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Blessed are the Peacemakers



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In his discussion of the Beatitudes, Steve Gregg highlights the importance of being a peacemaker. According to Gregg, peacemaking is a God-like trait that involves promoting peace even with our enemies. This approach requires reconciling broken relationships due to sin, forgiving others, and seeking reconciliation even in cases of big offenses. Ultimately, peacemaking involves a holistic approach that goes beyond personal interactions and seeks to promote wellbeing and harmony within communities and beyond.

Transcript

The Sermon on the Mount begins with what we call the Beatitudes. We're going to be looking at the, at Matthew 5, 9, this Beatitude says, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they should be called the sons of God. As you probably know, the word blessed means happy or at least having grounds for happiness.

You have reason to be happy. You're fortunate. You're enviable.

This group of statements at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, there are eight of them, each of them begins with blessed are and then describes a category of people. And then, as it is not necessarily intuitive that these kinds of people would be particularly enviable, for example, those who mourn, those who are persecuted, those kinds of things, the poor in spirit, the meek. In what sense are these people fortunate or enviable? Well, Jesus can justify his statement, he does in every case.

He says because. So he says, blessed are the poor in spirit because. Theirs is the kingdom of God, of heaven.

And so each of these Beatitudes says a certain group of people are enviable, whether the world sees them that way or not, God does. They have advantages that others who do not fit this description do not have. And Jesus does not leave us in the dark about it.

He tells us what advantages accrue to these particular states that we are now. Jesus in giving eight Beatitudes does not talk about eight different groups of people. Like, you

know, if you look around you might find somebody who's poor in spirit and you'll find someone else who's meek and somebody else who's merciful and somebody else who's hungry for righteousness.

But rather that this is a description, a composite drawing, as it were, of a disciple, of a person that is following Christ as they should follow Christ and being transformed as they should be transformed and experiencing the blessing of God in various ways that are listed. Each Beatitude has one particular advantage mentioned. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven, they shall be satisfied, they shall obtain mercy.

These are things that are, all of them are true of all Christians, at least all people, all Christians who fit these descriptions. The idea is we don't have eight different classes of people but one class of people who are supposed to have all these things as descriptors of their lives. And all of the advantages attached to them are ours.

And that's why we're very fortunate. Now in this one we're almost at the end of the Beatitudes when we come to Blessed are the Peacemakers. The reason that the Peacemakers are blessed is because they shall be called the sons of God.

Now in talking about being sons of God we need to make sure we understand what we're saying here. He's not saying that you become a child of God, born again, a saved person by being a Peacemaker. A person can be called a son of God in more than one way.

For example, Adam is called the son of God in Luke chapter 3 simply because he was created directly by God. Jesus is called the son of God for very different reasons because he is the only begotten son of God. We are called sons of God if we're born of God.

It says in John chapter 1 verse 12, as many as received him to them he gave the power to become sons of God. And in this sense that John is talking about being born of God because he goes on to say who are born not according to the flesh or according to the will of man and so forth but according but of God. To be a child of God in the sense that is most important of course is that we are born of God.

We have the divine nature. We belong to God's actual family because of the supernatural work of regeneration he's done. But that's not what Jesus means when he says they should be called the sons of God.

I mean he may be referring to the fact that truly regenerated people will be recognized as such by being peacemakers. But being called a son of God is a Hebraism. Remember Jesus was Jewish speaking to Jewish people and they would have understood this to mean being God-like.

The relationship of a father and a son when it is not biological in scripture often simply refers to the fact that somebody is the father of those who do what he did whether he's really their actual father or not. For example you find in Genesis chapter 4 verses 20 and

21 that Jabal and Jubal both of whom are sons descended from Cain, sons of Lamech. It says that Jabal was the father of those who dwell in tents and herd sheep.

He's the father of everyone who's ever done that. Certainly there's been people of all nationalities who have dwelt in tents and herded sheep. He's not the father literally of them.

And Jubal is said to be the father of all musicians. Well musicians might be of any family. How could he be the actual father of them? It doesn't mean that.

It's sort of like we would say that Washington is the father of this country. He's the founder. He's the prototype.

The idea is that those who are tenders of sheep and dwelling in tents they resemble. They have a similar conduct to this person. He happened to be the first to do it.

Everyone who's done it afterward is like in the Hebraic way of thinking like his sons, not literal sons. All musicians are like sons of Jubal only in that Jubal is the first to make musical instruments and to play them apparently. We are more familiar with New Testament examples as when Jesus said to the Pharisees in John 8, 44, he says, you are of your father the devil and the desires of your father you want to do.

He was a liar and he's the father of lies. He's the father of lies. Or actually says the father of it having mentioned liars.

And so he's the father of lying, of liars. People who lie are simply imitating the original liar. The father of in this kind of sense would mean the original.

Jabal was the original nomadic herdsman. Jubal is the original musician. Satan is the original liar.

Those who do the same things as they did are like their sons in a manner of speaking, a very common manner of speaking in scripture. In fact, there's three places in the New Testament that say that the ones who are the children of Abraham are those who do the works of Abraham. That is who have his faith.

Jesus said that to the Jews also in John chapter eight. He said, if you are Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. He's not talking about biology merely.

These people were biologically descended from Abraham. He said, but you're not really the children of Abraham in the sense that matters. You don't do what he did.

You don't believe as he did. That's in John 8, 39. And Paul says similar things in Romans chapter four, verses 11 and 12 and Galatians 3, 7. In Galatians 3, 7 it says, therefore, those who are of faith are the children of Abraham.

Well, I don't have any biological ties to Abraham as far as I know, but I have faith. Therefore, I'm a child of Abraham. I'm a son of Abraham.

Why? Because he had faith. I have faith. We have that shared characteristic.

You see, this is how the Bible uses the term father and son at times in many times. In fact, Jesus indicated that this is why he worked on the Sabbath. In John chapter five, we know Jesus as on many other occasions was criticized for working on the Sabbath.

He said, well, my father works every day and I work every day. I do what my father does. And when they decided they'd stone him for saying something like that, he decided, well, since I'm already in trouble, might as well go further on the same topic.

And he says in John 5, 19, most assuredly, I say to you, the son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the father do for whatever he does, the son does in like manner. Now, of course, Jesus is the son of God in a unique sense, but many scholars believe this is like a parable about sons and fathers. And Jesus is the one who's fulfilling the son's role with reference to his father.

But sons are apprentices to their fathers, at least in that society they were. Joseph had been an apprentice to Joseph and learned how to do carpentry. Other sons learned how to do their father's business.

Sons watch their father's work and learn to imitate them, he said. That's again the idea of father and son. This would be true even if the son was not a natural son, if he was an adopted son.

In fact, even if he was a mere servant being trained by an apprentice, a man might refer to such a one as his son. Paul referred to Timothy as his son because Timothy was a good protegee, learning to do what Paul did. Peter referred to Mark as his son in 1 Peter chapter 5. So father and son isn't always a reference to an organic or biological connection, but it has more to do with being like that person.

In Ephesians 5.1, Paul said, be imitators of God as dear children. It's just like a child imitates his father, you imitate God, becoming like God. And of course, what we're being told here is that those who are peacemakers resemble God and will be therefore his sons in that sense.

They will be doing a God-like thing. God is a peacemaker and they shall be peacemakers. In fact, God five times in the New Testament is called the God of peace.

Five times it says he's the God of peace, one time it says he's the God of love and peace, so I guess that makes six. And therefore, godly people are referred to sometimes as sons of peace. God's children are sons of peace because he's the God of peace.

So we see when Jesus sent out the 70 in Luke chapter 10, he says, when you go into a city and you go into a house, say, peace be on this house. And if a son of peace is in the house, then the peace will stay on the house. But if the man is not a son of peace, then it won't, if he's unworthy.

But you see, calling a person a son of peace is a very Hebraic way of saying he's a man who exhibits peace. And God is a God of peace, he exhibits peace. A son of peace is like his father, he's an imitator, he's doing a God-like thing in this case.

Now when Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers, he's saying that's what God is. God is a peacemaker. If you're a peacemaker, you'll be God-like in that respect, you'll be imitating your father.

You'll be recognizable as his son. Even in terms of biological children, you can often see a family resemblance. In this particular room, there's some rather large families, and I can easily, and so could anyone else, see family resemblances.

The parents pass on traits to their children. And that's just in the natural, physical, visible sense. But Jesus, in Hebrew speech in general, is talking about something less literal than that, but rather passing on spiritual traits, and spiritual behaviors.

And being a peacemaker is a trait of God, and therefore those who do it are recognizable as his children. And that's what he is saying. Now, peace, what is peace? Well, I think even in modern times we use peace a variety of ways.

I suppose maybe the first thing people think of as peace is in some kind of a global or international sense, there's no war going on. There's a tremendous distinction between war and peace. And especially if you've lived at times of war, when that war ends, you think of peace primarily in the sense of, wow, cessation of hostility, cessation of war.

It's calm, it's tranquil now, instead of hostile and awful, dangerous. But in the Bible, the idea of peace is an extremely important topic to the Jews. In fact, shalom is the Hebrew word.

Jesus may have used it here, although we have his words represented in Greek. The gospel writers translated his words into Greek, so it's the Greek word *erene*, which is Greek for peace. But it's probable, since Jesus spoke Aramaic, that he probably said, blessed are those who make shalom.

And shalom is a word that has a tremendously broad meaning. It doesn't just mean the cessation of violence, the cessation of war. It doesn't just mean security and tranquility.

It means the presence of every good thing, of every boon, of every benefit. When someone would go into someone's house and say shalom, in fact, that's how Jews would greet each other in the streets, they'd say shalom, that'd be their greeting. It's a wish of

every good benefit upon them, wishing their total good.

Good health, good prosperity, good relations in the family, good relations with neighbors, everything good. I mean, we think of peace often in negative terms, the absence of bad things, the absence of violence, the absence of war, the absence of conflict. But peace to the Hebrew mind was more positive.

It would be the absence of those things only because there's the presence of the opposite, that it's all good. A rather modern thing that people say, it's all good, that'd be exactly like saying shalom, in a way. It's all good.

Everything good to you. And in that sense, to be a peacemaker would be someone who promotes the benefit in all respects of other people. God does that, and he even does it to his enemies.

In fact, if you look in the same sermon, in the same chapter, in Matthew chapter 5, I personally believe that the Sermon on the Mount more or less amplifies the beatitudes at its beginning. In a sense, the eight beatitudes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount kind of distill into eight statements the main themes that are going to be coming up in the teaching of the rest of the sermon. It's kind of like an introductory outline, although it's not really an outline because they're not treated in the same order.

But it is a compact version of the Sermon on the Mount, and he unpacks that as he gives the rest of the sermon. And as you look at Matthew 5 later on in the chapter, he says in verse 43, Matthew 5, 43, you have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies.

Bless those who curse you. Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. Notice that you may be the sons of your father in heaven.

Now, he's not saying if you behave this way, then you'll be born again and you'll be children of God as a result of that. He's saying, again, the same thing, that you'll be like your dad. Do what he does.

Imitate your father. You'll be sons then of your father in heaven if you do this. Why? Well, Jesus gives examples.

God does this. He says he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust. Now, here Jesus is saying seeking the peace and seeking the benefit of other people is to be extended to all people, including your enemies.

And only insofar as you are seamlessly committed to making shalom, making peace with people, only then are you really like God. Only then are, he says, then you will be the sons of your father who is in heaven. Why? Because you see him doing that.

The benefits he gives, which Jesus summarizes in this case a couple of important benefits to agrarian society. He causes the sun to rise. That's a benefit to everyone, agrarian or not.

The rain isn't welcomed by everyone equally, but by farmers it is. And he says he sends the sunshine and the rain on the good people and the bad people. That is the people who he likes and the people he's not so happy with.

The people who treat God well and the people who don't treat God well. The wicked as well as the righteous. God gives blessings and benefits to all people.

Now, it doesn't mean everyone's saved, but it means that God is so beneficent that he just is, he's like a river of well, well-doing to people, peacemaking. Now, when it comes to making peace, we, I think, legitimately think in terms of relationships. Because in many cases in the Bible, that's what it's talking about.

People sometimes are not at peace with other people, or for that matter, not at peace with God. And so peacemakers are those who do what they can to restore peace, where there is hostility, where there is alienation. Making peace can be called reconciliation, because that's what it is.

Reconciliation is just a word, another word, that means making peace. People are reconciled when they were once alienated, once at odds, and something has happened to remove the offense, to bring about forgiveness, a rejoining of the relationship as it was before there was a problem, and things are as they should be again. That's been, reconciliation has taken place.

So, a peacemaker is one who practices reconciliation. Now there's several things about being children of God and being known by being peacemaking that are quite resembling God. For one thing, God is committed to peace, a responsible peace, however.

We remember when Jesus was in the storm in the ship with the disciples, and it was chaotic, it was turbulent, it was dangerous, the disciples were terrified. They woke Jesus up, and he commanded the storm, said, peace. He commanded peace, so be still, and then peace came.

Now, that of course is an actual thing that really did happen on the water, but it no doubt is something of a sample in physical terms of what God does in relational terms as well. He's a peacemaker, he's the prince of peace, Jesus is. He certainly is one who brings peace.

Now you might say, but I thought Jesus said, I didn't come to bring peace but a sword. Well, he did say that, but what does that mean? Well, that's an example of which we have many in Scripture, of what we call limited negative. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword is a kind of a statement, and there are many statements in Scripture that

are phrased like that.

Not this, but that. But you can tell in many cases, maybe all the cases, that it really means not only this, but also that. So it's a figure of speech, we call it a limited negative.

So it says, I didn't come to bring peace, that sounds like an absolute negative, but it's limited by, but a sword, meaning, but additionally a sword. There's going to be peace, I am bringing peace, but not just peace. There's going to be some division too.

And by the way, in Matthew he says a sword, in Luke it says division, in that same statement. Jesus wants to bring peace, but there's going to be division as a result of him coming to. There's going to be a little, there's going to be both.

But we are on the side of peace. We're the ones who are trying to make the peace. The reason there's division is there are people who aren't interested in peace, and we'll talk more about that in a moment.

But Jesus is a bringer of peace, and where people are receptive to him, he brings peace into their lives, brings peace into their relationships. But where people are not receptive, of course, it's another matter. In John chapter 16, in verse 33, in the upper room, near the end of the upper room discourse, Jesus said to the disciples, these things I've spoken unto you, so that in me you'll have peace.

In the world you'll have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world. Cheer up.

I've overcome the world, he said, which certainly didn't seem to be the case as they sat there in the upper room. He was hiding even then from his enemies who were looking to kill him. He had 12 guys, and one of them betrayed him, and one was about to deny him three times.

I mean, this is not exactly the image of a conquering person who conquers the whole world. And yet Jesus did conquer the world, and he said, you're going to have tribulation in the world. There's going to be storms, but in me you'll have peace.

If you're in the boat with me, I can say to those storms, peace, be still. You live in two realms as a Christian. You live in the world where your circumstances are quite independent from your circumstances in Christ, which is the other realm you live in.

In him, he says, I say this to you so that in me you'll have peace. In the world you're going to have tribulation. There's no promise here of external peace.

In fact, that's where the sword is. I came to bring peace and a sword, but not just peace. Do not think I came to bring peace on the earth.

Yeah, you're going to have peace. I'm going to give you that peace. My peace I give unto

you, he said elsewhere in the same sermon of the upper room discourse.

And the Bible does talk about peace. It's the fruit of the Spirit, is peace. God does bring peace.

Jesus does bring peace, but he's saying not just that. If you think it's all going to be rosy now because I'm here, you got another thing coming. There's also going to be division.

There's also going to be reaction. There's going to be opposition. There's going to be a sword.

But that's in terms of the world. The world will hate you, no doubt. It hated me before it hated you, he said.

So don't be surprised when the world hates you. If they called the master of their house Beelzebub, what do you think they'll call his servants? things. But the world, there's going to be tribulation.

There's going to be persecution. There's going to be turbulence. There's going to be turmoil, but not in you.

Not if you're in me. In me, you're going to have a peace, as Paul puts it, a peace that passes understanding. The peace that passes understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, as he said in Philippians chapter 4. So there's a peace that Jesus brings to us and gives to us in the midst of turbulence.

And so this is the business that God is in. He comes into a turbulent world. He comes into a storm, and he says, peace be still, and where it's received, it's received.

Now the storm had to receive it. They can't resist. They don't have free will.

The wind and the waves, they don't have free will. We do. If he says peace to us, we can reject that peace.

We have peace with God if we submit to him and if we don't fight him. Before we're Christians, we're at war with God. In fact, becoming a Christian, I think is best described, although there may be other analogies, but I think the best description of what it really means to become a Christian is you lay down your arms and you surrender.

You stop fighting God. You give in and say, okay, I give up. I'm your servant.

I'm laying down my arms. No more fighting. No more resistance here.

And when we do that, we find we have peace. Now we're not going to have peace if we're waiting for God to lay down his arms. If we're at war with God and we're hoping to beat him, it's not going to happen.

You'll never have peace if you're waiting for the other person to surrender and he's got infinite power and you don't. So the smart person surrenders quickly. And you do find people who are not that smart.

And they fight God and they fight God and they fight God all their lives. And they haven't got a clue. You can't beat God.

But smart people are, you know, it's the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord. People who fear God say, you know, I think I'll lay down my arms real quick. As soon as I know there's a conflict between me and God, I want to repent.

I want to get right with God. I want to maintain the peace. You know, if I don't repent what I've done wrong and God has an issue with me because of it, you know, I don't have peace.

I want to surrender. I want to stop doing the wrong thing as fast as possible so that I have peace. Because God wants to bring tranquility, wants to bring peace into my life.

And then he wants to bring peace in relationships. And there's two different ways that a peacemaker makes peace in relationships. One is between himself and his enemies.

And the other is between alienated parties, third parties and each other. That is to say a peacemaker is first concerned that he is at peace with others. And secondly, is loves peace so much he wants to make sure other people are at peace with each other too.

And so gets involved as a, you know, maybe a counselor or an intermediary to help bring reconciliation where there is lack of peace in other relationships. Peace in relationships is very, very important to God. We can see it because first of all, he reconciled his own enemies to himself.

That's the first aspect of that I mentioned just now. God as a peacemaker has committed himself to reconcile himself to his enemies. And he did that at great cost to himself.

In a sense, he surrendered to the cross so that he could make peace with his enemies. And we read this in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said, that is God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. And he has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Now the gospel is a word of reconciliation. We're committed the charge of sharing that reconciliation with others. But we've received it first because God saw us when we were his enemies and he reconciled us to himself by the death of Christ.

In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. And now having been reconciled, we're supposed to be agents of reconciliation, peacemakers. God was a peacemaker.

He made peace between us and himself through the death of Christ. And now we're to

be peacemakers too. In Colossians 1, 29 and 30, we see Paul affirming the same feature of God as a reconciler of people to himself.

And we can see how broad his intentions are. In Colossians 1, 19 and 20, it says, for it pleased the Father that in Christ all the fullness should dwell and by him, that is by Christ, to reconcile all things to himself. By him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of his cross.

Notice being made peace by the blood of Christ. God showed his intention and determination to reconcile everything to himself. And Paul said the same thing in Ephesians 2, 16.

Paul said that he might reconcile them both to God. Now them both in this context is going to be Jews and Gentiles. We're going to look at this whole passage in a moment under another point.

But he's talking about the Jews and Gentiles whom God reconciles with each other is really the main point of the passage. But this other element is there too. And he reconciles both groups to himself.

God reconciles Jews and Gentiles who believe in him to himself. And then, of course, the bigger part of this context is and to each other too, as we'll see. But the point here is that a peacemaker, first of all, is concerned to be at peace with those who are alienated from him.

When there's somebody in your life that you used to be friends with, or maybe you were never really friends with them, but there was every reason that you should have been friends. You worked together or your neighbors or whatever. You have brushings with them.

You have contact with them. And for whatever reason, either they no longer or never were friendly to you. In fact, they're hostile to you.

If you're a peacemaker, this is not acceptable. That is to say, it's not that you're angry at them. It's that you're not okay with not being their friend or at least not being on good terms.

Not everyone has to be exactly a friend. You only have room for so many of those in your life. They're time-consuming.

But at least to be on good terms with everybody is desirable. And when there is somebody who just will not befriend you, it's frustrating if you're a peacemaker. And you reach out as much as you can.

Now, if you realize that you've done something offensive to them, then, of course,

scripturally, you go and you repent to them. That's what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount later in Matthew 5. He said, if you come with your gift at the altar to worship God in the temple, and you there remember that your neighbor has something against you, that means you've done something and they're holding it against you. He says, you leave your gift at the altar.

Don't even bother to worship God. He's not ready to hear from you yet. You go and make peace with your neighbor first.

If you've done something to your neighbor to alienate him, you get that right. You go back. You apologize.

You repent. You do what you have to do. You ask for forgiveness.

You do what you can to be at peace with them. And then, once you've done what you can to be at peace with them, then God will take you seriously. You can come back and offer your gift at his altar, which shows that God takes this peacemaking business pretty seriously if he puts it even above formal worship of himself.

Don't be worshiping me when you're neglecting to do what I told you to do over here with your neighbor. Now, there are times when people dislike you, and you can't think of a thing you've done. Sadly, this happens in marriages sometimes, but it happens in all kinds of places, neighbors and so forth.

We've had neighbors in our past who, for whatever reasons, they're just not responsive to our overtures. They're just not friendly. They're grumpy.

And the one that was the greatest offender of that moved away finally, and there's a nicer neighbor there now. But the point is, we just couldn't figure this guy out. Take him cookies at Christmas time, greet him friendly every time we see him out in front, and he wouldn't speak back.

He wouldn't answer. It's very strange. The guy had a problem, and it wasn't okay with us.

We kept trying to reach out to make it right, but he would never say of anything we'd done to offend him, and it just was not possible to make peace with him until he moved away. Actually, he rents his house out now to someone else, and they're good, and he comes over, and he's friendly with us now. I guess if he doesn't have to live with us, he likes us, okay.

Some couples are like that, too, with each other. But a peacemaker wants others to be at peace with themselves. We'll see in a moment.

The Bible actually says that won't always happen. You can do your best, and it may not

happen. But you'll want it to happen.

It'll not be okay. You never figure, oh, well, I can live without them. Well, yeah, you can.

But can they really live without you? Will they be okay with God if they don't get it straightened out? And maybe they don't care about God or you, but you care about God and about them and about the relationship because God cares about the relationships. If there's broken relationships, this is a result of sin, somebody's sin, and it's not okay. It's one of the things that, it's the most damaging thing, I think.

Well, there's two damaging things sin did. It alienated us from God, and it alienated us from other people. And certainly, it's one of the big issues that God wants solved, and anyone who's got the heart of God wants to be a reconciler with people who are wrong with them.

But also, we should be grieved to see any two people who are at odds with each other, especially if they're Christians, both, or family members, which is sort of the same thing. You know, when you see families that are divided over something, it's amazing how small a thing it can often be. You know, when you finally hear what it was, you think, they're going to all this grief because that one little thing? I mean, it's so obvious when you read the scripture that we're supposed to forgive routinely of things, even big things.

I mean, when Jesus was crucified, he said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do. I mean, that's a big thing, being crucified.

If someone just takes me off and I haven't done anything wrong and they start nailing me to a cross, I'm going to consider that very offensive. That's offensive behavior. But that's what they did to Jesus, and Jesus said, forgive them.

Just unilaterally, he forgave them. In Mark chapter 11 and verse, I think it's 25, Jesus said, when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against him, that you may be forgiven by your heavenly Father. So just routine forgiveness, an attitude of always wanting to forgive.

Now, because you care about the relationship, you should also, in some cases, reach out and try to bring about a reconciliation where something you've already forgiven in your heart, someone did something to you, but you can't trust them because they haven't changed. Reaching out to them is then an important aspect of reconciliation. So Jesus said in Luke chapter 18, I'm sorry, Luke 17, he said, if your brother sins against you, this is at the beginning of Luke 17, if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in one day, and he says, I repent, then forgive him. Now notice, this is a little different than when you stand praying, automatically forgiving someone, you're going to talk to him about it.

And you're only going to forgive them in this case if they repent. But the first statement, when you stand praying, if someone's done something, just forgive them, that doesn't say they have to repent. What's up with that? Well, because there's two things about forgiveness.

One is the part that's in your heart. The other is the part that's in the relationship. You've got to keep your heart clean.

You've got to love your enemy. You've got to pray for those who persecute you. You've got to do good to those who don't do good to you.

That's just being like Jesus. But you want more than just to have the higher moral ground. I'm the good guy, they're the bad guy.

I forgive them because I'm good, and they're bad, and we'll just live with that. No, I don't want to live with that. I want them to be good too.

I want a relationship to be what God wants it to be. I may not want to be their good friend. I mean, I might be open to that, but I mean, that's not necessarily what I'm seeking.

But I don't want there to be an issue unresolved between us. And therefore, having forgiven them in my heart and saying, okay, I'm clean, now let's see if we can make this relationship work again. Let's see if we can stitch this together.

You know, brother, you did something that I have to say was not a very good relational thing to do. You injured me in such and such a way. And I only bring it up not because I don't forgive you.

I do forgive you, but it's an issue. I mean, if that's a habit you have, you're going to be alienating people all over the place. And frankly, if I'm not sure you wouldn't do it again, I don't know if I can trust you again.

I can love you from a distance, but trusting you is another matter. If you injured me once on purpose, I don't know that you won't do it again. And so I'm interested in restoring trust here because relationships require trust.

And if he says, oh, I'm so sorry, that was a bad thing I did. I repent of that. Then you're supposed to forgive them in a sense formally.

It's like you already in your heart have done that. The first part is a matter of unconditional love. Unconditional love is required.

That's why we're supposed to love our enemies. They're not meeting the conditions to be loved. We love them unconditionally, but unconditional trust is not required.

You cannot trust someone if they don't earn trust. You can love someone who doesn't earn your love, but you can't trust somebody unless they show themselves trustworthy. It's just impossible.

And it's not right. You shouldn't. The Bible says, woe unto him who puts his trust in man.

There's no virtue in trusting people. Trusting God is good, and trusting somebody who's faithful is good. But somebody who's not faithful, there's no virtue in trusting them.

It's just foolish, and you're not supposed to. But if you can't trust somebody because they've done a certain thing, they've done some wrong to you, and you've known that they are capable of doing such a thing, so you don't want to be vulnerable to them anymore, to go to them and say, listen, I care about this relationship. I could just ignore you.

I could just live my life somewhere over here, and you're over there, and I could just be a coward and not confront this thing. But I care about the relationship because God does. And because I do, I want to see what we can do to restore trust, because I don't trust you now because you did this.

And I want to. I want to trust you again. I'd like to think it was exceptional on your part rather than normal for you to do this kind of thing.

I want to know if this is something you would justify today or something you now are sorry for. I want to know where you stand on this injury you've done, not because I'm holding a grievance, but because I want things to be normal, and they're not. And if the person says, I wanted that too.

I repent. I'm sorry. I didn't do the right thing there.

I repent. I'm sorry. Well, then you're supposed to give them another chance, and another, and another, and another, if they do it seven times in one day, which is a hyperbole, I'm sure.

But the idea is you've got to be kind of endless in your willingness to try to work on this relationship. Make peace where there's not peace. Peacemakers do that.

God does that. How long does God pursue people who are ignoring him, people who are not repenting? I think he pursues them right down to the last breath. Some think he pursues them even after that.

But the point is God is committed to reconciliation of his enemies to himself, and we are to be like him. We should have that as a high priority. Now, in addition to that, of course, we want to be helpful in reconciling other people to each other, and God, of course, does that.

And we see in Proverbs 16, 7, for example, it says, If a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. God does. God will make your enemies to be at peace with you.

Maybe not every time. There might be exceptions. Again, peace requires the agreement of two parties, at least.

But God often, he's in the business of trying to make your enemies be at peace with you. He wants to reconcile alienated parties, in which case he's a third party, outside of that, in a way. And we are like that too.

But we see God doing that. This is where we come back to Ephesians 2, which I mentioned earlier. This is the extended discussion of God's commitment to reconcile people who are at odds with each other.

And the classic division, biblically, was between the Jew and the Gentile. They were hostile toward each other. They were hostile to each other, I think, largely because the Jews were so snobbish in many cases, because the Jews looked at everybody else as unclean, uncircumcised, a lesser breed without the law.

And frankly, most people who are looked at that way are not very gracious about saying, Oh, you can think of me that way. I'm okay with that. You know, I mean, usually if someone is looking down on you, say, Hey, you know better than me, then you're kind of angry at them for their attitude.

And this attitude of the Jews and the Gentiles was hostile through the history of the world until today. In fact, outside of Christ, those who are not in Christ are still hostility. They're still anti-Semitism.

In Ephesians chapter 2, beginning at verse 11, it says, Therefore, remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by those who call themselves the circumcision made in the flesh by hands, that at that time you were without Christ being alienated or aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. You Gentiles were alienated from the Israelites. You were not part of the same group as them, and there is an alienation.

And you were strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world. So you were alienated from God and from the Jews. But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Now we might think this refers to being brought near to God. And of course, it is true that we have been brought near to God. But in the context, you'll see as he goes on, he's talking about the Jews who believe and the Gentiles who believe have now been brought near to each other, where they were alienated from each other.

You were Gentiles alienated from Israel, but you've been brought closer now. You were alienated, but now you're not. We'll see that this is where he's going.

Verse 14, for he himself is our peace who has made both one. Now both means the Jew and the Gentile. They were not one before, but now they've been reconciled in Christ, and now we're one body.

God has made both of them one and broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in his flesh the enmity that is the law and commandments contained in ordinances. It was the fact that the Jews kept laws like circumcision and cleanness and other laws like that that alienated them from Gentiles who did not. God's done away with those.

So as to create in himself one new man, that's the body of Christ. The Jew and the Gentile in Christ are now one new body, one new man from the two, thus making peace. Thus God is the peacemaker between Jews and Gentiles as well as between himself and his own enemies.

And in verse 19, now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints. You're no longer alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. You're now not a foreigner.

You're a member of the family now. God has made one family, one new man, one body out of formerly alienated persons from each other and now broken down that alienation. Now we therefore become peacemakers by trying to eliminate all alienation between ourselves and others and also doing what can be done as God did to bring peace between parties that are not friendly with each other.

Now peacemaking can be fruitless. You can put in the effort necessary and it may not bring about peace. And we see that, for example, in Romans chapter 12.

It's at least implied in Romans 12 and it's stated outright in some other places. In Romans 12 18, in speaking about our obligation to be peacemakers, Paul says this, he says, if it is possible, Romans 12 18, if it is possible, as much as depends on you, implying that some parts of this do not depend on you but on someone else, but if it's possible and to the extent that it depends on your activity and your decisions, live peaceably with all men. Be peaceful with everybody if possible.

Now why would it not be possible? Because it doesn't all depend on you. In so far as it depends on you, you make sure your nose is clean. You make sure you've done all everything that you have not offended another person or if you have offended them, that you have gone and made it right.

You've apologized. You've made restitution if necessary. You've done everything necessary to remove an offense between you and another person and also to confront

them if necessary about an offense that remains between you and them that they've committed.

In other words, to sit down and talk very honestly but, you know, a lot of people don't want to do that. Have you noticed that? When's the last time you actually did what the Bible says to do and the other person was happy you did? Now I'm not saying there weren't cases. There are cases.

Going and making peace with someone is often has brought very, you know, very positive results and restoration in relationships but I'll bet there's at least as many times, maybe more, when somebody has injured you and you're going back to talk to them about it and they don't want to talk about it because it involves them having to say they were wrong and lots of people, frankly, don't want to say they were wrong. This blows my mind, actually. There's been some people.

There's at least one person I know, two, three. There's a few people I can remember. Sound like Monty Python.

Two elements is right. No, three! You know, three reasons but no, there's a few people I can think of that were alienated from me because I did something wrong to them. I was clueless.

I didn't intend to but it was, you know, I did something that injured them. I later realized it and I always went to them. I said, I'm really sorry.

I, you know, I shouldn't have done that. That wasn't the right thing to do. Please forgive me and the people I'm thinking of, as far as I know, have never forgiven me despite that.

I've actually gone back to them numerous times and asked them to forgive me and they still haven't. So, I think, well, I'm trying, you know, doing what I can but, you know, the breach was my fault but it wasn't such a great fault that they should find it impossible to forgive when I say I'm sorry, you know, but nonetheless, nonetheless, you know, there's alienation there. I'm trying but they don't want it.

Now, on the other hand, there's a number of people that I'm alienated with because they sinned against me but I've talked to all of them about it. All of them I know and try to confirm and a few of them I've been reconciled with and there are a few of them they just won't. They don't want to admit they were wrong.

They don't want to talk about it. So, Paul knows that. There are people for whom being a peacemaker is not a priority and that means that they're not attuned with God because it is God's priority, very certainly.

If you look at Psalm 120, it's easy to find though, it's a short psalmist, the next psalm after the longest chapter in the Bible. Psalm 120 verses 6 and 7, the psalmist says, my

soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace but when I speak they are for war.

That is one of the biggest differences between someone who's got the heart of God and someone who doesn't is that you just can't understand why do they want war? Why do they want alienation? Peace is so much nicer. It satisfies the flesh. Well, yeah, it satisfies their flesh.

In many cases, what it does, it preserves them from humbling themselves and saying they were wrong. There's a number of things, I guess, but none of them are worth it as far as I'm concerned. I'm for peace but when I speak they're for war.

I've dwelt so long with people who hate peace. And that's what Paul's talking about when he says, if it's possible, as much as lies in you, be at peace with everyone. But it isn't always going to be the case.

That's why Jesus said, I didn't just come to bring peace but also a sword, because there's going to be people, their decision also is a factor in restoration. Okay, so let me just say that pride is a big barrier to reconciliation. Proverbs 13.10 said, only by pride comes contention.

So humbling oneself is a necessary part of making peace. Another big issue, of course, is anger. Different than pride but very much a major part of causing contention and preventing peace.

In Proverbs 15.18, it says, a wrathful man stirs up strife but he who is slow to anger allays contention or is a peacemaker. A man who can control his temper will reduce strife but a man who's angry will increase strife. And then, of course, jealous desire.

James tells us that jealous desire is one of the causes of war. I think this would mean international and personal wars that people have. In James 4, verses 1 and 2, says, where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure, that war in your members? You lust and do not have.

You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war yet you do not have because you do not ask. It's amazing how jealousy and envy causes problems in relationships.

I'm thinking particularly of one I know of, and there could be several others, people that I'm not at peace with that I wish I was. One was a very good friend of mine. I even had him at one time as a co-host on my radio show for some time years ago.

It's in another state, another lifetime. But he was like my best friend. And then he kind of drifted off and he kind of avoided me and he started gossiping and talking bad about me.

I thought, what's up? What happened with this guy? And he came to me at church once.

He says, Steve, you know, I was just asking God why I'm so angry at you. And he says, God told me I'm jealous of you.

And I thought, okay, he's a Christian. He's making a confession. I guess he's repenting.

But he didn't repent. He just wanted to let me know. I hate you because I'm jealous of you.

And he didn't change. And he still hasn't. And I've made many overtures to it.

He doesn't want anything to do with me. But he said, it's because I'm jealous of you. And I don't know.

What a strange thing to be angry at someone for. They've got something you don't have. Or they have circumstances you wish you had.

You know, I mean, that causes strife. A lot of times you can't do much for them. I mean, these are things that will prevent peace from being made, even when you're trying to make peace.

Pride. Only by pride comes contention. Anger.

Some people are just angry people. And envy or jealousy. Those things definitely make it hard to be at peace.

In fact, in Genesis 34, 7, it says that when Joseph's brothers saw that their father favored Joseph more than them, says they hated him and they couldn't speak peaceably to him. There was no possibility of peace in that relationship because they were jealous. And in fact, in 1 John chapter 3, it says that Cain killed Abel.

It says, why did he hate him? Why did he kill him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous. That is, God honored Abel's righteous behavior and didn't honor Cain's. And Cain hated Abel for that.

Why? He was jealous that God favored Abel. Of course, Cain could have done something about it, but he didn't. Listen, I'm not going to keep you any longer, but if you look at the notes on the back side, the points there are about what I've called the way of peace, because that's a biblical phrase.

The biblical phrase talks about people who do not know the way of peace. Isaiah chapter 59, verse 8 talks about people who do not know the way of peace. Paul actually quotes that verse in Romans 3. He talks about those who don't know the way of peace.

But in Luke chapter 1, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he prophesies at the birth of John, in Luke 1.79, he says that God has fulfilled the promises he made to our fathers to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death and to

guide our feet into the way of peace. The way of peace. There's a way of living that's the way of peace.

It's not known by the wicked. The way of peace is not known by them, but God will guide our paths into the way of peace. Now, the way of peace is a way of living.

It basically involves a number of things. I won't look at the scriptures now. They're in your notes.

First of all, you pray for peace. The Bible tells us to pray for peace. First Timothy chapter 2, verses 1 through 4, Paul says, pray for all men and pray that we would have peace.

Pray for rulers so that we'll have peace. Okay? Praying for peace, for God to give peace. In Psalm 122, verse 6, it says, pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

We are the new Jerusalem, the church. But the point here is to pray for peace because God can give peace. Secondly, evangelism is being peacemaking because that's how you make peace between God and people who are not on good terms with him.

So we read that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. He says, we beseech you in Christ's head, be reconciled to God. He's talking about be converted.

When we evangelize people, we're trying to bring peace. In Ephesians 6, 15, the gospel is called the gospel of peace. Having your feet shod with the gospel of peace, the good news of peace.

Where does Paul get that expression? He gets it from Isaiah 52, 7. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes tidings of peace. The gospel is tidings of peace with God. Evangelism is peacemaking.

You're finding people who are not at peace with God and bringing them across that divide to be at peace with God as we ourselves are. It means being tolerant of diversity because people often separate. They get angry because someone doesn't see things their way or they're proud and therefore offended that someone doesn't defer to their way of looking at things.

But to be tolerant of people and give people the right to make their own decisions. I had an unbelieving friend who I've tried to evangelize many times. Actually, they used to be a Christian but they fell away and they don't want to come back at the moment apparently.

And a person was saying to me, it must be really hard for you as a Christian to, you know, to put up with the fact that I'm not a Christian. It must make you really upset. I said, well, it grieves me but I'm not angry to you.

You have free will. That's why you're making wrong decisions. God himself chose to give

you free will.

If he chose to give free will, I can't deny it to you. I've got to honor your choice but there'll be consequences for it. But I can't make you do the right thing, you know.

I've got to, you know, view you as somebody that God gave the power to make right and wrong choices and to enjoy or suffer the consequences of your choices. But I'm not going to hold it against you that you're not doing the right thing. I can tolerate diversity.

I can be grieved over it but I can survive it. It's not going to make me your enemy, you know. And in the church, people having different doctrines from each other sometimes offends people, usually because of fear that people have of being wrong or pride that I have to be right, therefore you've got to be wrong.

And this is important. So we're going to be enemies because of this. I mean, there's a lot of ways that peace will come when people learn to be tolerant and give people the right to make their own choices.

Paul said, among the Christians, some of you eat only herbs, some of you eat all things, some of you want to keep one day holy, some observe all days alike. Well, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. Everyone's going to answer to God.

Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls, Paul said in Romans 14. So Paul says, you know, they're going to have to answer to God. You're not responsible to make them behave, to make them see it your way.

You're responsible to love them. You're responsible to accept the fact that people can make their own decisions, just like you expect them to let you make yours. If you differ from them, then you know that they want you to agree with them as much as you want them to agree with you.

You feel like you have the right to disagree with them, then they have the right to disagree with you. If they're making a wrong choice, well, there'll be consequences, but they are going to own them. They make their own choice.

Speaking peaceably, of course, it says in Proverbs chapter 15, verse 1, a soft answer turns away wrath. It also says in Proverbs 12, 18, there is one who speaks like the piercings of the sword, but the mouth of the righteous is, I think it says, health, heals relationships. The way you speak to somebody.

In 2 Timothy 2, 24 through 25, Paul said, the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle with all, patient. You know, meekly instructing people so that maybe they'll, maybe God will grant them repentance to the acknowledgement of the truth. Being peaceable in your speech, much in the Bible about that.

And finally, overcoming evil with good. And you do that by denying your rights. Or not denying them, but laying them down.

Sacrificing your rights. In 1 Corinthians 6, 7, Paul's addressing a church where people were actually so much at odds with each other in the church that they're going to court against each other to settle their differences. And Paul rebuked them for that.

He said, you should, first of all, if you have differences, not go to the unbelievers, go to a believer if you can. But if that can't be solved, here's what you should do. Why not just let yourself be wronged? He said.

Why not just give up your right? Why not let yourself be defrauded? Isn't that what Jesus said? He said to turn the other cheek. If a man wants to sue you and take your coat, give him your cloak also. Didn't Jesus say that? Well, but if I do that, I'm being wronged.

Yep. Jesus was wronged too. And look what good that did.

A lot. His crucifixion had a tremendous impact on making peace. At least with us.

And when we lay down our rights, it may be the necessary step that it takes to make peace. Romans 12, this is the last verses I'll read and then we'll be done. Romans 12 verses 18 through 21 is making this point.

Paul said, that's where he starts by saying, if it's possible, as much as depends on you live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath. Effort is written.

Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, now this is your enemy we're talking about.

If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him drink. In so doing, you will heap up coals of fire on his head.

Do not overcome, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. You overcome evil with good by when you are suffering evil from somebody's misbehavior, you responding with goodness. He's your enemy.

You feed him when he's hungry. You give him drink when he's thirsty. Yeah, it'll be settled.

God said, vengeance is mine. I will repay. So there's gonna be a settling of the score, but it's not gonna be you that settles it.

God will settle it. You do good to them and leave it in the hands of God to make sure that justice is done in the end. You're overcoming evil by doing good and in many cases, you are literally overcoming it in the sense that the person who's your enemy will be won

over.

Many times when you're gracious toward people who were gratuitously unkind to you, you'll win them over. When I was in junior high, I was a real wimpy kid. You know those books? I've never read them.

What is it called? Diary of a Wimpy Kid. I actually, when I was in junior high, I'm a cartoonist. I drew little cartoon strips of me as a wimpy kid in junior high and when I saw those books, I thought, oh man, they stole my idea.

But I was a wimpy kid. I really was. I mean, and in junior high, that's when a lot of the guys are starting to get their first testosterone, you know.

I was a late bloomer. I didn't get much, but there were a lot of guys who had it before I had mine and with it, aggression. And so there are bullies who like to pick on me and I can't say I was a real godly Christian.

I was a believer, but I can't say, you know, I was full of grace and, you know, full of love for these people. But I didn't fight back. I mean, I knew it'd be a losing proposition if I fought back some of these guys.

So I just absorbed the injury, not because I was gracious and godly, but because I wasn't sure there was any other choice. But there was another choice. There's one kid in particular.

I won't tell you his name, but he was an angry, tough kid and he was in my same PE class. And I'd just be standing around minding my own business. He'd come and he, you know, body slammed me and knocked me down and things like that.

He'd say, I hate you and stuff like that. I think, boy, I don't know whatever I did to provoke that. But he was a menace.

I didn't want to meet him after school. I took the long way home because there were places on the way home where the bullies hung out and I didn't want to go by them. But it's funny because I wanted to start a band.

And I heard that this guy played drums. And I had some other guys to play the other instruments and I thought, I'm going to ask him to be the drummer in our band. Now, he's the guy who hates me.

He's the guy who, you know, he's violent toward me. He's a bully toward me. But I thought, couldn't hurt to ask.

And it blew his mind. It blew his mind that I asked him to be in the band. He joined.

We didn't play very many gigs, but we did practice and we did play a few places. And it

was just, he was never my enemy anymore, you know? So he hit you with the sticks? Yeah. I made sure he had not wooden sticks.

We gave him soft rubber sticks and brushes. But actually, you know, it worked. And I wasn't even doing it for godly reasons.

I just thought maybe this will work. I need this guy to stop picking on me. So, you know, you overcome evil with good.

You do a favor to a guy. It honored him. Say, hey, I need a drummer.

I heard you can play. You want to be in a band? He said, what? You know, he didn't have any other offers. So we became friends, actually.

And I don't say it always works that way, but it's a strategy, you know? When Elisha was in the city of Dothan and the Syrian armies were surrounding the city, both as hostile toward Israel and also toward Elisha personally, he was able to strike them blind at the gate. And then he led them to the king of Israel. And then he supernaturally opened their eyes and they found themselves, you know, surrounded and in the presence of their enemy.

And the king of Israel said to Elisha, what should we do? Should we strike them with the sword? Elisha says, no. Give them a meal and send them home. And so they did.

And the Syrians then went, they left. They stopped besieging the city. You know, treat your enemies good.

You never know. Might change their heart about you. It's peacemaking.

It's having a commitment to promote peace in all those places that God wants there to be peace between men and God, between you and God, between you and other people, between other people and other people that you have influence upon. We should be seamlessly and holistically pursuing well-being and peace among people because that's what God does. And when we are God-like, we show ourselves to be his children.

The peacemakers will be called children of God. They'll be recognized as such.