

# Becoming a Peacemaker Series

## The Path of Peace in Misunderstanding Conflict (1 Cor. 4:5)

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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 Misunderstanding Conflict

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Jurassic World Rebirth

1. Over the fourth of July holiday our family traveled to Minnesota to visit my parents and my brother along with his family. One of my nephews loves all the Jurassic movies. As soon as my brother's family arrived my nephew jokingly said, "Are we going to the new Jurassic movie tonight?"
2. My brother, his son, Caleb, and I ended up going to the movie. Once we got back to the house the normal question came up, "How was the movie?" At one point in the conversation, I was mourning the fact that Hollywood often portrays reality upside down in a way that is completely unrealistic. Movies become unenjoyable when a woman is portrayed as the manliest person in the movie and a male character is portrayed as fearful and in need of protection from the woman. It is commonplace in movies today for men's and women's natures to be distorted to an extent that they are no longer recognizable. I knew my perspective would be controversial.
3. My sister-in-law, somewhat jokingly, said, "So you're saying that you don't think women shouldn't be paleontologists?" I responded with a playful sarcastic, "Yes, that's exactly what I was saying." We tend to joke around with our differences in perspective around men and women. We've had many conversations in the past so we both know that we see issues related to the topic of feminism very differently.

- B. While we were having fun with one another and neither of us were upset, there was an underlying truth to our lighthearted conversation. It can be difficult for my sister-in-law and I to have conversations on topics that are connected to feminism because we see the world from very different perspectives. For my sister-in-law, feminism, is the lens through which she sees the world, her experiences, and other people's experiences. It is a fundamental piece of her worldview.
- C. My statement about the nature of reality and the inaccurate way it was presented was taken as an insult to women even though that wasn't at all what I said. My sister-in-law heard what I said through the filter of a narrative about life that she is convinced is true. Therefore, conversations and experiences are perceived through this lens. Reality is forced through the perspective of the narrative she wants to maintain. My words were changed to fit her assumptions about those who disagree with her. There was a miscommunication between us and not for the first time on this topic.
- D. The third type of conflict happens due to misunderstandings and miscommunications. A lack of clarity can result either through poor communication on the part of the speaker or poor listening on the part of the listener. In either case, misunderstandings lead to disagreement and conflict. This type of conflict can be resolved through clear communication and a correct understanding of one another. While resolving miscommunication conflict sounds easy in theory, in practice, it can be more challenging than expected. In some cases of misunderstandings, it can feel as if we are living in a different world than the other person.

## II. The Source of Misunderstandings

- A. Poor communication can happen because the speaker—the person initiating and attempting the communication—is doing a poor job of clearly expressing themselves. The person who is listening to them is doing their best to hear what the person is saying with an open posture. Faulting the communicator is usually assumed when there is a miscommunication. However, it is also possible that the reason there is a misunderstanding is because of poor listening—the person receiving the communication is doing a poor job of receiving the message. In fact, bad listening is more frequently mentioned in the Bible than bad speaking (at least when it comes to communicating God’s word). Miscommunications can be the result of the speaker, the hearer, or both.
- B. Since Scripture places a stronger emphasis on listening when it comes to misunderstandings, we will do the same. Developing good listening skills along with habits that regularly use those skills is difficult enough, this becomes even more challenging in times of conflict. In modern society, we are quick to criticize and condemn anything that disagrees with the way we currently think. It is common to become angry very quickly. Some people even have a hard time merely listening to viewpoints that disagree with their own. We can be quick to hear disagreement even before we accurately understand what the other person means. All this requires good listening to be intentionally sought out on our part for the purpose of avoiding misunderstandings.
- C. Since good listening is critically important when dealing with misunderstandings, it will be helpful for us to learn about various sources of misunderstanding that are found in the Bible. If the path of peace is going to be pursued in this type of conflict, we need to be familiar identifying misunderstandings and where they come from.
- D. Many misunderstandings are the result of making assumptions,
 

<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. 4:5)
- E. Since everyone goes through life assuming certain perspectives are true about the world, we then view all our experiences and the world itself through the perspectives we currently hold—this is called a worldview, fundamental convictions, and presuppositions.<sup>1</sup> In every situation, we assume certain ideas are true. If these assumptions aren’t well justified, they can distort our perspective. Everyone has a perspective on God, reality, knowledge, human beings, and values that we bring into every experience. Some facts about reality are not known and we should pretend that we know them (“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”, v. 5). In this verse, disciples are encouraged not to assume they know what they do not know especially when it comes to the inner workings of

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<sup>1</sup> In philosophy these are called basic beliefs. A belief that is not based on or justified by another belief, basic beliefs are held independently of other beliefs. Steven Cowan and James Spiegel *The Love of Wisdom: A Christian Introduction to Philosophy* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 82.

another person's heart. While we can know what is happening inside another person to an extent, we only have limited knowledge (Mt. 12:34, Lk. 6:45, 12:34). When we form an opinion about another person, it needs to be based on truth, not what we assume is true about them. At the judgment of God, everything hidden will be revealed (Mt. 10:26, Mk. 4:22).

- F. If we think an opinion is true about another person, their words or actions but it is an internal matter of the heart that is causing a disagreement, the best approach is to ask the person for clarification. Conversation should replace assumptions. Asking people about what is important to them, why they made a statement, what they are trying to achieve, etc. can clear up the false assumptions we make that result in conflict. Being direct and honest is important. Some good deeds and sins are not obvious at first (1 Tim. 5:24-25). Discernment and patience are needed.
- G. A specific type of assumption that generally causes misunderstandings is called evil suspicions in the Bible,
  - <sup>3</sup> If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, <sup>4</sup> he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a sick craving for controversial questions and disputes about words, from which come envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, (1 Tim. 6:3-4)
- H. It is common for people to read into what other people are saying or doing and interpret them negatively or assume immoral motives and desires in those we disagree with ("evil suspicions", v. 4). We reason toward conclusions from incomplete evidence and determine morally bad or wrong thoughts, motives, desires, or intentions.<sup>2</sup> Evil suspicions hear another person's words or observe their actions and assign negative motives or intentions behind them. We move from what we can observe to assumptions about what we can't see. When we assume something bad in another person it will change the way we interpret their words and actions, possibly distorting them. We may interpret another person's words, actions, or ideas in the worst possible light as a result. Evil suspicions are a destructive and harmful type of assumption.
- I. Another source of miscommunication is the spiritual problem of hardness of heart,
  - <sup>15</sup> For the heart of this people has become dull, With their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and return, And I would heal them. (Mt. 13:15)
- J. Those with a hard heart do not listen very well. The spiritual problem of hard heartedness is pointed out by Jesus ("For the heart of this people has become dull", v. 15). The spiritual insensitivity causes the symptom of an inability to hear—especially spiritual messages ("with their ears they scarcely hear", v. 15). A person with a hardened heart is closed off to God and is resistant to Him. A person with a hard heart digs their heels in and refuses to move even when God is encouraging them toward that which is good and beneficial. While this hardness of heart can be a general condition in life, it can also be directed toward a specific person (1 Jn. 3:17). When we are angry or upset with another person it is easy to shut down internally toward the

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<sup>2</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on 1 Timothy 6:4 "evil suspicions"

person we are having problems with, and put up defensive walls of protection which decreases our ability to hear what they are saying. The result of this internal hardening is that we don't hear very well. We can't hear what other people are saying in an open and receptive way which leads to misunderstandings.

- K. Individuals who don't have a healthy relationship with God and are unwilling to surrender their lifestyles to His way of life, will generally have a harder time making relationships work. Some people are so hard-hearted that they have conflict in almost every relationship they have. Those who are spiritually hardened can't see, hear, or understanding important truths from God that will help them live in a healthier way. Resisting God and closing ourselves off from Him in our soul is very destructive to us.
- L. A fourth common source of misunderstandings comes from a person not wanting to hear or accept what is being said,
  - <sup>25</sup> He then answered, "Whether He is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." <sup>26</sup> So they said to him, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?" <sup>27</sup> He answered them, "I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear *it* again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" (Jn. 9:25-27)
- M. A Jewish man who was born blind was healed by Jesus. The religious leaders, called the Pharisees, were looking for a reason to end Jesus' ministry and they thought this incident could be used for that purpose, so they were investigating this incident. The Pharisees were convinced Jesus was performing miracles by the power of Satan because they refused to accept that Jesus was a prophet or sent from God. After explaining how this man's sight was restored the Jewish man was asked to explain it again. At this point in the conversation the Jewish man tells the religious leaders that they are not listening to him ("I told you already and you did not listen", v. 27). Why didn't the Pharisees listen very well to the man? Because they didn't want to hear or accept what the man was saying as true. Their motives and desires prevented them from listening to an accurate description of what had happened.
- N. We are not as unbiased and objective as we like to think we are. Our desires and what we want can get in the way of listening to what other people say. Our motives matter, they affect how we listen to one another. We are usually far more open and receptive to messages that align with our desires (2 Tim. 4:3). We like messages that give us the freedom to do what we want to do and affirm the goodness of what we are pursuing in life. When we hear messages that disagree with our preferences, we will have a natural tendency to resist and reject those messages—even if they are true. It is very easy for us to deny truth and reality when we don't like it. Our desires affect how we listen and can cause misunderstandings. While there are many more sources of misunderstanding that are identified in the Bible these four are very common.

### III. Identify the Misunderstanding

- A. Now that we are familiar with some of the most common ways communication can go wrong, we are positioned to be able to participate in the first step of the path of peace regarding misunderstanding conflict,

<sup>24</sup> Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are mistaken, that you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God?” (Mk. 12:24)

- B. In a conversation with another religious group called the Sadducees, Jesus was discussing marriage and the resurrection. This group didn’t believe in immaterial realities such as the soul or angels. Because of this, they didn’t believe that people lived on after death. There was some miscommunication going on because of assumptions being made by the Sadducees. During the conversation, Jesus pointed out the source of the problem of the miscommunication (“Is this not the reason you are mistaken”, v. 24). Jesus intentionally and specifically identified the misunderstanding that was taking place, was aware of its source, and shared it for the purpose of clearing up the misunderstanding. All this was done to reestablish clear communication to the conversation. It is helpful when fixing a problem to know what the problem is.
- C. As soon as we realize we aren’t on the same page as another person and we are speaking past one another, attempt to identify the misunderstandings that have taken place. Once we know what the misunderstanding is and how it was caused, we can find a solution to correct it. Sometimes misunderstandings happen because we are thinking of the wrong person or situation. This type of misunderstanding is usually easy to correct. Others can be more difficult. Misunderstandings can happen when we are using the same term but with different definitions or when a person thinks we don’t value something important to them because of a statement we’ve made or a position we’ve taken—but we do value what they value. If we are going to clear up miscommunications with others, we need to identify the source of the misunderstanding, we need to know what the real problem is. Sometimes, the reason two people disagree is because they are talking past one another as they are thinking about and discussing two different issues all while assuming they are talking about the same thing. This happens all the time.

#### IV. Prevent Misunderstandings through Clear Communication

- A. As we’ve learned, some misunderstandings need to be corrected after they have occurred. These misunderstandings are usually very specific. An even better strategy than constantly clearing up misunderstandings that have already occurred is to prevent them altogether by learning good general habits of communication. The Bible has a lot to say about the way people should communicate with one another. There are instructions for both the person speaking and the person listening. Good communication skills that honor God can be learned from His word. Since the Bible has so much to say about communication a list will be provided to help us learn what clear communication looks like from God’s perspective.
- B. Disciples can develop clear communication skills by learning and practicing principles of interaction as explained in God’s word. It will not be possible to explain each principle of clear communication of speaking and listening, awareness of the general list can be beneficial. Clear communication is important to God because it is necessary for peacemaking.
- C. Clear communication as the speaker includes:
  1. Desire to please God with our words (Ps. 19:14)
  2. Speak plainly, directly, and clearly (Jn. 16:25, Isa. 32:4)
  3. Commit to using kind words (Col. 4:6, Pr. 8:6-8, 16:21, 24)

4. Don't say things you don't mean (Eph. 4:25-27, Pr. 23:7, 26:25)
5. Don't communicate with an angry tone (Eph. 4:15, Pr. 15:1)
6. Tell the truth and don't lie (Eph. 4:25, Ex. 20:16, Pr. 12:22)
7. Make statements that are helpful for the other person (Eph. 4:29, Isa. 50:4)
8. Don't use too many words (Eccl. 5:3, Pr. 10:19)
9. Think about your words before speaking them (Pr. 15:28)
10. Do not intentionally mislead, deceive, or give false impressions (Rm. 16:18, Col. 2:4, Pr. 24:28)
11. Don't be careless or thoughtless with your language (Pr. 12:18, 13:3, 21:23, 29:20)
12. Say the right thing at the right time (Pr. 25:11-12, 15:4)

D. On the receiving side, clear communication for listening involves:

1. Desire to hear the other person and their views (Ac. 28:22)
2. Pay attention to what the person is saying (Pr. 7:24, Ps. 17:6, Isa. 28:23)
3. Take care with how you listen (Lk. 8:18)
4. Draw out the heart of the other person (Pr. 18:4, 20:5)
5. Be quick to hear and slow to speak (Jas. 1:19-20)
6. Answering before listening is foolish (Pr. 18:13)
7. There is wisdom in remaining silent (Pr. 11:12, 17:28)
8. Seek to understand through knowledge of the other person (Pr. 1:5, 18:2, 18:15)
9. Allow others to disagree while staying faithful (Phil. 3:15-16)
10. Don't interrupt, wait until the other person has stopped talking (Ac. 15:13)
11. Listen patiently (Heb. 13:22, Pr. 25:15)
12. Do not be overly sensitive and take things personally (Eccl. 7:21, 1 Cor. 13:5)

E. Disciples can learn to be skilled at good communication both when they are speaking and when they are listening by using these Biblical principles in all their relationships. As we grow in our knowledge of good communication and develop habits aligned with God's word, we will be able to prevent many misunderstandings and avoid unnecessary disagreement and conflict. When disciples become clear communicators, they maintain peace in their lives.

V. Understand Each Person and their Viewpoint

A. As misunderstandings are corrected and clear communication is flowing, it is much easier to move to an accurate understanding of one another. When disciples are communicating well with one another, the intended outcome is described this way,

<sup>5</sup> Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another, according to Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that with one purpose *and* one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
(Rm. 15:5-6)

B. Even though disciples put in effort to maintain peace, ultimately, harmonious relationships come from God and His influence on our lives ("may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you", v. 5). Healthy and strong relationships are a gift from God! Good marriages are a grace shared with us. This is a blessing that is experienced through Jesus and aligned with His character and teachings ("according to Christ Jesus", v. 5). We must conduct

ourselves the way Jesus teaches if we are going to experience these results. We must be spiritually aligned and nourished by Jesus if we are going to be empowered to experience these results. In short, if we are going to experience healthy relationships, we need to be an obedience disciple of Jesus doing what Jesus says in His power.

- C. What good benefits are shared with us by God? Paul goes on to say that unity will follow (“be of the same mind”, v. 5). This similarity of perspective doesn’t mean all disciples will agree on every issue or trivial matters. Disciples will disagree on the church’s priorities or how best to serve Jesus and their community, but they will all generally agree on their common commitment to Jesus. Disciples won’t agree on every theological or doctrinal point, but they will all be united in the Bible being God’s word as the highest source of authority in our lives. Disciples agree and are united around the essentials of Christianity.
- D. Disciples share life together and participate in activities with one another (“with one another”, v. 5). Relationships are developed and community is created by those who are pursuing Jesus together. There is a communal and corporate element to the spiritual life of the church. Following Jesus is not merely an individual enterprise that is only concerned with our personal relationship with Jesus. Instead, the Christian life is participated in with other people who are also seeking and following Jesus. Part of this communal activity is worship and participation in the spiritual life of the group (“one voice”, v. 6). The church gathers for the worship and praise of God.
- E. Disciples work and partner together to accomplish the same joint objectives that are agreed on by the group in harmony with God’s word (“with one purpose”, v. 6). The church is a team that is working in unison toward the same goals. Spiritual goals that are established by Jesus as head of the church. Each individual disciple participates in the discipline making job of the church so that God’s kingdom is built on earth. All this activity is done for the purpose of glorifying God (“glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 6).
- F. If the conflict is caused by a misunderstanding, an accurate understanding will resolve the conflict and restore peace. If clearing up all the misunderstandings and promoting clear communication doesn’t clear up the disagreement, it is likely the conflict has changed types from misunderstanding conflict to diversity conflict. A disagreement can start with a misunderstanding but when the misunderstanding is cleared up, people may still not agree. In these cases, the type of conflict changes from misunderstanding to diversity. When two people or groups accurately understand one another after clear communication and the conflict remains, we are now dealing with a different type of conflict which we will deal with in a future message. Misunderstanding conflicts are quickly resolved once clear communication and understanding is in place.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. Misunderstandings are a very common type of conflict. These disagreements can be both prevented and corrected through good communication skills by both the speaker and the listener. However, the more negative our feelings and thoughts are about another person the more likely it is that misunderstandings will increase. When another person is viewed as an adversary or enemy, misunderstandings abound and conflicts multiply.



- B. When misunderstandings are identified and corrected through clear communication, understanding follows and peace is restored. The most challenging part of misunderstandings conflict is being able to identify that a misunderstanding has taken place and getting it cleared up. Once both people are back together on the same page, peace is quickly restored.