

Main Idea: In Philemon 17-21, Paul illustrates the anatomy of the peacemaker. By looking at his example we discover five characteristics of a peacemaker.

- I. A peacemaker exhibits a willingness to get involved (17).
 - A. Paul functioned as a partner.
 - B. Paul got involved in what could have been a messy situation.
- II. A peacemaker takes personal risk (18).
 - A. There is a fixed law in God’s universe that someone has to pay the price of sin.
 - B. There is an illustration here of the wonderful doctrine of imputation.
- III. A peacemaker demonstrates personal respect (19).
 - A. Relationships are like checking accounts.
 - B. If you want to get anything out of them, you have to put something into them.
- IV. A peacemaker possesses proper motivation (20).
 - A. It’s possible to be a peacemaker for the wrong reasons.
 - B. The goal of the peacemaker is to please Christ.
- V. A peacemaker exhibits optimism (21).
 - A. God is great enough to reconcile the most hardened sinners to Himself.
 - B. The same God can also reconcile alienated Christians to one another.

Take Inventory: Jesus calls all of us to be peacemakers.

1. We are to help people get right with God.
2. We are to help people get right with one another.

Scripture Reading: Philemon 12-21

God is the God of peace. He sent His Son into the world to give us peace, first with Himself, but then also with other people. Peace is His gift, and it’s the experience His people to enjoy with each other in the church.

“Peace I leave with you.” Those are Jesus’ words in John 14:27. “My peace I give to you,” He also said.

But how does the Lord Jesus give this gift of peace to those who need it? Here’s how, at least in part. He works through and calls us to be *peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9). And what does a peacemaker look like? We’ll find out this morning as we see Paul model the anatomy of a peacemaker in Philemon 17-21.

When I turned 15 I received a special birthday present. It was a puppy, a six week old Brittany Spaniel. I had a lot of fun with that dog. I also learned some lessons. The first night I kept him in a box next to my bed. That lasted only one night, one long night of whining and whimpering. The next night he moved to the garage.

Brit, as I called him, was a friendly dog. But he was also high energy. He loved to run. Our 120 acre farm wasn’t big enough for him. In the end that cost him his life for he ran to the highway nearly a half a mile from our house and was hit by a car.

When Brit was growing up as a pup we happened to have a young kitten. I think we called her Kitty (I know, a pretty novel name). I tried and tried to get those two to get along with each other. The problem was, Brit’s idea of “getting along” didn’t match Kitty’s. Oh, he loved to spend time with her. He’d throw his big paw over her back, pin her to the ground, and chew on her ears. You might say that theirs was a strained relationship. I did whatever I could to help them, but in the end I learned that there are some real challenges to being a peacemaker.

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous development, see the Philemon series at WBC on Sunday evenings in 2003.

What is a peacemaker? A peacemaker is a mediator, a go-between. A peacemaker is someone who restores parties who are out of terms. He or she is a reconciler. In a sin-cursed world, sometimes people get out of sorts with each other. Sometimes people need help in the reconciliation process.

Sometimes college roommates need help. Sometimes siblings need help. Sometimes married couples need help. Sometimes church members need help.

Do we have a responsibility when people around us are at odds? We do. Jesus calls us to be *peacemakers*. But how do we do it? What does it take? God has graciously given us the answer in today's text.

In Philemon 17-21, we see the anatomy of the peacemaker. Paul models five essential characteristics of peacemaking for us.

I. A peacemaker exhibits a willingness to get involved (17).

Let's resketch the backdrop of this letter. The story has to do with three main characters:

Philemon--a well to do Christian man living in or near Colosse

Onesimus--a slave in Philemon's household, who robbed and ran away

Paul--a personal friend of Philemon

We've seen what happened in previous messages. Paul had been arrested because of his allegiance to Jesus Christ. He was imprisoned in Rome. While there, the apostle received an unusual visitor. God directed the runaway slave Onesimus to Paul, who was under house arrest. Paul soon moved the conversation to the topic of Jesus Christ. He explained to this wayward slave how his sins could be forgiven, how his life could be changed, how he could be set free from the burden of guilt. Right there, Onesimus repented of his sins, and placed his trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord.

Immediately, Onesimus became quite an asset to Paul (see verse 11). He helped Paul in his prison ministry (see verse 13). In fact, the two quickly developed a deep father-son relationship.

But there was some unfinished business that needed attention. There was a severed relationship that needed mending. Onesimus had a past that he needed to face. He needed to go back and make things right with Philemon.

Indeed, when God saves us He makes us a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). That doesn't mean He necessarily makes our past problems go away, but He does give us the ability (and desire) to face them, for His glory, no matter what the cost.

So Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. But the apostle did not say, "Good luck Onesimus. You're on your own now. Drop me a line and tell me how it goes."

No. Paul played the role of a peacemaker.

What does it take to be a peacemaker? First of all, there must be a willingness to get involved.

Notice verse 17, "So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me." A couple of things stand out here.

A. Paul functioned as a partner.

"If thou count me, therefore a *partner*," says Paul to Philemon (AV). A peacemaker doesn't see himself as better than, for he knows he's a sinner too and may be on the receiving end of peacemaking the next time. Rather, he intervenes as a *partner*, a *koinonon* (similar to the Greek *koinonia*, the word for fellowship).

Peacemakers don't work top down, but side to side, brother to brother, sister to sister. We are partners because of Christ, and right now *we* (not *you*, but *we*) have a problem.

B. Paul got involved in what could have been a messy situation.

Take note of those two little words "So if" at the beginning of verse 17. *So if* you consider me a partner. Because if you don't, this isn't going to go well. If you don't appreciate the bond we have in Christ, you could convince yourself that I'm just meddling in business that's not mine.

This could potentially be quite messy, and Paul knows it. Remember, Roman law allowed masters to punish severely runaway slaves. What's more, there were stiff penalties for those who assisted slaves who went AWOL.

Paul knows that what he's about to say to Philemon goes against natural instincts. But Paul also knew that God had given to him, and to all who know Christ, the ministry and message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-19).

And that's why Paul got involved. Not as an apostle. But as a partner.

And what was his request? "If you consider me a partner, *welcome him as you would welcome me.*" "Receive him as myself" (AV). When you look at Onesimus, my brother, look at him as if it was me. Treat him as you would treat me.

So what does it take to be a peacemaker? It starts right here with a willingness to *get involved*, for the glory of Christ.

Seldom does a week go by but that someone from the community calls the church and says, "I hear you do biblical counseling at your church. Can you help me?" And it's our privilege as a biblical counseling team to get involved.

But here's the reality. We need others to step forward because the need is great, specifically marriages that are in trouble.

You say, "Sorry, but I'm not a counselor. I don't have what it takes to help a struggling couple save their marriage."

But wait. If you know Jesus as your Savior and therefore His Spirit, The Counselor, lives in you, and if you have a solid marriage yourself, and if you have a growing knowledge of the Word of God, and if you are willing to get involved, you can be a peacemaker with a couple that's in trouble.

"But what if I don't know what to say?" Then say, "I don't know what to say!" And then say, "But I care about you as a brother in Christ, and I want to help you. So I'm willing to work on this with you, by getting into God's Word. And if I need help in helping you, I'll find others who can help. Because I believe that the God of peace wants you to experience peace.

Brothers and sisters, let's reflect for a moment. Are there people right now that God wants to use you to help by taking the role of a peacemaker? Is the Lord bringing someone to mind? Okay, good. Now where does peacemaking begin. Right here. With a willingness to get involved.

II. A peacemaker takes personal risk (18).

Being a peacemaker can be costly. There's usually sacrifice involved. It demands personal risk. Listen to the cost Paul was willing to pay to see two brothers he loved restored, in verse 18.

"If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me."

This is a wonderful verse, for it reveals two things to us.

A. There is a fixed law in God's universe that someone has to pay the price of sin. Yes, God does forgive sinners. That's the glory of the gospel. But the reason He can forgive sinners is because the price for sin has been paid. By Jesus Christ.

Friends, someone has to pay the price for sin. This is a fixed law in the universe that's been created by a Holy God. Even though Onesimus was now a Christian, you don't find Paul saying to Philemon, "What's past is past. Let's just forget what happened."

No, Paul didn't presume upon Philemon. He knew Onesimus had a problem, and it would take more than love to solve this problem.

But love is willing to pay the price.

Paul puts the problem on the table. *If he has done you any wrong.* This speaks of legal injustice, for Onesimus had violated laws governing slavehood. Then, *if he owes you anything*, which implies financial loss through theft.

Onesimus had robbed Philemon. Did he take cash or property? We're not told. But it was a costly loss for Philemon. And Onesimus's coming to Christ didn't make the cost go away.

So watch what Paul said. *Charge it to me.* Put that on mine account, says the AV.

Paul used a technical, business term. He affirms the debt must be paid, and then affirms he wants to assume debt. Just like the Good Samaritan who told the innkeeper in Luke 10:35, "'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'" What an offer!

Listen. Being a peacemaker is costly and may involve risk.

Is it worth it? Is it worth the risk to assume the role of a peacemaker? It depends on what we want most out of life.

Answer this. Who is the greatest peacemaker of all time? There is no doubt about the answer. Jesus the Christ is! Jesus took action to pay someone else's debt, ours. Indeed, Jesus did for us what Paul said he was willing to do for Onesimus, only infinitely more so. He didn't pay a financial debt, but the sin debt. And it cost Him His life.

God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us.

Which brings us to the second thing this amazing verse reveals.

B. There is an illustration here of the wonderful doctrine of imputation.

Imputation. It's what happened on the cross. We had a great debt hanging over us, the debt of our sin. We were powerless to get rid of the debt. We were guilty before God Almighty.

But God the Father put our moral debt to the account of His Blessed Son. And His Son paid it. Jesus the Christ paid a debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.

Charge it to me.

Peter summed it up in 1 Peter 3:18, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit."

So is it worth the risk to be a peacemaker? This is critical to see. When we take a risk as a peacemaker, we're choosing to follow in His steps, which is what we were saved to do according to 1 Peter 2:21. "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

That's why we take risks. Because we're living for the day when we stand before God and hear Him say, "When you tried to help those two people, you looked just like My Beloved Son. Well done!"

But there's more. Being a peacemaker involves, first, a willingness to get involved, and then next, personal risk. Thirdly...

III. A peacemaker possesses and demonstrates personal respect (19).

This is key. Before you can be a peacemaker, you need to gain the respect of the parties involved. Paul had done that. He had won the respect of both men.

How do we know he had? Just think of what he was asking them to do. He was asking a runaway slave to return to his master. For Onesimus to even consider the request says to me he had a great deal of respect for Paul. And Paul asked the master to receive back his slave with open arms. For Philemon to consider this request says that he too had high regard for Paul, in light of what masters usually did with unruly slaves.

So Paul had the respect of both Philemon and Onesimus. But he didn't take advantage of that respect. As a peacemaker, he used it to reconcile his two brothers.

Verse 19 "I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self."

I will pay it back. I will repay. The letter of Philemon is like a promissory note. In fact, notice here that Paul says he "*wrote it with his own hand.*" Philemon knew Paul had poor eyesight—he typically dictated his letters and penned a few greetings himself. When Philemon saw the apostle's own handwriting in this letter, it surely touched him.

I doubt Paul had much money. After all he was a prisoner. But he knew that Onesimus had even less. In fact, Paul knew there was no way he could repay the debt he owed. So Paul said, "I'll pay the debt."

He says something else in verse 19, "not to mention that you owe me your very self." The KJV states, "I do not say to you how you owe me."

I think Barclay is right when he says there's a flash of humor in Paul's words here. It's like Paul is saying, "Philemon, old friend, you've received a lot from me in the past, namely all I've taught you about Christ, and it's been my privilege. In God's providence, you owe me. So now there's something I'd like from you."

Why could Paul make such an appeal to Philemon? It's because he had won his respect.

There's an important lesson here.

A. Relationships are like checking accounts.

B. If you want to get anything out of them, you have to put something into them.

It just makes sense. If you went up to a stranger said, "Hey, I can tell from your non-verbals that you're not getting along with your wife. You really need to make things right." I wouldn't expect a favorable response.

But Paul had invested in Philemon's life. And he had invested in Onesimus' life. Now it was time to make a withdrawal. What he was asking wasn't easy for either. But he had earned their respect. And what he was asking was for the glory of Christ and their own good.

What are the characteristics of a peacemaker? It takes a willingness to get involved, personal risk, and personal respect. Next...

IV. A peacemaker possesses proper motivation (20).

Why did Paul want to get involved in the first place? Why did he make himself vulnerable? After all, he could have set himself up for some pain, even rejection. What motivated him to be a peacemaker between Philemon and Onesimus?

He gives the answer in verse 20, "I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ."

What person did Paul refer to twice in verse 20? "In the Lord...in Christ." There was Paul's motivation. He did what he did, because of the Lord. And this is something Paul mentions again and again in his letters.

Philippians 1:21 "For to me to live is Christ..."

2 Corinthians 4:5 "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord..."

2 Timothy 2:8 "Remember Jesus Christ!"

2 Corinthians 5:9 "So we make it our goal to please Him [Christ]."

Keep this in mind.

A. It's possible to be a peacemaker for the wrong reasons.

Frankly, you can insert yourself into other people's problems because of your ego ("They *need* me!" Or worse, "God needs me to help them"). Or you can get involved simply to take the focus off your own problems that need attention.

But this wasn't true of Paul.

B. The goal of the peacemaker is to please Christ.

Paul did what he did because of Christ. Why did he want to see two brothers reconciled to each other. Because he was sentimental? No. Because he was nosy? Certainly not. Because it bolstered his own ego? No. Paul got involved as a peacemaker because of one consuming motivation. He wanted to please the Lord.

This is key. No sacrifice is too great when you're doing something for the Lord, for He paid the ultimate sacrifice for us.

Right here is one of the main reasons we have organized the church into our deacon care groups which will be meeting today. Our care groups exist to provide meaningful care for each member of WBC. When our members are growing and connected, we are then better prepared as a church to fulfill our mission of making Christ known to the world.

Each deacon care group possesses a blending of spiritual gifts and interests. We believe this helps each of the five groups to provide meaningful care for those in each group.

For a group to accomplish this goal, our deacons have some important responsibilities, and so do we as care group members.

The Deacon's Responsibilities:

1. Pray for the spiritual welfare of the members in his deacon care group.
2. Work at building relationships with each person in the group.
3. Encourage members to build God-honoring relationships with each other.
4. Seek, train, and mobilize others for care-giving ministries (hospital visits, etc.).
5. Communicate and work regularly with the other deacons in order to provide care for the entire congregation.

The Care Group Members' Responsibilities:

1. Fulfill one another responsibilities given in the New Testament (love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, edify one another, exhort one another, restore one another, etc)
2. Provide care for a member who is in the hospital or recovering at home (prayer support, meals, cards, visits, etc)
3. Provide care when there is a death in the family of a care group member (prayer support, funeral home visitation, offer and provide funeral meal, cards, etc)
4. Provide care for our elderly and shut-ins (visits, house repair if needed, etc)
5. Provide encouragement for those who become inactive (cards, phone calls, visits, invite for a meal, etc)
6. Look for ways to serve together as a care group so as to fulfill our mission of making Christ known to the lost

Our groups meet together about every other month. Why? Because we can't care for those we don't know. And as we've seen today, we can't be an effective peacemaker in the lives of those who don't know we truly care for them.

So today we'll be meeting to do several things—eat a meal together, visit, catch up on what's happening in each others lives—but most important of all, we'll discuss a question. *What opportunities is God giving us right now to demonstrate Christ-like care for one another in our group?*

Do we have any elderly that need a visit, or something fixed at their house? Do we any infirmed recovering from surgery who would appreciate a card or some meals? Do we have any who are grieving who need a listening ear? Do we have any who have become inactive who need an invitation to lunch and to hear, "We've missed you."

And do we have any who seem to be at odds with a brother or sister, or struggling in their marriage, or frustrated in their parenting, who need someone to do what Paul did with Onesimus and Philemon, to demonstrate care by assuming the role of a peacemaker?

What's it take to be a peacemaker? Paul demonstrated for us, first a willingness to get involved, then personal risk, then personal respect, then proper motivation. There's one more characteristic.

V. A peacemaker exhibits optimism (21).

Optimism. You say, "What does optimism have to do with peacemaking?" A lot.

Think first of the pessimist. What does he say as he reaches out? "I know you don't want to do this but..." I know you don't want to work things out, but don't you think you should try? I know you probably can't forgive her for what she did, but at least pray about it."

That's pessimism, and it doesn't facilitate peacemaking.

But this does. Listen to Paul the optimist in verse 21, "Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask."

Was Paul being presumptuous? I don't think so, but he was being optimistic. Successful peacemakers are that way. They know they serve a great God. Indeed they're convinced of two things.

A. God is great enough to reconcile the most hardened sinners to Himself.

That's what He did with us! We were hell-bound sinners who had no place in our hearts for God, but He came after us, and reconciled us to Himself.

We know that. And this...

B. The same God can also reconcile alienated Christians to one another.

That's why Paul let his expectation be known. He knew the Lord could reconcile these two brothers, had already enabled Onesimus to humble himself and seek forgiveness, and could enable Philemon to grant forgiveness.

And so he says, "I know you will do even more than I ask."

Next week I want to preach a thanksgiving message, so we'll finish Philemon in two weeks, the Lord willing. But before we leave this letter today, let's take inventory.

Take Inventory: Jesus calls all of us to be peacemakers.

And what will it take? Paul shows us. It takes a willingness to get involved, personal risk, personal respect, proper motivation, and optimism.

Being a peacemaker boils down to this, two ambitions.

1. *We are to help people get right with God.*

There's lots of talk about peace today, and the need for it. And why is there a need for it? Ultimately because of a problem that entered the world in Genesis 3, when, because of Adam's sin, enmity came into existence, enmity with God and with each other.

But this is why God sent the second Adam into the world, Jesus the Christ. At the cross, Jesus died to reconcile sinners to God, and then to each other, to make *peace*.

We know that. We've experienced that. So our aim is to help others experience that. We are to help people get right with God. That's what a peacemaker does.

Do you want to get right with God this morning? We'd love to help you.

2. *We are to help people get right with one another.*

2 Corinthians 5:18 says, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

This is our ministry, to help people get right with God and each other. So think about the opportunities the Lord has placed before you.

--Is there a marriage you know of that's struggling? Could it be that the Lord wants to use you to minister healing to them?

--Is there a teen who is out of sorts with his or her parents? Would the Lord be wanting you to get involved in a ministry of reconciliation?

--Do you know of two Christian brothers who aren't on speaking terms? Might you be the one the Lord would use to restore peace between them?

If you're thinking, "I'd like to help, but I don't think I can." Then just tell the Lord, and watch what He does. Say, "Lord, I'm seeing something that I know isn't pleasing You, and I'd like to help. Please show me what to do."

Maybe it's to let the people know you care for them. For sure it's to pray for them. Perhaps it's to facilitate getting others involved who are gifted at peacemaking. We're not all gifted the same way, but we are all called to be peacemakers.