

# BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus started off with nine sayings that have popularly become known as the Beatitudes. The seventh of these is found in Matthew 5:9 and it simply says: "Blessed are the peacemakers! For they shall be called the sons of God." What do you think of when you hear the term peacemaker? Do you think of someone like a U.N diplomat trying to broker a peace deal between intractable parties or a maybe you think about colt peacemaker where peace is made with the threat of violence to those who get out of line like in the American Wild West?

Josh McDowall in his book "The Secret of Loving" writes: "It is more rewarding to resolve a conflict than to dissolve a relationship. Of course, it is much easier just to walk away than to put forth the effort to resolve a conflict. But the reward of staying is that every time you resolve a conflict you come out a better person—better able to deal with the inevitable conflicts the future will bring" (p.103).

Not only do we become better people but often our friendships can be even stronger. Often people become much closer when they have resolved conflict between them. The Bible gives us clear simple advice about how to be a true peacemaker which I would like to look at today. Its clear simple advice shows us how to deal with four different scenarios to deal with problems. Let's take a look at these one by one.

## **1) When we've done something wrong to another person.**

Jesus' instruction for this is found over in Matthew 5:23-24 where we read: "If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave the gift there at the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift".

We don't bring gifts to the altar today. But it is easy to see the principle. We can't fool ourselves that we can carry a right relationship with God and ignore the fact that we have caused offence and hurt to someone else. The principle of this verse is very relevant for us with Passover coming up shortly. Do we have any unresolved problems with others that need to be sorted out? Jesus' instruction implies that we should do something about the problem as soon as we're able to - make a phone call, send an email or pay a visit and get it straightened out.

If we have caused offence the only way we can be reconciled as Jesus tells us to do is to have enough humility to admit the mistake, apologize and change our ways so we don't repeat doing the wrong thing that we've done to that person.

Most conflict is generated by two people. One seldom is all wrong and the other is all right. Conflict resolution begins with each of us personally understanding our individual parts in causing the conflict. I remember a minister who once said, "If there is a conflict and the other person is 99% wrong and you are only 1% wrong you still have to repent of that 1%."

To admit wrong or guilt is one of the hardest things we humans do. But if we want to have peaceful relationships and get along with others, if we want to solve the problems while they are small ones we will have to see what part we have played in the problem.

Why should it be so hard to say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong." A Reader's Digest article once said: "An apology is a friendship preserver, an antidote for hatred, never a sign of weakness; it costs nothing but one's pride, always saves more than it costs, and is a device needed in every home".

Some people have a pride where they can't be seen to be wrong. They have to "save face" and not look bad or wrong in front of others. This is why some people aren't prepared to confess and admit they've caused offence sometimes. They have a faulty and irrational perception. They don't want to look bad by admitting they are wrong but they really do look bad in front of others the more they dig in and refuse to admit they've done any wrong.

Politicians are especially guilty of this irrational logic. If they actually admit they've made a mistake and genuinely go over and above in trying to fix the problem the other person or persons will think much better of them. This paradox is mentioned in Matthew 23:12 where we read: "Whoever exalts himself (or we could say insists he's right when he's not) will be humbled (others will still think less of him), and he who humbles himself (is prepared to confess his mistake) will be exalted (others will think better of him, not less of him).

The way that we respond when people bring things to our attention that need correction and improvement are a reflection of our character. We can ask the question, "How responsive am I when someone criticizes me?" Do we defend ourselves and minimize our problems when we shouldn't? Do we really try to change and apply any legitimate criticism, regardless of the attitude of the person who brings it to our attention? Our ability to handle correction when it comes to us in all shapes and forms, both harsh and gentle, is a reflection of our character and maturity.

## **2) When another person has wronged us.**

There are always times when others will wrong us and we may need to confront them about the problem. Jesus spoke about these occasions in Matthew 18. We read starting in verse 15: "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church."

In this case we need to approach them privately about the problem and show them the problem with gentleness and love. We should sincerely forgive them when they do repent. Jesus tells us we should go to our brother first and always do it in private. Some people mix up the order and go the minister first or tell all their friends first whereas the wisdom of scripture, is to minimise the number of people who are involved and only bring in others if it's absolutely necessary.

There comes a time when a confrontation or some criticism is necessary when we shouldn't dodge it but keep it to a minimum. Sometimes it's very hard to gauge. After many painful mistakes in this area my rule of thumb is, if in doubt don't and err on the side of too little criticism rather than too much.

That said, when we do have to offer correction, we should find a time to talk privately with the person. Sometimes an email might be a better way to convey what you mean better. Pray beforehand. A gentle, courteous and humble approach is necessary to have the best chance of persuading the other person to change their actions. "A soft answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1).

If you've made similar mistakes before feel free to use that to soften the blow so they won't feel "inferior". They will also be more receptive to your criticism if you point out a number of their good points before bringing up the problem. Be diligent to make sure you have your facts straight and stick to the facts. If we offer criticism not only must we speak the truth in doing so but we must speak the truth in love. Finally, be willing to forgive them when they repent and make the needed changes.

### **3) When two people are arguing and have a conflict of interests.**

In this scenario the thing that the parties are arguing over are personal preferences that are not wrong of themselves eg. a husband and wife arguing over whether or not to buy something or go somewhere. Let's look at a great example of how to deal with this scenario from the life of Abraham.

Over in Genesis 13 starting in verse 7 we read: "And there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite lived then in the land. And Abram said to Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray you, between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are men, brothers. Is not the whole land before you? I pray you, separate yourself from me. If you go to the left, then I will go to the right. Or if you go to the right, then I will go to the left."

Sometimes we need to have the humility to let the other person have their way as Abraham did with his nephew Lot. A little humility and less insistence of what we want can go a long way to resolving these kind of matters.

Immediately before his instructions to husbands and wives, Paul says in Ephesians 5:21 that we should submit ourselves one to another – in other words be willing to defer to what others want and need rather than insisting on our own way all the time.

One of the peaceable fruits of godly wisdom Paul talks about in Philippians is being willing to yield or easy to be entreated as it says in some versions. If we put others needs and desires above our own and become more unselfish we will develop this flexible quality. If we have that flexible approach to others, without necessarily yielding to everything when it may not be wise to, we will find we can reduce the number of arguments we have with others.

### **4) When there are no problems.**

Another way of saying this is that prevention is better than cure. Prevention is better than cure as the old saying goes. There are ways we can prevent arguments and keep peace between people. Let's look at one spoken about by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10. We'll start with verse 23 and I am going to read this from the BBE version which says: "We are free to do all things, but there are things which it is not wise to do. We are free to do all things, but not all things are for the common good. Let a man give attention not only to what

is good for himself, but equally to his neighbour's good." Dropping down to verse 32 he goes on to say: "Give no cause of trouble to Jews, or to Greeks, or to the church of God. Even as I give way to all men in all things, not looking for profit for myself, but for the good of others, that they may get salvation."

Sometimes telling the truth even in love will offend others and we must not shirk back in standing up for the truth but apart from that Paul says here to strive not to do anything outside that which might offend others. Be willing to co operate with what other people want you to do and treat all people with love, courtesy and humility. Think twice about your comments before you speak so you don't offend others unnecessarily.

On the flip side of that, while there is a time to point out people's faults courteously, Paul has one other piece of wisdom in being able to prevent problems over in Ephesians 4:2 where Paul says: "with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Forbear means "to tolerate", "put up with" and "be patient with".

We should strive within reason to overlook the things that others do that annoy us especially with those who have quite different views or personalities to our own. Love is not easily provoked. Rather than being touchy we should give a little more room for mistakes and help others through bad times and moods if they are not kind to us.

In conclusion, the Bible has some simple principles that when applied will help us be a peacemaker and live peaceably with others as much as we are able to. A common thread that runs through all the advice on how to deal with problems and live at peace with others is being humble and not being selfish where we demand our own way. If we can live humbly and look out for the concerns of others we can be a peacemaker which is a hallmark of a true son or daughter of God.