

Warnings and Encouragement

Sermons From Pastoral Rule, Book 3

July 24, 2016

I. Exhorting and encouraging those who are often in conflict with someone and those who live in peace.

A. Scriptures

1. Psalm 133:1 . . . Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers [and sisters] to dwell together in unity!
2. Psalm 34:14 . . . Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. Notice that the first statement makes possible the second!
3. Proverbs 20:3 . . . Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.
4. Proverbs 17:1 . . . Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife. Peace is the treasure, not wealth.
5. Romans 14:19 . . . So then . . . pursue (an active effort on our part) the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
6. Romans 12:18 . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. We should never be the ones who prevent peace!
7. Isaiah 32:17 . . . The work of righteousness will [result in] peace, and the service of (effect of the peace produced by) righteousness, [will be] quietness and confidence forever.
8. Ephesians 4:1-6 . . . Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, [3] being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
9. 2 Corinthians 13:11 . . . Finally . . . rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and [if you do these things] the God of love and peace will be with you.

B. Today, we will begin with an explanation of the foundational reasons for being at peace with those around you. Then we will talk to those who live in peace and those who are repeatedly involved in ongoing conflicts.

C. Prayer

II. There are two foundational reasons for Christians to do what they can to live in peace with all men.

- A. The first reason has two parts, with the first part taken from 1 John 4:20, and the second part taken from Matthew 5:23-24. The first part has to do with loving God, and the second part with worshiping God.
1. In 1 John 4:20, John says that if we say, “I love God,” and yet hate our brother, we are a liar; for if we do not love the brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen.
 - a. As I said, the first part of this foundational reason for Christians doing what they can to live in peace with those around them is because they love God.
 - b. In other words, we validate our love for the unseen God when we seek forgiveness for wrongs done, make right the damage we have done, do what we can to resolve conflicts, and make it our aim to reconcile broken relationships with those we can see.
 2. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus said, “If you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”
 - a. The point Jesus is making is that when we worship God, we are worshiping the God of peace, who sacrificed His son so we could be reconciled to Him and enter into a peace-filled relationship with Him – in spite of our past rebellion against Him.
 - b. In other words, to claim you are worshiping God – who is the God of peace – while not making right a grievance someone has against you, or not resolving an ongoing conflict, or not doing what you can in some other way to live in peace with those around you, is to make a false claim. In relation to peace, we only worship God in spirit and in truth when we are doing what we can to live in peace with those around us.
 - c. Therefore, the second part of this reason Christians do what they can to live in peace with those around them is because they genuinely value and hold in highest esteem the peacemaking ways of God – and they want to be like Him.
 3. The point here is that if you know someone has a complaint against you, or if you know there is an unresolved conflict between you and another person, and you are not doing what you can to satisfy their complaint or resolve the conflict, then you do not love God and you do not hold in high esteem the peacemaking character and ways of God – which means whomever you think you love and whomever you think you are worshiping, it is not God.

4. The prophet Micah put it this way, “With what shall I come to the LORD and bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, with yearling calves? [7] Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? [8] He has told you what is good; and what the [He] requires of you, but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:6-8).

B. The second reason for Christians to do what they can to live in peace with those around them comes from Romans 12:20-21, where Paul says that if your enemy (or in this case anyone with whom you have a conflict) is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

1. If you know someone has a complaint against you, or if you know there is an unresolved conflict between you and another person, and you do not do what you can to satisfy the complaint or resolve the conflict, you are adding evil to the situation instead of adding good.
2. When you add evil, you are working against God and against the good of others, and you are working for the devil and his efforts to do harm to everyone possible.
3. Therefore, another reason we Christians do what we can to live in peace with those around us is because this is one significant way we can continue adding good to our homes, neighborhoods, workplace, school, and world.

III. Exhorting and encouraging those who live in peace

A. There are several important truths that those who strive to live in peace are wise to consider. This first one has to do with understanding the difference between using appeasement to gain and maintain peace and using godly means to gain and maintain peace.

1. Generally speaking, appeasement is self-serving, for it is driven by a selfish desire to live in a peaceful environment. In other words, those who appease are primarily concerned about a peaceful life for themselves. They are not looking for true and lasting peace. What they want is the absence of conflict, anger, criticism and rejection.
 - a. Now the reason this desire is selfish is because it willingly compromises, or even abandons truth, justice, and the good of everyone involved to gain the peace it seeks for itself.

- b. A further proof appeasers are selfish is that they want their own way just like anyone who is selfish, but they want their own way without having to listen to criticism, or having to deal with the anger of those who don't like what they're doing, or having to get pulled into open conflict with those who are unhappy with what they're doing. In other words, appeasers want their own way and a peaceful environment.
 - c. However, if they cannot get their own way without experiencing more criticism, anger, conflict, and rejection than they want, they will forsake their own way and appease those around them in order to keep their own environment peaceful.
 - 2. In contrast to the peace of appeasement, true peace results from a godly pursuit that seeks the well-being of all involved.
 - a. In fact, true peace cannot exist where one side chooses selfishness over love, self-rule over the community good, personal advantage over justice, and a denial or distortion of the truth.
 - b. Therefore, Christians who do what they can to live in peace, do so according to godliness – which means never distorting or denying the truth or supporting injustice or using ungodly anger or avoiding the hard work of resolving conflict or letting criticism and rejection get in the way of resolving conflict.
 - c. However, seeking peace according to godliness also includes
 - (1) praying for peace and the spiritual growth of all involved,
 - (2) appealing to and inviting the other side to join you in making peace rather than threatening them or trying to control them,
 - (3) avoiding unnecessary arguing, nagging, unkind or derogatory or threatening or sarcastic or abusive speech – even when the other side remains uncooperative,
 - (4) continuing to be patient, kind, gracious, and humble while the other side resists entering into real conflict resolution,
 - (5) gently, humbly, and occasionally speaking truth about the effects of the unresolved conflict on the relationship,
 - (6) and continuing to trust God to bring a great good out of what can seem like a great injustice or a denial of love.
 - 3. As you can see, pursuing peace according to godliness is a lot of work.
- B. The second set of truths I want to bring to your attention have to do with the life-transforming affects of living with those who won't work out the differences or resolve conflicts between you.

1. Sometimes, those who ought to love you – such as parents, siblings, and your spouse – insist on their own way at your expense and refuse to seek mutually satisfying solutions to conflict between you. And yet, they expect to be treated as if they are doing nothing wrong.
 - a. In other words, they are willingly making life difficult for you while expecting you to make life peaceful for them.
 - b. Now without question, such a situation is a painful trial that is hard to live with in a godly way.
 - c. And yet, it is these kinds of situations that hold great spiritual profit for us, for it is through such situations that God shows us what we still need to die to, and what godly qualities and ways we still need to take on, and how to apply – in very practical ways – what He is teaching us. In other words, it is these kinds of trials with those nearest and dearest that have the God empowered ability to transform us more and more into Christ-likeness.
 - d. So I am urging you, do not despise these kinds of situations, but rather do what you can to move toward mutual peace while gaining all the spiritual growth and strength of faith you can.
2. The next point I want to make deals with inner peace. Now it is true that true peace produces a well-being that effects everyone involved. However, true peace is not always possible, but the inner peace that comes from being right with God is always possible.
 - a. Besides, inner peace exceeds the value of outward peace because in spite of the outward circumstances, it cannot be diminished or taken away.
 - b. Now I want to remind you that inner peace does not exist just because you are a Christian. To have the inner peace that comes from God, you must trust God, obey God, and live godly.
 - c. And so I urge all of us to value and protect inner peace, so that regardless of the circumstances, we have true peace within.

IV. Exhorting and encouraging those who are often in conflict with someone

A. For some people, conflict is a way of life. If they are not in a rip-roaring conflict with this person, they are in a minor skirmish with that one. They seem to go from conflict to conflict, and from argument to argument. On the other hand, some people are generally agreeable, yet they openly demand or passively yet stubbornly cling to their own way in one or two areas. This results in one or more ongoing, unresolvable conflicts which the other side is expected to gracefully accept. For both groups, and those in between, we have God's word which addresses such situations.

1. James 4:1-3 makes it clear that when I am in a conflict, I must look at myself first as the source of that conflict. And though our tendency is to blame the other side as the cause of the conflict, God calls us to start by blaming ourselves first, and then look outward.
2. Sometimes you are not the source of the conflict, you just get caught up in it. However, Romans 12:17 tells us that we are NEVER to return evil for evil, which means that if you respond to an aggressor with aggression, and in so doing keep the conflict going or force a resolution that favors you, you have become just as evil as the one who started the conflict.
3. If you repeatedly begin conflicts or are preventing the resolution of a conflict, then in spite of whatever godly qualities you do have, you are resisting the work of the Holy Spirit and refusing to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit, for Galatians 5:22 says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . ." And Paul adds that if there is jealousy and strife among you, are you fleshly and living your life like an [unbeliever] (1 Corinthians 3:3).
4. If you are a willing participant in an ongoing conflict with another Christian, then you are refusing to work at maintaining the unity of the Spirit which exists among believers through the bonding agent of peace (Ephesians 4:3-4).
5. If you are holding on to a grievance done against you and as a result avoiding the perpetrator in a way that keeps you from engaging in relationship with him – even though he shows no interest in seeking forgiveness and reconciliation – then you are committing a form of murder, according to Matthew 5:21-22, and you are rejecting godly wisdom and living according earthly wisdom, for James says that the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, and without hypocrisy (James 3:17).
6. Finally, if God's word is not enough to move you to abandon your aggressive, argumentative, conflict producing ways, then consider the animal kingdom which consists of creatures made by God, and yet are unable to reason, think, and know God in the same way you can. Note that birds of the same kind do not abandon each other, but fly in a group to their destination. And even the strongest and fiercest of animals can be found seeking food together, as a herd. If they can live in peace, and if living in peace is a value to them, surely we can live in peace if for no other reason than the great value it holds for us and all mankind.

V. Conclusion

- A. Hebrews 13:20-21. . . Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, [21] equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.