

## Steps (Week 10) – Confronting and Forgiving

Michael Snetzer – November 6, 2013

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Tonight we're going to be talking about the second part of our *Biblical Peacemaking* talks on *Confronting and Forgiving*. Before we start, let me pray. Then we'll get right to it.

Father, thank you so much just for your Word. Lord, where we are lacking as your people, I pray you would fill us up by your grace, that you, Lord, would teach us through the reading of your Word, and that we might be an accurate reflection of you to one another and to the world around us. It's in Christ's name I pray, amen.

All right, well last time we were together, we went over *Biblical Peacemaking I*. We talked about what we are to do when we have sinned against another. Tonight we will talk about what to do when we are sinned against. You'll see there in Luke 17, verses 3 and 4, it says, "**Pay attention to yourselves!**" We talked a lot last week about the fact that we first need to be aware of our vertical heart relationship before the Lord.

Then it says, "**If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.**"

So tonight, we're going to be talking (as I mentioned) about biblical peacemaking. I'm going to take what is called a *conflict wheel* in Peacemaker Ministries, and I'm going to simplify it and adapt it a bit to talk a little bit about how we typically handle conflict.

Now I don't know about you guys, but I am historically conflict averse, meaning I don't particularly like conflict. I like peace a whole lot. So I remember having this discussion with our lead pastor here as we were talking about pastoral ministry and ministry opportunities. He said basically if you don't like conflict, you will not like pastoral work because so much of the work we do is helping to work through division, work through conflict.

Now we see here on this conflict wheel that there are two ends of the spectrum. On one end of the spectrum, we have avoidant responses. On the other end of the spectrum, we have attack responses. Said another way, on one end of the spectrum, we might have passive responses. On the other end of the spectrum, we might have aggressive responses. This goes back to the whole fight or flight, right?

So as I've contemplated and thought about this, I've come to this conclusion: You are going to probably fall to one end or the other in each specific situation based on one thing, and that is whether you think you can win. If you think you're going to lose, you're probably going to avoid conflict. If you think you're going to win, you're probably going to go into conflict.

Both these avoidant responses... I would say the less grievous avoidant responses would be things like just denial, just sweeping things under the rug in conflict, pretending like nothing happened. I would say the most extreme on the avoidant responses would be things like suicide, just a way to get away from the harsh realities of the difficulties of this life. Then on the other side, you have everything from outbursts of anger all the way to murder.

Both of these responses are responses of the flesh. They're both fear-based responses. They happen out of a lack of trust in God. So what we want to try to do is to walk in the middle. Not all disagreements are unhealthy conflict. There should be a way we are able to converse with one another without necessarily agreeing with one another. We talked a little bit about biblical decision-making and how that decision is made even when we don't agree.

To stay in the middle here is what the Bible calls *speaking the truth in love*, to be able to stand in there, to share ideas, to be interested in the other person's ideas, to weigh those ideas, but not to have to force the other person to believe what you believe. Do you see what I'm saying? Okay. To stand there in the middle. So this is what we want to practice when we're in disagreements with people. Otherwise, it turns to fighting and quarrelling, which we talked about in James 4. There is something that has become idolatrous. I want it so badly that I'm going to try to control you to get it.

Now just as a matter of reflection, we've talked about this verse before, but I hear oftentimes in recovery circles this phrase (maybe you've heard it before): *Just work your own side of the street*. I think this is a good thing. We should work our own side of the street. Often, that's said to people who have the tendency to work other people's sides of the street, right? To work your own side of

the street is what we've been talking about, focusing initially on just our vertical heart before the Lord. I just want you to see that oftentimes that doesn't go far enough.

In Matthew 7:3-5, it says, "**Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?**" Notice the brother language. This seems to be within the body of Christ. "**...first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.**"

So why do we take the log out of our eye? So we can see clearly (we talked about how sin skews, how our idolatry skews) how to help our brother. It's not enough just to watch our own side of the street, but we're to be helpful. Iron sharpens iron. So it appears that we are to remove the log so we can see clearly how to help our brother. The log is this veil of self-interest (remember we talked about that?) that clouds our ability to act as ambassadors for Christ. That was the Ezekiel 14 passage from last week. Now I would say a lot of times we might fit people into one of two categories.

There are *speck detectors* and there are *belly-button gazers*. Now a *speck detector* is someone who has the tendency to see the speck in their brother's eye all the time and, through a critical spirit, try to get this person to change. It is typically done because the person is not acting in accordance with the agendas of this controlling person. The motive is anything but love. It's self-interest; it's not really the good of that other person.

Now this other camp is usually easily manipulated by these controlling individuals. They're eternally focused on the log in their own eye. We might call them *belly-button gazers*. They never move beyond themselves to help someone else who may be in bondage. Just looking at your own junk is not the goal; the goal is to remove so you can lovingly help others and so you can address the issues in humility and in love.

So we're going to see this idea of conflict played out in just one of the most impactful (for me, personally) sections of Scripture as it relates to the body of Christ and the characteristics of the body of Christ in Matthew 18. Let me first ask you a question before get into that. If you or someone you love were struggling, where would you seek help? What kind of place would it be? What would be some of the characteristics of this place?

I would suspect it might go something like this. If someone you loved was looking for a place to go when they were struggling, they're probably looking for a place that is not going to be taken aback by the situation. Let's say you had a son or a daughter who is struggling with addiction. You probably aren't going to want to take them to a place where they are going to go, "Oh my gosh, I've never heard of that before. What on earth am I going to do?"

No, you want a place that is going to know what to do and what to say. You're going to want a place that welcomes and receives, nurtures, and does not mislead. You want a place that is going to provide care and structure and support and direction. You want a place that cannot only help the individual, but all those who have been affected. You want a place that guards against lies and protects from those who might take advantage of.

You want a place that is willing to confront with truth. You want a place filled with people who have similar stories but are now strangely different. Hopeful, joyful, expectant. You want a place that will not neglect physical needs. You want a place where you can be fully known and known by others without shame or condemnation. You want a place that would not minimize the difficulty of the situation but had a quiet confidence in a hope that is guaranteed.

You want a place that would lovingly pursue the heart, stand with and help lift up, a place that is not afraid to hold accountable and impose loving consequences, a place that is ready to celebrate the victories and come alongside and help when there are failures. You want a community that is redemptive. Where the church is not, the Enemy will use her shortcomings to offer counterfeits.

So I want to look just at a couple of passages in Scripture that speak to where my heart is and where I believe God's heart is for how we should act as a community, how we should relate to one another. The first is in Acts, chapter 2. I'm not saying we're all the way there, but I want to get there. Acts, chapter 2, starting in verse 42: "**And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching...**" Isn't that what we're doing here? We're sitting here reading Paul. "**...and the fellowship...**" We're having fellowship with one another as we're confessing our sins to one another, as we're getting to know one another.

**"...to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need."**

I believe this church has many resources. In fact, I'd say we have more here in this church who have resources than have desperate need. We're getting ready to go to a place that has desperate need, but there are those among us who are in need. I love the heart here of the early church and how they were eager to not store up treasures for themselves, but were so open-handed with their lives and what they were blessed with. They were trying to be good stewards of what they owned for the kingdom. As they saw people had need, they distributed.

**"And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes..."** So they're not just meeting at church once a week. They have relationships outside of their groups. They're in their homes. They're in the temple. **"...they received their food with glad and generous hearts..."** Man, I desire that. I desire daily to break bread with believers in our homes and to share in just the goodness of God's Word. **"...praising God and having favor with all the people."**

Look at what the Lord does as they do this. **"And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."** There's a testimony of the saints in the way they relate to one another that shows the world what God is like. They will know us by the love we have for one another. Then another place in Matthew 18. Let's look there. It's going to be our primary text here for tonight. Interestingly enough, in this section of Scripture, we're going to get a glimpse into how the disciples are relating to one another. Interestingly enough, they're in conflict.

So it says in Matthew 18:1, **"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?'"** So they're debating over who is the greatest, and they're talking about themselves. They're boasting in their strengths. **"And calling to him a child..."** So Jesus intervenes. He takes probably a very unlikely and unsuspecting character and brings him before them. **"...he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"** Several points here.

First of all, it says, **"...unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."** So is he talking about who the greatest is? No, he is saying, "For you to even get in, you are going to have to repent and become like children." So a question might be...*What are children like?* Notice he is not saying, "You must become childish," because they're already childish, right? He is saying, "You must become like children."

So what is the actual state of a child? They're helpless. They have to look outside themselves for direction and protection and provision. He says, "Unless you repent and become like children, you will never even enter the kingdom of heaven." Children are often marginalized, overlooked. They're weak. He is saying, "Unless you turn and become like them..." One of the things I've noticed about children is they're highly teachable. They at times don't listen, but they seem to be listening because they learn at such an incredible rate.

I think the most interesting thing in this context is that everything a child has has been given to him, right? There is no 2-year-old out there going, "I earned where I live. I earned my bed. I earned my toys." No, everything they have has been given to them. So Jesus is saying, "**...unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**" What are they doing? They're boasting, right? They're boasting. It's like, "What do you have to boast in? Everything you have, even if it is something good, is a gift from God."

If you can run fast, it's a gift from God. If you can jump like a gazelle and you can catch a football, that's a gift of God. If you're intelligent, that's a gift of God. If you're good-looking, that's a gift of God. Whatever it is you might think is valuable in your own mind or to the world or whatever... We all have different gifts and abilities, and they're gifts from God. We're not to boast in them. So we see here it keeps going.

It says, "**Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**" Interesting. What do we know about this child? I think we just met this child. What on earth could we know at this point? We know enough. The text tells us enough. What happens? Jesus calls him and he comes. He is obedient. He is not questioning Jesus. He is not going, "Well, why do I have to forgive?" Jesus says forgive. He is humble. One of the characteristics of Christ's covenant community is that we walk in humility. Another is that we are obedient. Humble obedience to God.

Now I would say everything we're going to talk about here in this framework is really going to fit into three big themes here within the church. First, this redemptive community Jesus is speaking about will preserve unity. Secondly, it will practice love. Thirdly, it will pursue holiness. Did you know there is no true happiness apart from holiness? Sin robs us of joy. Isn't that cool that God came to sanctify us that we might experience true joy in the way we relate to him as he cleanses us from sin? So we're going to see all of these three things work out.

Now let's look at verse 5. It says, **"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me..."** Now when it says *such child*, I don't think Jesus is necessarily talking about children. I think he is talking about those who would come and follow him, those who come in their weakness and in their woundedness, the strayed, the lost, those who in humility are coming and seeking help. Jesus is saying, "The church should receive. The church should be a place of mercy and should minister to those in their weakness."

Now when the church becomes self-righteous and they begin to say, "We're not like you. There's not a place here for you, for sinners," look at this. **"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me..."** Guess who they don't receive when they don't receive those who are weak, wounded, strayed, lost? You just shut Jesus out. It's like, "Okay." Your church is going to be dead. There's not going to be any life there. It is going to be a center of dead religious activity.

**"...but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned into the depth of the sea."** So we are to receive but not mislead. If you flip over to Matthew 19, in verse 13 it says, **"Then children..."** So here's this theme again of children. **"...were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray."** Where are we leading people to? Jesus. **"The disciples rebuked the people..."**

So they're interfering with people being brought to Jesus. Jesus says, "Do not hinder them from coming to me. Don't put yourself in the way of bringing them to me." **"Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' And he laid his hands on them and went away."** Our ministry here is to lead people to Jesus, that he might lay his hands on them through the church and bless them.

We see here that God is a God of mercy, but we also see God is a God of justice. He loves justice. He loves mercy. He wants mercy for people. If they refuse mercy, then there is justice coming for those would take advantage of the weak and intentionally mislead to build up a different kingdom, the televangelist who takes advantage of a desperate widow, the student ministry leader who takes advantage of his student sexually.

God desires that we would come to the defense of the weak and the oppressed and that we should love justice just like God loves justice. We should love social justice. We can't make that the gospel, but it should be part of our gospel message. We should use our position and culture and authority

in the church to help protect so people aren't taken advantage of here. It should be a safe place for people to come find help.

Do you see how Jesus is building this up? I didn't just come up with that little narrative about the place you would want to go; I'm actually deriving it from what Jesus is saying. It sounds too good to be true, but it's the vision Jesus himself is casting for his people. Then we see in verse 7, **"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"** The church should be countercultural. It shouldn't look the same. The world is about using people.

So Jesus draws this distinct contrast between the church and the world. When he says, "Woe" he is saying there is judgment coming for the world and not to be like them. The church believes Christ will return. We have a healthy fear of the Lord. In that healthy fear of the Lord, we deal radically with sin. It says here in verse 8, **"And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire."**

So we deal with our sin differently than the world does. How does the world deal with their sin? Well, they either harden their hearts and they boast in their sin without shame (that's one end), or they try to cover their sin with the works of their own hands. What we do is we bring our sin to light. We confess our sin and trust that the grace of God would cover our sin and would sanctify us. That's how we deal with our sin. We don't boast in it. We don't try to cover it up. We drag it into the light so Jesus will heal it, because we believe he can and he will.

**"And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire."** We take seriously our sin. That seems pretty radical to me. So we're to deal with our personal sin in this way. Corporately we're to be dealing with our sin in this way too. Did you know we are the body of Christ? We are the body of Christ. So he is the head. We are the body. That means his body should be acting in accordance with his head and his heart.

We're going to see this a little bit later here, but even corporately if your hand causes you to sin, if your eye causes you to sin, cut it out and throw it away. Then it goes on to say here in verse 10, **"See that you do not despise one of these little ones."** So here we are back to the little ones again, one of these weak, wounded, strayed, lost, right? Don't despise them. Don't sit in your small groups and



go, "If I have to listen to another weak-willed person talk about their sin..." Don't despise one of these little ones.

Now oftentimes we think the opposite of love is hate. I'm not sure the opposite of love is hate. I think the Scriptures might tell us the opposite of love is indifference. So let's look at this. It says, **"For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."** So we're talking about a strayed sheep, one of God's children who has strayed. Look at this. It says there are angels watching over them as they're straying. God cares.

**"What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?"**

This sheep matters to God. He cares for this sheep. The church should care for this sheep too. We pursue the things we love. You show me how you spend your time, your treasure, and your talents, and I'll tell you what you love. What this is saying is we should love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We shouldn't be indifferent to them because basically that communicates that you don't care.

Have you ever noticed a child who doesn't get enough attention will act out just to get attention even though it's negative attention? At least that shows you care about something. It says, **"And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray."** We celebrate repentance here. We celebrate coming home. **"So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."**

So if we take all of these characteristics (humility, obedience, fearing the Lord, loving justice and mercy, pursuing one another in love), we begin to see what I would call the crucible of Christian accountability and church discipline bringing all these things together in a process that is going to bring out these things: the pursuit of holiness and the practice of love.

Some people would say church discipline is unloving. We're about to see it follows directly after Jesus' words of, "This is what love looks like. This is the loving thing to do, to hold one another accountable." There are going to be people who don't want... You may be one of these people who, at this point, don't want people in your business. We're called to be in each other's business. This is going to be evidence of love in this covenant community.

Earlier we talked about that we should receive. It's okay not to be okay. That's kind of the language we hear around here, if you've been around here for a while. Then we see we should deal radically with sin. It's not okay to stay there. This text here, I think, is going to say, "If you think you're okay and you're not, your brother and sister should love you enough to tell you, to confront you."

So here we see, **"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone."** Do you see that? There is this personal, one-on-one accountability. I've put this graph up here. I think it's helpful. I think it's important to label this a redemptive process. Whenever I got here to the church, there were secret cells of women dealing with their husbands' sin. That's great, because they prayed together. They prayed for their husbands.

There was support, but it wasn't everything that Christ intended for his people because it just allowed sin to reign in their husbands' lives with no confronting of it. There was no church leadership involvement. It was just ongoing, rampant sin. It says here you are to lovingly confront one on one. If they listen to you (remember that mark of humility, to listen?), then you disciple toward restoration. If they don't listen, it says what to do next. **"But if he does not listen..."** You would rejoice, right? You've won your brother.

Do you see the culmination of all these things, pursuing in love, celebrating repentance, offering mercy? Then also loving justice? **"But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses."** Wow, this sounds like a court case, right? We are actually to hold each other accountable and bear witness to each other's faithfulness or lack thereof.

So is this one person making a decision in isolation? No, it's a community working together to testify. **"If he listens..."** Sometimes there is that interpersonal conflict, and you just can't... Does the Scripture just say, "Keep beating your head against the wall. Just keep having that same conversation over and over again"? No. Matt talked a lot this weekend. There are sins we should overlook and we should extend grace to. That should be our default.

If you see a brother who is in ongoing, unrepentant sin and it's not for their good, this is not a selfish interest thing, I'm not self-protecting here, I see my brother or sister headed in a direction that is detrimental to their well-being, they're playing in the street... If they don't listen, it tells us what to do. If they do listen, let's rejoice and let's move toward restoration.

It says, "**If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.**" So the circles are getting bigger. There's not going to be a place for you to hide. "**And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**" That is the authority God has given to the church, to loose and bind.

Now for some, it's not going to matter, but for the children of God biblically, the highest privilege a mortal can enjoy is to be a welcome member of the worshiping congregation. That is something we should value. If you walk through this process and you're like, "Hey, I don't really care. Church, no church... No big deal to me," then you're probably disclosing the fact that you may not be a believer if that's not of value to you. It says, "**Again I say to you, if two of you agree...**" So this brings the idea of the witnesses together. "**...on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.**"

We actually walk through this process of church discipline here at the church because we love people. We don't want for them to think they're okay if they're headed in a direction, if they're choosing their sin over Jesus. Jesus is better than your sin. This is not, "I'm struggling. I'm wanting to walk out of this." This is, "I know what the Scriptures say. I don't care. I'm going to do what I want." You just chose your sin over Jesus, and that doesn't end well.

Then we come to this parable of the unforgiving servant. So you had the parable of the lost sheep on the front end, that we should pursue one another in love. We get this process we're to walk through. Then it's like, "But don't forget who you are. Don't come in this positioning yourself over this person. Don't chase after this person and go, 'What are you doing?'" You go. You gain trust. You try to lead them back. If they come back, we stand eager to forgive. We are eager as believers to forgive because what our main goal is we don't live for ourselves.

We're not putting ourselves between that person and God. We're removing ourselves from the equation and we're saying, "Be reconciled to God." When they are, we rejoice. We don't use that as an opportunity to say, "Wait a second. What do I get out of this deal?" So we have this picture in Matthew 18 of this unforgiving servant who is forgiven a whole lot, more than he or his family could ever repay. Then he chokes out his fellow servant when he doesn't pay him back. The other servants just can't believe this is happening. So they go and they tell the master what he has done.

**"Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."**

So great mercy has been shown to us. It must be evidenced by great mercy shown to others. It must change our hearts.

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