

Conflict: Be a Peacemaker in a Warring World – Matthew 5:21-26

I've never taken the time to learn to solve a Rubix Cube, but what first seems impossible turns out to be fairly straightforward. This is because the cube can be solved by using an algorithm. What's an algorithm? It's a set of rules that are followed in a problem solving operation. If you follow the rules or the algorithm, you can solve the cube.

Today most of the time you hear that word algorithm used when it comes to content you see online, but the same basic idea applies. An algorithm is simply a set of rules used to solve a problem. So, what is the problem solved when it comes to online content? Well, the problem is how to keep your eyes glued to the screen. This is what these companies want. So, the rules are set up to give you content that will keep your attention and the vast majority of the time that means content that causes anger, and conflict and confirms what you already think.

Some event will happen in the news, and the algorithm will feed you videos, articles, posts, and content that make you angry and confirm what you already think. This has created an increasingly large divide in our culture between people who think differently.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls his followers to be salt and light in the world they live in. This requires us to live in the culture but also to maintain distinction from the culture. I believe one of the most obvious ways you and I can be salt and light in our divided world is to hear Jesus's words just a few verses earlier in the Beatitudes. *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."* To be called a son of God means that you resemble your heavenly Father.

God has gone to shocking lengths to bring peace and reconciliation between warring parties, humanity and Himself. That reality must drive us to learn how to pursue reconciliation with those around us, especially those closest to us when there is a break in the relationship. Ken Sande put it this way: *"God's grace, as revealed in the gospel of Christ, is the driving force behind peacemaking."* – Ken Sande

We've spent the first part of 2026 talking about this topic of conflict and how to handle it. I wanted to address this topic for two reasons. First, to be honest, this is something most of us struggle with. We have conflict in our lives and don't know what to do with it, so it lingers and deepens. Second, even if you don't have a major source of conflict in your life now, I want to prepare you to handle it. Hopefully this will set the groundwork for you to carefully and wisely address it in the future.

The goal in all of this is for us to be peacemakers. To bring healing and wholeness to relationships. And so, we are going to talk about the process of reconciliation today. What do you do to pursue healing when there's conflict? **4 Keys to Actively Pursue Reconciliation.**

1. Commence the Process

This is probably the hardest part of all this and here's what Scripture would have you do when there's a break in a relationship. You be the one to start the process. You go first. You become the peacemaker.

But here's what we tend to do. There's been a break in a relationship. Maybe you've had an argument with your spouse and things didn't end well. Unkind words were said and now you feel the tension in the relationship. But you also know deep in your heart that she is more to blame than you are. In fact, the percentage is something like 70-30 or maybe even 80-20. And, since she has the greater responsibility, she should be the one to seek you out and apologize first. Sande describes this as "believing that my sins are more than canceled by another's sins."

But this isn't at all what the Bible teaches. Let's look at Matthew 5:21-26. Let's read verses 21-22. This is often where we tend to stop and we say something like, well in order to avoid murder we need to avoid anger. Jesus is making what was simply an outward command in the OT an inward heart issue in the NT. But Jesus isn't interested in us just avoiding anger. Anger does lead to further conflict and potentially murder, but rather than simply avoiding anger, Jesus wants His disciples to be people who pursue reconciliation. Look at verses 23-26.

The heart of this is reconciliation and the responsibility is one you to take the initiative to pursue it. Notice in verse 25 He uses the word “quickly”. Reconciliation is a high priority, and you see this in the illustration about the gift at the altar and when an issue is going to court. We are to pursue reconciliation with urgency and we are to start the process. This is exactly what God did with us. Listen to Roman 5:6-8. Once you decide to pursue reconciliation and you commence the process, you confess your role in the conflict.

2. Confess Your Role

I already mentioned that owning your part is key to getting this process going. This means two things are necessary. Repentance and confession. Repentance means a change of mind. You think differently about the situation than you did before. You turn from your sin and wrongdoing, acknowledge it, and turn to Christ in faith and trust. 2 Corinthians 7:9-10 describes godly sorrow and repentance. Paul had confronted the Corinthians regarding many sin issues within the church. 1 Corinthians is filled with problems! And they responded in true repentance. They passionately wanted to clear themselves and fix the wrong and this is because of their repentance.

Here's how Ken Sande explains repentance: "*Repentance does not mean we simply feel sad and uncomfortable. Nor does it involve a mere apology. To repent literally means to change the way we think. Thus repentance is sometimes described as 'coming to our senses'. It involves waking up to the fact that we have been deceiving ourselves and that our ideas, attitudes, values, or goals have been wrong. If this change in thinking is genuine, it will lead to a renouncing of sin and a turning to God.*" – Ken Sande

So, if repentance is a change in the way we think, then confession is the acknowledgment of my wrong to another person verbally. I don't know what you think of when you think of confession, if you have a Catholic background, you probably think of a priest and a sacrament, but that's not confession in the biblical sense. You find examples of confession in Scripture in places like Psalm 51 and Psalm 32. Confession is necessary to bring about restoration in the relationship

and again, you own and confess your role in the conflict or wrongdoing. This means having a conversation.

Now, confession is hard. It flows from repentance and takes humility and a real desire for reconciliation. Often people struggle with confession. You can see a multitude of bad examples of confession online when people have been caught in a transgression and have to put out a statement for publicity sake. Mishandling a confession can cause more tension and set the conflicted relationship back even further.

In his book, *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande gives 7 elements of a biblical confession that guide us as we think through what to say and how to say it. The goal here is to state your repentance clearly, to own your wrong, and to move the relationship toward reconciliation so that forgiveness can take place. These don't all have to be present in order in every confession, but they do give the direction and boundaries of a biblical confession that can lead to restoration. I'd like to share these with you this morning to help you and if you want a longer explanation, please go get Sande's book. These all start with the letter A.

- Address Everyone Involved

Sande makes the point here that your confession should reach as far as your offense. If you sinned publicly, you need to confess publicly. You want to make sure your confession goes to all those who have been wronged or hurt in the situation.

- Avoid If, But, and Maybe

This is a big one. It's so easy to caveat or try to explain why you sinned or wronged someone else. How often do you "confess" like this: "I'm sorry I said that, but I felt I needed to respond to what you said." There will come a time to address the other person's wrongdoing in the process of restoration. We will cover that next time. But your confession shouldn't give caveats or contingencies. Own it and state it clearly. A confession is not biblical and will not bring about reconciliation when you shift blame, even slightly.

- Admit Specifically

The more specifically you can state the issue and your sin, the better the confession will set up the restoration. If you deal in generalities, it cuts off the process of reconciliation. “I’m sorry I messed up” is far different from specifically stating what you did wrong.

- Acknowledge the Hurt

For a person to know you truly grasp the wrong you have done, you need to acknowledge how it hurt that person. This indicates you can see the situation from the other person’s perspective. They will feel understood and they will know you truly grasp the wrong done.

- Accept the Consequences

Genuine repentance knows that sin brings consequences with it. Accepting those consequences makes reconciliation possible. If your words have caused a break in the relationship where that other person doesn’t feel they can trust you, say that you see that and know that’s a part of what you have caused. You also cannot demand that the relationship instantly return to what it was before. Full reconciliation may come, but it often takes time to undo the consequences of sin.

- Alter Your Behavior

Obviously, this means that you actually do change, but it’s also important to tell the person how you plan to live differently in the future. Lay out what you have learned and what needs to change.

- Ask for Forgiveness (and Allow Time)

We’ll get into the specifics of forgiveness next time, but after articulating the wrongdoing and acknowledging the hurt, it’s appropriate to ask the person to forgive you. Forgiveness is a transaction and you are asking for that person to do something specific for you. Now, part of true repentance is understanding that sometimes forgiveness takes time. The hurt can be deep, and you cannot rush true forgiveness. Acknowledge that and allow the person the time to forgive. It’s

never a sign of true repentance to demand forgiveness and to order the other person to act like nothing ever happened.

Now, these are the first two keys to actively pursue reconciliation and we still have two more. We will get to these in two weeks and finish this series up. But let me briefly put them out there so you know where we are going.

3. Communicate the Truth

This is where you lay out the wrong done by the other party. This is an absolutely necessary part of reconciliation and cannot be ignored.

4. Clear the Wrong

This is forgiveness and we need to talk about what it means to forgive and how to navigate this.

We'll do that in two weeks. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions – 2/1/26

- Have you experienced the algorithm guiding what you see online and how you view a situation? How would you even know if you have or not?
- What does it mean to be a peacemaker and how is this counter cultural in our world?
- Why is it hard to be the one to initiate the reconciliation process?
- What are the dangers we imagine to be there if we own our wrong if its less than the other persons wrong?
- How does the gospel shape our understanding of reconciliation with one another?
- How would you describe repentance?
- How does confession relate to repentance?
- Which of the 7 A's of confession is most challenging to you?
- Which of the 7 A's do you think most people miss?

- What's one principle from this message that you can use to help you handle conflict better?