

Living at Peace

Romans 12:17-21

Introduction

Ken Sande founded Peacemaker Ministries back in 1982. He was trained as a lawyer but saw a great need to help shepherd Christians thru conflicts with others – so his ministry is devoted to helping conciliate business / family / and church disputes in a biblical / Christ-honoring manner

He shares one story in his book – ‘The Peacemaker’

Ted was a new Christian who worked for a government agency. He was enthusiastic in trying to talk to his co-workers about Christ but none showed much interest. Ted had a supervisor named Joan with whom he had never gotten along with very well. He at times tried to tell her how she could run her department more effectively. His Christian faith simply provoked her further. As Joan became more irritated with Ted she began giving him more difficult work assignments even though she knew he had a bad back. Eventually he injured his back and had to leave work for several months. Although he did receive some disability, Ted lost several thousand dollars in wages and medical bills. He decided to file a lawsuit against Joan and the agency.

Ted later went to meet with a *Christian Conciliation Service*. At the time – He was back at work and his lawsuit was moving slowly thru the court system. During the first interview – Ted was challenged to consider how he may have contributed to the conflict with his supervisor. After a while – he began to see his own faults more clearly and considered accepting the settlement amount the agency had offered him of \$5000. However, some of his friends encouraged him to stick with the lawsuit.

The more Ted reflected on his own behavior – he began to feel that the Lord wanted him to drop the case altogether.

The next morning – he met with his supervisor Joan and told her. He admitted that he had been disrespectful, arrogant, and rude – and asked for her forgiveness. Joan was suspicious – she asked why he was doing this.

Ted replied, ‘I became a Christian a year ago and God is slowly helping me to face up to a lot of my faults, including those that contributed to a lot of the problems between you and me. Since God has freely forgiven me – I forgive you.’

Joan was amazed by his answer and said, ‘Let’s let bygones be bygones’

Word of this meeting began to circulate around the office.

Like ripples in a pond – the next day – two of Ted’s co-workers asked to meet with him over lunch to discuss the Bible. Later, others asked him questions about his faith. It became clear to Ted that God was using his response to a conflict to draw attention to Jesus.

Three years later Ted was asked whether he regretted his decision to give up the settlement. Ted replied, ‘No – that was the best \$5000 I ever spent.’ [The Peacemaker, pp. 75, 76]

Christians are to be peace makers

Romans 12:18 - 'If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.'

This teaching is also reflected in the Proverbs

Proverbs 20:3 - 'Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.'

Jesus said in one of the beatitudes

Matthew 5:9 - 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.'

Ultimately – we are talking about ways in which our lives are to be different because of Jesus Christ

Dietrich Bonhoeffer: 'What makes the Christian different from other men is the peculiar, the extraordinary, the unusual, that which is not a matter of course.'

The Christian as he follows Christ - - - will be one who is a peacemaker

I. At Peace with All Men - v. 17

Here Paul moves to the scene of conflict

Paul is talking about something everyone can relate to

'Do not return evil for evil'

You cannot live in this world without having someone do you a wrong turn / it is going to happen

How do you respond?

How should a Christian respond?

One of the most striking interviews I ever saw was a number of years ago with Dan Rather on 60 Minutes - - - he was interviewing an older gentlemen in prison – who had been married for something like 45 years to one woman – had never been in trouble with the law – had been a Deacon in a Presbyterian church – then one night he found himself caught up in a scene of road rage on the freeway [wife in the car with him saw the whole thing]

He and another driver were so angry at each other – they pulled over to the side of the road

This guy went back to his trunk and pulled out a cross bow – and shot the other guy – killed him – now in prison for it

As Rather interviewed him – he asked an important question: ‘Are you sorry – do you wish you had done things differently?’

Perfect opportunity for this guy to show some semblance of the Christian faith

He could have hung his head and said – ‘Yeah – I blew it – and I’ve repented and asked God to forgive me.’

But instead – the man seemed to return to that night in his mind – anger welling up within him – said forcefully – ‘no – he should not have done what he did’

Such behavior is clearly counter to what Paul is referring to here

That’s not how Christians are to respond to evil – we have many more options available to us – that can better serve the purposes of the glory of God

Ken Sande: ‘Whenever you are involved in a conflict, God has given you an opportunity to manage yourself in a way that will glorify Him, benefit others, and allow you to grow in character.’ [The Peacemaker, p. 29]

This will not come naturally

For many of us – this can be a real battleground

But – we grow spiritually when we say to God – ‘Your way is better’

That is the Christian position at all times: ‘God’s way is better than my way or the world’s way – or the devil’s way

We can do it our own way - - - but that doesn’t work out so well

Thomas Watson: ‘Has not misery always attended the doing of our own will, and happiness the doing of God’s will.’

God’s will: Do not return evil for evil

David did this – and it worked quite well

David was chased by King Saul all over the countryside - - - as Saul sought to put David to death

I Samuel 23:14 - 'And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.'

It came about providentially on one day – that Saul had entered a cave where David and his men were hiding – and David's men said – 'Here's your chance! The Lord has given Saul into your hand!'

Saul was a despicable character at this point - - - he had ordered the deaths of all the priests at Nob - - - he has been wasting all the resources of the palace on chasing David around the countryside

However - David has not been told by God to strike down Saul

So – instead of killing Saul - - - he cuts off the edge of his robe - - - to show him how vulnerable he was at that moment

I Samuel 24:8-10 - Afterward, however, David got up and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him . . . David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David is seeking to harm you'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the Lord had handed you over to me today in the cave, and *someone* said to kill you, but I spared you; and I said, 'I will not reach out with my hand against my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed.'

I Samuel 24:11-13 - '. . . I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life, to take it. May the Lord judge between you and me, and may the Lord take vengeance on you for me; but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you.'

We see David responding with kindness towards Saul's unjust provocations - - -

He is doing what is completely unnatural – the natural things would have been to snuff out the life of Saul

'If one of us has to die – I choose Saul!'

Instead – he chooses to leave justice in the hands of God

v. 12 - 'May the Lord judge between you and me . . .'

David knows that Saul's actions have been unjust and wicked - - - but he is willing to wait upon the judgment of God

We also see how Saul responds to David's righteousness

I Samuel 24:16-19 - ' . . . Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul raised his voice and wept. And he said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt maliciously with you. You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the Lord handed me over to you and yet you did not kill me . . . May the Lord therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day.'

Saul is made to recognize [if only for a moment] that he is fighting a battle he cannot win

David – his enemy – has returned good for the evil Saul was committing

Saul seems to repent – but 2 chapters later – he is back at it! [ch. 26]

He is like an alcoholic saying – 'I will never touch that stuff again.' - - - But then he does

Saul never did change – but for a brief moment – he acknowledged the truth

If someone does you a wrong turn – whether slight or significant / petty or criminal

A Christian does not have to 'even the score' - - - because He knows about the judgment of God - - before whom all will stand

If the person sinning against you is a fellow Christian - - - that sin is covered by Calvary

If by an unbeliever – that sin is a sin they will pay for at the judgment

Either way – there is no need for you or I to 'even the score'

II. If Possible - v. 18

Sometimes people are not willing to be at peace with us

The bible is very realistic about this

Let's say we are applying all the Scriptures

Proverbs 15:1 - 'A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.'

Or – perhaps – we do some soul searching - - - try to make sure that we are not the problem or the cause of the conflict

But still - - - It will not always be possible to have peace with everyone

Elijah was accused of ‘troubling’ Israel

He had prayed that God would send a drought upon Israel – for its rampant idolatry and worship of Baal

King Ahab said to him

I Kings 18:17 - 'Is this you, you troubler of Israel?'

I Kings 18:18 - 'And he said, 'I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father's house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and you have followed the Baals.'

King Ahab said – ‘You are the problem!’

Elijah responded with – ‘no – you are the problem – you and your idol-worshipping wife – Jezebel!’

I saw a Facebook post that said: ‘If you believe that being gay is sin or immoral – then you are the problem.’

A Christian cannot be at peace with that kind of attitude

MLJ: 'Live at peace with all men unless they make it impossible for you to do so.'

Several players this last week on the SF Giants – added a bible verse reference on to their ball caps - - -

As players – they had been told to wear a rainbow logo on their caps to celebrate pride month / pride night

One of the players just wore his normal cap
And two others wrote a bible verse – from Genesis referring to the original purpose of the rainbow after the flood

All the left-wing media outlets were highly critical of this stand these men took – how divisive!

How dare they refuse to bow to the woke enforcers and not give allegiance to the LGBT flag

They took a stand – in the spirit of Shadrach / Meshach and Abednego!

Image

So – MLB decided to step in an issue a reprimand to the players as well

Jack Brewer – a former NFL player for the Minnesota Vikings said the actions of MLB are disgusting - - - to force Christians to support something against their religion – and threaten them if they do not - - - he calls for the players to form a class action lawsuit

It is not always possible to be at peace with all men

We are not to be people who love a fight

But – we cannot compromise biblical values – and exchange them for the values of Satan's kingdom

The way to be salt and light in the world is not to turn down the light – or pretend to support godless values when we don't

The way we are salt and light - - is by standing for the truth – honestly / cordially / respectfully

III. The Wrath of God - v. 19

The Christian is willing to wait on the justice of God

We recognize that there is more to this life than the here and now

There is the after-life / the judgment of God

If we are treated unjustly in this world – or suffer for the sake of righteousness [and can do nothing to remedy the situation] - - - we believe that is not the end of the story - - - that God will make things right in eternity

Matthew 10:28 - 'And do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.'

God's judgment will be the final vindication of His glory and justice

Evil will be seen for the awfulness that it is – and sinners will receive their due penalty

Man can spurn God's laws right now – He can blaspheme – He can murder – He can commit all kinds of atrocities and seemingly get away with it

But – at the end of the day – He will find that He has gotten away with nothing – will be brought to account

Because of that – we can respond to personal acts of injustice and - - - let it go

** We can treat others better than they deserve because God has treated us better than we deserve! [Christ died for us]

Romans 5:8 - 'But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'

We can forgive others for offenses against ourselves because God has forgiven us

C.S. Lewis: 'To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.'

In doing so – we are simply following the example of our Savior - - Let God be the Judge

I Peter 2:23-24 - 'and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.'

Timothy Keller: 'The gospel tells us there is a judge and He can be trusted to make all things right. We do not need to get even . . . we are free to leave room for God's wrath . . . the gospel promises us justice, and reminds us that we are not the ones who give it.'

IV. Overcoming Evil with Good - vv. 20-21

There is a power in goodness

To return evil for evil – is to let evil win / and simply increases the net amount of evil in the world

If we return good for evil – our hands are clean

Heap coals of fire – Prov. 25:21, 22

A lot of discussion over this

But if we simply look at how David dealt with Saul - - - we see that Saul's heart was convicted - - - and ultimately his own judgment increased when he failed to repent

Our goodness may drive the evildoer to shame and remorse – perhaps to repentance

Conclusion

We are here in this world – living for God's glory

John MacArthur: 'As a Christian, you are God's person in your family, school, or place of employment. He has placed you there as His ambassador to influence others for Christ. That's a wonderful privilege and an awesome responsibility.'

In the news recently has been the teenaged murder of Austin Metcalf – by Karmelo Anthony at a track meet

Anthony went to the other team's track tent – and was apparently taunting / challenging anyone to touch him

When Austin did - - - Anthony stabbed him with a knife – leading to his death

Anthony has to live with the reality of his choices – serving a 35 year prison sentence

Austin's family and friends – have to live with the results of the murder – their son is gone

I'm sure parents and friends can envision all kinds of ways in which this senseless murder didn't have to happen

What if Austin Metcalf merely walked away / or fetched a coach – or even offered to buy a Coke for Anthony?

What if Karmelo Anthony had been taught – 'Thou shalt not murder' – and a few other biblical values?

What if his mom said to him before school – now remember:

Proverbs 20:3 - 'Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel.'

He's a fool spending the next 35 years of his life behind bars

That is the Bible's definition of a fool

Matthew 5:9 - 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.'

God's children are to be different from the pattern of the world

One of those traits is that of peace