

The Theology of Forgiveness

One of the things that endears us to God is the fact that an infinitely holy God has forgiven us of our infinite sin. Forgiveness indeed, is a very precious truth and reality of our faith. Every week in the counseling zone/room, this one issue always rises to the surface. The reality of living in a sin-filled world with other sinners is that we all need forgiveness and, because we are sinful, we inevitably need to extend forgiveness. Because of this reality, we want to continue to give full attention to the issue of forgiveness. Sinners sin. We sin against one another. When we sin against others, there is usually a conflict that follows. When there is conflict, restoration needs to happen. Restoration will always require the seeking of and granting of forgiveness. Let me ask you, my friend, "What is your theology of forgiveness?" You do have a theology of forgiveness. Perhaps it isn't fully developed in your mind, nor could you give a clear explanation of such, but you already have a theology of forgiveness. You must give some thought to this issue. As I said in the last edition of the COG, if you don't, you won't be able to help others be reconciled. In fact, if you don't have a clearly thought-out theology of forgiveness, you'll most likely find yourself in the pit of bitterness, struggling to figure out how to get along with and reconciled to others. You'll find yourself stumped, wondering what to do when you seek forgiveness but forgiveness isn't granted. Your theology of forgiveness must start with your view of God and His character. Once you lock in a clear theology of God and an understanding of His holiness and the wonderful attributes of mercy, grace, and love, you begin to get a sense of what is involved in forgiveness and why you truly must and can forgive.

Welcome back to the counseling room. This is our third session observing a counseling situation. If you recall from our last couple of editions of the COG newsletter, we are sitting in the "Chair of Observation" watching a counselor work with a couple of men who have had a conflict. It wasn't your ordinary conflict. The conflict involved two men, Shaun and Cal, both of whom were, at the time, involved in their local church but who also worked together for the same company. Cal was the supervisor and Shaun worked in a crew under Cal's directives. If you recall, Shaun and Cal had a massive conflict at work which ended in Shaun exploding in anger and walking out the door of his workplace. Persuaded by their wives, Cal and Shaun arranged to meet with the counselor to try to work through their conflict. In the first session, Cal was told of his transgressions and he humbled himself and sought forgiveness from Shaun. Shaun didn't grant forgiveness, nor did he ask Cal for forgiveness for his wrongdoing in the situation. Shaun's response was saddening to both Cal and the counselor. In a meeting three days later the counselor confronted Shaun, seeking to compel him to forgive Cal and Shaun had responded to the counselor, "Why should I forgive him? I don't trust Cal. I'm not sure I believe he is truly sorrowful, so why should I forgive him?"

To Forgive or Not to Forgive...

Now Shaun and the counselor are meeting to answer the question, "Why should I forgive him?" We saw that the first reason why Shaun ought to forgive Cal is because forgiveness is the most Christ-like act a person can do. The counselor has explained to Shaun that we are never more like Christ than when we are extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us. What endears us to God is the fact that He has forgiven us. At that point, the counselor asked Shaun to read two very familiar passages: Ephesians

4:31-5:1 and Colossians 3:12-13. The counselor pointed out to Shaun that God actually talks about him (Shaun) in the verses read, pointing out that Ephesians 4:31 speaks of the explosive anger, of the slow burn anger, of the bitterness, of evil speaking, and of the clamor which all characterized Shaun in this conflict. The counselor helped Shaun see the issue of forgiveness as laid out in Ephesians 4:32, "...and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you." The counselor belabored the point of verse 32: "God in Christ forgave you," having Shaun read it several times. "Let it soak in for a while. God forgave you," he explained to Shaun. "When you forgive you are being an imitator of God, as the next verse in Ephesians says that we are supposed to be" (Ephesians 5:1). Next, he explains that Shaun ought to forgive Cal because it isn't murder only that is commanded against in the 6th commandment. The counselor has Shaun read, Matthew 5:21-22, which says:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment and whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

The counselor helps Shaun understand that the problem is in the heart and from God's perspective, his heart attitude towards Cal is likened to murder.

The counselor begins his next session with prayer and asks Shaun to turn to Psalm 51. The psalm is a prayer of repentance of King David. Yes, the man after God's own heart stepped into sin—horrendous sin. Adultery, promoting deception and drunkenness, and ultimately conspiring to have Uriah, the husband of the woman with whom he committed adultery, killed in the line of duty. It was a cover up, a ploy to avoid taking responsibility for his sin and the unavoidable consequences of his sin.

The counselor has Shaun read verse 4 which says, "...Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight..." The counselor stops Shaun at that point and asks, "Is that really an accurate statement? What about Bathsheba? Uriah? David's family? Israel? Didn't he sin against them as well?" It is true. David sinned against more than just God. So how can David make such a statement? The counselor goes on to explain that, in light of the sin against Uriah and Bathsheba, really, that sin was nothing compared to his sin against God. The counselor wants Shaun to ponder this point. So he continues, "Shaun, you asked why you should forgive Cal. You've already seen a couple of reasons, but let me give you another reason to ponder this week. You see Shaun, you should forgive Cal because whoever—in this case, Cal— has offended you has offended God greater and if God has forgiven Cal, can you not also forgive? This doesn't minimize the sin against you. But it does remind you that Cal offended God in a much greater way than he offended you and because God has forgiven him, it would seem reasonable that you can and should also forgive."

Shaun is asked by the counselor to take some time during the week to memorize the verse in Psalm 51 and to read the whole chapter three times. The counselor closes in prayer and Shaun heads for the exit. The counselor knows that there is so much more to cover to help Shaun understand why he should forgive. And, that is for next time.



THE COG

Community Of Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry

Edition #39 — June 2017
(Newsletters also available online at: gbcmt.org)



Food for Thought: Blessed are the Peacemakers - Part 2

By Chris Sedgwick

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9). I have never really studied what it means to be a peacemaker. I took a Bible College class called "Peacemakers" and learned much about conflict resolution between two people. But, still, I didn't fully understand what Jesus was telling us in this passage. My goal for writing this article was to gain a proper perspective of peacemaking so that I may apply it to my life. I also want to touch on how it is good for me, being a "child of God," a husband, and a counselor, and hopefully in the future a father. However, in studying this I hope that whomever reads this will be encouraged from what I have learned. I pray that you take this and learn more, and apply it to your life as well. This is part two of my article. Please consult the previous COG for Part 1.

The Peace of GOD

The antithesis of this beatitude can be found in Matthew 10:34 which says, "...do not think I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword." This verse is telling us that there will be opposition when we come to His righteousness. The world doesn't want this peace that God gives us. To be peacemakers on God's terms requires being peacemakers on the terms of truth and righteousness. When believers bring truth to bear on a world that loves falsehood, there will be strife. It is easy to see how this truth brings anger before it brings happiness, and is a costly process, but one that can produce harmony. The gospel of Jesus can bring bad feelings before good. That is why in order to be comforted, we mourn, for blessed are those who mourn (Matthew 5:4) over one's own sin and the sins of others. "Peace cannot come where sin remains," therefore God's word pierces and cuts deep before it heals (Hebrews 4: 12-13).

The Enemy of Peace

Sin! Sin is the great enemy of peace. Sin is what separates us from God and causes a lack of harmony with one another. There is much war and strife because the world is sin-filled. God tells us that "our hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Peace cannot reign where wickedness reigns. Wicked hearts cannot produce a peaceful society. "There is no peace for the wicked, says the Lord." (Isaiah 48:12). In order to gain peace, we must have repentance. Sinful people cannot make peace, either within themselves or amongst others. Only strife, conflict, and disorder can come from the unrepentant heart. God is the only one who can bring purity in people and peace, gentleness, good fruits and so forth as we see in James 3:16-17. However, in verse 18, God tells us, "Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace." Sin is the source of every conflict, and if you don't resolve the sin issue, peacemaking is worthless.

Becoming a New Creation

I can't help but think about the war on ISIS. They don't believe in the God of the Bible, and it seems as if our country doesn't either. However, ISIS is killing Christians for being Christians, and the United States is "trying" to resolve it, but both are in sin because God is not in the picture between the two. Both sides believe in a false god and the only way to resolve this conflict is to go to the true God in His truth, and in repentance.

Ephesians 2:13-15 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace."

Jesus is the only One who can bring God and man back together, reconciling and bringing peace.

"For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:19). The question arises, how does the cross and Jesus bring peace? Jesus was cursed at, spit upon, mocked, reviled, pierced, and put to death on that Roman cross. It was anger and hearts of hatred venting against God. Yet, it was through that violence God brought peace. Through the righteousness of God, He defeated the wickedness of man and sin. Therefore, peace was won.

To bring a better definition of peace we must understand how the Trinity works for bringing peace through Jesus. God the Father is the cause of peace. Jesus is the demonstration of the meaning of that peace, and the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the operator of peace in our lives. Galatians 5:22 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness. Who can be peacemakers? When reading through the beatitudes it seems to me that only believers through faith in Christ can be the peacemakers, and that happens by being reconciled to God and becoming a new created being (2 Corinthians 5:17). 2 Corinthians 5:18 tells us that Jesus "has given us the ministry of reconciliation." This means we must bring others to be reconciled to God, regardless of what their sins and trespasses may be (2 Corinthians 5:19-20).



Blessed
are the
peacemakers,
for they
will be called
sons
of God.

Matthew 5:9

Continued on next page—

Food for Thought [Continued from cover page]

With, and Without Jesus

I have learned that there are four things that characterize a peacemaker. For this article let me mention one. First, we know that peace is always corrupted by sin, and for the believer we must be holy and free from sin. As stated before, we humans must have peace with God. "When we received Christ as our Savior and He imputed His righteousness to us, our battle with God ended, and our peace with God began." Therefore Scripture tells us that, as believers, we can enjoy the peace of God. Philippians 4:7 says, "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Colossians 3:15 is describing part of the character of the new man having been saved through faith, saying, "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful." Therefore we should do what Ephesians 6:15 tells us to do. It tells us that we are to "shod" our feet—to be prepared with the gospel of peace. The word "shod" is describing a Roman soldier's boots that had nails in them for stability and traction, which brought confidence to the soldier in standing his ground while in combat. The same goes for the gospel of peace described in this verse. Our relationship with Jesus and understanding of His word and gospel gives us confidence and allow us to stand firm through His strength when dealing with reconciliation. Romans 5:6-11 clarifies this better saying,

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

What is involved in having peace with God through salvation? I touched on it briefly, but let's take a deeper look at salvation. It must involve having an entirely new outlook on life. It means having a new nature and a new heart, thus, a pure heart. It means that self-interest and

self-concern must be entirely delivered from us. You must be, as it were, absolutely neutral so that you can bring both sides together. You must not be sensitive, you must not be touchy—you must not be on the defensive. If you are, you will not be a very good peacemaker. The peacemaker is someone who doesn't always look at everything in the terms of the effect it has upon them. This is something that we must be fully aware of and come to grips with because selfishness is our nature, as Philippians 2:3-4 seems to indicate. We tend to look at everything as if it affects only us. However, if you are poor in spirit—if you have mourned because of the blackness of your heart, if you truly see yourself, and if you have hungered and thirsted after righteousness—then you will not stand any longer on your rights and privileges. You won't be asking, "What about me in this?" You will have forgotten self. Indeed, can we not agree that one of the best tests of whether we are truly Christian is just this? It must be noted that peacemaking is not for those who are peace lovers, but only for the peacemakers.

So often people who love peace are the ones that actually make trouble and not peace, meaning they will talk about it for peace's sake, but never put it into action to try and make peace. They refuse to go face to face with the situation that causes sin and chaos. The peace which the Bible calls blessed does not come from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them. Looking more into Scripture, John 12:25 says, "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Romans 7:23-25 says,

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

When battling the flesh we must be ready to humble ourselves and do any and everything in order to promote the glory of God. That is what a peacemaker does first.



Question(s):

**Does Biblical Counseling ever fail, and if so, why?
How does a Biblical Counselor respond when failure does happen?**

By Pastor Blake Shaw

Answer:

This question is one that comes up quite often in various training classes and I believe it is appropriate to deal with it over the span of several editions of the COG. I would guess that, of all the people who serve as a part of our counseling team, it is only appropriate that I tackle this question regarding failure in counseling, for that seems to be a common theme in my experience. Oh, to be sure, not all counseling situations are failures. Actually, it is quite the opposite, but I've experienced some incredible failures in the counseling room. So the question is, "Why? Why does counseling fail?"

It is critical to understand that there are actually two responses to the first question, "Does biblical counseling ever fail?" The first answer is: No, biblical counseling never fails when it is received and, by faith, applied to the person who receives the counsel. It never fails. God's word never returns void without Him accomplishing exactly what He wants to accomplish. God never fails. There are many who will testify to the fact that when they repented and began to embrace God's counsel and apply it to their lives. Change happened. Hope was secured. God was exalted. Joy returned. Relational conflicts were resolved. Unity in the marriage began to take place. Thus, at the risk of sounding arrogant, biblical counseling doesn't fail when it is received and applied by the one receiving the counsel.

Yet, there is a second answer to the "Does biblical counseling ever fail?" question. That answer is: "Most certainly!" I'm guessing every biblical counselor has experienced this — some more than others — but it's a common experience nonetheless. Perhaps the better question is, "Why does it fail?" That will form the content of this column in the months ahead as I hope to lay out an in-depth understanding of why biblical counseling fails. To answer the question, what I hope to do is provide a list of questions that point to the reasons why counseling fails.

When Counseling Fails

First, when counseling fails, we must ask, "Is the counselee a believer?" We first considered that, when counseling fails, we must ask, "Is the counselee a believer?" This is a critical starting point. Is that person, sitting across the table or desk from me, the counselor, an unbeliever? Am I trying to counsel someone who is described in God's Word as spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), an enemy of God's (Romans 5:10), even a child of Satan (I John 3:10)? Am I trying to counsel a person who is described in Scripture as "the natural man"? We saw last time that the natural man does not understand or accept the things of the Spirit of God (I Corinthians 2:14), so when our counseling fails, we have to evaluate whether we are counseling a true believer or not.

There is a second reason why our counseling might fail: Perhaps I, as a counselor, have failed in a very fundamental way, to gather adequate data. Thus, when counseling fails, we must ask, "Did I gather adequate data?" One critical element of biblical counseling is that the counselor must gather data. I think of Proverbs 18:13 that says, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him." One of the blemishes on the church and more specifically on the biblical counseling movement historically, relates to the issue of gathering data. Who amongst us hasn't made the mistake of hearing a little bit of the story that someone shares and then doled out a canned answer, quoting some Bible verse and giving a simple, Sunday school answer to the person who has sought our counsel? I'm guessing you and I are alike and we all stand as guilty. Gathering data is an absolutely critical cog in the wheel of biblical counsel. Data gathering involves asking many questions, listening to the person as he recounts his story. The good biblical counselor probes into many areas of the person's life. The counselor asks about areas of life such as: physical, relational, emotional, actions/behavioral, conceptual/beliefs, historical, etc. Doing this well requires that the counselor leave no stone unturned.

A Folly and a Shame

Biblical counseling can fail for various reasons, but one of those reasons can be because the counselor is providing answers that do not really pertain to the core issue. I can only speak for myself, but I note times in my past where I so badly wanted to give the person an answer and quickly fix the problem that I heard a little bit of the story and then opened the Bible and started dumping verses on the poor soul. The verses were great, but the they had very little to do with what the person was truly battling in his heart. I gave an answer, but really it was folly and shame.

This doesn't mean that every time counseling fails that it is due to the fact that the counselor didn't gather enough data. There are many other issues at play that could have led to the failure in counseling, but certainly, one of the common causes of failure relates to the issue of data gathering. When our counseling fails, we would do well to evaluate and make sure that the failure is not due to the fact that we did not listen enough to gather necessary data for providing God's solution to the person's situation.

For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.' Isaiah 46:9b-46:10

2017 Biblical Counseling Conference at GBC

Join us, Thursday-Saturday, July 20-22, to learn how to plumb the glorious depths of God's Word and learn more about how "all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Visit gbcmt.org/bcc to see this year's schedule for Track Two (Track One is full), to see the phenomenal speakers we are so very blessed to have this year, and to register.