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Series: Proverbs: Living Wisely in a Fallen World
Message: Troublemaker or Peacemaker

Transcribed Message
October 20, 2019

We're going to have a 3-question quiz this morning. We're going to do a 40th anniversary quiz next Sunday. I promised we'd do that, and we will. This morning just a quick 3 question quiz. You've got three questions. You have to pick one of the answers. Okay. Question number one. If your friends were to describe you, would they say that you're a troublemaker or a peacemaker? These are your friends now. You only get two choices. Your friends, when they think of you, does the word troublemaker come to mind or peacemaker? How about your work associates, people you work with? We move into a different realm and a different level. The people that you work with day-to-day. When your name comes to mind, do they think of you as a troublemaker or do they think of you as a peacemaker? Last question. Your family. Yes, your family. What does your family think of when they think of you? Do they think of you as being a troublemaker or do they think of you as being a peacemaker?

We are back in Proverbs. We are venturing into Proverbs 10 through 31. We've already looked at the first nine chapters which give us really poems of praise with regard to wisdom. Wisdom, we talked about for all of those weeks together, is really living life the way God would have us live it. It is seeing life from God's perspective and then living in light of that truth. That's the wisdom that we're called to walk in and to live. As we come to Proverbs 10 to 31, we get into these statements and topics that we are most familiar with when we hear the word proverbs. We've already looked at the power of words. We've looked at the danger of gossip and slander. This morning we look at this matter of strife and conflict and contention. There's a connection between those three, isn't there? Very often words are a major contributor to strife and contention as we'll see. God is in the peacemaking business, and He has called us to join Him. In fact, Jesus has said blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.

Let's begin with some necessary clarifications. First of all, disagreements are simply a part of life. Disagreements are inevitable. We live in a fallen world. We are a fallen people. People are going to wrong us. We're going to wrong other people. There will be differences of opinion. There will be disagreements among us. That's why when we read Proverbs, over 20 times we come across words like conflict and strife and contention. It is just an acknowledgment that that's the world we live in. 1 Corinthians Chapter 11 in verses 18 and 19 Paul talks about the fact that in Corinth, which we know was a church dealing with a lot of division, he acknowledges the fact that there are divisions among you. He just puts that out there. He is just saying what we're saying here. Division and conflict and strife are inevitable in a fallen world.

I'm sure you've heard of the man who was shipwrecked and he lived alone on an island for 15 years. Finally, when the rescuers came, they were amazed at the island that this man had been living on. He was a hard-working man. He was an industrious man. He was a creative guy. He spent 15 years working on this island. They asked if they could have a tour and he said of course. So they came to his home and it was beautiful. It overlooked the ocean of course because he was on a deserted island. They went a little bit further and there was a park. He had developed a beautiful park. Down the way a little bit was the market. That's where you went and got your fresh fish of the day and your produce. Next to the market was the bank where you got your currency to go and buy your produce. Across the street he built a gym where he went and worked out every day. There were a couple of buildings down the way and somebody in the rescue party asked what those two buildings were. He said, "Well, that building on the left is my church. I go to church there every Sunday." Someone asked him, "What about the building on the right?" He said, "That's where I used to go to church." So conflict is just a part of life and even sometimes among ourselves. We have disagreements within ourselves.

Secondly, when disagreements occur, don't be disagreeable. If you don't take anything else away from this morning, just remember that. When disagreements occur, don't be disagreeable. That is the whole point of Proverbs. That is the whole point of living in wisdom. It is in fact to live life the way God wants us to live it. It is to live life from God's perspective. When we step into these disagreements, His counsel to us is

don't be disagreeable. Have a different goal than the world has. As a believer, as someone walking in wisdom, your idea of how to resolve this conflict and how to deal with this issue is going to be different than the world.

One of the best things you can do is to remember the four G's of the Peacemaker Ministry. Within the Peacemaker Ministry, they've given us a lot of incredible material and great ideas, but within this solution that they bring to handling disagreements they tell us that there are four G's that we should follow. So our goal should be to handle disagreements differently than the way the world does. If we were to do that, they suggest the very first thing you do is you say I want to glorify God in this. I'm in the midst of a disagreement and my heart is I want to glorify God. Whatever else happens in this circumstance, in the way I deal with that, I want to glorify God. Now that takes a whole lot of stuff off of the table, doesn't it? It's a game changer. It's no longer about me being right. It's no longer about me at all. It's about God and about His glory and how we can resolve this in a way that's honoring to Him.

Secondly, their second G is get the log out of your eye. Get the log out of your own eye. Don't want to blame somebody else right off. Think in terms of what I have contributed to this problem. So you're standing at, if you will, and you're looking into the mirror of the Word as you face this disagreement, this conflict, this issue that is causing division. You start with yourself and you're getting that log out of your eye and what have I contributed to this.

Thirdly, you gently restore. There's a process you go through. We're going to look at some of this in a little bit. There's a right way to do this, isn't there? That's what the Scriptures would certainly indicate to us.

Then lastly, go and be reconciled. Go and be reconciled. The fourth G is go. Pursue peace. Pursue reconciliation. I think this is where we so often fail. Go. Pursue this. Be reconciled. Seek forgiveness. Offer forgiveness. We'll see how some of this plays out.

Proverbs 17:14 tells us why these things are so important. It says the beginning of strife is like letting out water so quit before the quarrel breaks out. We're going to get a lot of imagery as we look at some of these Proverbs this morning. and you can just picture water that is being dammed up, it's being held back. Proverbs 17:14 says you

better be careful about how you let that water out. We know the power of water. We know what happens when the dam breaks. Behind this proverb is the reality that you can't predict the outcome. That is why he's saying be careful. You don't know where this is going to go. It may be impossible to stop this once it starts and takes this turn. The result could be something that you regret. Proverbs 18:19 is a very familiar verse: "A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city and quarreling is like the bars of a castle." You know what happens when family members and friends don't follow peacemaking principles in dealing with conflict? Instead of being family, instead of being friends, they literally become enemies. They literally turn against each other. He's giving us a much better solution here. One of the first things he says is to be careful. Be careful because once that water gets released you don't know where it's going to go. You're not sure if you're going to be able to guide it in the way that you thought, so be careful. Be cautious.

Lastly, when a disagreement is left unresolved, sin is likely at the core. Notice I said likely. There could be exceptions I'm sure to that. When a disagreement that could be resolved is left unresolved, it is very likely that there are sins that are part of that scenario. The sin of selfishness. The sin of stubbornness. I'm almost certain that the sin of pride is a part of that scenario. You've got things that probably both sides are contributing to, but it should be resolved. It should be pressed into because that's the way God intends for us to deal with conflict.

Let's look secondly then at the bulk of our lesson this morning. Who are you? We're back to our opening question. But I'm going to change it. I'm going to change it from troublemaker to peace breaker. Instead of a troublemaker, are you a peace breaker? Here are some things that might qualify. You might be at peace breaker if you can't control your temper. You might be at peace breaker if you can't control your temper. Listen to Proverbs 29 and verse 22: "A man of wrath stirs up strife and one given to anger causes much transgression." Back in chapter 15 and verse 18 it says this: "A hot tempered man stirs up strife but he who is slow to anger quiets contention." The cause of the anger is not dealt with in these proverbs. He's not dealing with the cause. He's dealing with what anger does. He is dealing with the outcome. What anger does is anger often acts as an agent in strife and conflict and contention. Proverbs 30

verse 33. Talk about a picturesque proverb. Listen to this one. “For pressing or agitating milk produces curds...” So if you want to make butter or curds, you take milk and agitate it. You stir it violently. So he says, “For pressing and agitating milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood.” No problem with that. If you grab someone’s nose and you twist it violently, you’re going to most likely get blood. You might get something else too like a punch in the nose yourself.

Pressing anger produces strife. This is the consistent refrain of Proverbs that it is anger that is out of control that is often a contributor. An angry person is willing to die on every hill. An angry person can’t make oftentimes adjustments to what is important and what isn’t important. What’s important and what’s trivial. Which should be let go and what should be held onto. The angry person is quick to speak and slow to listen, the exact opposite of the admonition that James gives us. The angry person has as their model for ministry the Old Testament prophets, maybe Elijah, calling down fire on his opposition. They tend to take everything personal. They immediately go in to attack mode. That’s what anger does when it’s not checked. We’ll look at anger actually, Lord willing, more in detail next Sunday.

You might be a peace breaker if you always have to be right. If you always have to be right. In other words, you have the spirit of pride, the spirit of arrogance. Chapter 28 verse 25. Listen to this. “A greedy man stirs up strife but the one who trusts in the Lord will be enriched.” And you say what? You say wait a minute. I thought you said a proud man. An arrogant man. And I did. Verse 25 the word greedy is translated about half of the time by this word greedy or it’s translated the other half of the time with this word arrogant or proud. It’s because as the translators grapple with this word, they are not exactly sure which of these uses is to be understood here. But if you look at them, the word itself means wide. It means large. It means to be enlarged. It means roomy. That is the root of this word. Whether you translate it as greedy, it would then be what? I want to enlarge my possessions. I want to enlarge my stuff. Sometimes in conflict and in disagreements your stuff become stuff I want. Or I want all my stuff when I should be giving it to you. You can see how that fits, but you can also see how pride fits that same definition because in pride you have an enlarged view of yourself. In fact, when we think of somebody who’s proud we might even describe them as having a big head. We say

they're a big headed person and we're talking about the fact that they have a spirit of arrogance. There's a spirit of pride. They have an enlarged perspective of themselves. So either of those work. Proverbs 13:10 says "Only by pride comes contention." By pride comes contention. Pride keeps us from doing one of the things we said at the outset. It keeps us from looking at ourselves. It keeps us from seeing if I'm contributing anything to this problem. Pride won't let us admit when we're wrong. We just can't go there. That would not be something that we would want to do. Pride makes us think that we know it all. We're right back to where we started. A contentious person, a peace breaker is someone who always has to be right. Pride is a peace breaker.

Thirdly, you always have to say what you think. You always have to say what you think. Proverbs 18 and verse 6: "A fool's lips walk into a fight and his mouth invites a beating." Proverbs just has a way with words. Do people know your opinion about everything? They shouldn't. They shouldn't know your opinion about everything. That's the whole point of this proverb. People don't need to know your opinion about everything. You don't need to share your opinion about everything. There is a time that we do exactly what James says. Be slow to speak. Maybe don't speak at all. Listen. You don't have to share your opinion about everything. It is good sometimes just to pause. It's good sometimes just to listen, especially I think in today's climate. We don't need to answer every comment. We don't need to respond to every opinion that gets shared. Listen to Proverbs 17:28, "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise. When he closes his lips he is deemed intelligent." So if you just don't say anything, people will look at you and think you're smart. It's advice that we can all heed from time to time.

There are many other reasons in Proverbs for qualifying as a peace breaker. Ridicule, sarcasm, gossip, foolishness, drunkenness. Alcohol and conflict are lifted up a number of times. Just perversity of heart. Proverbs 17:19 "Whoever loves transgression loves strife; he who makes his door high seeks destruction." To make your door high is a Hebrew idiom for you have a high view of yourself. When you have a very high view of yourself, you're inviting yourself to be humbled. That's exactly what the Scriptures say. If you're any of those you could very well be qualified as a peace breaker.

Let's look at what it means to be a peacemaker. A peacemaker. You're a peacemaker if you look to avoid conflict. We're not talking about being a peace faker.

We're talking about being a peacemaker. You seek to avoid conflict. 16:28. We already read that. "A dishonest man spreads strife and a whisperer separates close friends." We don't want to be that person. We want to be somebody who avoids conflict. chapter 20 and verse 3: "It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling." So we seek at times to simply avoid strife, conflict. 26:17. "Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears." That wouldn't be a good outcome. Verse 21: "As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife." It's just saying stop. You don't have to enter into every conflict. You can purposefully, specifically, willfully, intentionally choose to step away from conflict. A peace maker is not looking for a fight. They're not looking for conflict. They don't have a chip on their shoulder. They don't need to disagree just to disagree with somebody. They're doing what they can actually to avoid conflict, but not so that they can have peace at any price. That is not what he's talking about. He's not saying give up your convictions and lay aside your beliefs. No, of course not. We do not do that. But there are so many other things that contribute to conflict that we don't need to appease our convictions and fake peace but rather we need to at times determine that we will avoid conflict. Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." So you have a choice. You choose the soft word. 22:10. Guarding your tongue qualifies you as being a peace maker.

Secondly, you might be a peacemaker if you deal with the problem and not the person. You can't resolve conflict if you're focused always on blaming the other person. If the other person is the point of your comments, focus on the issue at hand. Focus on what it is that's causing the division to begin with. So often it gets lost in personalities and interjecting comments about each other. We usually end up hurting each other, speaking words recklessly and find ourselves focusing not on the problem at all but on the person. It's kind of like the legend of the Hatfields and McCoys, which I guess we know how it started, but for generations it got lost as to why these two families were fighting each other. They were just at a point of hating each other because that's what they were supposed to do. They had totally lost sight of the issue at hand. How much better to follow Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4 where he tells us to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake has

forgiven you. Instead of berating somebody, focus your energy on the problem that is causing this division.

Thirdly, you might be a peacemaker if you cover a multitude of sins with love. You cover a multitude of sins with love. In 19:11 it says, "Good sense makes one slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook an offense." There is almost the exact same thing in chapter 10 verse 12 where it says there is value in overlooking an offense. What are we talking about here when we talk about covering a multitude of sins, overlooking an offense? Dr. Welkie, who has done great work in Proverbs, takes this picture. He says what you're doing is almost like you're pulling a curtain down over an incident, over a situation. You're giving a picture of covering it. Instead of putting somebody at the center of the stage with a spotlight on them and focusing all of it on them, you're literally in the stage setting, pulling the curtain down for that moment.

I would imagine a good number of you have played pickup basketball games or some other kind of sport where you don't have officials. You don't have referees. In pickup basketball where you're playing in the gym with a bunch of guys or gals, you call fouls on yourself. In some cases, it depends on how you set it up, they call fouls on you. If you've ever played with a guy who calls a foul for every time you barely touch him, you know not only the frustration of playing in that setting but you know it just takes all the joy out of it. You just bump into him. Foul. You know, you knock him down, you hack him and he calls a foul on you. No, in that case, of course, you know it's a foul. Our rule was if there's no blood there is no foul. That didn't always apply. Some guys were very touchy. It'd be like go ahead and cover a multitude of offense. I think that's what this means here. It's talking about covering over things in which we don't need to make a big deal.

In 19:11 that verse says it is a glory to overlook an offense. This word glory is sometimes translated beauty. It is beautiful, is what he is saying, to overlook an offense. You don't assume the worst of somebody when something happens. You don't immediately make a judgment about them. You give them the benefit of the doubt. That's what he's talking about. That's the way you cover over something that is minor. You might think to yourself I could've done that. I could've said that. You might think I have done that. I have said that in a setting very similar to that. So you overlook the

small stuff. Peter says the exact same thing in 1 Peter 4:8. "Love covers a multitude of sins." You just think best of somebody instead of thinking worst and you've fulfilled this proverb.

Then the last thing we want to look at. We're going to spend a little time here. You follow the pattern that Jesus taught in Matthew 18. You follow the pattern that Jesus taught in Matthew 18. As we wrap this up this morning, I want you to understand the seriousness with which God views harmony and unity among His people. It's all through the Scriptures that this is the heart of God for His people. All through the Scriptures we see this principle being violated as people fail to walk in wisdom and walk in the truth that God has provided us. Sometimes it's shocking how much we simply ignore some of these fundamental principles for how it is that we get along with each other and how we treat each other. We act as if we have no guidance from God as to how it is that we should be doing. Paul said in Ephesians 4 we should be working hard every day to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, whether that's within our home, our marriage, our relationships with our children, our parents, off to work we go, our neighborhood, our friends, associates, whatever setting that looks like. Here we have a passage that is familiar on some level that gives us some very clear guidance for how it is that we are to deal with some of these things. Jesus simply is going to reflect the things that we've looked at in Proverbs.

The first thing that he says in Matthew 18 verse 15 is that you should go alone. Jesus says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." All right. That's very straightforward, very simple. If there is a conflict that has so ruptured a relationship that you have with a brother or sister in Christ, or with anybody for that matter, then you are to go to that person. You are to one-on-one and in private, without putting this on the prayer chain, you're to go to them and see if this can be resolved. In fact, go back to Proverbs and in chapter 25 and verse 9. Very similar. "Argue your case with your neighbor himself and do not reveal another secret." So it is very clear. There is a conflict that has ruptured a relationship. There's something that's not right and you and that person are to sit down together and you're to have this conversation in which you follow these principles that we've already put forth. Focus on the problem and not the person. This is a command that Jesus gives us. It's not a

suggestion. Jesus is serious about us being peacemakers and not peace breakers and not peace fakers. Remember as you go to that one-on-one meeting, you've already rehearsed in your mind that you've gotten the log out of your own eye. You've asked yourself what you might have done to contribute to this and you've also prayed search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my way. Show me if there's something that's not right within me before I sit down with this brother, this sister. If going in private resolves the issue, he says praise the Lord, your relationship is restored. You've been a peace maker.

But if it's not restored, he says don't stop. Keep working. Take the next step. The next step is to go with two or three others. I'm counting you as being one of those two or three others. Two or three people are now involved in this. Verse 16 of Matthew 18: "But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses." So now you've taken it to another step. You've kept the circle small still, one or two other people and you. There's two or three of you that are going to have a conversation with this person with whom you have a broken relationship. It obviously is not what we've talked about. This is not some minor incident that you can simply overlook and think the best of them. This is something that has disrupted. It is harmful to your relationship. When you think of this person, there's a painful thought there because you know it's not the way it's supposed to be. I think as you consider who it is that you are going to take, you don't have to just think of people who might come alongside and take your view. You might think of the other person and think of somebody that they respect, somebody that they would want to have included in that setting. You go and you see the importance of this step. You see the idea is that you don't stop because you're committed to peacemaking, because you know that God values that. You know that Jesus has that on His heart. This is a matter of obedience and you're going to pursue that. You're going to keep going.

And then if that doesn't work, then he says thirdly verse 17: "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." Now if you thought steps one and two were hard, step three gets a little harder. We don't do it because it's easy. We do it because it's right. We do it because God has on His heart reconciliation. That is what He has done for us. He has pursued us. He has sought after us. Jesus said resolve this conflict. Deal with

this issue. Deal with this sin. Again, without going into detail, different churches handle this step differently. When it says tell it to the church, I think in some measure the size of the church impacts how churches do this. But we'll leave that for another time. But there is a setting in which this matter is broadened out now to a much wider circle. The idea obviously is not to harm anybody. The idea is to bring restoration between people who claim the same Lord and the same faith and the same unity, but it has now for some reason been fractured.

Then he says finally treat them as an unbeliever. Now here is what I want to say before I comment on this. I think one of the saddest things in Christianity today is that so many Christians are totally unfamiliar with this process. There are so many people who have never even once seen this thing lived out or realized or experienced. I don't know how that could be. You see, because I'm a broken person. I hurt people. I offend people. I say things I shouldn't. I do things that are harmful. That's the world that we live in. People do that to me occasionally. I know we live in a broken world. I just don't know how it is that within the body of Christ we have so many people who don't even know that this passage is something that is supposed to be applicable and lived out in their life experience. Over the years when we have taught on this or when we've had these kinds of things come up, we've had people leave Covenant because they thought this was some kind of a weird group of people who were doing something totally out of line. And yet here's Jesus laying out a formula to basically keep us focused on what it is that He died to give to us, which was unity.

This last step – treat them as an unbeliever – I think sometimes again is misunderstood by people. They begin a process of shunning and pushing this person so far out of their life in the realm of influence that that they're almost like a nonperson. But you're not giving up when you go to this last step. You're not giving up at all. You're as committed as ever. You're trusting that God's going to do something. How is it that we are called to treat an unbeliever? My goodness! If we're to treat this person who is now separated from us over a conflict as an unbeliever. How do we treat an unbeliever? We're praying for them! We're loving them. We're trying to cause them to see the value and the benefit of the gospel being lived out of their life. It's not a matter of being hurtful at any point along the way. This is a relationship that we want restored. We want for

there to be harmony. We love them. We pray for them. Because at the end of the day, we understand that in the economy of God, relationships are the most important thing that we have. It isn't our stuff over which we fight. It isn't our possessions that we want to hold on so closely to. It isn't our ego that needs to be massaged. It is our relationships with each other that God says are fundamentally the most important thing of all. In Romans 12:18 Paul says if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Sometimes you do the best that you can and that's what he's allowing for here. Sometimes it's impossible because somebody doesn't want to have that peace. But as much as it is possible with you. You are pressing and you are pursuing. You are making relationships the most important thing.

Why? Because God is in the peacemaking business. He has called us to share in that ministry. He has said blessed are those who pursue peace because they're going to be called children of God. So what do we take away? Peacemaking is part of the gospel centered church. The church is committed to the gospel. The church is committed to the Word of God. It's got to be committed to peacemaking. That means at least three things.

It means first of all knowing we're all strugglers, knowing we're all sinners, we're not surprised when someone sins against us. We sin against somebody else. We fail each other. We acknowledge that. That is part of life in a broken, fallen world.

Secondly, knowing God has forgiven us we forgive others. If we are a gospel centered church that is committed to peacemaking, we know that since we received that amazing forgiveness we extend that forgiveness to others.

Then lastly, knowing God took the initiative to reach out to us, we do the same towards each other. That's why when Jesus goes through this listing you don't stop after number one. You don't stop after number two. You don't stop after number three. You don't even stop after number four because you continue to pray for God to do His work that only He can do.

Clearly all of this is seen in the gospel. This peacemaking is in fact the gospel. That's what Paul says in Romans chapter 5 verse 1. It is God's heart. It is His desire to be at peace with us and He's provided the means to do that through Jesus Christ. That peace which we have by putting our faith and trust in Christ with Him is what He affords

us to share with each other. That's where we conclude this morning. This wonderful, amazing, incredible offer that you and I can have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Not through self-effort. Not through something that we can do for God, but in accepting what He's done for us. We want you to have that peace in your relationship with God and we want you have that peace in your relationship with others. God alone gives us that privilege by His grace.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You so very much for this amazing, unfolding gospel of Your grace. Lord, thank You for this church. Thank You for these people. Thank You for the work of Your Spirit. Father, I pray that our commitment would be to be people who are peacemakers. I ask right now that Your Holy Spirit would bring into any of our minds somebody with whom we need to step out in obedience and say my heart is not right towards this person. Father, help me to be a peacemaker even as You have provided this amazing gift to me. We ask this in Jesus's name, amen.