

The Peacemaker  
*Peace Rules*  
January 29, 2017

**PRELUDE – Football Sunday vide**  
**Worship Songs – Greater / Come Thou Fount**  
**Announcements – Shannon**

**Feature – The General / Offering**

What an interesting song ... and a great way to begin the conclusion of this series, *The Peacemaker* ... because sometimes the battles we think are worth fighting really are not. Sometimes the best thing we can do is simply to say “go now you are forgiven.”

Anyway ... good morning everyone!

As I said at the end of last Sunday’s service (and again in my weekly “At North Heartland” email), our goal today is to get very practical and talk about how we actually go about being peacemakers in everyday life; in the day-to-day

situations in which we find ourselves.

If you've been here for any of this series so far, you know that we've spent a lot of time to this point laying the *foundation* of what goes into being a peacemaker – into becoming *the kind of person* who brings peace instead of turmoil into our relationships and into the world around us.

And the reason we've done so is because of a principle that Jesus teaches us.

### **He said ...**

*A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.* Luke 6:45 (NLT)

In other words, “what’s ‘in here’ eventually winds up ‘out there.’”

... which means that if you have conflict and tension and turmoil in your heart, that's what's going to come out of your mouth; that's what's going to come out of your life. And instead of being a peacemaker, you'll be a peace-breaker. You'll be a person who causes conflict; a person who damages and maybe even destroys relational harmony.

## **Series Review**

So, in order to be an effective peacemaker “out there” (in the world in which we live), we first have to be a person of peace “in here” (at the heart level). And that's what we talked about in the second week of this series.

To have peace at the core requires two things:

**Peace with God that comes when we trust Christ as our savior.**

... which is what the Apostle Paul talks about in his

letter to the church at Rome:

*Since we have been made right in  
God's sight by faith, we have peace  
with God because of what Jesus  
Christ our Lord has done for us.*

*Romans 5:1 (NLT)*

And the implication is that unless and until you and I *are* made right by our faith in Jesus, we are *not* at peace with God.

And, as I said in the message that day – and I feel like it bears repeating in this one – a lot of people don't understand this. A lot of people think that everyone in the world starts out “right with God” and then they do something (whatever that is) that serves to put them at odds with God.

But reality is exactly the opposite. Reality is that everyone is *already* at odds with God, for everyone is born into sin as a sinner. Some of us turn out to be big sinners, some of us turn out to be little sinners but, reality is we're all sinners and we're

all in rebellion against God.

And until you come to the point in your life where you resolve that underlying state of conflict with God *by faith*; until you ...

- Agree with God that you are a sinner in need of saving;
- Believe that Jesus is that savior because He died on the cross and rose from the dead to atone for your sins, and then ...
- Come to Jesus and join His movement and follow Him ...

... until you get right with God by faith, you will not have peace at the core of your innermost being – your spirit. That’s the first requirement.

**The second, we learned, is peace with self that comes by constantly cleaning out the emotional and spiritual clutter that tends to build up in our hearts and choke out peace.**

And in that message I listed six pieces of garbage

that the pastors here at NHCC see all the time as we counsel with people:

- Bitterness from the wounds inflicted on us by another person.
- Unresolved grief that comes from the wounds of tragedy or misfortune.
- Self-condemnation – not understanding or accepting just how complete God’s grace is towards those who are in Christ.
- Resistance to God’s will ... God tells us to do this but we do that instead.
- Refusal to accept our limitations ... living more like a human doing than a human being.
- Lack of trust in God for whatever need in our situation.

And if we’re going to be peaceful at the core, we have to constantly make room for peace by paying attention to what’s going on inside of us and then taking out that kind of emotional and

spiritual trash when it begins to pile up – as it does for every single one of us.

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Then, last week, we turned the focus from “in here” to “out there” – but not in the sense of what we should or should not do. Instead, we talked about how we think of and perceive the individuals and groups around us.

And in the interest of time, I’ll summarize greatly (and encourage you if you were not here to go to our website or app and watch, listen to or read the message).

In the end, it comes down to this:

**We either see individuals and groups as *objects* or we see them as *people*.**

When we look at the folks in our world and interact with them – and I’m talking about those who are close to us *and* those with whom we occasionally or randomly interact – at any given

moment, we either see them as an *object*: as “something” that is helping us, hindering us or is irrelevant to us reaching our goals and getting what we want.

Or ... at any given moment, we see them as *people* who have dreams and desires, cares and concerns, needs and problems that are just as important and legitimate to them as ours are to us.

In the first way of seeing and being, your heart is guarded or indifferent to those around you, which does not lead to peace.

In the second way, you are open and unguarded because you see others as people created by God, loved by God, and therefore worthy of *your* love and compassion even when they’re wrong, even they don’t deserve it, even when you don’t agree with them, even when they treat you poorly.

That’s the perception – that’s the mindset – of a person of peace, which is what we’re called to be



if we are followers of Jesus. And I explained why that is true in the first week of this series.

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Now, with all of *that* as the foundation that we are continually working to build in our lives, we can begin talking about the daily practice of being a peacemaker. And I say “*begin* talking about” intentionally, for what I am going to say this morning barely scratches the surface of what could and should be said.

So what I’m going to do in the limited time we have is to try and narrow it down to two sets of biblical principles and biblical wisdom that I’m personally trying to integrate into my own life, as well as some of the those that we, as pastors, find ourselves talking about with folks on a regular basis.

I’ve said several times in this series that this is not something that comes naturally to me – far too

often I have carried gasoline to the fire instead of water. And I've seen a lot of other folks do the same thing, which is how we end up being peace-breakers instead of peacemakers.

## **Preventing Destructive Conflict**

So the first set of principles I want to share with you I'm going to put under the heading of "Preventing Destructive Conflict." And I say *destructive* conflict because conflict can actually be *constructive* as long as it is handled well.

And these principles, I think, would fall under the general scriptural commands that are given to all who are followers of Jesus:

### **Paul wrote to the Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians at Rome:**

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

*Romans 12:18 (NIV)*

Now, there are obviously many things we could do to help accomplish that. For instance ...

- There's the Golden Rule where Jesus says, in essence, "Treat others the way you yourself would want to be treated" and its corollary of "don't judge and condemn others because that same measuring stick is how you *will* be treated."
- And the Law of Love, where Jesus says "the greatest commandment is to love God but *also* to love your neighbor as yourself."
- And the principle of "Believe the Best"; give people the benefit of the doubt; extend grace to them – treat them better than they deserve because that's how God treats you in Christ.

If you and I put those kinds of attitudes and behaviors into practice, we'll avoid doing major damage and destruction to relational harmony.

However, what I want to focus on in this section are those times and situations when you feel the tension rising inside of you; those times when you're starting to get upset or angry with a person or a situation and you're about to blow up and do some damage.

I want to give you five "rules" (so to speak) that will serve to ratchet things down and avoid the kind of conflict that divides and destroys.

Rule number one is very simple; just one word.

**Rule #1. Wait.**

*Fools show their annoyance at once,  
but the prudent overlook an insult.  
Proverbs 12:16 (NIV)*

*Whoever derides their neighbor has  
no sense, but the one who has  
understanding holds their tongue.  
Proverbs 11:12 (NIV)*

The other day, I got an email about something I said in a recent message. Maybe I was reading it wrong but, it struck me as being at least unfair if not unkind and maybe even a little snarky and condescending. And I was annoyed and insulted.

My immediate reaction was fire back a defensive self-justifying email that ended with something like:

If you would listen a little better, you wouldn't feel that way about what I said!

God Bless.

Pastor Rick.

But I didn't. I stepped away from the computer and I waited until my emotions subsided a bit. And as I waited, I tried to remember "this is a person who has dreams and desires, cares and concerns, needs and problems that matter as much to them as mine do to me."

Now, I can't say that I felt totally at peace with that person after that. What they said still stung. But I was able to respond with something along the lines of "I think you misunderstood me. Here's the heart behind what I said" which, I think you'll agree, is a much more constructive response than what I originally thought about sending.

By the way, *however difficult it is for you to wait before responding to an offense is almost always related to how peaceful you are at the core.* In other words, if you're already full of turmoil and conflict on the inside (because of the reasons I mentioned earlier), then whenever something happens outside that causes even a small disturbance in your life ... your pump is already primed and you explode.

Point being, if you want to get better at waiting, you probably need to be more intentional about regularly removing the garbage from your heart.

So, that's rule #1 when the tension rises. *Wait.*

**Rule #2. Go face-to-face not to Facebook (or other electronic communication).**

And I know ... I violated this rule when I got that email.

Part of the reason I did is because I don't know the person who sent it and I didn't have a phone number, plus I felt like my response would not inflame the situation.

*But I don't know that for sure.* I haven't gotten a response back. I might have made things even worse. And it could be *I'll never know*, which is why face-to-face is always best. There's just too much potential for misunderstanding but an even bigger issue is that *electronic communication makes it very easy to perceive others as objects.* They become allies who "like" us, enemies who "unfriend" us, or irrelevant who for some dumb reason sit on the sidelines.

That's why people say things to others on social media they would never say face-to-face which means they do damage to others and relationships at a level they would never do face-to-face.

And that's why, for some of us, *the* number one thing we could do to create more peace in the world would be to stop posting on Facebook. And if you're a Christian, I challenge you – I dare you – to stop thinking about who will like you or who might unfriend you and start thinking about those who read what you post ... *as real people*. And then consider how what you say is going to affect them.

And I'm not saying you shouldn't stand up for truth as you see it. I'm not saying you should compromise. I'm just saying that Facebook and Twitter and Instagram are not the best way to win friends and influence people. In fact, they're almost always counterproductive in that regard.



So, that's rule #2 for avoiding destructive conflict when the tension rises. *Go face-to-face and not to Facebook to voice your concerns.*

Ok, rule #3. I can't believe I even have to say this but, since our culture is so amped up these days, it needs to go on the list.

### **Rule #3. Avoid inflammatory language.**

*A soft answer turns away wrath, but  
a harsh word stirs up anger.  
Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)*

There are words we can say that stir up anger; words we can say that inflame the situation and bring war instead of peace.

And I think those words fall into three categories, with the first and most obvious being *profanity*. And I've talked about that a lot over the years so I won't go into it again other than to say one of the most foolish and destructive things you can do is to direct profanity at another human being. For

some of us, *the* number one thing we could do to bring peace to our relational world would be to stop yelling and cussing at people.

The other two categories of inflammatory language aren't as obvious and immediate in their destructive ability but they, too, eventually cause great damage.

One of those is *the language of invalidation* that makes people out to be stupid or morally bankrupt.

For example, saying something like “How can you possibly feel that way? How can you possibly think that?” ... is an invalidation and an insult that communicates, “You must be an idiot.”

Or saying something like – and I see this on Facebook and in the comments section of blogs and online newspapers all the time – “well, if you think *that* then you're a hater.”

You know what that communicates? “If you don’t agree with my enlightened and morally superior opinion it’s because you are backwards, uncaring and evil” ... which does not lead to peaceful and constructive dialogue.

The third category of inflammatory language is what I would call *the language of demandingness*. This is very subtle because it doesn’t necessarily sound angry or confrontational. For example when we say things like:

- “Well, you should ...”
- “You ought to ...”
- “Why don’t you ...”
- “Wouldn’t you agree that ...?”

... you are making a demand. It might not sound unpleasant when you say it but what you’re communicating is “If you don’t think like me or do what I would do, then something must be wrong with you.”

And if you're thinking right now, "Oh my gosh, Rick! That's not what people should think when I say that!" then you have this problem.

So, that's rule #3 for preventing destructive conflict when the tension rises: *Avoid inflammatory language.*

Rule #4 is basically the opposite of the language of demandingness. And it goes a long way to de-escalating tension.

**Rule #4. Listen, then ask permission before sharing your opinion.**

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. James 1:19 (NIV)*

One of the things we've seen a lot of recently in our culture, is average ordinary people shouting their opinions at each other (either literally or figuratively on social media). Nobody is listening

to anyone else – well, only if they agree with us and give us ammo against “them.”

And that’s not just a cultural phenomenon, it’s actually a huge problem in relationships in general. When the tension rises, we start pounding home our position because “we’re right and they’re wrong and the sooner they agree with us, the happier we’ll all be.”

But rarely does that approach work. What usually happens is they pound harder and yell louder to get their point across.

The only way to peace in that situation is for someone to stop talking and start listening. “OK, I get that you’re upset about this. Can you help me understand why? Help me understand what you’re thinking.”

And then listen. *Really* listen. Take a deep breath and don’t get offended when you hear things you don’t like or don’t agree with. Ask clarifying

questions. Repeat back what you think they're saying until they begin to calm down.

THEN – and *only* then – ask for permission to share your opinion. “Would you be open to hearing a different perspective? An alternative view? A dissenting opinion?”

Sometimes people will say “no.” And when they do, it's hard, but you need to respect that and keep your mouth shut.

Most times, however, people will sense your respect for them and what they think and they will feel safe enough to say “yes.” Even people who say “no” at first will eventually say “well, ok, what do you think?”

At that point, I have found it a good idea to try to phrase your opinion in terms of a question or statement that communicates that you don't have all the answers – because you don't. You are not God. There are limits to your knowledge and

understanding.

For example, “I know you think that abortion is murder of an unborn child. But have you ever thought about the woman that gets stuck with having that child while the man just goes off and does whatever? That bothers me. I don’t think it’s fair.”

Or “I know you think that better gun laws would reduce homicides. But what will keep the bad guys from getting and using guns? I’m concerned about that. I don’t think it’s wise.”

Or (to take it out of the political realm), “I know you think that our kids ought to be in every activity and sport, but could that turn out to be detrimental? I’m concerned about that. At what point would we draw the line and say, ‘too much’?”

Now, reality is that sometimes, even with this approach, the tension does not de-escalate. That’s

why sometimes, the best thing to do – and this is rule #5 for preventing destructive conflict when the tension rises:

**Rule #5. Give others the freedom to be wrong (at least as you see it).**

As I said at the beginning, sometimes the battles we think are worth fighting really are not. Sometimes the best thing we can do is simply to say “I give you the freedom to be wrong.”

Of course, don't say that *out loud*. Just decide in your heart and mind “this is not my battle to fight.”

And you also have to be smart about this. If there's immediate danger to life and limb, for example, you *do* have to fight and win. But a lot of the stuff we fight about with people isn't anything we can directly control or change. We're just spouting off. And it's not worth the relational destruction it causes.



And I know that some of you are thinking, “I don’t know, Rick ... that sounds like being politically correct. If you can’t just say what you think, it sounds like you’re compromising the truth.”

**In Psalm 119:160 there’s a fascinating statement. Speaking to God, the writer says**

...

*All your words are true; all your  
righteous laws are eternal. Psalm  
119:160 (NIV)*

This is what’s known as a syllogism in Hebrew poetry, which equates the subjects and objects of two clauses. So this verse is a more poetic way of saying “all the words and righteous laws of God are true and eternal.”

And that’s the thing about truth. The truth is *always* the truth. It’s eternal. By definition, it can never be compromised. What’s true will always be true regardless of what people believe; regardless of who defends it or denies it.

And when you get that in your head, you can graciously and lovingly allow others to be wrong in what they think and what they believe. You can give up the right to prove yourself right and trust God to do whatever convincing needs to be done ... instead of you.

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So, those are some of the things I'm working on that might help you, too. When you feel the tension rise internally:

- Wait
- Go face-to-face instead of to Facebook (or other electronic communications).
- Avoid inflammatory language
- Listen, then ask permission before sharing your position
- Give others the freedom to be wrong (at least, as you see it).

By the way, those last two: that's also how you intervene when you see others in conflict and you want to be a peacemaker. You don't just barge in – you ask permission to comment on what you're seeing. And if you are given permission to comment or even to mediate, you give up the right to be right about your comments or your mediation because, in the end, it's their deal and not yours.

## **Restoring Peace**

Now, because we're human or because we're not mature enough relationally, even though we may try to follow the “rules” of preventing conflict when we're feeling tension, a lot of times we don't. We blow up and now there's a relational mess to clean up.

Or, sometimes we *do* follow the “rules” and it doesn't work because the other person or persons don't. As far as it depended on *us*, we did what we

should have done but, reality is, *peace doesn't depend only on us*. Peace-making isn't the same thing as peace-achieving. It depends on the willingness of others, too. And they weren't willing so, again, there's a relational mess to clean up.

So what do we do in that situation? Well, there's a lot that could be said but I think it really comes down to two simple words; two actions that we need to take if we're trying to be peacemakers.

The first word – the first action towards restoring peace – is “confess.”

**Action #1. Confess whatever you've done to cause and contribute to the conflict.**

Take responsibility. Own up to your part.

Shortly after Jesus made the statement that has been the basis of this series, “happy are those who embrace a lifestyle of peacemaking” He said:

*“If you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.*

“In a similar fashion,” Jesus continued ...

*“When you are on the way to court with your adversary, settle your differences quickly.”*

*Matthew 5:23-25 (NLT)*

How do you settle with an adversary? What do you do? You own up to your part. You take responsibility.

And when you confess your part in the conflict and take responsibility, what are you hoping will happen?

You’re hoping that the other person will say, “I won’t hold it against you. I won’t take it out on

you.” You’re hoping they will say “*You are forgiven.*”

And that’s the second word – the second action that restores peace – “forgive.”

**Action #2. Forgive whatever *they’ve* done to cause and contribute to the conflict.**

You say to them, “I won’t hold it against you. I won’t take it out of you.”

And those who are true peacemakers are constantly doing those two things – confessing and forgiving, confessing and forgiving – moving towards the restoration of peace, regardless of what anyone else does because *those two actions are not dependent on what anyone else does.*

Listen carefully:

- You can and should confess even if the other person isn’t willing to forgive.

- And you can and should forgive even if the other person isn't willing to confess.

And of all the spiritual, relational and emotional concepts we've talked about over the years here at NHCC, that's probably the one that is most challenging and confusing to people: *you can and should forgive even if the other person isn't willing to confess or apologize or repent.*

**That's because forgiveness is something that happens inside of *you*, not *them*.**

Now, it *can* change the world of the person who is being forgiven (especially if they realize they've hurt you and offended you and they've come to you and said "I'm so sorry. Would you please forgive me?") It *can* change their world, but that's just an optional byproduct. The change that is ALWAYS brought about by forgiveness is what happens inside of you, inside of me. We're set free from the bitterness that's holding on to us. And peace begins to reign inside of us.

Another confusing thing about forgiveness (since we're talking about it) is that it rarely stays nailed down. It rarely "sticks" with a one-time pronouncement.

**To forgive someone for an offense means repeatedly choosing to give mercy and grace every time you remember ...**

... "wow, they really did me wrong – and it still hurts." It means that whenever something is said or we see something that reminds us of the hurt, we choose again to release the offender from having to make it up to us.

By the way, this re-choosing idea explains a very curious conversation that once took place between Jesus and the Apostle Peter.

**The Bible says that ...**

*Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"*



*“No, not seven times,” Jesus replied,  
“but seventy times seven!”  
Matthew 18:21-22 (NLT)*

The point Jesus was making is clear. “Peter, your forgiveness needs to be without limit (as God’s forgiveness is without limit).”

What isn’t clear is whether Jesus was talking about forgiving 490 different offenses, or 490 consecutive occurrences of the same offense. Maybe He was saying that sometimes you have to forgive one offense 490 times. Sometimes, forgiving one offense is a process that you never give up on; a series of decisions that you make over and over – without limit.

And since we’re talking about it, let me try to clear up one more confusing thing about forgiveness ...

**...which is that it is not the same thing as reconciliation and restoration.**

Just because you forgive someone – you choose to cease being hostile and offended towards them – doesn't mean you have to have the same relationship with them that you did before.

As I said before, it *can* open the door to a renewed and restored relationship but there are many other factors that go into that ... primarily the person's response to your forgiveness. Will they confess? Will they repent? Will they seek to grow and change?

If they won't, then resuming that relationship will actually lead to less peace in your life. And you shouldn't do it until you see the fruit of repentance.

## **Communion**

Well, hopefully what we've talked about today and in this entire series has been helpful to you – and practical – as you follow in the footsteps of Jesus and seek to be a person of peace in your

relationships.

And as we close today we want to remember those footsteps. We want to remember what Jesus did to bring peace and reconciliation. “We have peace with God because of what he did,” we read earlier.

And one way we remember what Jesus did is through the ceremony we call The Lord’s Supper or Communion. Jesus said “whenever you eat the bread or drink the cup, remember that my body and my blood is what makes your relationship with the Father possible.”

So that’s what we’re going to do.

<prayer>

**Feature – My Worth Is Not In What I Own /  
Communion**

**Worship – Rejoice**

Endnotes