

Are You Spiritual Enough?

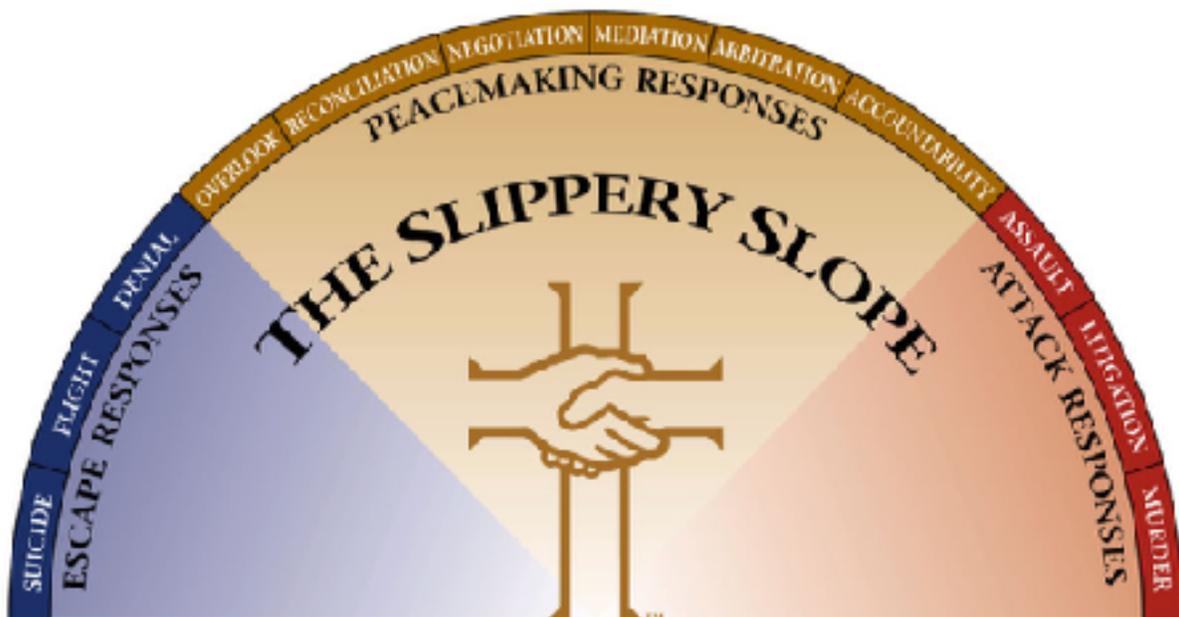
Scripture Text: Galatians 6:1

Introduction

In this sermon series about making peace, we are learning about having peace and making peace. God wants us to be at peace with Him and with each other. He wants us to be *peacemakers*. Peacemaking is not optional. We are commanded to make peace with God and with others, but how do we make peace with others? The first bit of advice I received about dealing with marital conflict was from a pastor before I was married. He told me, "Michael, there are only three things you need to remember when dealing with conflict in marriage: *Yes dear. You are right, dear. You are always right!*" While that advice may not *always* be correct, I can say with certainty that I have not followed that advice every time. My mouth usually gets in the way of *responding* to my wife in a way that makes peace. Someone else once said about making peace in marriage, "You can be right or you can be at peace! Which do you prefer?" Oftentimes, we care more about being right or winning an argument than we do about making peace and resolving conflict. Our motive is usually demonstrated in the way we respond to conflict.

The Slippery Slope

There are two basic ways in which we can respond to conflict. Our response either draws attention to ourselves and to our situation, or it draws attention toward God. Our response will often either focus on us or on our current situation. Within those two basic categories, there are also several ways we can respond to conflict. These ways are part of the *slippery slope*.



We can choose to escape from conflict by *denying* a problem exists, by *running away* from the problem, or by losing all hope and *taking our own life*. We can also choose to see the person or persons as the problem instead of dealing with the actual issue and attack them by *assaulting* them (either verbally or physically), by *litigation* (taking them to court), or by *killing* those who oppose us. None of these responses resolve conflict or make peace with others. Rather, these responses oftentimes make a situation worse. But, there are ways to respond to conflict that at least *attempts* to make peace with others. I say “attempt”, because you can do everything in your power to resolve conflict and make peace and others can still reject that peace. Look at the following verse.

Romans 12:18 *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

Peacemaking involves more than just us...but, it must begin with us. How we *respond* to conflict will largely determine how successful we are in making peace. The peacemaking responses include *Overlooking an Offense*, *Reconciliation* (resolving the issue), and *Negotiation* (seeking to reach a settlement that satisfies each other). If you need help to assist in peacemaking, you can also seek *Mediation* (asking someone else to help you voluntarily resolve a conflict), *Arbitration* (appointing someone else to listen to your arguments and render a judgement for you), and *Accountability* (fellow church members lovingly intervene to hold you accountable to Scripture and seek repentance). These peacemaking responses attempt to resolve an issue between parties and bring restoration to relationships in a way that brings *glory to God* in the situation.

Glory to God and Get The Log Out (First and Second “G’s”)

Two weeks ago, we looked at the first step to peacemaking, the first of four G’s - *Glory to God*. Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we should seek to please and honor God. What will bring God glory in the midst of conflict? The second “G” to peacemaking is to *get the log out of your own eye!* Jesus used the log and the speck to refer respectively to *blatant sins* and *minor shortcomings*. How can someone whose vision is totally obscured by a log in his or her eye correctly assess another person’s minor vision problems that are due to a speck? We should be humble so as to rightly judge our own sin *before* attempting to judge the sin in someone else’s life. Therefore, we need to examine our own attitude, and evaluate our own sin and responsibility to a conflict before we judge someone else. We need to confess our part in a conflict before addressing another person’s part in it. There are three ways to have a log in your eye: *a critical, negative attitude, sinful words, and sinful actions*. Once we have dealt with our own contribution to a conflict or problem, then we are in a position to gently and lovingly confront and try to restore others who have erred.

Peacemakers Seek Restoration

The next step in peacemaking is to bring someone back from the conflict to a peaceful resolution. After we have assessed how we contributed to the conflict, we can then help others understand how they contributed to the conflict. Restoration cannot be accomplished without confrontation. We must go to the other person to bring them back

into fellowship with us. When Christians think about talking to someone else about a conflict, one of the first verses that may come to mind is Matthew 18:15. If this verse is read in isolation, it may seem that we must always use direct confrontation to force others to admit they have sinned. However, we see Jesus had something much more flexible and beneficial in mind than simply confronting others and describing their sins.

Matthew 18:15 *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*

Of course, the above verse is part of a whole disciplinary process. That process involves several levels of appeal beginning with personal admonition in a one-on-one encounter, moving to a small group discussion involving two or three others, and culminating with bringing the matter to the whole church. Maybe we focus too much on the rest of the process that we overlook the first part. Maybe we do not spend enough time with the first step in confronting the other person. Maybe we forget *the goal* is to resolve the conflict and restore the relationship. We might be too willing to jump to the other steps. If that is so, what does that reveal about our motivation? Does it show that peacemaking and restoration is really not our goal? Just before this passage, Jesus mentioned about a loving shepherd who looks for a wandering sheep and then rejoices when it is found (Matthew 18:12–14). Thus, Matthew 18:15 is really about *restoration*, not condemnation. Jesus tells us to “go and show him his fault” by adding, “If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” Jesus hits the restoration theme again later, where he uses the parable of the unmerciful servant to remind us to be as merciful and forgiving to others as God is to us (Matthew 18:21–35). This involves spiritual maturity.

Peacemakers Are Spiritually Mature

How spiritual are you? Do your words and actions show that you are a spiritual person? Jesus called for something much more loving and redemptive than simply confronting others with a list of wrongs. How do we go about bringing someone back, restoring a broken relationship? The third “G” to peacemaking is to *Gently Restore* the other person. Galatians 6:1 provides the guidance on what our attitude and purpose ought to be when we confront someone else. Our purpose should be to restore that person rather than to condemn him or her. Look at the following verse regarding peacemaking.

Galatians 6:1 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

As with other passages, the word “brothers” does not mean male siblings. Paul is addressing the whole church with a *familial* term. After all, those who follow Jesus are members of God’s family. Another way to address these people is to say “brothers and sisters of Jesus”. What does Paul call his spiritual family to do? He mentioned that if anyone is caught in any transgression, others should go to that person to restore him or her. If an offense is too serious to overlook, if the wrong or the conflict is something so serious that it needs to be addressed, then God commands you to go and talk with the

offender privately and lovingly about the situation. Perhaps Paul was responding to a real life situation in the church in Galatia of specific acts of wrongdoing. Maybe it was one or more of the “works of the flesh” that he mentioned in chapter five (Galatians 5:16-21), things that disrupted both the Galatians’ relationship to God and their fellowship with one another. What were the believers to do in such a situation?

Someone should go to the person who committed the offense, but who should that be? In Matthew 18, Jesus referred to the one who was offended, meaning if someone has offended you, then *you* should go to that person about the issue. Paul expands this a bit by mentioning those “who are spiritual”. This may be a situation that affected the whole church, or an offense that was against the whole church. Those “who are spiritual” does not refer to an elite class of Christians. These are not the “super-Christians” or the Christians that are spiritually superior to the rest of the congregation. If that was the case, Paul could have said, “Alright, if you think you are so ‘spiritual,’ then demonstrate your spirituality by acting responsibly and lovingly with your fallen brothers and sisters.” More likely, these “spiritual ones” are those who are more mature and experienced in the Christian life and who are therefore in a position to help their brother or sister. It means those “living and walking according to the Holy Spirit”. After all, Paul called the church to restore the person immediately after writing about the Fruit of the Spirit. He told the church, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” Therefore, “those who are spiritual” are probably identical with those Christians who are walking in the Spirit, are being led by the Spirit, and are keeping in step with the Spirit.

Peacemakers Gently Restore Others

What are these spiritually mature people to do with the one who is caught in a transgression? Those who exhibit evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit, have a special responsibility to take the initiative in seeking restoration and reconciliation with those who have been caught in such an error. But how is this to be done? The lapsed brother or sister should be “restored gently.” The word for “restore” literally means “to put in order,” or “to restore to its former condition.” Restoring involves putting the situation back to where it should be. When you restore something, you are putting whatever it is back to its former condition. The same word is used in Matthew and Mark for the mending fishing nets. Look at the following verse.

Matthew 4:21 *And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.*

The sons of Zebedee were mending their nets, meaning they were restoring them to their former condition. In the situation of a broken or strained relationship, one where conflict has created a situation and the relationship is not what it should be, we are to go to the other person and restore him or her in a *gentle manner*. Our attitude should be one of gentleness rather than anger. Paul was not calling the church to be lenient or to overlook a serious transgression. But, he was saying that the work of restoration should be done with sensitivity and consideration and with no hint of self-righteous superiority.

Galatians 6:1 *Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a **spirit of gentleness**. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

We are to *gently* restore the relationship that was broken. Gentleness is part of the Fruit of the Spirit and cannot coexist with an angry or a harsh spirit. Furthermore, vigilance and self-examination are needed for the one who goes to restore, to make sure his or her attitude and motivation are proper. What are some ways to gently restore someone? You must go to the other person with humility. There can be no pride in your actions. You must go to the other person with compassion and mercy. You must go as one who needs and receives mercy. You must also go in love. The following are some practical things we can do when we go to another person to *gently restore* him or her:

- *Pray for humility and wisdom*
- *Plan your words carefully (think of how you would want to be confronted)*
- *Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses (rehearsals are helpful)*
- *Choose the right time and place (talk in person whenever possible)*
- *Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise*
- *Listen carefully (listening should always precede rebuke)*
- *Speak only to build others up (you are there to restore, not tear down)*
- *Ask for feedback from the other person*
- *Recognize your limits (only God can change people!)*

If an initial conversation with the other person does not resolve the conflict, do not give up. It may take several attempts to make significant progress towards peace. Review what was said and done, and look for ways to make a better approach during a follow up conversation. It may also be wise to ask a spiritually mature friend for advice on how to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again with even stronger prayer support. If repeated, careful attempts at a *private discussion* are not fruitful, and if the matter is still too serious to overlook, you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and the person in conflict and help you to resolve the issue through mediation, arbitration, or accountability. Private confrontation is only the *beginning* of the process.

Conflict Between Bob and Joe

Let us now return to the story about Bob and Joe, who are members of the same church and in conflict with one another. If you recall, Joe and his wife hired Bob to build them a home. Joe and his wife noticed several things wrong with their house - the kitchen cabinets were not installed correctly, the master bathroom was smaller than they had wanted, and more seriously, the living room floor was not level. Bob tried to correct the problem the best he can, but the real issue is that the foundation to the house needs to be fixed. This is going to take more time, more money, and puts the project behind schedule. Joe and his wife question whether Bob can actually fix the

problems. Both parties reach a point where they do not want to deal with one another. They avoid each other at church, which has affected their relationship not only with each other, but also with others in the church. How can each person respond to this conflict? What can both Bob and Joe do to “gently restore” one another? Who is the spiritual person in this situation? Both parties need to do is to pray for each other and to pray about the situation. Both need to see the situation as the problem and not each other. Both should also empathize with the other with humility. They can then meet together with the goal of resolving their issues in a way that brings *glory to God*.

Conclusion

In closing, we will experience conflict in this life. We cannot always avoid it. How we respond to conflict is an opportunity to point people to ourselves and to our problems, or it is an opportunity to point them to the living God of the universe. What response will you choose? Will you be the spiritually mature person who takes the initiative to gently restore another person? Will you be the person who reaches out to another, after careful self examination, and seek to restore another person to fellowship with you and with God? God is serious about making peace. After all, God sent the Prince of Peace, Jesus, to make peace with us. He also wants us to be peacemakers on this earth. You are the means that God uses to bring healing and restoration to others. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!