, were struggling to get along. Despite the long history and the friendship, these two men could not resolve conflict in their working relationship. Instead of continuing their success together, they parted ways, and the Cowboys didn't make it to the third Super Bowl.
4. The Cowboys organization lost money, success, historical achievements, and likely more Super Bowls, all because two individuals couldn't resolve their conflict. Everyone connected to that team was left wondering what might have been if those two men could get along and stick together. Unresolved conflicts are very costly. In some cases, it may even cost millions of dollars. Being able to resolve conflict is an important and life-changing matter.

B. We've outlined five different types of conflict and their unique path of peace; the final two types of conflict are the most difficult to handle. Finding peace through conflict resolution and reconciliation is much less common in these last two types of conflict. Yet, with God's help and if all parties involved are willing to navigate situations God's way, peace is still possible.

C. We've addressed conflicts that come from sin, a person giving offense, misunderstandings, competition, and unfulfilled desire. In this message, we are going to be addressing diversity conflicts and principles that can help us shift our perspective so that we can move toward peace. Disciples need to understand what to do when we can't see the same situation with the same perspective as another person.

## II. Principle of Ownership: Authority and Responsibility

A. While the previous types of conflict may not be easy to resolve, they aren't as complex as these last two types of conflict. The question we will be seeking to answer is, "What do we do when

we just can't see eye to eye with another person?" No matter how hard you try, how much you communicate, and how much you understand one another, sometimes two individuals just can't agree, and a decision needs to be made. Now what? This Biblical form of conflict is what I'm calling diversity conflict. There is a lack of agreement and peace because there is an unreconcilable difference in perspective, values, priorities, or styles. Two people just can't see the same situation in the same way, even when both people's positions and motivations are clearly understood.

- B. If we are to move forward in diversity conflict, we need to learn how to think about the situation we are facing. A critical part of finding peace in diversity conflict is learning how to clarify and shift our perspective, since it is our perspective that is the most common source of diversity conflict. To help us think through the situation more clearly, we need to learn specific Biblical principles that will help us determine how to move forward.
- C. A key factor in shifting our perspective in diversity conflict is the principle of ownership. Imagine someone walking into your house and rearranging your decorations. Once the shock and surprise wear off, you will probably intervene. When you confront the intruder about their actions, they respond by saying, "This is the way I prefer it. I think it looks better this way." You would rightly call the cops and yell, "This isn't your house!" Why would a person think they have the right to enter and rearrange another person's house? Ownership matters, because ownership gives us the right of decision making. The first critical issue to realize in diversity conflict is: who "owns" this? Like a person entering your house and assuming authority for it, some conflict can be seen to be completely irrational because one person or party does not have ownership over the sphere in which the conflict is taking place.
- D. There are two major elements of ownership: authority and responsibility. Ideally, these two elements should operate jointly. If only one or the other is given, problems are guaranteed to follow. Ownership determines who is in charge. Ownership is the most important factor in being able to move past the gridlock when we get stuck in diversity conflict without the ability to move forward. Final decision making is grounded in ownership.
- E. The importance and impact of authority is promoted in the interaction between Jesus and the centurion—a Roman military commander:
 

<sup>7</sup> for that reason I did not even consider myself worthy to come to You; but *just* say the word, and my servant shall be healed. <sup>8</sup> For I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under myself; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does *it*." <sup>9</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, He was amazed at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith." (Lk. 7:7-9)
- F. Jesus operates from an understanding of the world (worldview) in which there exists various structures of authority that govern our lives. All these authority structures are sourced in God and are determined by Him (Jn. 19:11). God the Father delegates His authority through these structures of authority. This centurion has adopted and articulates this same perspective of the world ("I also am a man placed under authority, with soldiers under myself", v. 7). This Roman

soldier acknowledges Jesus and His authority to heal his servant (“just say the word, and my servant shall be healed”, v. 7). Jesus then affirms and praises this centurion for his accurate perspective and His trust in God’s authority (“not even in Israel have I found such great faith”, v. 9).

- G. The issue of authority is an important consideration for Jesus in the way people ought to conduct themselves in this world. Jesus even went so far as to point out the problems that were happening as people tried to assume authority in areas when they didn’t have ownership (Mt. 21:33-44). Instead of respecting God-established authority structures, some people try to steal authority and do what they want to do instead. God will ultimately correct these types of situations and restore rightful authority to those He shares it with.
- H. The role of responsibility is described in the relationship between parents and children:
  - <sup>14</sup> Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for *their* parents, but parents for *their* children. (2 Cor. 12:14)
- I. The primary reason God gives authority to certain individuals or human organizations is for them to be able to carry out specific responsibilities. In this case, parents are given authority by God over their children so that they can care for children who are not able to provide for themselves (“for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children”, v. 14). Notice how authority and responsibility go together (Eph. 6:1, Col. 3:20). Some people have certain responsibilities (parents), while others do not (children). Responsibilities are determined by the nature of the relationship.
- J. Authority is given by God in various areas of life so that those in authority can do good to others. This is always the nature and intention for authority. God provides and gives authority for our benefit, not for our harm. Can authority be abused? Of course. Does this mean authority is bad? No! The solution to bad authority is good authority, not no authority at all.
- K. The idea of authority is very counter cultural today. Ever since the 1960’s, people have developed a skeptical attitude and even opposition toward institutions and authority. A postmodern perspective assumes the only valid source of authority is the individual. Some of this has been good and a needed correction to abuses and selfishness of those in authority. However, it is still God’s wise design for humanity to live under authority in various areas of life so that we can flourish, be provided for, be protected, and be guided toward that which is good for us. Those who attempt to live independently from any outside authority will end up causing great harm to themselves, whether they know it or not.
- L. In diversity conflict we run into the significant problem of selfishness that assumes ownership and authority in all areas of life without feeling the weight of any responsibility. Unfortunately, we are encouraged to go through life with the expectation that we should get our way all the time in every area of life. If we don’t get what we want, we simply move on to the next person, business, or church who will provide what we want. Disciples need to be distinct from the world by realizing we don’t have authority over everything, only God does. We shouldn’t expect to get our way all the time, especially in areas of life where we have no responsibility.

M. If the area of conflict doesn't have a clear "owner," can you develop one? Sometimes diversity conflict becomes unresolvable because no one has ownership of the decision. When both (or multiple) people all believe they have the right to be the one to make the decision or have their way, we face an impossible situation. It is good, if it is possible, to use healthy communication to come to an agreement about who the owner of the area of life in which the diversity conflict is happening is. This step can go a long way in helping us reach a resolution. Where there is no clear ownership, conflict is sure to follow.

### III. Principle of Stewardship: Accountability to God

A. Another essential principle that is closely connected to ownership that can help us clarify a path forward in diversity conflict is the principle of stewardship. Stewardship is another way to help us determine ownership and reminds us of what we are responsible for. Stewardship asks the question: Who is accountable to God for the matter that we are in conflict over? What are my responsibilities in this situation before God? For most people, bringing God into the way we think about everyday situations will require a shift in the way they normally think. The more we bring God's presence and instructions into our daily activities, the more our perspective will change. Understanding our personal responsibilities before God in any given situation can help motivate us to do what is good. The principle of stewardship helps us shift our perspective toward a proper way of resolving diversity conflict.

B. Paul mentions the importance of the principle of stewardship concerning His work as an apostle:

<sup>1</sup> This is the way *any* person is to regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup> In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. <sup>3</sup> But to me it is an insignificant matter that I would be examined by you, or by *any* human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. <sup>4</sup> For I am not aware of anything against myself; however I am not vindicated by this, but the one who examines me is the Lord. <sup>5</sup> Therefore do not go on passing judgment before *the* time, *but wait* until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *human* hearts; and then praise will come to each person from God. (1 Cor. 4:1-5)

C. Paul shares similar thoughts in Romans 14. God establishes order in every area of life. There is a design for life and a way that life should operate to function properly. In the passage above, Paul has responsibilities toward God as an apostle and spiritual leader ("stewards of the mysteries of God", v. 1). These responsibilities are connected to the principle of stewardship ("it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy", v. 2). When we are in diversity conflict, it is a good habit to shift our focus from striving to be the decision maker and getting our way to desiring to fulfill our responsibilities toward God with what He has given to us. Paul is not concerned about the opinions and judgments of other people; he is only concerned about God's evaluation of him, his actions, and his life (vv. 3-5).

D. This type of responsibility before God does not only apply to ministry and Paul's apostleship, but accountability to God also applies to every person:

<sup>10</sup> But *as for* you, why do you judge your brother *or sister*? Or you as well, why do you regard your brother *or sister* with contempt? For we will all appear before the judgment seat of God. <sup>11</sup> For it is written: “As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee will bow, And every tongue will give praise to God.” <sup>12</sup> So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rm. 14:10-12)

<sup>9</sup> Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. <sup>10</sup> For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds *done* through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:9-10)

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one *of them* according to their deeds. (Rev. 20:11-13)

- E. Each one of us will have to give an answer to God for everything we do. How we act in each situation of life carries responsibility and accountability to God. We are not responsible for how other people treat us, but we are responsible for how we respond to the way we are treated. We might not be responsible for a decision, but we are responsible for how we respond to what has been decided by those who have authority. Sometimes, we may be responsible for the decisions being made, and when that is the case, we better make good and healthy decisions that are beneficial to others and not just ourselves.

#### IV. Principle of Personal Autonomy: Freedom of Choice

- A. While working through and navigating diversity conflict, it is important to keep in mind the value, dignity, respect, and freedom each individual possesses by right of being a human being. A common danger in diversity conflict is for one person or party to dismiss, minimize, neglect, or override another person or group’s autonomy. The principle of personal autonomy and the freedom each person has in expressing and operating according to their own freedom of choice must be maintained. One person should not be forced to abandon their own personal convictions in illegitimate ways.
- B. In some situations, one person doesn’t have the authority to make another person operate according to their own personal choices or preferences. In diversity conflict a person or group will demand another person or group defer to their decision. This is only a reasonable request when the person or group making this demand has proper authority over the other person or group.

- C. There are several key passages that encourage the value of personal autonomy and decision making:

<sup>13</sup> “But he answered and said to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take what is yours and go; but I want to give to this last person the same as to you. <sup>15</sup> Is it not lawful for me to do what I want with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?’ <sup>16</sup> So the last shall be first, and the first, last.” (Mt. 20:13-16)

<sup>29</sup> Now *by* “conscience” I do not mean your own, but the other person’s; for why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? <sup>30</sup> If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered about that for which I give thanks? (1 Cor. 10:29-30)

<sup>3</sup> The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. <sup>5</sup> One *person* values one day over another, another values every day *the same*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> The one who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and the one who eats, does so with regard to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat, *it is* for the Lord *that* he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God. (Rm. 14:3-6)

- D. Every person who is made in the image of God has self-autonomy that should be respected, valued, and upheld generally in most cases. While exceptions are made in unique circumstances, in most cases, each person should be allowed to operate in their own life according to their own convictions. Other people should not be forced to conform to the decisions of others unless the decision makers have proper authority. For example, it is right for an employer to be able to tell an employee how to do a job and what they need to be doing at work. The employee shouldn’t be allowed to simply decide not to work. However, each employee can decide if they will continue to work under the decisions being made and the conditions they are given.

## V. Use an Objective Standard of Resolution

- A. There is great wisdom in having agreed on objective standards by which to make decisions that can resolve conflict when two or more individuals can’t come together. Seeking an “outside” decision maker can be as simple as flipping a coin or as complex as using the legal system of the government. In either case, a third-party source is used to determine a final decision on a matter. When using an objective standard of resolution, it is important for all parties to agree on the mechanism of decision making prior to the decision. Then, following the decision, everyone needs to stick with the outcome of the objective standard. If two people can’t agree, there needs to be a referee.

- B. One of the methods for an objective standard in decision making and conflict was the Old Testament use of lots (like dice):

<sup>18</sup> The *cast* lot puts an end to quarrels, And decides between the mighty ones.  
(Pr. 18:18)

- C. The lot was viewed as an approved method of expressing God’s decision according to His ultimate authority and control over the circumstances of life—called sovereignty (Pr. 16:33, Lev. 16:8, Josh. 18:6 1 Sam. 14:42, 1 Chr. 25:8, Jon. 1:7). Through casting lots, God’s decision was determined in a variety of situations. It was how leaders were chosen, how land was distributed, how conflict was resolved, how priestly duties were delegated, who the guilty person was, and much more.
- D. An objective standard can be impersonal, such as flipping a coin, or it may be letting a third party decide the matter:
- <sup>1</sup> Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? <sup>2</sup> Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to form* the smallest law courts? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? <sup>4</sup> So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them *as judges* who are of no account in the church? <sup>5</sup> I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you anyone wise who will be able to decide between his brothers *and sisters*, <sup>6</sup> but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? (1 Cor. 6:1-6)
- E. It is a pattern throughout the Bible that individuals who know God and His ways are the ones in the best position to render fair and discerning judgments. These judicial decisions were made by priests, judges, kings, and church leaders. When disputes arose, wise and discerning leaders decided the cases brought before them. In this context, Paul assumes there are wise individuals within the church who can make decisions so that disciples don’t need to go through the legal system of those who don’t know God or His ways to resolve disputes between disciples. He asks the rhetorical question why disciples are going to those outside the church instead of those inside (“Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints?”, v. 1).
- F. Is there an objective standard of decision that can be used to resolve this conflict? Without an objective standard to resolve conflict, conflict remains ongoing, and it festers—usually growing in strength. Leaving open conflict unresolved is disastrous and it destroys relationships and organizations. Conflict must be dealt with and brought to some sort of closure—even if some are unhappy with the results at the end. Unhappy conclusions are much better than no conclusions and people being left in limbo.

## VI. Keep Your Distance and Do No Harm

- A. The long-term family relationship Jacob had with his father-in-law went through many different seasons. Some were good, others were not. Eventually, the relationship deteriorated to the point that Laban’s attitude toward Jacob changed and became very negative to the point that no matter what they did, they couldn’t get along and come to any sort of agreement. The



whole story can be found in Genesis chapters 29-31. Jacob and Laban maintained irreconcilably different perspectives, and no amount of communication and understanding brought their experience-based perspectives together. It feels like Jacob and Laban lived in different worlds, even as they interacted with one another for a long time.

- B. After twenty years of working together and having a family relationship, Jacob and Laban's relationship had deteriorated to the point that they could not agree and did not have any objective standard by which to come to some sort of resolution. Therefore, here is what they did:
 

<sup>45</sup> Then Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a memorial stone. <sup>46</sup> Jacob said to his relatives, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. <sup>47</sup> Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. <sup>48</sup> Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed, <sup>49</sup> and Mizpah, for he said, "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. <sup>50</sup> If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, *although* no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." <sup>51</sup> Laban also said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the memorial stone which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup> This heap is a witness, and the memorial stone is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this memorial stone to me, for harm. <sup>53</sup> The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. (Gen. 31:45-53)
- C. God prevented Laban from doing harm to Jacob as His chosen person to carry out His divine plan (Gen. 31:24, 29). Jacob acknowledged that if Laban was allowed to do what he wanted, Jacob would have been left destitute (Gen. 31:42). Since these men could not come to any agreement, they both put the situation in God's hands and let God be the judge between them ("May the Lord keep watch between you and me", v. 49, and "The God of Abraham...judge between us", v. 53). Essentially, both men said, "We can't decide so God will decide."
- D. Further, the men made a covenant with one another that they will separate and stay away from each other ("I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap...to me, for harm", v. 52). The relationship was so bad that they agreed simply to stay away from one another. Not only were these men going to keep their distance and not interact with one another, they also committed themselves not to harm one another. Both separation and an agreement not to do harm to one another were part of their covenant. All of this took place among family.
- E. In the worst-case scenarios, we may have to simply agree to stay away from other people for the sake of peace. If we reach the point that Joseph and his brothers did when they, "could not speak to him on friendly terms" (Gen. 37:4), the path of peace probably requires separation and distance. If jealousy, anger, hatred, or bitterness takes over a person and makes a relationship with them impossible, severing the relationship may be what is needed. Some people are irreconcilable (2 Tim. 3:3). Depending on the nature of the relationship, this separation will look different in each context. For example, in a marriage, separation should always be used as a

long-term opportunity to be reconciled (1 Cor. 7:11). In another relationship, the separation may need to be used for personal protection from further loss or harm while wisely making the separation permanent—say in a business relationship, or a friend who demonstrates consistent and unchangeable immoral character.<sup>1</sup>

## **VII. Conclusion**

- A. Diversity conflict (having an irreconcilable difference of perspective) is one of the two most difficult types of conflict to resolve in peace. Frequently, diversity conflict gets stuck in a stalemate that becomes unresolvable or leads to an emotional blowup. However, applying these principles wisely offers a far better alternative.
- B. By shifting our perspective and using the principles that help bring about resolution, disciples can walk down the path of peace. Creative solutions are necessary when clear communication and understanding leads to an irreconcilable difference of opinion. We need to discover a path forward, even in these types of circumstances.

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<sup>1</sup> This type of separation is permanent until there is repentance and real change in the life of the other person.