

Coach's Corner

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“Blessed Are The Peacemakers”

The title for this article comes from Matthew 5:9, within the Beatitudes. These eight brief, catchy, and powerful statements give us a snapshot of those who are part of the kingdom of God (see Matthew 5:3b, 10b). What this implies for verse 9 is that those truly part of the kingdom will have a passion for and work hard toward bringing others into peace with God and peace with each other.

Since all of us on the board have been Christians for some time, we realize that being a Christian and hanging around other Christians do not prevent conflict. The Church seems to have its share. What is different from unbelievers hopefully is that we will be more considerate of each other in our dealings and when we have conflict, we realize we have great resources in Christ for reconciliation.

Many of you know this first hand from the difficulties the congregation went through back in 2002-2003. I recently have been thinking about your experiences since Larry Bill loaned me a copy of the recommendations the district made at the end of 2003 regarding those trials you faced. As I read the report I was reminded once again of what I already know: there is a great amount of love and maturity in this congregation. What is more, the efforts of the leadership of the church worked well and graciously to bring peace—at least as much as could be brought.

As I read this report I was also reminded of something I believe very strongly—that any healthy and strong church teaches its members and regular attenders how to deal with conflict, how to be peacemakers. I have learned the need of this myself not from a book, but from the trials and difficulties experienced, as well as mistakes made through years of ministry. Lord-willing we will continue to have new believers and other believers come into our congregation. Many will not be equipped to deal with conflict. This demands that we ask an important question: How will we equip them since this is part of our calling as leaders? (Ephesians 4:11-16).

First, let's introduce a great resource: the *Peacemaker* ministries started by Ken Sande. As a Christian attorney, Mr. Sande saw plenty of Christians who were not only failing in reconciliation, but seemed to have little idea what the Bible provided in the way of direction. As a result, years ago he wrote a book called *THE PEACEMAKER* which eventually spawned a ministry by the same name. I would encourage us somewhere along the line to purchase his DVD series, *THE PEACEMAKING CHURCH*, to utilize in Sunday school and/or small groups. Or, if someone wanted to teach the material themselves, he could do it based on Sande's original book. This is a subject that should be offered occasionally through preaching, Sunday school, and/or small groups.

Next, let's look at the overview of the biblical teaching on conflict resolution which Sande teaches. When conflict arises:

Glorify God. Understand that conflict is an opportunity to put God's grace on display. When everyone in a group or organization agrees on everything and sees everything similarly, it is not that big a deal when people get along. However, we all know that doesn't last for long. Conflict is sure to arise. This is why when we work through it by His grace, when we love each other and remain unified, we honor Him (Mt. 5:9, 16; John 13:34-35; 17:21-23; Phil. 2:14-15). So, don't avoid a tense situation or think, "Wow, this is terrible! Why did this have to happen? All is lost!" Instead, see it as an opportunity to put God's grace, His resources, His life-changing power on display. It will transform how we approach the situation.

Get the log out of your eye. (see Matthew 7:3-5) When conflict demands that we go and talk with someone, we should make sure we examine ourselves first. How have we contributed to the situation? How do we need to repent? Do we need to ask forgiveness? In what way(s) have we been guilty of similar sins? This will put us in a much more humble and loving frame-of-mind to speak with the other person.

Gently restore. (see Matthew 5:23; 18:15f.; Eph. 4:15) We must prayerfully, graciously, lovingly, and carefully approach the other person with the purpose of reconciliation. This will often include apologizing to them and asking for forgiveness. It will also often involve speaking frankly with the other person about how they have offended you. Doing this in the biblically prescribed manner—making sure the right people (and only the right people) are involved and that we refrain from gossip—is very important.

Go and be reconciled. (See Matthew 5:23f.; 18:15f.) Work through the issue until the other person forgives, until you forgive, and until reconciliation takes place. This can also often involve the need to bring in third parties—especially for very difficult and emotional strife.

This is only a brief outline of the biblical teaching. There is some good meat to put on these bones in a small group or Sunday School class.

I would encourage us as a board to consider prayerfully taking steps to equip our congregation in reconciliation and in being peacemakers. May He use us mightily toward that end!

Joyfully pastoring the flock with you toward peacemaking,

Tom