

Philippians 4:2-9
(Isaiah 26:3,4&12; Matthew 5:9)
“Making Peace”

Introduction

The verses of our text are usually seen as a loosely connected series of final exhortations as Paul nears the end of the letter. I disagree, and think that they are all linked by Paul’s concern that these people, whom he so clearly loves and appreciates, join together in healing the divisions that have occurred within their community. It is, in essence, a call to make peace.

As long as we live this side of eternity, we will know conflict, and it is naïve to think that we can spend our lives avoiding it. Our nation is presently embroiled in a war on two fronts. Some of you are going through family conflicts or troubles in the workplace or community. What we must hear this morning is that the Lord Jesus who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,” is calling us this morning through his apostle Paul to give ourselves afresh to the task of making peace wherever possible, not only with those from whom we ourselves are alienated, but wherever people are at war with one another and we have an opportunity to be Christ’s ambassadors of reconciliation.

Note with me this morning five ways that Paul shows us the importance and centrality of the task of making peace.

Body

1. Making peace is a matter of *urgency* (v.2).

Paul *entreats* Euodia and Syntyche to make peace with one another. The key statement is that they “agree in the Lord.” The sense of urgency, then, is because peacemaking concerns the very nature of our salvation, and for the individual believer, peacemaking may be a matter of spiritual life and death. What do I mean?

Making peace is urgent because of the nature of the gospel. Christ came in order to reconcile us to God and to each other. He came, not only to offer us forgiveness, but to enable us to begin to keep the law of God, which is just this: love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Christ came to break down the walls of enmity between us, and to be our peace. Refusing to make peace is a rejection of the gospel.

Making peace is urgent because it is a matter of life and death. Jesus made it very clear in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18) that we

cannot know God's forgiveness if we are unwilling to forgive and be reconciled to one another.

However, there are times when our best efforts at making peace simply fail. We reach across the divide, but no one from the other side will take our hand. What then are we to do?

2. Making peace is a matter of *community* (v.3).

At such times, making peace becomes the concern of the entire community, and we must do what we can to begin bringing together those who have been alienated from each other.

Making peace is at the heart of what it means to be a community. The identity of the "true companion" or "yokefellow" is not important. The point is this: Paul is calling the community to help reconcile these two women. Jesus prayed the night before his death that the church might be so unified that the world would see it as an entirely different sort of community, one that does not manifest the usual divisions, tensions and animosities that we see in all other human groups and organizations. Paul's description of the church as the body of Christ makes the point in a different way: A body must be united, all parts working together in harmony for health.

Making peace is also a matter of life and death for a community. Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, a community torn by division, warns them that they are to be God's alternative to the culture around them. If their divisions destroy the testimony of the church, Paul warns that God will destroy them. He will not let them go on misrepresenting his name.

The sad fact is that, when there are divisions, most folk take sides, there are winners and losers, and the losers leave or remain unreconciled and broken. The community festers in an unhealthy state, until intentional steps are taken to bring peace. Why does this happen? Why do few of us feel the need to get involved in the work of peacemaking, a work that Jesus claimed brings great blessing to those so employed.

3. Making peace is a matter of *the heart* (vv.4-7).

We will only have God's own heart on this when our hearts have begun to be made like his. Our affections are the result of several things, among them the conscious, intentional choice to hear and heed the voice of God's Spirit within us calling us to rejoice instead of complaining, to trust and rest instead of fretting. Through such choices we begin to experience "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding." We must live as those who realize that "the Lord is at hand." What choices would we make if the Lord were visibly

standing before us? Do we believe, as we claim to believe, that he is always near?

4. Making peace is a matter of *the mind* (v.8).

What we choose to think about shapes what we become. What we set our minds on shapes our character and our behavior. If we are immersed in the sleazy world of soaps and sitcoms, we are more likely to see those behaviors as normative and fall into them. If we are immersed in the filthy language of our culture and entertainments, our own language will become filthy. Paul was observing a simple psychological reality: if you want to be honorable, you must think of things that are honorable, if you would be honest, just and righteous, you must meditate on what is true and just and right.

Sadly, most of us spend far more time immersed in our entertainments than in the intentional pursuit of God and the doing of his will, of loving him, loving each other and serving the world. Our culture is well down a road that Neil Postman described decades ago as “amusing ourselves to death.” What are you permitting to shape the life of your mind?

5. Making peace is a matter of *the will* (v.9).

The aim is not merely changed thoughts, but a completely changed life. If we are to be peacemakers, those who are God’s instruments in keeping his people together, then we must live differently than others live. Paul calls us to “practice these things,” that he has been describing. The Christian faith is not a private, inward matter, but a public testimony of a community of changed lives.

If we are the body of Christ, then we should look increasingly like Jesus in the way we live and relate to one another and the world around us. *We* should be the single greatest argument that the gospel is true.

Conclusion

Finally, we are given the powerful reminder that the source of our peace is “the God of peace,” who has promised to be with us as we seek faithfully to reflect his character to a world torn apart by people who too often choose to hate, but who long for love and desperately need the reconciling love of Christ, who alone brings lasting peace.