

## Pursuing Peace in a Divided World: Attitudes for Peacemakers

### Various Scriptures

As many of you know, they opened a chick-fil-a here in Woodhaven recently. Now, I know some people believe that chick-fil-a is God's restaurant, and they only serve holy chicken sandwiches. I'm not here to enter that debate but have you had the cookies and crème milkshake?

Regardless of what you think about their food, I was watching a video about the business model of chick-fil-a as a company and it was very interesting and very different. One of the key aspects of their business is the process of choosing who will be an owner operator of a local store. In fact, they receive over 8k applications a year to be a franchise owner-operator, and they only take about 100 of those and open 100 new stores a year. That's just over a 1% acceptance rate. For some comparison, Harvard's acceptance rate is 5%.

The reason for this is that there's a massive interview process and they have a very specific list of qualities they are looking for in owner operators. These qualities include someone who can develop people, build a team, foster relationships in the local community, and approach work with energy and passion.

If these qualities are there, they know the person will be successful at running the store and maintaining the brand. We're obviously not here this morning to try to convince you to develop the qualities necessary to successfully run a Chick-Fil-A, but we are here to talk about the qualities necessary to be a peacemaker.

If this is true: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God", then what are the qualities that are required to be a peacemaker? It's not something that just happens spontaneously. To be this type of person doesn't happen by following a list of steps to resolve conflict even though such a list can prove helpful. It's not something you sort of stumble into or work through a list. There's a mindset, an attitude and a mentality that must be there.

But the problem is that peacemaking doesn't come naturally to us, as we learned last week. It's a challenge for us so we must cultivate these qualities that form us into peacemakers. **These qualities help us to rightly view situations.** Here's what I mean by that: If I am walking through the wilderness of Montana and encounter a

Grizzly bear there are a number of factors that will determine how I act in that situation. If I have experience in these sorts of situations that experience will calm down my emotions in the moment and I will be able to think more clearly. If I happen to be carrying bear spray with me I will have a level of confidence that if worse comes to worse and the bear charges me I will be able to use the bear spray and get it away from me. The attitudes of calmness and confidence shape how I view that situation and help me to see it correctly. Then I act based on the way in which I view my circumstances.

It works the same way with character qualities. When you are a person who is loving, gentle and patient, those qualities don't just help you to react in the right way. They are like glasses that give you clarity to the true nature of the situation. You are able to rightly assess what is going on.

So, this morning I want to paint a picture of a peacemaker for you. What sort of traits does this person have? **We're going to see 4 Attitudes Necessary to Actively Pursue Peace.**

### **1. Gospel Shaped**

To be Gospel shaped is to live a life that conforms to the reality of the gospel. What is the gospel? The good news that Jesus Christ has won the victory over sin and death and brought God's kingdom through His substitutionary atonement. Because of His death for me, I am forgiven of my sins, freed from the penalty and power of sin in my life, and my future hope of being with God for eternity is secure. That news shapes my daily life in deeply profound and practical ways.

Listen to Ephesians 4:1. To walk worthy means to walk suitably or in a lifestyle that fits your calling. We had a concrete patio poured recently at our house. The guys who did the work spent a large portion of their time setting the mold or form that the concrete would be poured into. They drove stakes in the ground and put wood barriers up that would hold the wet concrete in and give it a chance to dry in the shape we wanted the patio to take. Our calling in Christ gives a definite shape to our daily actions. It provides the borders for the way we think, what we love, and how we see those around us.

So, what sort of shape does this Gospel formed life take? Look at verses 2-3. Why these qualities and attitudes? What's the connection between the work of Christ

and these qualities? Look at verses 4-6. The gospel means that those of us who are “in Christ” are united together. The shape of the gospel is one of unity and these qualities are necessary for unity and peace.

The rest of chapter 4 continues to work out a gospel formed or shaped life for us and at the end of the chapter he gives several very clear examples of what this looks like. Look at verses 20-24 where, again, we are given the structure of the gospel shaped life. It’s one of putting off, renewing your mind through Christ’s work, and putting on new actions. Look at a clear example of this in verses 31-32. The action is to forgive but why that action? Because the gospel tells us we have been forgiven of all of our sin! The mold is Christ’s forgiveness of us and the shape that forgiveness gives your life is one of lavish forgiveness of others. Your daily life is controlled by Christ’s work on the cross for you.

You may remember that in the very first sermon in this series I told you that all other forms of peace begin with peace with God. You will not be a peacemaker unless your life takes its structure from Christ’s work to mediate peace with God and man. And this shaping includes kindness.

## **2. Kindness/ Gentleness**

It’s not uncommon today to see shirts promoting the idea of kindness. Maybe you have seen some that say: “In a world where you can be anything, be kind.” Or “Kindness Matters.” Sometimes these shirts come with a rainbow on them, and the message is that kindness means accepting anything and everything.

Don’t let the world’s misuse of a word, kindness, push you away from the importance of kindness and gentleness. Biblically speaking kindness doesn’t mean accepting anything and everything. But it does mean that the way we handle conflict and disagreement is controlled by kindness and gentleness. The Apostle Paul specifically encourages kindness when it comes to dealing with those we have disagreements with. In 2 Timothy 2 he’s speaking to a pastor but the principle I think it quite important for all. Let’s start in verse 22 and read down to verse 26.

In this passage kindness does not mean accepting any and every opinion out there. But the way we handle differences matters very much. In fact, Paul ties the way we act with kindness to the possibility that God may grant the opponent

repentance. Think about that for a second! God may use your gentle firmness to influence a person who is headed down the wrong road.

### **3. Reasonableness**

Conflict makes people lose their minds. People get so angry and so tied to their position or interpretation of events that they cannot think straight. Did you know the Bible actually says that believers should be reasonable? They should be willing to listen and yield to the other person when appropriate?

We looked last week at James 3:13-18 which is the thematic center of the book of James. James is describing the difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom. God's wisdom is very much connected to pursuing peace and acting out of attitudes that promote peace. Listen again to James 3:17-18. Verse 18 describes the wise as those who "make peace" but how do they do this? They operate out of the qualities and attitudes of verse 17.

We talked briefly through these in our study on James and you can see our 2<sup>nd</sup> attitude of gentleness or kindness here in verse 17. I want to focus on the next quality there after gentleness, "open to reason." What does this mean? Wouldn't everyone say they are reasonable? "I'm the most reasonable person on the planet. It's everyone else who has lost their minds."

The guy who has this attitude is not looking to argue or start a fight. He's compliant and willing to yield when appropriate and necessary. He's able to see the situation from the other person's perspective. Take into account why that person may have the opinion they do. Think about their circumstances and life experience. It's always a good thing to remind yourself that people often have difficult stuff going on in their lives and you may not know about it.

I think the vast majority of our squabbles and conflicts boil down to the fact that we just don't listen to each other very well. You probably have trouble considering the possibility that you might be wrong or you might have contributed to this situation. Rarely are conflicts 100% the responsibility of one side. Be willing to listen and acknowledge whatever percentage you contributed to the difficult situation. That is what a reasonable person does and they make peace.

### **4. Humility**

This may be the most vital attitude necessary to be a peacemaker. We saw humility listed in Ephesians 4 and it will be the main topic in James 4 as James talks about the source of conflict and how to pursue friendship with God. Listen to what James says in 4:6. It's also used in Philippians 2 to speak of Christ's attitude in going to the cross for us. Listen to Philippians 2:8.

So, what is humility and why is it so important for pursuing peace? Well, in James 4:6 we read that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humility is the opposite attitude of pride. To be prideful is to be puffed up when you consider yourself. It's to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. There are some animals that will inflate themselves to appear bigger and more dangerous than they are in order to detour predators. That's essentially pride. It's to have an enlarged view of yourself.

In many ways humility is the opposite. It's to have a smaller view of yourself or to shrink the attention you receive. I think a helpful description of humility is a modest self-perception. In what other ways do we use that word modesty? Well we most often think of it when it comes to dress and the root idea is that you are not drawing attention to your body through your dress.

So, if humility means I have a modest self-perception then that will mean I'm not always focused on self and worried about self. It means that I am, like Jesus in Philippians 2:3, considering others as more important than self. Author Tim Keller put it like this:

*Gospel-humility is not needing to think about myself. Not needing to connect things with myself. It is an end to thoughts such as, 'I'm in this room with these people, does that make me look good? Do I want to be here?' True gospel-humility means I stop connecting every experience, every conversation, with myself. In fact, I stop thinking about myself. The freedom of self-forgetfulness. The blessed rest that only self-forgetfulness brings. – Tim Keller*

The Puritan writer, Thomas Watson put it like this: *"A humble man values others at a higher rate than himself, and the reason is because he can see his own heart better than he can another's. He sees his own corruption and thinks surely it is not so with others; their graces are not so weak as his; their corruptions are not so strong. 'Surely', he thinks, 'they have better hearts than I.' A humble Christian*

*studies his own infirmities and another's excellences and that makes him put a higher value upon others than himself." - Thomas Watson*

So, you can see how pride leads to conflict and humility brings peace. If your ego swells up to the point where you can't stop thinking about yourself and putting self at the center of every interaction and every situation than your overinflated self is going to bump into others and cause conflict because you want nothing more than to swell your sense of self even more. But if you have a modest perception of yourself because you know how sinful you are and you know the grace you have received and you are listening to others and forgetting yourself as you genuinely want what's best for them, you will automatically be a person who pursues peace, just like the Lord Jesus did for us.

So, the challenge this morning is to consider these attitudes and learn them from Christ in order to grow into peacemakers like him. Let's pray.