

Are You a Peacemaker?

The Beatitudes

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We have a very, very practical time in God's word ahead of us with very far-reaching implications for relationships and the way that you think about how you interact with people going through life, both in a positive way and in a protective way; it's going to be a wonderful time as we come to the Beatitudes once again in chapter 5 of Matthew. And I'm going to read the opening eight Beatitudes just to set the context, remind ourselves of where we've been, and then we're going to focus on verse 9 tonight, and quite possibly next week as well, because I think there are just so many important things for us as a body of believers together to contemplate carefully from God's word. Where you get into trouble in spiritual life and in, you know, being on the margins of Christianity is making a lot of assumptions that you don't test by Scripture, by assuming that things should be one way when really Scripture says they should be another. We all have the tendency to think that we know more than we do, we think that we are secure and more able to deal with things than what we really are, and it's just so important for us to humble ourselves before God's word and let it speak to us clearly in the fullness of the revelation that God has given to us in the 66 books of the Bible.

Matthew 5, beginning in verse 3, we read this as Jesus expounds on what the character is that is produced by the new birth, stated differently, this is what true repentance looks like and what true repentance produces, and it's not that common. It's a rare character trait, not a common one, as we read in Matthew 7, but that's for another time. Matthew 5:3, Jesus said,

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus Christ, Scripture tells us, is the Prince of Peace, and where Christ is peace is; peace in the heart, peace in relationships, that's the way that God designs it to be, and that is the

impact that our Lord Jesus has on the people that he truly saves. And so it's not surprising in verse 9 when we read that a central part of Christian character is the idea of being a peacemaker. Verse 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." And the question for tonight is are you a peacemaker? And even more directly, and to expand it out maybe even a little bit more, are you a biblical peacemaker? And what we want to do is we want to find that out today and quite possibly next week, as I said, as my preparations just expanded and ballooned as we got closer to the hour. There's just so much that I want to say about this. It's just so timely for our lives in Christ as a congregation and I want to give you five different principles overall from this verse about being a peacemaker. Actually, I guess it's four principles. Four principles about being a peacemaker and the first one is this, is that you have to work at peace. You have to work at it. You have to work at peace and the word peacemaker in the original language is a compound word, and there is an active component to it. You could actually translate it a peace-doer. Are you a peace-doer? And that helps us right from the start to set expectations. You see, beloved, peace, as Scripture defines it, it doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen by default. It's something that you have to make a priority in your life. You have to seek after it. You have to practice it. You have to work at it. And it helps us to understand and to remember why it is that there is even conflict in the world and in our private lives in the first place. Why are there wars over the course of human history, so regularly, so repeatedly, with so much bloodshed? Why is there conflict in homes, even in professing Christian homes, in marriage between parents and children, and why is there conflict in the church? Why is that? Why is there such conflict?

Well, let's get a perspective on that by looking at the book of James 4 and to remember that there are forces at work that cause these disruptions that we need to take into account as we think about being a peacemaker. The book of James, which reads at times like a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, says in chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask." Now, beloved, this is a really important point to remember and recognize. What causes conflict, what causes violence in society, what causes difficulties even in Christian lives, it's not related to a lack of education or a lack of economics or lack of opportunity, things like that, which is what the world tries to do as it superficially tries to address matters of conflict and violence and crime in society. We just need to give them more money when they need better housing and, you know, some people do need better housing, but that's not the root of the problem according to Scripture, the root of the problem is, is that there is wickedness in the human heart that generates conflict. When two sinners get together, there will ultimately be conflict because of the evil, angry forces that are at work in each one of our lives.

Turn over to the book of Mark 7 and just to remind you of the words of Jesus in a similar context and Jesus says that the problem is within the man, not outside him. In Mark 7:20, Jesus said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting,

wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." And in like manner, the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5 said in verse 19, "the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." And so, beloved, these inner sins, which are far more powerful, far more controlling than we like to admit, far more motivating than we would care to acknowledge, the inner sins of pride and envy and hatred and selfishness and bloodlust are behind the violence and the divisions and the difficulties and the arguments that we see, and so as soon as we come to the idea of peacemaking, our hearts are immediately exposed by Scripture to realize that there are things within us that work against peace.

Now, why is that vital for us to understand, and why is it vital for being a peacemaker? Well, beloved, and I'm going to get into this much more in the next point, but the sad reality is that there's a prevailing spirit among good-hearted Christians, okay, a prevailing spirit among good-hearted Christians that if they're just nice enough to people that they can make all the problems go away. Now, I'm oversimplifying, I'm being simplistic for the sake of making a point, but there is a misguided sense of self-confidence among many Christians that they can fix a problem of a conflict in places where others have failed. That's not a good way to think. That's not a wise way to conduct your life because the reality of the matter is, is that we are seeking peace as Christians in our relationships on hostile ground. Hostile ground. Peace is not automatic, and it's not easy, and we would be wise to take to heart all of the warnings that Scripture has about the depth of wickedness in the human heart, and not make it something that we think that we can fix on our own, by our own power, by our powers of persuasion, by our niceness. That's not wise. That's a serious mistake to approach things with such a sense of self-confidence and not realize the help that we desperately need from the Lord in order to bring about peace. You can think about Ephesians 6, that we wrestle with, not against flesh and blood, but with the powers and the spirits of the power of the air and Ephesians 2 talks about this. And beloved, you know, I'm just kind of going on at length here, knowing that I'm going to go on at even greater length in my next point about this, because I really believe that there are some in the Christian church that need a reality check about the challenges that await those who want to make peace. This isn't superficial. We are up against a supernatural opposition to peace, just like Christ was when he was on earth. When the Prince of Peace was on earth, did he automatically have good relationships with everybody? Or did he face opposition that was unjust and ungrounded and wicked? Was he always friendly and kindly and sugary with everybody? Or were there times when he rebuked the Pharisees, like in Matthew 23, and said, "Woe to you, woe to you, woe to you, you're like whitewashed tombs." And he confronted them for their wickedness, and it wasn't simply a matter of always coming to the quickest, most superficial level of reconciliation so that you could make a surface conflict go away. That's not biblical peace, as we're going to see.

And so I make all of this point to help us take earnestly the challenge of peace and to recognize that we seek peace on hostile ground, in hostile territory. We are behind enemy

lines when we want to be peaceful and to be peacemakers because there is a devil that is working to disrupt it. There is a world system that loves conflict and hates Christians and therefore works against our desire for peace. There is sin in the heart of men that work against peace. Not everybody even wants peace. And so peace is something that is not easy. It's not automatic. And so we have to realize that if there's going to be peace, that we're going to have to work at it, even with other believers and to realize that peace may even come at a price. If you think about it, how did Christ make peace with God for us? How did atonement come to pass so that we could be brought to God, brought to a holy God, despite our sin? Christ made peace with God at the cost of his life on our behalf; the ultimate conflict, as the forces of hell were arrayed against him at the cross, he was purchasing peace and working at it, even in his crucifixion. And so all of that, all of that to help you see that what we're seeing from Scripture here today is not a lighthearted, easy matter. Peace takes work, we seek peace in enemy territory, and it may not come easily.

I was thinking earlier about how Jesus told us to count the cost before we build a tower and to be aware of the costs that are involved before you embark on a project of some kind or something like that, beloved, we need to realize that this isn't as easy as it sounds and if we can embrace that, if we can recognize and acknowledge that in a general principle, then we say, okay, we have work to do, and immediately something else happens, my friends, immediately something else happens. When you realize the supernatural nature of the opposition to peace, and that there is conflict in the heavenly places and that we live out our Christian lives in the midst of an environment of conflict, then maybe we've taken a single step in the direction of acknowledging the difficulty, and rather than trusting in our own pride and our own ability and our own niceness to bring about an end to conflict, maybe, just maybe, we would humble ourselves before the Lord and say, "Lord, maybe there's more going on here than I realize. Maybe there's a depth of things in the heart that I'm not aware of. And so, God, I seek your help. I seek the help of the Holy Spirit to produce peace here." And not simply think that we're the one that can make it happen by the power of our own will and exercising our personality over against someone else. And so we love peace, we want peace, but we realize that we have to work at it.

Now, transition here to the next point and again, I just love the Bible. I love it for so many, many, many, many, many reasons, but I love the Bible, and I love the fact that it does not let us think superficially and I love the way that it confronts us and confronts superficial thinking about the nature of the Christian life, it confronts us and does not allow us to be superficial in our thinking because there are some Christians who live as though the point of Christianity is that you should avoid conflict at all costs. If something's wrong, then, you know, you just automatically, you know, you just automatically give in no matter what and the key being no matter what, and you just give in so that people won't leave, or people won't be angry with you, or something like that. So the question is, in the name of being a peacemaker, should we avoid all conflict at all costs whatsoever? In our private lives, in the church, in society, should government just avoid conflict and not have any accountability for criminals and things like that? You

know, it's obvious that in many cities, that's what they're thinking these days. What's the biblical way to think about it and how do we think about this on a personal level?

Well, secondly, write this point down: peacemaking requires righteousness. Peacemaking requires righteousness. Biblical peace is not the absence of conflict no matter what. That is not biblical peace, the absence of conflict no matter what. If the absence of conflict was the measure and the goal so that we would never confront anything in the name of peace, then our Lord Jesus was a pretty miserable failure at being a peacemaker, because he had conflict all the time with people that were opposed to his ministry. And here's the thing, beloved, and once again, the Beatitudes are going to get me animated, and I don't know how to avoid that. Jesus did not capitulate when evil people tried to hinder his ministry. He did not capitulate when demons tried to confuse the issue. He did not capitulate in the face of false teaching. Indeed, there in Matthew itself, as you read on, just a few verses down in the chapter, Jesus says in Matthew 5:20, he lays down the gauntlet to the Pharisees and scribes who were the religious leaders of the day, in Matthew 5:20, "I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." Beloved, that's a confrontational statement for him to make. It was a cultural collision for him to say something like that, which we may see in future days.

So biblical peace is not the absence of conflict, no matter what and here is what we must understand together if we're going to have anything to do with biblical righteousness and biblical peace. Jesus Christ, when he establishes peace, he establishes – watch it – a righteous peace. He establishes peace that is according to truth, not that yields to error, not that yields to unrighteous men, and notice the context, notice the context of this seventh beatitude. In verse 6, we see that before he gets to the point of peacemaking, he establishes the principle of desiring righteousness before he gets to peace. The very sequence of the Beatitudes say righteousness and then peace, because in verse 6 we read, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." And in verse 8 we see, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," those who have an undivided ambition, a pure ambition to seek after God and to love him and to be submitted to him and to be living righteously before him. Go a little further in the Sermon on the Mount to chapter 6, verse 33. Matthew 6:33 and you know this verse but so often we don't think about the implications which it carries for the way that we assess relationships and what we are to do within them. Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Seek first as the principal priority, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. Seek what is right. Seek what is true and focus on that first, and then the other things will fall into place in the way that they should.

And so it's just very, very critical for us to think about these things and even let me take you to another passage in Philippians 4, as more and more things just come to my mind, even as I'm standing here. Philippians 4:8 and 9, a great passage on peace, but notice again, beloved, the sequence. Notice again the sequence. Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure." Do you see the sequence? Truth, honor, just, purity, "whatever is lovely, whatever is

commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me," as it pertains to truth, honor, justice, purity, loveliness, commendableness, excellence, what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me about those things, "practice these things, and," as a consequence, "the God of peace will be with you." Truth before peace. Beloved, you can't flip them. We do not compromise truth for the sake of an external, superficial tranquility.

In all of these instances, in the sequence of the Beatitudes, hunger and thirst for righteousness, and then peace comes. Matthew 6, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and then all these things will be added to you. And Philippians 4, whatever is true, think about these, and then the God of peace will be with you. In all of these things, beloved, in all of these things, we see that there is a pattern, biblically a sequence, about placing truth and righteousness at the head and letting other things flow therefrom and all of that is not coincidental. Biblical peace, and I emphasize the word biblical peace, flows from truth and righteousness. It is not attained and it is not sought apart from truth and righteousness. You do not set aside truth, you do not set aside righteousness for the sake of a superficial harmony in relationships. You seek truth, you practice truth, and you let peace flow from that. Then peace is set upon a firm foundation. Then peace, when it is established on truth, is set on a rock that will not move. If you take away the foundation of truth, the foundation of righteousness, and build peace on that, it's going to come down like a house built on the sand. There's no avoiding it.

Now we see this, we see this in multiple principles in Scripture and let me just make some general statements and then take you to Scriptures that show these things plainly, okay? For example, when we say, remember our point here is that peacemaking requires righteousness, peacemaking requires truth, truth before peace, righteousness before whatever peace and harmony means, Biblical peace flows from truth and righteousness, not vice versa. So, for example, we could state a principle like this, peace: biblical peace does not tolerate doctrinal error in order to achieve a superficial harmony among people who claim to be Christians. Peace does not tolerate fundamental heretical error in order to have superficial harmony with one another.

Look for the little letter of 2 John, which is just before the book of Revelation and before Jude. 2 John has this principle laid out for us. In 2 John, verse 6, "And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist." Now, he's called us to love, he's called us to obedience to the commandments, and then he immediately warns us about an influence that is at work to undermine love and to undermine truth; you have to be aware of the principles of love and righteousness because, verse 7, many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ. We're not to be reconciled with them, as we're going to see as we read on. He says, in light of the command to love, in light of the presence of many deceivers, and there's that word "many" again. Nancy, write that down so I remember it for the sermon on "many" that I've got to preach in days to

come, many deceivers have gone out into the world, and what does he say to that? Verse 8, "Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward." Verse 9, "Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son." He's placed truth as a premium and he's warned us that there are deceivers that are out and about and at work. And so we have to watch ourselves. We have to beware. We have to pay attention. We have to be careful. So much so that he says in verse 10, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works."

Now, beloved, the truth of the matter is that in broad, so-called evangelical Christianity today, there are people that want to cozy up with rattlesnakes and they'll tell people like me and my friends, "You need to watch your tone. You need to be kind and you need to not be so forceful in dealing with people who deny the truth." That's not a biblical approach. That's the approach of a false mindset about truth. Scripture says if someone comes to you and is contradicting the teaching of the gospel, don't give them greeting, don't receive them into your house, because there must be lines drawn and you cannot allow poison to be poured into the pure water of the well of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Some things are worth protecting and not everybody can be welcomed if they don't come and share in the teaching. If they come bringing teaching that contradicts the truth, Scripture says, you make a point of separation there. That doesn't sound at first blush like peacemaking, does it? But the point is, and the way that you understand and resolve these things in your mind, is that truth comes first. Peace is grounded on truth, not vice versa. None of you, none of you with children, none of you with friends, none of you would ever knowingly allow someone that you loved, who was defenseless or who was unaware of the danger, to pick up, to go into a nest of rattlesnakes and pick them up and start playing with them. Now, would you? You would not do that because you recognize that there is a danger there that must be avoided and so you stay away from the rattlesnake that can strike you and hurt you with its venom.

Now, in a similar manner, and again, the point that we're making here is that peacemaking requires truth and righteousness, in a similar manner, in Titus 3, turn there with me, if you will. Titus 3, beginning in verse 9. There are some things to be avoided in the Christian life, beloved. And look, at some point, at some point, we have to have the conviction in our heart that says, "What I want more than anything else in my life is to be biblical. What I want more than anything in life is to do what Scripture tells me to do. In my personal life, in church life, in the way that I deal with broader relationships, I just want to be biblical," you say to yourself. And so when the Bible speaks, then you say, "Okay, I see that there's something for me to do here and to not argue against it because it seems to cut across popular notions of what this or that might mean."

Now in Titus 3:9, we read this, "But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned." There are some people that you avoid because they have manifested their character and

made it known what they are like, and when that has been addressed again and again and they persist, then Scripture commands us to avoid them, not to go sit down in the nest and play with the snakes. "I just want to be biblical," you say to yourself and you see that Scripture says that there are some people to avoid. Not everybody gets a hug. Not everybody gets a hug anymore than you would go up to a wild bobcat and try to hug and pet it when you know that by the nature of the bobcat, his instinct is going to be to latch onto your face with his jaws and hurt you. You know to avoid it in the animal realm.

Now, at the risk of making my point many, many, many times, there are other places in Scripture that warn us that there are certain kinds of people to avoid. Look, here's the thing, beloved, we have a choice in front of us as we consider these things, either we recognize that there are some people that we avoid, or we avoid something else, and we avoid the Scriptures that tell us to avoid people like that. You have to make a choice. Either we avoid the people that Scripture tells us to avoid, or we simply avoid, contradict, explain away, or say, "I'm too good. That doesn't apply to me because of my great interpersonal skills," or whatever. Scripture is filled with people that we are to avoid.

Let me just give you a few other examples. In Proverbs 5, yes, go ahead and turn to Proverbs here. Proverbs 5. And eventually it becomes a question of whether we're going to hear and heed Scripture or not. If we're not, if we're not going to heed Scripture, then I'm not really sure what we're doing here, right? Why would we take the time to study Scripture if we're not going to do what it says to do? And this becomes very practical, this passage that we're going to look at in Proverbs 5:7, as Solomon is warning his son about the adulterous woman. He does not tell his son to go evangelize her. He tells him, stay away. Verse 7, "And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless." Don't even go near her, my son. Avoid her. Stay away. It's a trap. It's quicksand that will swallow you up and so stay away.

The obedience is not thinking that you can get into the relationship, but you'll be careful, and you know, and you'll obey within the forbidden relationship, and you'll be careful, and you won't stumble. That's not the obedience. That's disobedience. That's sin. The obedience is by avoiding the relationship in the first place. You married men and you married women for that matter, you have no business whatsoever cultivating relationships with emotionally vulnerable people of the opposite sex in the name of ministering to them, "I'm going to help them." You have no business doing that whatsoever. Avoid it because it is a trap. And if you, you know, if you don't believe me, I wish that someplace there was a database, there probably is someplace, I'm sure George Barna has put together a database like this someplace, a database of well-intended, so-called well-intended evangelical pastors who decided that they were going to help the hurting lass in their midst and come alongside in comfort and text, "Are you okay today," and all of that. The whole landscape of the church littered with men who did not heed the boundaries, got entangled, disqualified themselves from ministry, ruined their marriage, ruined their lives simply because they thought they were the exception and they could get involved in, you know, they could play with fire and not get burned. They could play with the snakes

and not get bit. And at one level, we feel compassion for these men, at one very narrow level, on another, we say, you should have known not to get into that mess in the first place and the way that you avoid it is by avoiding the compromising private situation to begin with. Avoid it. Our policy as elders is we want to help men and women. We do. And when a hurting woman comes to us as elders, our policy, our practice is, "Let me find you an older woman that you can talk to." You know, we'll talk to women in public situations. One-on-one, uh-uh, we don't do that. It's protection for the church, it's protection for the elders, it's protection for the woman herself, and vice versa. Just avoid the emotional entanglements to begin with. It's what Scripture says, the point being that peacemaking requires righteousness and truth and that sometimes that means that we avoid people and we avoid situations rather than getting involved in the middle of them.

Look at Proverbs 22. Proverbs 22. I remember as a very young Christian reading this verse and separating from a friend as a result of it. Proverbs 22:24, "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare." You see somebody who's chronically angry, chronically complaining, chronically critical, Scripture says avoid that person. Just step back and cultivate your friendships someplace else. Leave that person to themselves, leave them to whatever but Scripture warns us in 1 Corinthians 15:33, that bad company corrupts good morals. And it's a false sense of pride, and it's a wrongly placed self-confidence, self-reliance that says, "I can be the exception. I can hang out with a woman who's not my wife and I won't fall. I can hang out with these miscreants. I can hang out with these people who are poisonous in their attitudes, and it won't affect me because, after all, it's me." Well, beloved, Scripture says, "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." And in these matters of biblical peace and righteousness, and that there are certain categories of people that we avoid, we need to take heed. We need to take heed. Again, I just come back, either there are people that we avoid or we avoid the Scriptures that tell us to avoid them, and if we want to be biblical, then the principle is that we obey Scripture all the way through and we realize that if Scripture, you know, if there are so many, so many warnings about people to avoid, then apparently at some point in life, we're going to encounter people that we actually should not cultivate relationships with. And that's not contrary to being a peacemaker. It's practicing a full-orbed biblical discernment and being thoroughly biblical and balanced in our approach to these things.

One other text. You don't need to turn there, but write it down, please, two more texts, Romans 16:17 and 18 says, "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them." Avoid them. "For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive." Now, no one wants to be told that they're being naive. No one wants to be told they're being self-reliant. But at some point, Scripture says there are people that you need to avoid.

Jesus within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, he even says in Matthew 7:6, "Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." There's some people that you avoid.

Biblical peacemaking is not a kindly spirit to everyone, utterly regardless of the nature of their character and the nature of their conduct. Biblical peacemaking is not, is not a call to capitulate to troublemakers. It's just not. We confront sin and call people to repentance. We recognize conflict, we try to resolve it if we can. Yes, we work at peace. We seek after peace. But, beloved, there comes a time, and this is where spiritual leadership has a role to play, to help assess things with wisdom based on accumulated and a consensus of experience and wisdom gathered together, not simply something that an individual goes out and judges all for himself, all by himself, there comes a point where collective wisdom says, "Do you know what? That person is not receiving correction. That person is causing division. It's time to step away." And if it's someone within the church there, they can't abide in the church like that. They can't because biblical peace is premised first and foremost on biblical truth and righteousness, and then peace flows from it. It is spiritually reckless and irresponsible for someone to just have an attitude, "I can fix them," in the face of warnings to the contrary. "I'll be friendly. They'll warm up to me." That's just an overconfidence in self and an underestimation of the power of Satan and sin and all of these biblical warnings to the contrary. Beloved, it is false grace and misguided pride to ignore so many biblical warnings on these matters just for the sake of wanting to be friendly to everybody.

So, that is critical force to understand. We need to let the fullness of Scripture inform our understanding of what peacemaking looks like and what our responsibility of peacemaking is. Just as I did on Sunday, the reason that I am belaboring this point so much from the pulpit is that I just know that kindhearted people are vulnerable here, vulnerable to sacrifice truth for the sake of being friendly and it doesn't matter whether that's well-intentioned or not, if it's a wrong, undiscerning, unbiblical way to be, and unless we bring these Scriptures out and think about them and contemplate them, beloved, pre-existing presuppositions are going to be the basis through which you interpret them and you say, "I've got to be friendly to everybody." There's never grounds to separate because we've got to be peacemakers and if that's the presupposition, then you whitewash dozens of passages in Scripture, dozens of warnings in Scripture and you plant the seed for the harvest of which will be great havoc later on. I know it's not popular to say these things, but you know what, when you get right down to it, the Bible is not really intended to be a popular book. It's a book about righteousness, not about popular opinion, especially in a wicked world like ours and so, we have to have a balance on these things.

Now, let's set that aside and come back to what this text is talking more about because what this text is talking more about is how you conduct yourself in personal private relationships, and when you hear that righteousness, there's a temptation the other way. There's a temptation to be overly conciliatory. There's also a temptation for others to be irreconcilable when they hear that truth must precede righteousness, to be irreconcilable and to say, "Well, this is a matter of truth," and I want to address that here as we talk about peacemaking requires righteousness. For some, when they hear that righteousness must precede peace, it becomes a temptation to justify themselves in maintaining a division and a conflict, and we try to define our personal issues in terms of righteousness so that we can justify ourselves. So, for example, don't deceive yourself on the other side. The truth of the matter is, is that when we talk about gospel issues and truth and

righteousness, beloved, the truth of the matter is, is that the gospel is not at stake in that financial dispute that you have with someone else. The gospel is not at stake in that family disagreement that just popped up, and you're not justified in being hard and irreconcilable in the midst of that. That is precisely the realm where this call to peacemaking applies. You see, beloved, it's precisely in your personal life, with personal issues that affect you, that you work at peace, and that brings us to our third point here this evening, as we try to find and maintain the biblical balance on these matters. Thirdly, righteousness requires peacemaking. Righteousness requires peacemaking.

Look at Matthew 5:9 again, where it says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." They and they alone shall be called sons of God. Peacemaking is not optional for the Christian. A Christian must be a peacemaker because they and they alone will be called sons of God. And, beloved, it couldn't be any other way. It couldn't be any other way. If the Prince of Peace has saved us, if the Holy Spirit indwells us, the Spirit whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, then peace will be a matter of course in the life of a true Christian. Let's put it this way, and to get to what Jesus is talking about here, you could put it in a negative way, the peacemaker is someone who doesn't enjoy conflict, doesn't enjoy an argument, doesn't look for fights to agitate. He's not trying to stir up conflict and to draw others into his or her conflict, he's looking to maintain peace by resolving conflict and promoting harmony in relationships. And Jesus explains, as you go on in the Sermon on the Mount, what it is that he has in mind and so while we've dispensed of matters that deal with corporate matters and personal matters of the limits of peacemaking, now we're going to look at the positive side of what it is that Jesus requires, and this searches our hearts with equal depth going the other direction, you could say.

How important is peacemaking? What's the priority on it? Beloved, according to Jesus, peacemaking is more important than an act of worship. It's more important than an act of worship. You reconcile where you can before you worship. Look at Matthew 5:23, "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." How important is peacemaking? You reject, you repent of that spirit of automatic retaliation when someone offends you. "You hit me, I'll hit you back. You insult me, I'll insult you back." None of that in the Christian life.

Look at Matthew 5:38, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." That text is a sermon all of its own. Just to summarize the intent of what Jesus is saying here is that he's addressing that inner automatic response that if someone offends you, you want to strike back, you want to retaliate, you want to hit them back. He's saying that is contrary to being a peacemaker, that matter and that spirit in your heart has to be rejected and repudiated for the sake of peacemaking.

In like manner, you show kindness to your enemies. Verse 43 of Matthew 5, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." Instead of harboring bitterness, resentment, grudges, you show kindness instead, Jesus says. That's the spirit of peacemaking.

You pray with integrity as a peacemaker. You examine your heart. You're careful about these things. Look at Matthew 6:12. "and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." "Father, I come, I confess my sins to you but I've examined myself first, and I have forgiven, I'm willing to forgive, I'm seeking reconciliation with that person that I've had the conflict with. I'm not bearing grudges against man horizontally, Father. Vertically, I ask you for your forgiveness."

And primarily, you start with yourself. Matthew 7:3, "Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." Peacemaking? What's the sense of it? Well, beloved, a Christian doesn't criticize the sin that's in the world and then be characterized by an argumentative spirit at home and at work, or in the church, for that matter. He's not somebody that opposes sin out there as a vague societal principle, but he's dealing with sin personally, and he's humbled over his sin, he's broken in his spirit over his own sin, so much so that in his most intimate circle of relationships, in his marriage, in his family, in his work, can I say it, with his elders, the Christian is peaceable, cooperative, loving, gentle. The Christian has the integrity to say deep in his heart, and listen carefully to how I phrase this, "Where is it in my sphere of relationships that I must spread peace?" Because you see, this is about the relationships that God has given you in your personal life, that you're a peacemaker. Where is it in my relationships that I must spread peace? You know, over the course of 30 years of ministry, and combined with the other elders, you know, 150 years of ministry, one of the most common things that we hear and that we deal with, and it's sad but it's real, and this is much more the sphere in which this verse is talking about than the other things that I was warning you against earlier, one of the most common things that we hear is from a spouse or a child telling us, "That person in the church, my dad, my husband, my wife, they're not like that at home. They give you the appearance of being all gentle and cooperative and helpful, but you should see him at home. You don't know how many times he's lost his temper. You don't know how many times he's spoken harshly to me. You don't know, you don't realize. He comes here and everybody thinks he's great, but he's a drunk at home." You see, the inconsistency of showing one face with a body of believers and then being a different place at home, that's what we're talking about. That's Christ saying, "No, you be a peacemaker in your most intimate relationships." Don't go grabbing a dog by the ears and injecting yourself in conflict that does not belong to you, that you're not involved in, that you're not part of the problem and you're not part of the solution. Don't do that. Don't be a busybody and meddle with things that you have nothing to do with, saying, "Oh, I'm a peacemaker here." That's not godly. What's godly is to say, "My family, my spouse, my kids, my

parents, my grandparents, I want to bring them joy. I want to encourage them. I want to be a peacemaker with them." On the one hand you have a busy body, on the other hand you say, "I have a responsibility before God in the privacy of my most intimate relationships to be a peacemaker." On the surface, when you first start talking about it, I first start showing you some of those Scriptures, it might seem like there's a tension between the two, but they're perfectly in harmony.

Now let me be pastoral here. Our church has many peacemakers, and for that I'm grateful. At the same time, we're all fallen. And so let me just say these things to you. If you have a quick temper, or if you have a sullen spirit and you just withdraw at home, or if you harbor bitterness toward your spouse or family, or I've known people like this, or if you love just being someone that other people do not mess with, "You don't mess with me," and you love that, or if you refuse even to meet to discuss a problem when the request is made to you, so much, so much of that quick temper, bitterness, false bravado, "I'm the mama bear here. You better not mess with me." Please. "No, I won't meet with you. I won't discuss this. I won't tell you what's wrong." I'm giving you direct quotations of things that people say over the years. Point being that if something, some of that describes you, beloved, forget your public persona. "Oh, you know, Tom," I'm picking a name at random, "You know, Tom's such a great guy. Everybody thinks Tom's a great guy." Forget the public persona. I don't care about the public persona at all. It's absolutely irrelevant to what Jesus is talking here. If you've got the quick temper, you've got the bitter heart, you're withdrawn and aloof from those that are closest to you, you love being that person that no one messes with because you're tough and you'll stand your ground, you know, you can't have a reasonable, peaceable discussion to work through an issue. If any of that is you, beloved, then I say it gently, and I say it for concern for your eternal soul, you need to take spiritual inventory of yourself. You need to seriously step back and say, "What is going on in my life that I am like that?" Because Christians, real Christians, are peacemakers and it's the peacemakers, they and they alone, Jesus said, it's only the peacemakers that will be called sons of God. It's only peacemakers that actually share in his nature of peace. The Prince of Peace, when he causes someone to be born again, when God gives birth to spiritual children, you know what the God of peace gives birth to spiritually? He gives birth to peacemakers. Not this other nonsense. "Oh, but I walked the aisle. Oh, but I've been baptized. Oh, but I, you know..." I don't care. It's peacemakers and they and they alone that are sons of God. Don't point to a past action that you did, a past profession that you made, that is not backed up by the reality of a changed life driven by the power of God's Holy Spirit. Don't play that game because it's an eternal danger to your eternal soul to do that.

And so, beloved, I ask it gently because I care about you. I want to be somebody that will say things to you that other people aren't willing to say because whether you do or not, almost every time I'm in this pulpit, I'm mindful of the fact that you're going to stand before God and give an account. I'm mindful that many Jesus said, are self-deceived and it's precisely on these matters of character where the self-deception is exposed. And so I ask you, what's up with you? What's up with you? Are you a peacemaker or no? Now, maybe you're a Christian and this just brings you up short and you say, and I say it reverently, "Oh my, oh my God. My God, my Lord, my Savior, where did I go wrong?"

But look at who I am. And look at who I am compared to Scripture. Oh, I confess my sin and I repent in dust and ashes and ask you to forgive me and cleanse me and change me and send people to help me because this can't be any longer! God, it grieves me," and we're back right to being poor in spirit and spiritually bankrupt once again. You'll have to sort that out with the Lord. I can't tell you if you're a Christian and you're like that or not, but I know that you can't be a Christian and accept that and harden your heart and say, "I'm going to keep being this way." Doesn't work that way. If you harden your heart against this, you're giving evidence that you very well may not be a Christian, no matter what you've said in the past. But if your heart is tender, your heart breaks at this, you confess sin, you want to repent, the Spirit of God isn't done with you. The Spirit of God is working in you. Praise the Lord for that. But, beloved, these are the kinds of things that make us say, you know, don't run from the thought that maybe you need to be born again. Maybe you've never been a Christian all this time. You know, you just mouth certain things that you were taught, some Baptist preacher baptized you when you were six years old and, you know, nothing ever changed, but you were baptized and you assumed you're a Christian. Well, the assumptions are over now. Christ has brought his word and he's exploded all the assumptions and now you're just broken before God. That's a good place to be because Christ receives unworthy sinners just like you, and he'll receive you even at this late date.

Now, this is all uncomfortable, you know, and I'm blessed to have lived with a peacemaking wife all these years, 35 years, you know, and it wasn't always reciprocated and I've had my own matters of repenting to do over the years on these things. I don't speak down, you know, I'm speaking up to you. But here's the question: why should we live this way? Why should we live this way? And once again, after all of the conviction of the Beatitudes, we're brought to the encouraging part as we close. Point number 4, God will reward peacemaking. God will reward biblical peacemaking and before I go there, I just need to say one quick word about this, and I should have said this earlier, but I forgot. There are so-called ministries that Christian mediation, so-called Christian mediation ministries that say that they can come in and help make peace in the conflict, and sometimes churches will make the lethal mistake of inviting them in to help resolve church issues. So often that kind of ministry is premised on finding compromise and playing a moral equivalence game, "Well, you're wrong here, and you're wrong here, and so we need to meet somewhere in the middle." And Beloved, you just, you know... churches and individuals and even businesses need to be aware of those kinds of enterprises. Sometimes they can be helpful, but if at the heart of it is just finding common ground and compromise and blaming both sides for a portion of it, that's not always the case and that's why truth has to be at the center. Truth has to be preeminent in it. And so just be cautious around those people that hold themselves out for a fee to be the ones who can mediate your disputes. Peacemaking is built on truth, not on moral equivalence. You didn't pay me to say that. That one was for free.

Point number 4, God will reward peacemaking. God will reward peacemaking. God honors Christians who seek to spread righteous, righteous peace. Verses 8 and 9, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Christian, here's what motivates you to be a

peacemaker, even when it's difficult. The term "son" here emphasizes that the true Christian reflects God's own peacemaking character. This is so sweet, so lovely, so motivating to the redeemed heart. You see, in verse 8, Jesus said, the pure in heart will see God. Well, verse 9 takes it even a step further than that. It's going to be incredible to see God like that, but this is a step even further beyond that. You see, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, those of you that are peacemakers because you've truly been born again and you're seeking righteous peace, not peace as the world defines it, hear me carefully and let this encourage your heart. You're not only going to see God as we saw last week, as we studied last week, we didn't see him last week in the same way, you're not only going to see God, generally speaking, you will see God as your heavenly Father. You're going to see God as your Father, a son of God, meaning God is your Father and the son is welcome in the Father's presence. You will see God in peace and without fear and he will claim you as his own in the presence of all the holy angels. "That one's mine. He was on earth, fruit of the Spirit in his life, the marks of peace were in him. I claim him as my own. He shares my nature. He lived it out. It was real in him." And God will own you as his son, as his daughter, and you will have the delight and security of knowing him and seeing him as your Father. What Christ has promised, Christ will certainly fulfill.

We talk often about what lies ahead for us in eternity, the majesty of worship, honoring Christ, bowing before him. Somehow when we are with our Lord and our Savior, there's going to be a peace beyond any perfection that we could ask or think, exceedingly beyond all that we could ask or think, exceedingly far beyond anything that we could ask or think or imagine. The peace, the comfort, the love, the security, the joy, the gladness that will be ours in the presence of God, knowing in the depth of our being that he has finally, fully, ultimately, completely received us as sons and daughters of his, and the peace that will permeate heaven will be a fragrance so sweet to our spiritual senses. Christ promises that to us, beloved. We will have it if we belong to him. Beloved, I close with this question and this counsel to you: are you a peacemaker as we've seen it here tonight? Don't fight to get what's yours. Simply be a peacemaker. Trust Christ to care for you and look forward to that day when you're welcomed as a son of God.

Let's pray.

Father, these are matters that require discernment for us to live out day to day, and yet by your Spirit you make us sufficient for all things. Dear Lord, we honor you and praise you and thank you that you purchased our peace with God at the price of your own blood. Having established us, reconciled us with God, help us to be those men and women that are marked by peacemaking in our private lives and having the discernment to know who to avoid, who to embrace. All of those things, Father, guide us by your Spirit that we might glorify you in it all. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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