

Our Place at His Place

Peace Makers

July 12, 2020

Welcome to a place where *peace-keepers* and *peace-hopers* are learning to be *peace-makers!*

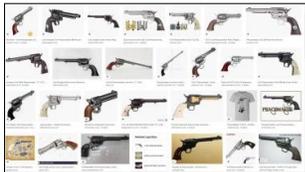


We've been tackling the topic of judging. Last Sunday we saw that **right judging requires radical self-examination**. But, what are we on the lookout for? Well, we're diagnosing ourselves in order to see if we are peacemakers or troublemakers. So: **Do you put more effort into peacemaking or troublemaking?**



In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said:

Blessed are the peace-makers, [not the peace-wishers; but those willing and able to take courageous action to make peace happen] for they will be called sons of God. – Matthew 5:9 NIV



[Because] The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God [a.k.a. the peacemakers] to be revealed. – Romans 8:19 NIV



[So] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [i.e. Christ-like love (Col 3:14)] – Ephesians 4:3 NIV



When I typed the word “peacemaker” into Google Images, this is the first screen that came up: *pistols!* Those look more like *troublemakers* to me. But then, so do a lot of us so-called “peacemakers”.



But I must say how I've been so blessed by so many who've come to me after a service (back in the old days when we used to meet in a *building*) to say how **warm** and **authentic** and **happy** this church is. That's *huge!* And that's *you*. So keep it *up* and keep it *going!* You *get* it. At His Place, **perfect people will be prosecuted!** Because, that's a mask that **hides** us, **divides** us, **isolates** us, and prevents *peacemaking* from taking place. **Only a warm body can coax people out of a cold world.**

Two are better than one, because they have a *good return* for their work: [What work? **Unity!**] If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But *pity* the man who falls and has *no one* to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can *one* keep warm *alone*? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of *three* strands is not quickly broken. – Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NIV

So, what are the “*three strands*” these *two* friends have?

Support when we fall. **Warmth** when we're cold. And, **strength** when we're overwhelmed. We need to invest in dear friends like *that*.



The Apostle John's very short third letter in the NT is written because of a church leader, who's a real troublemaker; and written to a "dear friend" who's definitely a peacemaker, *and* a real *pistol!*



The location of this writing is unknown, but tradition places it in Ephesus. And that's a great excuse to show you something really cool! This was the main road in Ephesus in John's day. That's the public bath. It's next to a Greco Roman temple. And across the street is where the rich folks lived. It was illegal to build a church before Rome officially recognized Christianity. So, believers met in the largest houses of their most wealthy. Six houses being excavated were standing in John's day. They had forced air heat, and hot and cold running water. And if any of these owners were Christian, one of the early churches would've likely met here. And John would send teachers and messengers to these churches. But, **a church leader named Diotrephes sees these ambassadors of Christ as an insult and a threat to his own limited authority.**



[John writes] Diotrephes, *who loves to be first*, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. – 3 John 9-10 NIV

Diotrephes' doctrine isn't the problem ... it's his ego! But, John's dear friend refuses to be bullied. He steps out, and stands up, and takes them in, and takes the heat. So, John writes:

Dear friend ... It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your *faithfulness* to the *truth* and how you *continue to walk* in the *truth*. – 3 John 2-3 NIV

Don't confuse meekness for weakness. Peacemakers confront and resist troublemakers. There is a price to be paid to "make every effort" to make peace happen. But I have a question: **Was Jesus a peacemaker or a troublemaker?** Before you answer, better remember that He said:

Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did *not* come to bring peace, but a *sword*. – Matthew 10:34 CSB



The ol' double-edged Sword of God's Word that comes out of His mouth. (Rev 1:16) **The Prince of Peace came to shake things up.** Because, although *troublemakers* will *never* be peacemakers, **peacemakers must sometimes be troublemakers ... to the troublemakers.** So how can you tell the difference between the two? Pretty simple, actually. Just **look at what they're aiming at.** If peace is your aim, you're a genuine peacemaker (even if you're a bad shot). But, if you're aimin' for trouble, you're a full-fledged troublemaker.



Jesus didn't come to bring peace, or to keep the peace; He went out – in a blaze of glory – to make peace, and leave peace.

Peace I *leave* with you; My peace I *give* you. I do *not* give to you as the world gives. [So]
Do *not* let your hearts be *troubled* and do *not* be *afraid*. – John 14:27 NIV

[You see] In *Me* you *may* have *peace*. In *this world* you *will* have *trouble*. But take heart!
I have overcome the [troubling of this] world. – John 16:33 NIV

[Therefore] The *work* of righteousness *will* be peace, – Isaiah 32:17 NKJ

For He himself *is* our peace, – Ephesians 2:14 NIV

That was written to the house-church in Ephesus. You see our “faithfulness to the truth,” and to “continue to walk in the truth” means that **we must stand up to non-truth when God gives us the opportunity, the timing, and the means to do so in love, in His name, as His ambassadors.**

Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. – 3 John 5-6 NIV

Talk about poetic justice. John’s dear friend is forever known for his selfless love. But, *because* Diotrephes indulges his self-love of being number *one*, his troublemaking pride immortalizes *him* as a moronic, malicious house-church leader; and a total number *two*! Sadly, **he loved recognition more than righteousness**. So, **he builds himself up by tearing others down**. Hey, I think I’ve *met* Diotrephes ... uh-oh, I think I’ve *been* Diotrephes! The good news, Diotrephes: you’re in the *Bible*! The bad news: it’s *accurate*. Diotrephes demonstrates the downward spiral that every believer has fallen for at one time or another.

It begins with “gossiping maliciously”. When our ego is bruised, for whatever reason, real or imagined, it’s *so* tempting to slander and smear those who I *think* are the cause; because, **it’s such a reliably and immediately quenching, satisfying, and pleasing ... poison!**



And so: **we speak against them**. We shoot off our mouth and slam ‘em, slander ‘em, and serve ‘em up cold. And thus, we tip Diotrephes’ first cursed domino. Thing is, the Lord takes gossip a bit more seriously than we do. He catalogs it alongside the *vilest* of sins.



They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters ... – Romans 1:29-30 NIV

Not to get too personal, **but how often do you entice people to hate God?**

Wait! Why are gossips and slanderers lumped in with God-haters? Well, just watch the dominos fall: “Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers”. *Speaking* against them, instead of “making every effort” to make peace,” won’t solve the problem, scratch the itch, or sooth our pain.

So ... **we act against them**. Our self-love loves to take revenge. Nothing serious mind you (we’re *Christians* after all), just something hurtful to satisfy my self-centered desire to let ‘em know **there’s a price to pay for crossing the likes of me**. Granted, I’m clearly communicating to our Father that I don’t trust *Him* to take care of things the way they need taking care of. But if he didn’t want us doing it, He would’ve made it more clear.

“Oh. Hmm. Well, I’m not *exactly* sure what that means in the *original* language. I’ll have to do a word study!” But, with Diotrephes’s *third* domino, it becomes clearer why slanderous gossip is lumped with hating the Lord. “He also stops those who want to [welcome the brothers]”. **We’ve quickly descended to recruiting – if not forcing – others to join in our sinful rebellion against Jesus.**

And, not only do **we incite others against them**, but we reward them with acceptance and approval for speaking and acting against *those* we *chose* to prolong a personal problem with.



Facebook has made this sin impressively efficient! I can just un-friend ‘em. And I might just un-friend any other friend who won’t un-friend my former friend. It’s amazing (in the bad sense) what people will publically post and immortalize online (again, in the *bad* sense). So **consider your aim before you give ‘em that “Unfriend finger”.**

When we share poisonous slander with another believer, **we arrogantly, ignorantly force them to make a grotesque choice: grieve God or grieve me.** “Remember, *God* won’t un-friend you; but *I* will. So you better stop following *Him* for a moment, and follow *me* into my *sin* ... or you’ll feel *my* wrath”. “And [Diotrephes] puts [those who won’t go along with him] out of [his house]”. And likewise, **we punish those who won’t follow in our footsteps.**

When that final domino drops, we’ve declared our distaste for God’s mercy and grace, as well as our lack of trust and faith; we’ve dethroned Him, taken His place, and forced *His* followers to follow *us!* And *that’s* why it’s lumped with God-hating! **We’d never consider coaxing someone to murder or malice, so why do we give so little consideration to coaxing them into God-hating gossip?**

The NLT translates Jesus’ beatitude as: **“God blesses those who work for peace.”** So, what’s it gonna be? Because, **God won’t let us work both sides.** Here’s our job description:

Live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic ... be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to *this* you were called so that *you* may inherit a *blessing* ... seek peace and *pursue* it ... But even if you should *suffer* for what is *right*, you are blessed. Do not fear what *they* fear ... in *your* hearts set apart Christ as *Lord*. – 1 Peter 3:8-15 NIV

It’s so much easier to entertain malicious gossip and scandalous scuttlebutt, than to actually take action and work to bring healing and harmony. But that’s our job! So let’s examine ourselves now with a few obvious differences between peacemakers and troublemakers.

Peacemakers overlook minor disagreements (the “disputable matters” we talked about last week). Whereas, **troublemakers focus on the frivolous** as though it’s a major.

Peacemakers have reasonable expectations of others. Whereas, **troublemakers expect everyone to be like Jesus** ... everyone *else*. We’d all like to find a perfect church; but if we did they wouldn’t let us join! And if they did, it would cease to be perfect!

Peacemakers contribute rather than complain. Whereas, **troublemakers stand back and pick apart.** Now, it's the devil's "job" to blame and tear down Jesus' flock. When we do it, we basically tell him kick back and relax, and we more-or-less say, "Don't worry, pal. I got this!"

Peacemakers refuse to entertain or enable slander. Whereas, **troublemakers treasure careless condemnation.** We need the conviction and courage to say, "I know you're upset, but you're telling the wrong person. You need to let *them* know how you feel. Can I help with that?"

[God] reconciled us to himself *through Christ* and gave us the *ministry* of reconciliation
... [And] committed to us the *message* of reconciliation. – 1 Corinthians 5:16-20 NIV

And John wraps up with some words of wisdom, profound in their simplicity.

Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. – 3 John 11 NIV

Not to get too personal, *but* **How often do you imitate what is evil?** Ever notice how we speak more negatively around negative friends, and positively around positive friends? We "imitate" by nature. It's what we do. It's kind of impossible *not* to. So, use God's wisdom in selecting who you admire, desire, and surround yourself with. After all, as Proverbs says:

Troublemakers listen to troublemakers, – Proverbs 17:4 CEV

It's not rocket science. Hang with the peacemakers (who love righteousness more than recognition) and you'll grow in *that*. Hang with the troublemakers (who don't mind dethroning God now and then) and you'll *hang* yourself. So, tell yourself the truth, **do you put more energy into peacemaking or troublemaking?** Because, we all slide to one side of that scale!

If a "10" is a *peacemaker* (who overlooks minor disagreements, has reasonable expectations of others, contributes rather than complain, and refuses to engage in gossip), and a "1" is a *troublemaker* who argues trivial matters, has unreasonable expectations, picks things apart, and carelessly condemns others: **Where are you at on the peacemaker-troublemaker scale?** And more importantly, do you think, with time, we could get that up to a two?

John closes his letter with three words of promise to all of God's dear friends.

Peace to *you*. – 3 John 14 NIV

If *that's* your aim.