

Family

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9

As the prisoner stood before the judge, he knew that his life hung in the balance. Would he experience the justice he deserved, or would the judge be merciful and offer leniency? This is the place we all find ourselves as we stand before the Judge of all. We deserve justice—to pay the full penalty for our sin. But into the situation walks Jesus, our Mediator, who offered His life as the sacrifice to atone for our sin. Upon the basis of this sacrifice, God offers to all sinners His incredible mercy—eternal forgiveness of all of our sin. Upon the acceptance of His sacrifice for our sins, we walk free from the justice we deserve.

In Romans 5:1, Paul describes the outcome of our acceptance of salvation, *“we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* This peace brings another benefit, and Paul speaks of this in Romans 8. We become the adopted children and heirs of God. *“You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father (8:15b).* God’s forgiveness makes us part of His family.

So, in one sense as Jesus spoke of peacemakers, He certainly had in mind those who accepted God’s offer of salvation—they made peace with God. But in another sense, as we seek to live out the command to love our neighbor, we must also become like God as we make peace with those around us. The testimony of this is our sense of family with other believers in Christ.

Jesus told the disciples that their greatest testimony to the world around them would be their love for one another. *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).* It is impossible to show our love for each other and for humanity in general when we live in a constant state of conflict with others. Here in the Beatitudes, Jesus calls us to be peacemakers.

Peace is not just the absence of conflict. It is also the resolution of bitterness. Not only are we called to cease from conflict, but we are also called to forgive others. In becoming part of the family of God, we are called to be *like* our Heavenly Father. Just as God forgave us, so we are to forgive others.

Yet forgiveness is antithetical to our human nature. It just feels wrong to us. Instead, we have in our sin nature an innate desire for revenge. And throughout human history we have seen how devastating this sinful drive can be. Cultures that uphold blood feuds are never peaceful.

Instead, they become places filled with anger, hate, and the most twisted and dark of human sins.

As difficult as it is to let go of our bitterness, the rewards of peace and community are far greater. Making peace brings a joy to our lives that is contagious. It brings the ability to build a community of those who love and support each other. This family gives believers the strength and protection they need to withstand the societal pressure to abandon their faith. The community aspect of a church is a testament to the world around us that we are the forgiven children of God. And as God’s children, we are to offer the same forgiveness He offered us to the world around us.



The Joy of Resolution

Restoring broken things.

Peace Making

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me” (Jill Jackson and Cy Miller). This lyric hits to the truth of peacemaking—it is first and foremost a personal endeavor. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed this out in **Matthew 6:14-15**. Why does God require that we forgive? *But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

More context is given to this concept in **Mark 11:22-26**. What clarification does this bring to this command? *It is in the context of having our prayers heard and believing that God can do great things for us. In the same way, we must believe that God will forgive us for our sins and we must trust that He is in control of all things. Forgiving others is a sign of our respect for God’s authority and sovereignty in our lives. We can trust Him to bring justice where it is needed. The negative about this points to the issue of “quenching the Spirit.” Holding a grudge or anger in our hearts places distance between us and God. It keeps us from living in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

In His exchange with Peter in **Matthew 18:21-22**, how many times did Jesus command us to forgive? *“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Either 77 or 490 –either one works.*

The cultural context of this statement is that the Jews taught you were to forgive someone 3 times. So, Peter was actually expanding upon this number and being generous in his offer of 7 times. Jesus’ response infers the idea of a limitless number of times. How does this reflect the way God forgives? *God always forgives us, no matter how many times we ask.*

Jesus went on to tell the parable of the Unforgiving Servant in **Matthew 18:23-35** which underscores the concept of God’s forgiveness versus our forgiveness of others. We often think of certain actions being unforgiveable, but what light does this parable cast on them? *Nothing is unforgiveable. The sins that are afflicted on us by others are very small compared to the sins that God has forgiven us for. Our refusal to forgive others casts us as petty and small minded. We, who have been forgiven so much, should be happy to extend this to others.*

How does the description of the master’s punishment in **vs. 34** illustrate the price we pay in refusing to forgive others? *“delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.” A refusal to forgive others damages us and our relationships with others and God. It is self-inflicted torture. This is an example of God allowing us to be punished by the natural consequences of our choices. Revenge never ends well; it always does more harm to us than to others.*

Literature is full of tales of the problems associated with revenge. Two examples are *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. Both of these illustrate the depths that someone will go in their desire for revenge, but also the horrible price that will be paid by the one who seeks it. It is a total loss of peace and an adoption of a lifestyle of personal destruction. Let’s look at some Biblical stories that show a different path.



Learning to Forgive

Accepting that God is Sovereign

Of all the stories in the Bible, Joseph's life story most illustrates the Sovereignty of God. His life was a series of ups and downs over which he had little control. He was his father's favorite but despised by his jealous brothers. And so, his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt. There he displayed remarkable ability and rose to be the overseer of all of Potiphar's possessions. When Potiphar's wife propositioned him, he refused her advances and she retaliated by bringing a false accusation against him. Joseph found himself in prison as a result. There his remarkable abilities were again noticed and put to good use. He helped the cupbearer by revealing his dream, but then the cupbearer promptly forgot him and didn't help him in return. Finally, two years later, Joseph's life took an unlikely turn. The cupbearer remembered him and recommended him as a revealer of dreams to Pharaoh. Suddenly, Joseph found himself freed from jail and placed into the second highest position in Egypt, the world power of the time. In this position, he was able to put his amazing organizational skills to use feeding Egypt and the surrounding areas during a seven-year famine. Finally, he was reunited with his family when his brothers came to Egypt to buy food from him. It is a remarkable story that was rife with opportunities for anger and bitterness.

What hints do we get of Joseph's emotions concerning his brothers when they show up and bow before him in **Genesis 42:6-9**? *He seems to have mixed emotions. He's feeling vindicated seeing them bowing before him remembering how they hated his dreams. He's feeling anger as those memories come flooding back.*

Ultimately, we never see any sign that Joseph was racked with bitterness, and we never see Joseph exact revenge in his story. What is Joseph's explanation for this in **Genesis 50:17-20**? *He recognizes God's sovereignty—I am not God to you. And he realizes that God meant what happened for good in his life and the life of his family*

How does a recognition of God's sovereignty change the way we look at the events of our lives?

It helps us accept the difficulties we've faced knowing that God is in control and has a reason.

Accepting God's sovereignty over the events of our lives, can allow us to recognize the many ways God has worked through them to do His will. But it doesn't remove the issue of justice we are left with. We want to see those who have wronged us pay the consequences for their actions.

Accepting that Judgement Belongs to God

The life of David provides many examples of experiencing injustice at the hands of others. In one instance, David came close to exacting revenge. David and his warriors had protected the flocks and shepherds of a rich man named Nabal. But when David asked Nabal to repay them for their services with a supply of food, Nabal rudely refused and cursed David instead. Angrily, David prepared to march on Nabal's land and destroy everyone associated with Nabal. How did David characterize Nabal's refusal to help in **1 Samuel 25:21-22**? *Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belongs to him. And he has repaid me evil for good. May God do so, and more also, to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all who belong to him by morning light."*



It is at this point that Abigail, Nabal's wife, enters the scene. Told of how Nabal had treated David, and of the danger they faced as a result, she takes things into her own hands in an attempt to stop David from making a horrible mistake. What does she remind David of in **1 Samuel 25:26**? *the Lord has held you back from coming to bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hand*

What is David's response in **1 Samuel 25:32-33**? *And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand.*

Notice what eventually happened to Nabal in **1 Samuel 25:36-38**. *after about ten days, that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died.*

What was David's response to the news in **1 Samuel 25:39**? *"Blessed be the Lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil! For the Lord has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head."*

How does David's response reflect **Deuteronomy 32:35**? *He acknowledges that God vindicated him and thanks God for the way He worked.*

Taking matters into our own hands, simply ends in our committing sin. We become just as guilty as those we seek vengeance upon. Leaving it in the hands of God alleviates us of the desire to commit sin in seeking revenge. It also frees us from carrying a burden that will ultimately destroy us. Rather than be burdened by bitterness, we can walk away from the sin of others knowing that God will avenge us. We can live a life of joy and peace despite the sin that has been visited upon us.

Accepting *God's Authority*

Resentment and bitterness don't only exist in situations where wrong has been done. They can also occur in response to perceived injustices due to the difference in our position to that of others. The Early church dealt with this due to the prevalence of slavery in the Roman world. Often believers in the early church found themselves on both sides of the owner/slave relationship. The epistle to Philemon highlights this issue.

While Paul was in prison in Rome, he met an escaped slave named Onesimus. What was interesting about Onesimus is that Paul knew his master, Philemon, and his family personally. Philemon and his wife, Apphia, hosted a church in their house in Colosse. Their son, Archippus, is was the pastor of the church (Colossians 4:17). So Onesimus had escaped from a strong Christian family who are active in their service to God. Somehow in Rome, he and Paul had met up and as a result Onesimus had received Christ as his Savior. How does Paul describe the difference in Onesimus now in **Philemon 1:11**? *While he was previously useless for Philmon, he is now a profitable person both for Philemon and for Paul.*



Our view of slavery today is influenced by Christianity's historical attempts to stamp it out. But in the New Testament period, slavery was still very much an accepted practice. A slave was a valuable piece of property and losing one resulted in a great financial loss to the owner. With this in mind, what is Paul doing as he sends this letter according to **Philemon 1:12-14**? Why is he doing it? *He's sending Onesimus back to Philemon. Paul would like to keep him with him since he's been so helpful, but he recognizes that he is Philemon's property. Paul is giving Philemon the opportunity to set Onesimus free if he chooses so that he can continue to work with Paul.*

How does Paul want Philemon to view Onesimus now? (**Philemon 1:15-16**) *As a brother.*

Onesimus is mentioned also in **Colossians 4:8-9**. What does this seem to indicate happened in his story?

He was set free to serve with Paul.

In **1 Timothy 6:1-2**, Paul dealt more specifically with the societal problem that was faced in the early church due to the issue of slavery. How were slaves to treat their masters? Why? *count their own masters worthy of all honor...so that God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.*

In **Colossians 3:22-25**, Paul dealt with specifics of how slaves were to act honorably.

- Obey in *sincerity of heart*, not just when they were around
- Recognize that they were serving *God not man*
- Realize that *the reward* for their service would be given to them by God
- Accept that God would fairly *prosecute injustice*

Many things in life seem unfair. Anytime we are tempted to feel that we are being treated unjustly, what did Peter remind us of in **1 Peter 2:18-24**? *We have not suffered like Christ did.*

Children of God

The promise of being a peacemaker is that we will be called the children of God. Just as Jesus accepted suffering in order to give us forgiveness, so we may at times suffer as we seek peace with others. What reassurance did Jesus give us in **John 14:26-27**? *He has given us his peace.*

As a result of the peace of God, what did Jesus encourage us not to do? *Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

How do worry and fear often rob us of peace and keep us from being good representatives of God to our world?

