

Matthew 5:9 (ESV) – 9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

We continue this morning in the Beatitudes, with Matthew 5:9.

Scripture can only be understood in context. Since the context for peacemaking is conflict, we need to take a few minutes and make sure we understand it.

CONFLICT

Where Does Conflict Come From? Sin.

Conflict between God and man is because of sin (Genesis 2-3). There can be no peaceful relationship between Holy God and sinful man. The Law provided for a person's sins to be covered, which allowed them a very distant worship of God, and the means by which God blessed them materially. A person's sin was covered by blood, because they owed God blood – their very life. He designed a system by which an animal's life could be substituted for their own, but this was only a temporary solution.

Likewise, conflict between people is because of sin (Genesis 3-4). Sometimes it is a sin committed against someone, like Absalom's betrayal of his father, David. Often it is simply because both people are sinners. We all deal with being impatient, getting irritated, being grouchy, being insensitive, or overly sensitive.

However it all works out, all conflict arises because of sin.

Conflict is inevitable.

Conflict is inevitable between Holy God and sinful man. Romans 8:7-8 says that those who are dead in sin are both unwilling and unable to submit to God. We are born into rebellion, and rebellion is as natural to us as breathing.

And of course, conflict is inevitable between sinners. I don't need to show you Bible verses, do I? Of course not. Conflict is inevitable. There's a joke about a ship that came across a small, remote island. A man stood on the shore waving and yelling, so they stopped and rowed ashore. It turned out that he had been shipwrecked years before. He gave them a brief tour of the island, and showed them three crude huts. "That one," he said, "is my house, and that one is where I go to church." They said, "What about the third hut?" He said, "Oh, that's where I used to go to church."

Conflict is evitable between Holy God and sinful man, and between sinners as well.

Conflict is not just inevitable; it is often necessary.

There must be conflict between Holy God and sinful man. The answer, of course, is none. Ephesians 2:3 calls the wicked "children of wrath," meaning the wrath of God. Sinful man is in open rebellion against God; the Lord will never simply shrug His shoulders and ignore their hatred and treason.

And there must be conflict between Christians and sinful man.

James puts it far more bluntly:

James 4:4 (ESV) – 4 You adulterous people! [He is speaking to so-called Christians who refuse to be separate from the world.] **Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**

There are at least three areas where there can be no peace between people.

With people who reject Christ (Matthew 10:34-39).

Jesus gives us full disclosure.

Matthew 10:34-39 (ESV) – 34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36** And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. **37** Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. **38** And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **39** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Nothing - not even your own life – is more important than Jesus Christ. Those who insist that other people ARE more important than Jesus are, in Jesus’ own words, not worthy of Him.

With unrepentant sinners (First Corinthians 5:1,5).

1 Corinthians 5:1, 5 (ESV) – 1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife ... **5** you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

With false teachers (Second Peter 2).

2 Peter 2:1-3 (ESV) – 1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in **destructive heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. **2** And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. **3** And in their greed **they will exploit you with false words**. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

Christian, the world will never be your friend.

The world, and often people you know and love, will demand that you deny the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, and agree with them that other religions and gods are all valid.

The world, and often people you know and love, will demand that you reject true holiness, and accept their values and morality.

The world, and often people you know and love, will demand that you turn reject the Scriptures, and bow to THEIR truth.

And they will arrogantly do all of this in the name of “love,” when in fact they are filled with hatred and disgust for God, His Word, and His people.

Now that we have laid the foundation for the reason conflict exists, and the kinds of conflict that cannot be resolved, let’s turn consider Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:9.

Blessed are the peacemakers

Matthew 5:9 (ESV) – 9 “BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS, for they shall be called sons of God.”

The Beatitudes, and in fact the entire Sermon on the Mount, is for disciples of Jesus Christ, and not for the world. The Beatitudes are not steps we must take to be saved; they are the character and nature of those who have been saved. Each of them is impossible for those who are still dead in their sins. They require the new birth, the new nature, and the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ purpose here is not to tell us how to get along with the unbelieving world, but to remind us that there is to be peace within His church.

Now, even when we simply focus within the Body of Christ, there is a huge need

for peacemakers; we even see this in the Scriptures. These passages give us some principles for dealing with conflict in the church.

For instance, First Corinthians 6:1-7 describes situations where believers were suing other believers in secular courts.

Paul rebukes them for appealing to those whom the church otherwise sees as wicked and dead in sin. He calls them to rely on believers who are wise enough to resolve the dispute. This is such a serious issue that he writes, in the case that they cannot resolve their issue in the church, “Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?” That is, if a believer has a legitimate grievance with another, and no one in the church can be found to help resolve it, it is better to let it go and suffer the loss than to appeal to the world’s legal system.

Let me say, by the way, that Paul says “don’t sue,” not “don’t get sued.” If a believer sues you in a worldly court, you might have no other option than to defend yourself.

What principle comes from this passage? Christians are never to turn to non-Christians to resolve conflict in the church, or between believers.

Another example is found in Philippians 4:2-3.

Philippians 4:2-3 (ESV) – 2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **3** Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Euodia and Syntyche were two women who had fallen out with one another. It was not an issue of sin or doctrine, because Paul would not have ignored those sorts of conflicts. Whatever it was, it was painful and obvious to everyone. So he urges the two ladies to be peacemakers: “agree **in the Lord.**” They were to honor Christ as Lord over all, even over their disagreement, and simply **stop** the conflict. They were to lay their differences to rest, and embrace one another as sisters in Christ. And

notice that he also calls upon a third party, whom he calls “true companion,” to help them do this.

What principle comes from this conflict? The burden of peace lies upon the people in the conflict. IF they are willing to yield completely to the Lord, they CAN be at peace with one another. In my view, the work of the “true companion” was not in simply mediating a truce, but helping these ladies to each be fully submitted to Christ, so that they could agree in the Lord.

And of course, the letter to Philemon is primarily concerned with peacemaking.

Philemon was a believer in Colossae. He owned a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus ran away to Rome (one-third of Rome’s population was slaves, so it was a good place for runaway slaves to blend in). By the providence of God, Onesimus came across Paul, who was under house arrest. Onesimus was converted by the Lord, and became a Christian. Paul then wrote a letter to Onesimus’ owner, Philemon, urging him to treat Onesimus as a brother in Christ, and not a slave. Philemon had the LEGAL right as a Roman to have Onesimus tortured or killed for running away. But Philemon’s right as a Roman were eclipsed by his responsibility as a Christian. In the letter Paul refuses to order Philemon to obey him, even though he had the right as an apostle, and instead for the sake of love, begged him to free Onesimus.

By the way, our world is obsessed with rights, isn’t it? That obsession makes itself known in the church as well. But the focus of Scripture is not on rights, but on responsibilities. The more Christians prefer their rights over their responsibilities, the more they resemble the unsaved world. Insisting on having your rights is probably the greatest obstacle to peacemaking there is.

What principle comes from this conflict? It is better to urge someone to resolve a conflict, and even beg them, than it is to command them.

FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD

Why not daughters?

Because in the biblical world “sons” had the greatest rights of legal inheritance. If a man had sons and daughters, his daughters would receive nothing by inheritance. Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” That is, there is no hierarchy in Christ; all have the same blessings and benefits and responsibilities.

Being called “sons of God” is the blessing.

The most common use of “son of” is simply a reference to parentage. There are thousands of these references in Scripture. “Son of” is also used to describe a family line, as when Jesus is called the Son of David.

But there are times when “Son of” is descriptive of someone’s nature and character, and becomes a title.

James and John wanted to call fire down out of heaven on those who rejected Jesus. Jesus, in turn, called them “Sons of Thunder.” They were loud, but ultimately powerless. Lightning strikes cause a lot of damage every year, but thunder is nothing but a big noise. Praise God, James and John did not remain merely big noises.

On the other hand, Jesus called Judas Iscariot the “Son of Destruction” in John 17:12. “Destruction” could also be translated ruin, or waste, or annihilation. It meant that in spite of Judas being counted among Jesus’ disciples for time, he had always been destined for the judgment of God.

And then in Luke 10 Jesus sent out 72 on a short-term preaching trip in Galilee. He said to them, “When you enter a house, first say, “Peace be upon this house,” and if a Son of Peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you.” Here “Son of Peace” means someone who has believed in Jesus. That person, male or female, is a “son of peace,” because God has made peace with

them through Christ.

You see, peacemakers have two characteristics that come only from God.

First, peacemakers are themselves peaceable. God is the God of all peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Peace and salvation are equivalent terms. He gives His peace to those who trust Him and know Him. Colossians 1:19-20 says that reconciliation with God and peace with God are inseparable:

Colossians 1:19-20 (ESV) – 19 For in [Jesus Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and through Him **to reconcile to Himself all things**, whether on earth or in heaven, **making peace by the blood of His cross.**

And so the people of God are people of peace. Abraham sought peace with Lot. When Moses was opposed by Korah, he humbled himself and let the Lord choose between them. When David has been appointed king, he refused to use violence to remove Saul. Jesus says later in Matthew 5,

Matthew 5:44-45 (ESV) – 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** 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.

And second, peacemakers do not ignore or dismiss conflict. It is not peacemaking to simply pretend that nothing is wrong. Peacemakers long to see conflict resolved, and are eager to help IF THEY CAN. While peace cannot be made with those who reject Christ, peacemakers don't hate the wicked, but hope and pray for their salvation. While peace cannot be made with those who are unrepentant in sin, peacemakers don't hate them, but suffer because of the unrepentant man's suffering (no Christian ever enjoys sin), and long to see them repent and be restored to the Lord and the church. And while peace cannot be made with false teachers, peacemakers don't gloat over their judgment, but long for them to know the truth and be saved.

Let's bring this home.

Blessed are the peacemakers – how can you be a peacemaker? You must be in Christ, and fully submitted to Him. You must lay aside the idea of “rights,” and accept the yoke of responsibility laid upon you by the Lord.

You must make the glory of God your aim, not your own desires. If you are to help two people who are in conflict, you must call them to seek the glory of God in all things, rather than trying to negotiate their rights.

You must face your own sin. Do you remember what Jesus said? Before we can help a brother or sister get a moral speck out of their own eye, we must first make sure that we don't have any logs in our eyes.

You must seek to gently restore those who are in conflict. Galatians 6:1 calls for restoration to happen in a spirit of gentleness. Conflict, by its very nature, is divisive and corrosive and violent, at least in emotions and attitudes. People in conflict cannot be forced to be at peace.

Ultimately, peacemaking is an act of love, so let me close with an exhortation to truly love others. Most people assume that when there is conflict, that the conflict has been resolved in order to restore the relationship. Is that how God approached our salvation? Did He say, “First you come to me, and then I'll see about doing something about your sin”? No, the love of God came first, and because of that love, salvation. The Father loved us when we were His enemies, and sent His Son. The Son loved us when we were His enemies, and died for us. The Spirit loved us when we were His enemies, and He brought about the process of salvation. Love came first.

If two people in conflict will love one another in Christ, grieving for the conflict that divides them, sorry for their part, and longing for resolution, then the conflict is not going to be able to continue for long.