

## Sermon Notes

**Series: How to Be A Peacemaker**

**Date: November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

**Title: “Step 1: Choose to Pursue Peace”**

**Text: Romans 14**

**When we face difficulty in our relationships we can choose to...**

### 1) **AVOID THE PROBLEM.**

**a) And that choice was certainly something those at Rome faced – especially those who felt free to eat all types of food.**

- i) When they found out that some of their brothers were offended by the meat they were eating, they could have chosen to avoid the problem.
- ii) To deter these Christians from avoiding the problem, Paul said they should not put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of their brothers.
  - (1) Basically, instead of avoiding the issue, they should be mindful of it.
  - (2) Instead of passively ignoring the issue, they should actively address it.
  - (3) They should take every effort to remove any stumbling blocks...

**b) We are all tempted to avoid problems when they arise in our relationships.**

- i) Some of us avoid those problems like the Corinthians. Essentially we avoid our problems by denying them.
  - (1) We turn a blind eye to the problem.
    - (a) We sweep it under the rug and bury it.
  - (2) Sometimes offenses in our relationships should be overlooked. (Pro 19:11)
    - (a) The problem though comes when we make that our life verse and apply it to every struggle we face in our relationships.
    - (b) There are many problems God doesn't want us to overlook.
      - (i) And to deny those problems only makes matters worse.
- ii) We avoid problems in our relationships by waiting indefinitely for the other person to change.
  - (1) Don't fall into the lie that “time will heal it.”
  - (2) As Biblical Counselor Stuart Scott has said, “Healing alone is not what is needed or what honors God when a conflict has taken place. What is needed is confession, forgiveness, and repentance. Time passes for us but not for God. He wants His children to deal with sin quickly (Matthew 5:23-24, Ephesians 4:26). Usually another's sin and our hurts become bigger (not smaller) with the passage of time. Our memories can even become very selective and make the resolution process even more difficult.” – *Exemplary Husband*, p. 254
- iii) We can avoid problems in our relationships is by running away from them.

**c) How should we evaluate the choice to avoid the problem?**

- i) First, think about the **focus** of avoiding the problem – self!
  - (1) We're looking for what is easy and convenient and comfortable.
  - (2) When we avoid the problems in our relationships, we're being peacefakers.

- (a) Typically we're avoiding the problem because...
  - (i) we don't want to be perceived as unloving or aggressive.
  - (ii) we fear losing the relationship more than disappointing God.
- ii) Second, think about the **cost** of avoiding the problem.
  - (1) When we choose to avoid the problem, we as individuals can become isolated, and bitter, and depressed.
  - (2) Also, our relationships remain surfacy.
    - (a) We may be able to talk about the weather and sports and current events but we're probably reluctant to talk about our beliefs and convictions and real feelings.
    - (b) After all, we don't want to offend that person.
  - (3) And of course, when we choose to avoid the problem, our relationship with God is also hindered. (cf. 1 Peter 3:7)
    - (a) If there is a problem horizontally, there will be a problem vertically.
  - (4) SO please, brothers and sisters, whatever you do, when facing difficulty in your relationships, don't make this choice. Don't avoid the problem.

## 2) **ATTACK THE PERSON.**

- a) **Attacking the person was something that those at Rome were very capable of. (v.3)**
  - i) Those who felt free to eat all meats were in danger of despising their brothers.
    - (1) They were in danger of mocking and ridiculing them for being so restrictive.
  - ii) But we can also face the same temptation as those who had weak faith in Rome.
    - (1) Like the Jewish Christians who were tempted to judge their more liberal brothers, we do the same thing with those we perceive as more liberal than us.
- b) **And there are certainly other ways that we make that choice as well.**
  - i) For one thing, we can attack the person by gossiping.
    - (1) According to *Webster's Dictionary*, a gossip is "a person who chatters or repeats idle talk or rumors, especially about the private affairs of others."...
    - (2) I'm not suggesting that if we're in the midst of a struggle that we can't seek outside advice or counsel.
    - (3) But typically, if we are seeking counsel, we don't need to share a lot of details... or identify the person we have a problem w/... or complain about them.
    - (4) Why Mt 18 says that if your brother sins against you should go to him in private.
      - (a) And if that doesn't work, then you should involve others.
  - ii) Well, second, we can also attack the person by punishing them until they change.
    - (1) Not referring to physical punishment.
    - (2) Instead I'm talking about the things we do to our spouses or friends or fellow members to try to manipulate them and shift the blame.
    - (3) We may give them the silent treatment, or refuse to get close to them, or stop calling them.
  - iii) And of course if things really get out of hand, we could even attack the person literally or legally.

**c) Let's step back for a second and evaluate this approach.**

- i) What is the **focus** of attacking the person? That person!
  - (1) We get so focused on the other person's wrong that all we can think about is how to change and control them.
  - (2) And when that happens, we're being a peacebreaker.
- ii) And sadly, when we choose to attack the person, we pay a **price**.
  - (1) And that price can include anything from a lack of joy to strained relationships to God's discipline for being so self-righteous.
- iii) And so whatever you do, when facing difficulty in your relationships, don't make this choice. Don't attack the person.

**3) PURSUE PEACE.**

**a) And this is certainly the choice that Paul wanted those at Rome to make.**

- i) That's why Paul told them not to judge each other and not to set up stumbling blocks.
- ii) Cf. vv17-19
  - (1) Peace is what characterizes kingdom citizens.
  - (2) When we live in light of God's kingdom we won't be peacefaking or peacebreaking.
  - (3) Instead we'll be busy experiencing righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.
- iii) It is true that there is cost involved with peace.
  - (1) It does require prayer and discernment and investment.
  - (2) At times it even requires self-denial and uncomfortable conversations.
- iv) But if we are willing to pursue peace, we can experience peace...
  - (1) within our hearts knowing we were faithful to God.
  - (2) in our relationships knowing that we did everything possible to be reconciled.
  - (3) and with God as we are reminded of the power of the cross.

**b) And so let's commit to making the right choice.**

- i) Let's commit to pursuing peace when we face difficulties in our relationships.
- ii) Cf. v. 19... encourage you to memorize this verse.

**c) Well in closing this morning, let me remind you of something important.**

- i) We can only choose to pursue peace because of Jesus' work in our lives.
  - (1) We are not naturally inclined to pursue peace.
  - (2) But because of Jesus we are new creations in Christ.
- ii) And as new creations, we've not only be released from the penalty of sin – we're released from the ongoing power of sin. (cf. Romans 6:1-14)
- iii) So let's believe the good news of the gospel for our problems today.
  - (1) Let's draw on resources that we've been given in Christ.
  - (2) And with the Spirit's help, we will choose to pursue peace with each and every difficulty we face.