

## ***BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS***

**Matthew 5:9**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. Dennis Prager of PragerU.com argues that happiness is a moral obligation. First, he says that you are responsible to God to be happy. “The most effective argument for atheism is an unhappy religious person.” As a Christian, you are a walking advertisement for Jesus Christ and Christianity. When you are unhappy, you are a bad advertisement. Why would anyone want to be a Christian if it just leads to unhappiness? Second, he says that you are responsible to others to be happy. It’s no fun being married to an unhappy person, or being raised by unhappy children, or working with someone who is unhappy. Prager said, “Our happiness affects others -- profoundly. That’s why happiness is a moral obligation. We are morally obligated to at least act as happy as possible - - even if we don’t feel happy.” Unhappiness can be compared to bad breath. We not only brush our every day to prevent cavities, but because we don’t want to inflict bad breath on those around us. In the same way, we must choose to be happy, or at least act happy, so that we don’t inflict a bad mood on the people around us.
2. I totally agree with Dennis Prager about happiness being a moral obligation. This is why Christians are often commanded in Scripture to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil 4:4). How can you rejoice in the Lord always? No matter what you are going through three things are true about you:
  - i. It could be worse.
  - ii. You have it much better than you deserve.
  - iii. You have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3).
3. But the question we’re wrestling with in this series is how to find happiness. If you are unhappy, how can you be happy? Well, you can act happy even if you don’t feel like it, and you should for the sake of the people around you. But how can you find true happiness?

4. Jesus taught about happiness in a section of scripture called the beatitudes (Mt 5:3-10). In the beatitudes Jesus taught that happiness is not found in the things of this world, but in a right relationship with God and others. Then He proceeds to describe the qualities of a person who has a right relationship with God and others. Jesus said if you cultivate these qualities, then you don't need to look for happiness, happiness will find you.
5. But we're not finished. There are still two important beatitudes to study. Today we are studying the seventh beatitude.
6. **Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
7. If you want to be happy, then you need to become a peacemaker.

## II. **WHAT IS A PEACEMAKER?**

1. To be a peacemaker is to avoid strife and conflict between yourself and others.
2. This is commanded multiple times in the Bible.
3. **Romans 12:18** If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
4. **Hebrews 12:14** Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness—without it no one will see the Lord.
5. What do you need to do to be a peacemaker? You actually know a lot about peacemaking – more than you may realize. If you are married then you know a lot about peacemaking in your marriage. If you have parents or children, then you know a lot about peacemaking at home. If you have siblings, then you know a lot about peacemaking. I have six kids, all close in age. The two boys share a room, and the four girls shared a room. Do you think they know a little about peacemaking? If they didn't they would have murdered each other by now. If you have a job, then you know a lot about peacemaking at work. If you have ever been on a team, then had to learn a lot about peacemaking. So, we could go in any number of directions with this subject. But since we are at church, and since we are in church, this morning I want to talk to you about pursuing peace at church.
6. The Bible commands Christians to pursue peace not just at home, not just with your neighbors, not just at work, but at church.

7. **Romans 14:19** So then, let us pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.
8. **1 Thessalonians 5:13** Be at peace among yourselves.
9. To learn how to pursue peace in the church, we have to talk about unity, because they go hand in hand. As a pastor for over twenty years, I have learned a lot about unity.

### III. **SIX LESSONS ABOUT UNITY**

#### **1. Unity is commanded.**

- i. **Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- ii. It's a sin to cause strife and conflict and division in the church. God takes the unity of His church very seriously, and you should too.

#### **2. Unity is important.**

- i. **Acts 9:31** So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was strengthened. Living in the fear of the Lord and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers.
- ii. This passage is talking about the early church. It says it had peace – no strife and conflict. As a result it grew in health and in number. Unity is essential to the health and growth of the church. If the church can't get along, then it can't get things done. When strife and conflict arise, the ministry comes to a halt.
- iii. Think of several people in a raft together. To steer the raft they have to get along. But if they start fighting with each other, their focus will shift, and the raft will drift. If the church is divided, it will lose focus and drift from its mission.

#### **3. Unity is fragile.**

- i. It's easy to disrupt the unity of the church. Why? Do you remember my talk on the third beatitude – gentleness? Do you remember what I said about people? People are very fragile. They are easily upset, offended, hurt, and frustrated. Along with that is the truth that people are sinful – even mature Christians. We often do and say things that are inconsiderate, and selfish, and hurtful, and offensive. When you put those two realities together – the fragility and sinfulness of people – unity becomes very

difficult to maintain. It doesn't take much to cause conflict and strife.

**4. Unity doesn't happen automatically.**

- i. When I first started the church, I assumed that if I could just lead people to fall in love with Jesus and God's word, then unity would follow. We would all naturally get along without any conflict and strife. Boy was I wrong! Unity requires intentionality, strategy, and planning.

**5. Unity must be taught.**

- i. One way to be intentional about unity is to teach it. People have to be taught that unity is a command, that it is a sin to disrupt the unity of the church. People have to be taught unity is dear to God's heart – that Christ prayed for it in John 17. People need to be taught that unity requires effort and sacrifice. And they need to be taught how to protect the unity of the church.

**6. Unity requires peace.**

- i. Unity and peace are not the same thing. Unity is agreeing on a goal and working together. Peace is the absence of strife and conflict. Unity is not the same as peace, but it requires peace. You work together if you aren't at peace with each other. When there is strife and conflict, everything comes to a halt until the conflict is resolved. That's why peace is so important.
- ii. **Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- iii. Notice that the key to unity is peace. In fact, it says that peace is a bond. A bond is something that joins things together. Think of glue, or rope, or tape. Peace is the bond that keeps the church unified. It is the bond that keeps the church from dividing. It is the bond that prevents the church from drifting from its mission and coming to a halt.
- iv. So, how do you pursue peace? How can you be a peacemaker at church? If being a peacemaker means avoiding strife and conflict between yourself and others, then we need to identify the types of behaviors that cause strife and conflict; the kinds of behaviors that disturb the peace in the church. There are six big ones.

#### IV. SIX PEACE-DISTURBERS

##### 1. Throwing a fit when you don't get your way.

- i. This happens when a person asks leadership if they can do something at church, or they ask a fellow church member for something, or they present an idea at a meeting, and when they are denied, they throw a fit.
- ii. Let's say you are on the greeting team and you have an idea. You go to the greeting team leader and you say, "I think all the greeters should wear neon green hats that say, 'welcome.' What do you think?" And the team leader says, "No, I don't think we're going to do that." So you throw a fit.
- iii. Or let's say that you want to be in the worship band, so you approach the worship leader. "Hey, can I be in the worship band?" The worship leader asks, "Do you sing or play an instrument?" You reply, "Yes! I used to play the rubboard in a zydeco band." The worship leader says, "That's really cool, but we don't have place for a rubboard on our worship team right now." So you throw a fit.
- iv. This also happens when you are in a team at church and people reject your idea. Imagine that you approach the leader of the food team and say, "I've a great idea for the upcoming potluck. Let's do Chinese food." But the food team leader says, "No, I think we're going to do some traditional Cajun dishes." So you throw a fit.
- v. Or imagine that you ask someone in the church to join your ministry, or your small group, or go to your child's birthday party, and they say no. So you throw a fit.
- vi. Now, you're not mad because someone in the church has done something sinful, or immoral, or unbiblical; you are mad because you didn't get your way. You are mad because they told you no. (Parents, this is why it's important to tell your kids no from time to time. That way they don't become the kind of adult who is shocked and hurt any time someone tells them no.)
- vii. This anger often leads to accusations – this leader is too controlling; the ministry leader is mean; the fellow church

member is selfish. But again, they haven't done anything unbiblical or immoral; they just said, "No."

- viii. What does the Bible say about demanding your own way?
- ix. **1 Corinthians 13:4-5** Love... is not self-seeking. The NLT says, "Love... does not demand its own way."
- x. Demanding your own way is selfish, and it is divisive. To be a peacemaker don't throw a fit when you don't get your way.
- xi. The next time you get upset with someone for telling you no ask yourself, "Did they do something unbiblical or immoral, or did they just tell you no?" If they didn't do something unbiblical or immoral, then you need to calm down.

## 2. Behaving in a hurtful way.

- i. There are some behaviors that shouldn't be hurtful. Some people are hyper-sensitive. There are some behaviors that are hurtful but necessary, such as confronting someone in their sin, or giving someone constructive criticism, or telling someone that they aren't qualified for a certain ministry position. And then there are some behaviors that are hurtful that should be avoided. These are the kind of hurtful behaviors that I want to talk about. Let me give you five examples.
  - 1. Cutting remarks. Saying something mean, or rude, or offensive, or demeaning to someone. Sometimes you might do this without trying to be hurtful; perhaps you were just joking. But what's important is not merely what you intended, but how your words made them feel.
    - a. **Ephesians 4:29** No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.
  - 2. Lying. One of the most painful experiences is finding out that someone has deliberately lied to you.
    - a. **Ephesians 4:25** Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.

3. Unfaithfulness. Unfaithfulness is when you break your word. It's when you tell someone that you will do something, but you don't follow through. You said that you were going to show up, you were going to help out, you were going to pick them up, but then you didn't do it. That hurts.
  - a. **Matthew 5:27** But let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no.'
4. Talking bad about someone. It's wrong to talk bad about someone behind their back, even if you are telling the truth. That's very hurtful. The Bible tells us what to do when someone hurts you.
  - a. **Matthew 18:15** If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault, between you and him alone.
5. Unjust criticism. Unjust criticism is when you criticize someone for doing something that they have the right to do. For example, the Bible doesn't say that it is a sin to drink alcohol, or that it is a sin to dance, so it would be unjust to criticize someone for those things. There are all kinds of choices that the Bible doesn't speak directly to, and that means people are free to do what they think is best.
  - a. **James 4:11** Don't criticize one another, brothers and sisters.
  - ii. All of these behaviors are hurtful, and they will create conflict and strife.

### **3. Refusing to forgive those who hurt you.**

- i. Rub shoulders with someone long enough, and eventually you will hurt each other. You will offend each other, let each other down, and disappoint each other. The same goes with church. If you stay at any church for a long period of time, eventually someone is going to offend you, hurt your feelings, let you down, sin against you.
- ii. That's why you shouldn't just leave the church every time you get hurt. If you do, you'll leave every church that you join. If you are unwilling to give grace, exercise patience, and forgive, then you

will not be able to stay in any church for an extended period of time.

- iii. **Colossians 3:13 (NIV)** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
- iv. There are two principles that motivate me to forgive people who hurt me:
  - 1. Nobody will ever sin against me as much as I have sinned against God. Therefore how can I expect God to forgive me if I won't forgive others?
  - 2. Unforgiveness damages my relationship with God.
    - a. **Matthew 6:14-15** 14 "For if you forgive others their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. 15 But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive your offenses."
- v. Do you remember what forgiveness is? It is the decision to do good to your enemy and the willingness to be reconciled. Repentance is not necessary for forgiveness, but it is necessary for reconciliation. And if they are willing to repent, then you must be willing reconcile.

#### **4. Treating every doctrine as equally important.**

- i. Doctrines should be categorized by their importance.
  - 1. A first-order doctrine must be affirmed to be a Christian (e.g., the Apostles' Creed).
  - 2. A second-order doctrine must be affirmed to be a member of a church. These are identified in a church's doctrinal statement. For example, at our church we believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. You don't have to believe that to be saved, but you must believe it to be a member, or leader, or teacher at our church.
  - 3. A third-order doctrine is something that is not in the church's doctrinal statement. For example, our church doesn't take a stand on Arminianism vs. Calvinism, or on the millennium (Amil, postmil, or premil).

- ii. As a general principle, if a doctrine is not clearly laid out in the church's doctrinal statement, then it is fair game. People in the church are free to hold different opinions.
- iii. A peace-disturber is someone who treats every one of their theological beliefs as a first-order doctrine. If you don't agree with them on every point of doctrine, then you are not a good Christian. For example, they condemn or demean someone for drinking alcohol, or for dancing, or for being an Arminian or a Calvinist.
- iv. It's okay to have strong convictions on third-order doctrines. I do. I'm a passionate Arminian and Amillennialist. But do not condemn or demean people who disagree with you.
- v. **Romans 15:7 (NIV)** Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.
- vi. When it says to accept another, it means agree to disagree on third-order doctrines and issues. At church we don't have to agree on everything. We're not all going to vote for the same person, or agree on everything politically. We're not all going to agree on whether it's okay to decorate for Halloween and take your kids trick-or-treating. We're not all going to agree on whether or not Christians should go to Mardi Gras parades. We're not all going to agree on the issue of alcohol. We're not all going to agree on every political issue or vote for the same person. And that's okay, as long as we agree on first and second-order doctrines, that's what matters for unity.
- vii. If you are looking for a church where everybody agrees on every single issue, you're not going to find it. You're going to bounce from church to church until you drop out and tell everybody that "we do church at home."

##### **5. Teaching false doctrine.**

- i. Every church has a doctrinal statement that you must affirm to be a member, or teacher, or leader. You don't have to agree with everything in the doctrinal statement to be saved, to be a Christian. For example, Methodists and Lutherans and Anglicans and Episcopalians and Pentecostals and Presbyterians are true

Christians, but they wouldn't agree with everything in our church's doctrinal statement. That's fine. But if you want to be a member of our church, or of any church, you have to affirm the church's doctrinal statement.

- ii. Sometimes in a church an influential leader or teacher will start teaching things that contradict the church's doctrinal statement. Eventually they gather a following, and then this turns into a major church split. We don't want that to happen.
- iii. There's a simple way to prevent that from happening. Make sure you carefully read the church's doctrinal statement; you can find it on the church's website. If you don't agree with it, then this is not the church for you. No hard feelings. Nothing personal. It doesn't mean you are not a Christian. It doesn't mean you don't love Jesus. It doesn't mean that you're not good person. It just means that this is not the church for you. Maybe you'll fit in better at a Methodist or a Presbyterian church.

#### **6. Resisting change.**

- i. I know, the only people who like change are babies with dirty diapers. But some people forget that the church is driven by mission, not tradition or denomination or even personal preference. In other words, the church determines what it does and doesn't do by what best serves the mission of the church.
- ii. What is the mission of the church? To help people far from God become fully-devoted followers of Jesus Christ.
- iii. For the church to be effective, it must be willing to stop doing things that are ineffective and to try new ideas -- even things that no other church is doing. This is the way every effective organization operates -- businesses, teams, charities. If they are doing something that isn't working, they stop, or they tweak it. And if they come across an idea that might increase their effectiveness, they try it out.
- iv. The behavior that disturbs the peace is when you resist change. It's when you fight to hold on to tradition, to the way we've always done things. It's when you throw a fit because the church makes a program change, or a scheduling change.

- v. Now obviously change is hard, especially when the church makes a change that you don't like. So how can you avoid disturbing the peace when that happens?
- vi. You have to distinguish between mission and method. The mission of the church is to help people far from God become fully-devoted followers of Jesus. It is to make disciples; to reach the lost and teach believers. The mission is a biblical mandate. It's not optional. We can't change the mission. It was given to us by Jesus Himself (see Mt 28:18-20). The method is how you accomplish the mission; it's your strategy; your approach. And the Bible says very little about methodology. In other words, the Bible doesn't say what kind of music you should have in church – traditional or contemporary. The Bible doesn't say what kind of pulpit the pastor should use – a big wooden pulpit, or no pulpit at all. The Bible doesn't say what time the church should meet. It doesn't say how long the service should last. It doesn't say if the church should have small groups during the week or Sunday school. It doesn't say what the building should look like, or what color to paint the walls. It doesn't say if you should have a youth group or be family integrated. Those are all methodology issues.
- vii. To protect the peace and unity of the church don't confuse mission with method. When it comes to method, for the church to be healthy it must continue to try new things to better accomplish the mission, and it must change or discontinue things that are no longer effective.
- viii. When the church makes a change that you don't like you, ask yourself, "Is this a mission issue or a method issue?" If the church changes its mission, then that's a problem. But if the church changes its method for the sake of more effectively fulfilling the mission, then that's a good thing, as uncomfortable as it may seem.
- ix. Let me put it this way. While it's not fun going through change, what's worse is being a part of a church that refuses to change. That's how churches die. They sacrifice mission for tradition and they stop reaching people. They care more about their

preferences than reaching people for Christ. That's the kind of church you don't want to be a part of.

- x. Over the past several decades many churches have transitioned from traditional music to contemporary music. And I've seen two different responses to the change. Some people refuse to change, and so they leave the church and find a church that plays their kind of music. But other people have said, "Well, it's not my kind of music; it's too loud; I prefer the old hymns. But if the young people like this music, and if this will help church to grow then I'm all for it." The first attitude is someone who has confused mission with method. The second attitude is someone who is holding tightly to missing, but is flexible with method.

## V. PEACEMAKING & HAPPINESS

1. What is the connection between peacemaking and happiness?
2. **Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
3. In Hebrew, instead of using an adjective to describe someone, they would often say someone is a "son of" something. For example, instead of calling someone a peaceful man, they would say he is a son of peace. Instead of saying a person is kind, they would say he is a son of kindness. So in this beatitude when Jesus says that a peacemaker will be called a son of God, it means that he is acting like God.
4. Peace is an important part of God's character. Often in the Bible God is called the God of peace (2 Cor 13:11). The reason that God sent Jesus to earth was to make peace with men. Before Christ, we are God's enemies; but God sent Christ to reconcile us and bring us back to God (2 Cor 5:19). So when you are a peacemaker, you are happy because you have the satisfaction of knowing that you are acting like your heavenly Father, and He is pleased with you.
5. But peacemaking also leads to happiness because it leads to better relationships, and happiness is all about right relationships with God and people.
6. Finally, peacemaking leads to happiness because it will make your church healthier and more effective, and it's fun being a part of a healthy church.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

1. Let me close with a challenge this morning. The Bible has some very challenging words about peacemaking. First, it says that if someone in the church has sinned against you, then you need to go to them for reconciliation; don't just leave the church, and don't wait for them to come to you (Mt 18:15). Second, it says that if you know that someone in the church is upset with you, you are to go to them; don't wait for them to come to you (Mt 5:23-23-24). Third, it says that if someone in the church hurts you, you need to forgive them (Col 3:13).
2. Here's my challenge:
  - i. Is there someone in the church who has hurt you that you need to confront?
  - ii. Is there someone in the church who is upset with you that you need to initiate a conversation?
  - iii. Is there someone in the church who you need to forgive?