

## Go And Be Reconciled!

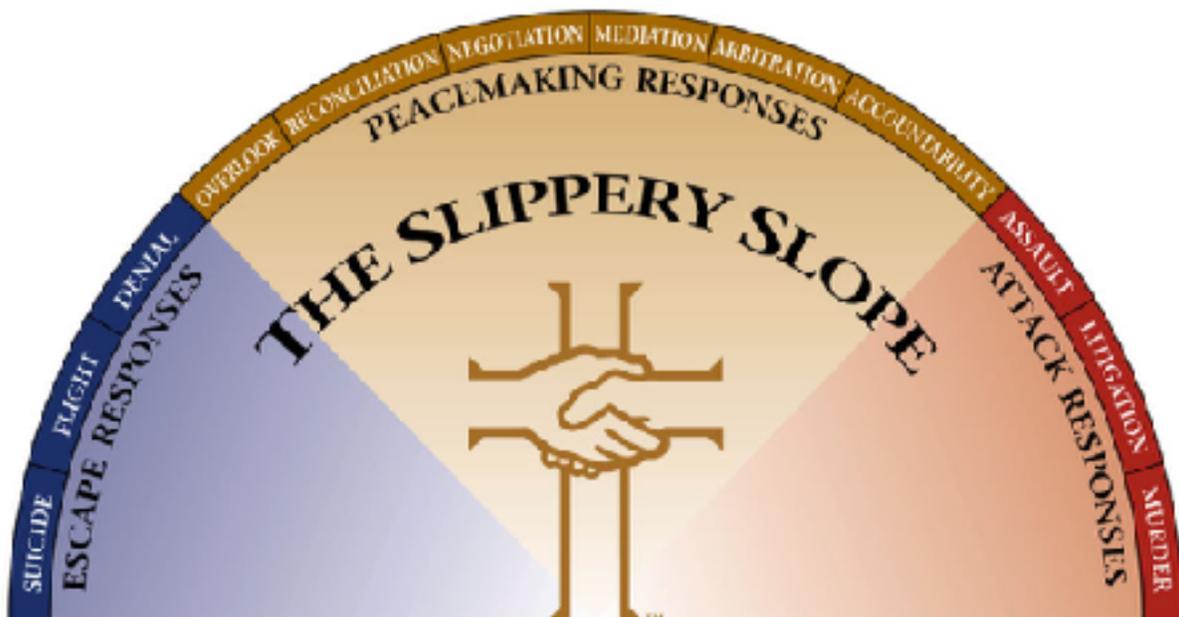
Scripture Text: Matthew 5:21-26

### Introduction

In this sermon series, we have been learning about making peace. Peacemaking is not easy, but it is worth it and God wants us to have peace. He wants us to be at peace with Him by knowing His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is the ultimate Peacemaker who makes peace between God and us. God also wants us to be *peacemakers*. He commands us to make peace with others. But, how can we make peace with others? It involves a desire for peace. We must want it. It also involves *not* seeing the other person as the problem, but rather seeing the issue between you and the other person as the thing that needs to be resolved. It also involves humility, being able to consider how we have contributed to the conflict and a willingness to change. Oftentimes, we care more about being right or winning an argument than we do about making peace and resolving conflict. Our motives are shown by our response to conflict.

### The Slippery Slope

There are several ways we can respond to conflict. How we *respond* to conflict largely determines how successful we are in making peace. Our response to conflict will either draw attention to ourselves and our situation, or it will draw attention to God. This is called the *Slippery Slope*.



We can choose to **Escape** from the conflict by *denying* a problem exists, by *running away* from the problem, or by losing hope and *taking one's own life*. We can choose to

see others as the problem and **Attack** them by *assault* (either verbally or physically), by *litigation* (suing them), or by *killing* them. These responses do not resolve conflict or make peace with others. The **Peacemaking responses**, however, include *Overlooking an Offense*, *Reconciliation* (resolving the issue), and *Negotiation* (seeking a settlement that satisfies each other). If you need help in peacemaking, you can also seek *Mediation* (asking someone else to help you voluntarily resolve conflict), *Arbitration* (appointing someone else to listen to the issue and render a judgement for you), and *Accountability* (fellow church members lovingly intervene to hold you accountable to Scripture and promote repentance). These peacemaking responses seek to resolve an issue and bring restoration to relationships in a way that honors God.

### **Glorify God, Get The Log Out, and then Gently Restore Others**

The first step to peacemaking, the first of **Four G's** is to bring *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!* We should be humble so we can rightly judge our own sin before attempting to judge someone else's sin. Thus, we should examine our own attitude and evaluate our own responsibility to a conflict first. We need to confess our part in a conflict *before* addressing another person's part in it. Once we have done that, then we should *gently and lovingly restore* the other person. Restoring means putting a situation back to where it should be. We are to go to the other person and restore him or her in a *gentle manner*, not with anger, pride, or self-righteousness. We should exhibit the Fruit of the Spirit, which includes *gentleness*. We must use compassion, mercy, and love, and not anger or a harsh spirit.

### **Anger Can Hinder Peacemaking**

Now, we come to the fourth and final "G" of our peacemaking process. Last week, I mentioned that if an initial conversation with the other person does not resolve the conflict, then do not give up. It may take several attempts to make significant progress towards peace. You may need to ask one or two other people to meet with you and the other person to help you resolve the issue. The goal of peacemaking is to be reconciled to the other person. This can be hindered by an angry spirit.

**Matthew 5:21–22** <sup>21</sup> *You have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment."* <sup>22</sup> *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, "You fool!" will be liable to the hell of fire.*

Premeditated murder is prohibited by the sixth commandment (Exodus 20:13) and was punishable by death under Old Testament Law (Numbers 35:31). God prohibits murder because people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27; 9:6). However, Jesus expands upon this by referring to anger. Anger, however, can be appropriate in some situations. For instance, we should be angry at sin, at evil, and at injustice. Those

things should anger us, but that is not what Jesus was mentioning. Jesus referred to the kind of anger towards another person that typically involves a desire to hurt or destroy the other person. That type of anger is dangerous and destructive. Harboring wrath in one's heart is sinful and deserves punishment. This is especially bad for Christians who get angry at other "brothers in Christ" and destroy the peace and unity of Christian fellowship, since they themselves have been spared God's wrath through Christ. Jesus then moved on from just anger to abusive speech, such as calling a brother an idiot or a fool. It is common to be so angry at another person that you resort to destructive thoughts and calling the other person names. This is related to anger, in that it is an attack on one's character and identity. Jesus warned that this is wrong as well.

### **Go And Be Reconciled**

Since anger can have such destructive consequences, we need to urgently escape this judgment by dealing decisively with it. Jesus made the point with a dramatic illustration that has to do with people who worship together. Jesus described a scenario in which personal reconciliation takes precedence over our corporate worship activities. The twist here, though, is who has the problem with whom. Look at the following verses.

***Matthew 5:23–24*** <sup>23</sup> *So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,* <sup>24</sup> *leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

God expects the one who worships Him to place *reconciliation above ritual*. That is not to say that we are putting other people before God, but, our interpersonal relationships have an effect on our relationship with God and our ability to worship Him together. Have you ever gone to church mad at someone else? Have you ever gone to church with some conflict or issue, maybe even anger towards another person in your church family? I have seen people gather on Sunday morning with some problem with another person, and they could not focus on worship at all. They were thinking about what the person did or said to them, or how wrong that person was. God puts a priority on reconciliation with others in the church. God's priority for peace is so high that Jesus commanded us to seek reconciliation before we seek to worship God together. Reconciliation with those you worship takes precedence over worshipping together. How many churches would be temporarily emptied on Sunday morning if we took seriously Jesus' commands here about reconciliation?

Notice who bears the burden of making things right. The one who initiates the reconciliation is the one who has wronged the other person. However, notice the word "so". Jesus began this passage by talking about the dangers of unjustified anger towards another person, insulting another person, and calling someone a "fool". Significantly the situation Jesus mentioned does not pertain to one's own anger but to the anger or grudge that another has towards you. Disciples are thus responsible not only to reign in their own anger, but to take steps to reconcile with others who are angry at them. Maybe, we should be concerned that someone else is in danger of judgement

by being angry without a just cause. It is not a question of arguing about who offended whom but of both offender and injured party taking responsibility for reconciliation. Such reconciliation to a fellow disciple must be addressed before one offers worship to God.

### **Forgiveness Leads to Reconciliation**

One of the most unique features of biblical peacemaking is the pursuit of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. Why is that? Have we not been reconciled to God through Jesus? Have we not received peace with God by the Prince of Peace? Even though Christians have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to show forgiveness to others. We cover up our disobedience by saying, “I forgive that person, but I just don’t want to have anything to do with him again.” Imagine if God said to you, “I forgive you; I just don’t want to have anything to do with you again”? How would you would feel? Would you feel forgiven? Would you feel reconciled to God? No! Praise God that He never says this! Instead, God forgives you totally and opens the way for genuine reconciliation. He then calls you to forgive others in *exactly* the same way. Our reconciliation with others is explicitly tied to our reconciliation with God. Look below.

***Ephesians 4:32*** *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

If we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ, we are then called to be kind to one another and to forgive one another. We must seek peace and reconciliation, and we must forgive others, *just as* God has forgiven us through Jesus Christ. Again, look at the following.

***Colossians 3:12–13*** <sup>12</sup> *Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,* <sup>13</sup> *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

Notice in the passage above that we are to “put on” or “be clothed in” the virtues of Christ. One of those virtues is *forgiveness*. Notice that it is specifically mentioned about those who have a complaint against another! This sounds similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 5. God’s expectation is for us to forgive each other, the accused and the accuser, just as God has forgiven us. God has loved each one of us so much that He sent His very own Son to die for us. He chose to forgive our sin, and then He expects those who have received His mercy and forgiveness to pay it forward. We must forgive!

### **Four Promises of Forgiveness**

After all the steps of peacemaking are made, after redeeming the situation to bring *glory to God*, after *getting the log out of one’s own eye*, and after *gently restoring the person* by carefully addressing the wrongs he or she has made, we are to be reconciled to each other primarily through forgiveness. Through forgiveness God tears down the walls that our sins have built. This is exactly what we must do if we are to forgive as the Lord forgives us. We must release the person who has wronged us from the penalty of being

separated from us. We must not hold wrongs against others, not think about the wrongs, and not punish others for them. One way to imitate God's forgiveness is to make the **Four Promises of Forgiveness** when you forgive someone:

- "I will not dwell on this incident."
- "I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you."
- "I will not talk to others about this incident."
- "I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship."

By making and keeping these promises, you can tear down the walls that stand between you and others. But, forgiveness is still a spiritual process and you cannot fully accomplish it on your own. Therefore, as you seek to forgive others, continually ask God for grace to enable you to imitate His wonderful forgiveness that He has toward you. You cannot guarantee that another person will agree to be reconciled with you, but you should make every effort "as far as it depends on" you (Romans 12:18).

### **Conflict Between Bob and Joe**

So, what about Bob and Joe? Remember, they 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, however, they noticed several things wrong. Bob tried to correct the problems the best he could, but Joe and his wife began to question whether Bob could actually fix the problems. Both parties reached a point where they did not want to deal with one another. They avoided each other at church, which affected their relationship not only with one other, but also with others in the church. Bob finally went to Joe and his wife to resolve the issues, and admitted the wrongs he had done. Bob made good on his promise to fix everything, but Joe's wife was still holding a grudge. Because of the issues with the house, her and Joe were not able to move into their new house in time and had their newborn baby before the move. This added to the stress and she has not gotten over it. It has now been six months and Joe's wife still refuses to talk to Bob and is now thinking about going to another church. What needs to happen in this situation? How can true peace and reconciliation be achieved between all parties? They each need to forgive the other as God has forgiven them.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, we will experience conflict in this life. 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 choose to glorify God in your conflicts? Will you choose to get the log out of your own eye, first? Will you choose to gently restore others through careful correction? Will you choose to be reconciled with others and to forgive others as God has forgiven you? God is serious about making peace and He wants us to be serious about it, too. He sent His Son, the Prince of Peace, to make peace with us and He wants us to be peacemakers, too. You are the means that God chooses to use to bring healing and restoration to others. Will you be a peacemaker? May it be so! Thanks be to God. Amen!