

# Becoming a Peacemaker Series

## The Path of Peace in Taking Offense Conflict (Pr. 18:19)

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By  
Andy Davis

### At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
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- IV. Make Emotions Obedient to Truth
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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 Taking Offense Conflict

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: Upset Coworker

1. When I was working outside the church, I had a coworker who applied for the same job I applied for. When I got the job and moved to the shift he worked on, it became obvious that he was angry with me. When we did have to interact, it was never on pleasant terms. He treated me very poorly.
2. It should be obvious that I did all the same actions that he did to apply for the job. He did all the steps that I did. Also, I wasn't the one who made the final decision, several supervisors and the warehouse manager made the final decision. I didn't wrong my coworker in any way because we had never worked together and weren't ever on the same shift.
3. Despite all this my coworker was mad at me. This is an example of the last and most difficult type of conflict we need to be prepared to react to. Conflict can happen when a person develops hurt or angry feelings toward us even when we haven't done anything wrong.

### B. We are now going to deal with the most difficult and least resolved type of conflict: taking offense conflict. The wise words of Proverbs are constantly demonstrated to be true,

<sup>19</sup> A brother who is offended *is harder to be won* than a strong city, And quarrels are like the bars of a citadel. (Pr. 18:19)

### C. When an individual gets offended, it is very difficult to get back to a positive tone and restore the relationship to good terms. Conflict can become an impenetrable prison. People generally don't respond to negative emotions well and these negative emotions regularly destroy relationships—even when the negative emotions aren't justified. So often, our feelings create the reality we live in. How we feel is what we assume is true. However, our feelings can play tricks on us and convince us something is true even when it is not. These are the difficulties and complexities of this type of conflict. We must learn how to navigate all these hurdles.

## II. Notice the Change

- A. In a previous message we considered situations where people are being obnoxious and insensitive—giving offense. The offended person has a good reason to be upset. The type of conflict we are dealing with here is a different type of conflict in which the “offending” party hasn't done anything wrong, but another person becomes offended illegitimately. Just because a person doesn't do anything wrong doesn't mean others won't be hurt or upset about their actions or decisions. Taking offense conflict happens when one person develops hurt or angry feelings without another person doing wrong. These are the types of situations we have in mind regarding taking offense conflict.
- B. Since most people do not respond to conflict the way they should, when a person becomes offended, they rarely go to the person who caused the offense to clear up what happened. Since this is the case, the most likely scenario is that the person who committed the “offense” will need to be paying attention and notice the change in the other person's attitudes and

behaviors. This is usually the first step in taking offense conflict. Spouses notice this pattern frequently when they ask the reoccurring question, “Is something wrong or are you upset?”

- C. Negative emotions lead to a change in attitude and demeanor,
  - <sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. He answered by giving orders to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. (Dan. 3:19)
- D. When a person is upset and has negative emotions toward someone else, their attitude, demeanor, disposition, and countenance change (Gen. 4:5, 31:2, 1 Sam. 18:9, Job. 9:27). The Bible frequently uses the language of facial expression to describe a person’s attitude. If a person’s face brightens in the presence of someone else that indicates a positive attitude. If a person’s facial expression hardens or darkens in the presence of another person that indicates a hostile or negative attitude. This is happening in this passage (“Nebuchadnezzar was filled with wrath, and his facial expression was changed”, v. 19). Our facial expressions convey our feelings.
- E. Indicators of a negative change in the relationship might be a person seeming withdrawn and distant, hearing little negative and critical comments, a lack of openness and honesty, little patience, easily irritated or angry, finding excuses to avoid interacting with you, another person telling you about gossip, complaining to others, etc. All these indicators can happen without any behavioral changes or changes in the relationship from your perspective. It can seem like, suddenly out of nowhere, a person’s attitude and behaviors toward you have changed. If any of these indicators are noticed, it might mean something is wrong and the other person has become offended for some reason.
- F. As disciples grow to become more considerate and thoughtful toward others, we learn to pay closer attention to the condition of our relationships and how others act toward us. We become more focused on others as we monitor the health and strength of our relationships as we desire to use them for the spiritual development of others.

### III. Attempt Reconciliation

- A. Once we suspect or become aware of someone else has an issue with us, we need to be proactive in pursuing reconciliation. According to Jesus’ teachings, if our conscience is bothering us because we know we’ve done wrong to another person or when we realize another person is upset with us—even when we haven’t done wrong—we need to pursue reconciliation. It doesn’t matter which side of the equation we are on, when we know there is a relational problem, we need to attempt to fix it. This is how authentic relationships work in the kingdom of God.
- B. Here is how Jesus explained a situation in which an individual realizes someone else has something against them,
  - <sup>21</sup> “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not murder,’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be answerable to the court.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be answerable to the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be answerable to the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell. <sup>23</sup> Therefore, if

you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. <sup>25</sup> Come to good terms with your accuser quickly, while you are with him on the way to court, so that your accuser will not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you will not be thrown into prison. (Mt. 5:21-25)

- C. Jesus begins by raising the relational bar. The old way of thinking about relationships is not enough. Not trying to murder another person does not mean our relationships are healthy (v. 21). A lack of active hostility toward another person is not the standard of what a healthy relationship looks like. If anyone is angry with another person it indicates a relational problem that needs to be fixed (“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother”, v. 22). The minimalist ethic of “as long as I’m not hurting anyone” means our behavior is moral does not work with God. God’s standards for our relational health is much higher than many people think. Having the feeling of anger toward another person is enough of a wrong to justify punishment from God (“shall be answerable to the court”, v. 22).
- D. The reconciliation process is initiated because one person is aware of or has noticed a relational tone change (“you remember that your brother has something against you”, v. 23). In this passage, it is assumed that the person who may be at fault knows there is a problem and they haven’t taken any steps to deal with it yet or the issues remains open and there is more they can do to clear it up. When this happens, action needs to be taken if our relationships are going to operate the way God desires.
- E. Once a problem is identified, the person who knows there is an issue goes directly to the other person and attempts to clear it up (“and go; first be reconciled to your brother”, v. 24). Intentional actions need to be taken to attempt to reconcile the issue. The hope in going directly to the person that may have a problem with us is to be restored to a favorable or friendly relationship after a presumed wrong.<sup>1</sup> While the other person assumes we have done something wrong, we go to them and clear the issue up either by repenting for a wrong done (it the presumed wrong is correct) or by helping the other person realize we did not do anything wrong and helping them adjust their perspective to the truth. Even when we are in the wrong, we should seek to restore good terms with the other person (“Come to good terms with your accuser”, v. 25). The health of our relationships impacts the quality of our worship and our relationship with God. God wants us to clear up offenses so we can approach Him in a more honorable way.
- F. As disciples, we should not ignore and dismiss another person’s negative feelings as “their problem” without first trying to move toward reconciliation. We shouldn’t assume the other person has unjustly taken offense at us without us doing anything wrong until we have a conversation with the other person to find out what happened and why they are upset. Reconciliation frequently involves more than only one conversation and understanding the situation might not be resolved in just one conversation. Just because we don’t think we’ve

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<sup>1</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Matthew 5:24 “be reconciled”

done anything wrong doesn't mean we don't have any responsibility in trying to restore a relationship.

- G. As uncomfortable and as against our nature as it may seem, when we realize another person is upset with us or has become offended, we need to initiate a process of reconciliation directly with them—or at least attempt to. We need to learn and develop God honoring relational habits. If the other person refuses to have a conversation or is unwilling to listen to what you have to say, at least we have done everything we can to try to live at peace with them. We can rest confidently knowing we have done what God's requires of us even if the conflict remains unresolved.

#### IV. Make Emotions Obedient to Truth

- A. Switching gears now, we are going to look at the situation from the perspective of the offended person—the one who took offense. If we are offended, it is critically important to practice the principle promoted by Jesus of “taking the log out” (Mt. 7:5) as we practice self-reflection. Time and thoughtfulness are required to identify our own moral failings and how our perspective may be tainted so that we aren't viewing another person's “offenses” clearly—according to what is true. As disciples, we should be thoughtful about what is happening inside us and honest in the way we lay ourselves openly before God for His evaluation (Mk. 4:22, Heb. 4:12, Jer. 20:12). With God's help, we need to ensure that we are seeing the situation clearly and we are not blinded by our own sinfulness so we can see clearly to help the other person with their moral shortcomings—which may be less significant than our own.
- B. An important question to ask about another person's actions to help us keep the situation and our feelings in proper perspective is: did this person do anything God clearly says is morally wrong? If the person didn't do anything morally wrong, we can follow up with a question that helps self-investigation: why is what the other person did bothering me? We should not accept our feelings at face value without evaluating them—even God encourages this. Trying to get to the source of our negative feelings or perspective so we can align them with what is true is critically important. We should not let our feelings have the final say. We can ask ourselves the instructive and wise question God asked Jonah of his anger, “Do you have a good reason to be angry?” (Jon. 4:4).<sup>2</sup> The depth of the question was lost on Jonah, so Jonah kept assuming his anger was justified. From God's perspective, and according to what is true, Jonah's anger wasn't justified or reasonable (Jon. 4:5-11). Just because we are very angry because something negatively impacted us or we didn't like what happened, doesn't mean we have a good reason to be upset.
- C. The writers of some of the Psalms, called the sons of Korah, demonstrate how this works as the author expressed his strong emotions to God,

<sup>5</sup> Why are you in despair, my soul? And *why* are you restless within me? Wait for God, for I will again praise Him *For* the help of His presence, my God. <sup>6</sup> My soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. (Ps. 42:5-6)

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<sup>2</sup> God asked the same types of questions to Cain (Gen. 4:6).

- D. The author repeatedly evaluated his feelings according to the truth and God's word (Ps. 43:5). He begins by assessing his feelings ("Why are you in despair, my soul?", v. 5). The author is open and honest about his feelings, and he doesn't try to deny them. He didn't try to convince himself that someone belonging to God shouldn't feel as though they are sinking down in life and ready to worry or panic.<sup>3</sup> The writer brought his feelings openly and vulnerably into the presence of God so he could process them. He also felt an anxious uneasiness and discomfort about his situation ("And why are you restless within me?", v. 5).<sup>4</sup> The author's sense of peace is being stirred up. It is openly admitted that life is very difficult in the current season and there are constant tears (Ps. 42:3). God feels distant. All this leads to the author to "pour out my soul within me" (Ps. 42:4). In a culture that treats every feeling we experience as valid; God and His wise word offers us a healthier alternative—our feelings should be evaluated and directed by truth.
- E. At the same time, he didn't let his feelings run wild and take control as he brought his perspective into alignment with the truth of God and he encouraged himself in a course of action that is approved by God—not based on what he is currently feeling. The difficulties drew the author closer to God and deepened his longing for God instead of causing anger toward God to rise. He began by informing his feelings how he will act ("Wait for God", v. 5). Waiting on God when we are feeling in despair and having a lack of peace about the situation is not natural—it is supernaturally inspired. Even when the situation seemed bleak, he decided to depend on God and continue to trust Him. While the author may be powerless to change his situation, God is not. The author allowed God's presence and power in his life to comfort his emotions knowing that God is still good and will treat him according to His goodness (Ps. 42:8). This course is intentionally chosen against his current feelings. It is an act of faith.
- F. The author moved his thoughts from his emotions to truth about God and the promises God makes to those who belong to Him ("for I will again praise Him", v. 5; and "For the help of His presence", v. 5). He gave himself hope knowing that he will praise God again and that God will help him. This hope is not grounded in his current situation or on wishful thinking—things will get better. It is a concrete hope found in God. By trusting in God, the writer was convinced that God was going to be in his corner no matter what happened. Truth informed him how he was going to respond to his feelings and his despair. While his soul was in despair and wanted to be in despair, the author decided to allow his feelings to be impacted by God and His truth. He was convinced God would help him and that he was not alone. God would be good to him even in the toughest of circumstances.
- G. The author's mental focus shifted from his situation and his feelings to the nature of God. Even though his emotions are still negative, he strives to change his feelings through a knowledge of God and how God works in his life ("My soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You", v. 6). The reason the writer of this Psalm spends extra time thinking about God is because of where he is at emotionally. The uncomfortable feelings he was experiencing was the very reason why he turned his thoughts to God. The writer feelings and understands his deep need

<sup>3</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 42:5 "are you in despair"

<sup>4</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Psalm 42:5 "are you restless"

for God and God's influence in his life. Thinking about God is the medicine his soul requires (Isa. 26:3). He is finding peace in God and not his situation.

- H. When we are offended and we process our emotions as God desires, we can move ourselves from a place of hurt or anger to a place of peace and trust in God. As we evaluate, process, and heal our emotions, our attitude toward and relationship with the person who offended us can be restored—even without the other person doing or changing anything. Sometimes, this might require having a conversation with the other person even if they didn't do anything wrong. This type of conversation can help the other person have a better understanding of us and our needs and develop more effective ways of interacting with us in the future. However, it is possible to restore a relationship in which we have unnecessarily taken offense, for whatever reason, without bringing the other person into the healing process. If we can't do this on our own with God's help, we probably need to have a conversation with the other person to help us see the situation and their actions for what they are.
- I. This Biblical author's example is very instructive to disciples today and teaches us how to live an emotionally healthy life. With God's help, we control our emotions according to the truth of God. Disciples need to learn how to let truth and a knowledge of God influence their feelings.
- J. If we are confronted with a situation in which an unjustly offended person refuses to evaluate their own feelings and hurt with truth, there is little we can do to resolve this type of conflict. This is what makes this form of conflict so difficult. Many people assume every feeling they experience is justified and will attempt to fit reality into their feelings. If individuals aren't willing to do self-reflection, self-evaluation, and have self-awareness, this type of conflict will not be solved.

#### V. Complexity of Conflict

- A. The way conflict works in real life can become very complex. As situations play out, the various types of conflict tend to get tangled up with one another, so we deal with multiple types of conflict all at the same time related to the same situation. Sorting through the various elements of the situation, identifying the different types of conflict, and determining which element of the situation is connected to each type of conflict can be a challenge. However, if we are going to be peacemakers, we need to learn how to untangle the complexity of conflict.
- B. Imagine conflict like a multicolored rope made up of smaller intertwined strands. The rope of conflict needs to be unraveled by twisting and untying all the various intertwined elements of each type of conflict that is connected to the situation or disagreement. Each color strand is a different type of conflict, but the rope of conflict is all tied to the same situation. In the real world, conflict is an entanglement of multiple types of conflict that are occurring all at the same time. There may be a conflict strand that is the result of sin conflict. There may be a conflict strand that is the result of misunderstanding conflict. There may be a conflict strand that is the result of taking offense conflict. There may be elements of a conflict that find their source in a difference of perspective due to diversity conflict. Hypothetically, every type of conflict could be involved in the same situation at the same time. This is why conflict resolution can become very complicated.

- C. Normally, as conflict progresses, additional types of conflict are added to the original conflict and the conflict becomes a large, entangled mess. Conflict is usually much easier to untie and resolve the earlier it is dealt with. Conflict grows much more complex and difficult the longer it is left unresolved. What starts as a misunderstanding conflict develops into a misunderstanding that has elements of sin, giving offense, taking offense, and diversity. Successful resolution increases the quicker we address conflict—this is simply the nature of how conflict works. The longer a conflict stays open and unresolved, the bigger and more complex it becomes.
- D. As long as both individuals who are involved in the conflict focus their attention on conflict resolution rather than getting their way or reaching agreement on perspective or decision making, a lot of progress can be made in all different types of conflict. As Holy Spirit empowered, God’s word informed, and love motivated disciples work together through conflict, peace can prevail, and conflict resolution can be found. All this almost universally requires us to change how we think about and respond to conflict.
- E. Disciples need relational wisdom to be able to identify different types of conflict, all the elements of the situation that are a result of each type of conflict and understand how to work toward resolving each type of conflict simultaneously using the Bible principles and skills we’ve covered in this series. This is not an easy task. It will take practice and experience. At first, we might not be very good and conflict resolution but with time and practice, we can get much better.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. When people refuse to work hard at reconciliation, it is likely negative emotions will take control and corrupt our heart even when we are the innocent party,  
<sup>17</sup> You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may certainly rebuke your neighbor, but you are not to incur sin because of him. (Lev. 19:17)
- B. Harboring negative feelings about others, even because of wrongs done to us, is wrong from God’s perspective in most cases. Staying hurt or angry and refusing to work toward healthy relationships, by itself, is enough reason for God to punish us if He decides to do so—according to Jesus. The way we respond to and deal with conflict is an important factor in living a healthy Christian life and it should not be neglected.
- C. Putting the peacemaking principles from this series into practice on a regular basis is critically important. If we are going to live at peace with others and become the person God wants us to be as peacemakers, we need to work hard at getting along with those around us. The quality of our lives significantly depends on it. Use what you’ve learned in this series to become a peacemaker, God will help you do it!