

HOW TO PURSUE PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER, PART I EPHESIANS 4:31–32

INTRODUCTION

One of the most heartbreaking realities is that in this life, you are **certain to experience conflict**.

Conflict mars every relationship.

Why? Because we are fallen sinners living with other fallen sinners in a fallen world.

Disagreements that are the breeding ground for sinful conflict can even be seen **between some of our heroes of the faith**, like Paul and Barnabas.

As they prepared for their second missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas didn't see eye to eye about whether they should take Mark along with them after he had abandoned them on their first journey.

The tension grew to the point that Paul and Barnabas couldn't reconcile their differences, and as we read in **Acts 15:39**—

³⁹ **There was such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another...**

If **Paul**, the apostle who wrote all about about pursuing peace, and **Barnabas**, the man known as “the son of encouragement,” **couldn’t avoid conflict**,

then we must accept that we are going to be confronted by disagreements and conflicts in our relationships too.

Thankfully, while conflict is an **ever-present reality** in this life, so too is **God’s provision of grace and wisdom to overcome conflict**.

God gives us a way **to pursue peace with one another** in order to enjoy harmonious relationships within our families, friendships, and local churches.

In order to understand **God’s plan for relational peace** and effectively put it into practice, we need to clearly define the terms that we use.

The first two terms that we need to clarify are **“disagreement”** and **“conflict.”**

A **“disagreement”** is a difference of opinion that you have with someone else because of your unique perspective.

We have different backgrounds, personalities, and preferences.

Simple differences of opinion are normal and expected.

There is nothing sinful about disagreeing with someone else and having a different opinion.

For example, good friends can enjoy a peaceful, harmonious relationship even when **one prefers coffee** and the **other prefers tea**.

A husband and wife can enjoy a blissfully happy marriage even when one would prefer to take a holiday with all their friends in the mountains and the other would prefer to take a holiday alone as a family by the sea.

Disagreements don't have to turn into conflicts.

A **"conflict"** is a disagreement with sin injected into it.

Though you may successfully navigate many differences of opinion with your family, friends, and fellow church members, eventually sin will turn the disagreement into an ugly conflict because **you are a fallen sinner living with other fallen sinners in a fallen world**.

That's the reality we see in **Philippians 4** and the conflict between **Euodia and Syntyche** that threatened to divide the church in Philippi.

That's also the painful reality that **Jim and Kevin** had to face in their friendship.

Jim and Kevin had been friends for years.

For all that they had in common, Jim and Kevin would often laugh and tease each other about their differences.

Jim was an engineer who loved sports and Kevin was a doctor who preferred to unwind with a good book.

It was when they were both asked to teach in Sunday school that their differences almost destroyed their friendship.

Jim wanted his 13 year old daughter, Anne, to help him teach the younger kids,

which he thought would be a good lesson in responsibility and service that would also allow him to regularly engage with her on her own need for Christ.

Kevin, however, thought that it was a bad idea to let someone they both knew was not yet a believer teach the gospel to others.

After all, Anne was still living like a worldly unbeliever.

Though they tried to talk through their different perspectives,

Jim's frustration boiled over into sinful anger when he told Kevin he wouldn't be drawing such a hard line if his 14 year old son, Tate, hadn't been baptised just 6 months prior.

At that remark, Kevin snapped and started shouting at his friend, yelling about his foolishness before storming out and driving home.

Though their wives both tried to intervene, neither Jim nor Kevin seemed willing to admit to any wrong and stubbornly dug in their heels as they waited for the other to apologise.

Jim and Kevin had let **a disagreement turn into a conflict** because they had each responded by **injecting their sin** into the difference of opinion.

The solution? They needed to pursue peace with one another.

Though you are certain to experience conflict in your relationships, **God provides the grace and wisdom to overcome the sin** that damages and even destroys your relationships.

As the God of peace, God has a plan for believers to **overcome conflict and enjoy peace** with one another.

In **Matthew 5:9**, Jesus said—

⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**

It's a plan that is **going to require your diligent effort** to overcome the sin that divides us.

Though conflicts are **inevitable** and we should expect them, **they are also sinful** and therefore we should make every effort to resolve them.

That's why **Romans 12:18** instructs that—

¹⁸ **If possible, so far as it depends on you, [you must be] at peace with all men.**

Similarly, **Hebrews 12:14** commands us to—

¹⁴ **Pursue peace with all men...**

Every conflict is therefore also an opportunity to **experience the grace of God** and **practice the wisdom of God.**

Though conflicts are the **painful consequences of sin**,
you should seize every opportunity to pursue peace with
one another.

Pursuing peace doesn't mean that you'll never experience
conflict,
but it will mean that **you will learn to avoid turning
disagreements into conflicts**
and **will learn to effectively resolve the conflicts that
do arise**.

In other words, though sin will still rear its ugly head,
if you pursue peace with one another then you will
experience more relational harmony with your family,
friends, and fellow church members.

**As Paul maps out how to pursue peace with one another,
he does so with a particular concern for the harmony of
the local church.**

Sin affects every relationship in our lives which is why God
wants us to pursue peace with everyone,
but in the church where every believer has access to
the grace and wisdom of God, our relationships should
particularly be marked by peace.

That's the context in which Paul describes God's plan for
pursuing peace in our relationships.

Look at the beginning of the chapter as we read

Ephesians 4:1-3—

¹ **Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, exhort you to walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called,**
² **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,**
³ **being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

PROPOSITION

As a believer, you are **called to be a peacemaker.**

Your relationship with Christ should make you more peaceable with your family, friends, and especially within your local church.

That's why we're going to study **Ephesians 4:31-32**, because through Paul's instruction **we will discover the practical steps to pursuing peace with one another.**

We're going to **examine this over two Sundays**,
and as we focus on **verse 31** today we'll discover the **first two steps** in pursuing peace with one another.

1. THE SINS THAT BREAK PEACE (31)

As you cast your eye over **verse 31**, you can see that Paul lists **six sins that destroy relational peace**.

These are the **six “peace breakers”** that we need to put away.

Before we even examine them, we have to consider the context.

Paul has already introduced a vital principle in **verse 2** as he writes of “**bearing with one another in love.**”

Here Paul teaches us that **the best way to deal with conflict** is simply to **avoid it in the first place**.

In other words, before we consider **God’s plan to resolve conflict**,

we should remember **God’s plan to avoid conflict**.

To be clear, you can’t avoid disagreements, nor should you try.

They reflect our unique background, preferences, and personalities and that diversity is part of God’s good design for humanity.

However, you certainly should **make every effort to avoid injecting sin** into those differences of opinion.

In fact, the wisdom of avoiding conflict is implicit in **verse 31** even as Paul lists out our sinful “peace breakers”

Paul’s expectation is, of course, that as we put away these practices that we will **experience fewer sinful conflicts**.

We also find this **“peace preserving” wisdom** of God in **Proverbs 15:18**—

¹⁸ **A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, / But the slow to anger quiets a dispute.**

Similarly **Proverbs 10:12** commends overlooking disagreements and offences—

¹² **Hatred stirs up strife, / But love covers all transgressions.**

Quoting that verse, **1 Peter 4:8** says—

⁸ **Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.**

At the core of God’s plan for dealing with our conflict is the wisdom of being **slow to take offence and quick to forgive**.

We find that in **Colossians 3:12-13**—

¹² **So, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience;**

¹³ **bearing with one another, and graciously forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord graciously forgave you, so also should you.**

In other words, you can “**bear with one another**” by simply overlooking disagreements and minor offences.

That is the same principle Paul is referring to in **Ephesians 4:2** when he writes again of “**bearing with one another in love.**”

The best way to deal with conflict is to avoid it in the first place, and you do that by being **slow to take offence and quick to forgive.**

So we find here **STEP ONE** in pursuing peace with one another **is being slow to take offence.**

Too often our hearts are like powder kegs, waiting for someone to light a match and spark our explosive reaction.

Instead, the heart of a peacemaker is like a pool of water—that same match is lit, but there’s no fiery response, only the quiet sizzle of the match being extinguished by a refusal to take offence.

Tom and Emma were learning to implement this first step in their new marriage.

They had noticed that while they didn’t have major blowups, their enjoyment of their first year of marriage was nevertheless affected by silly squabbles that happened every few days.

Of course, Tom regularly left the toilet seat up, but he found it hard to take Emma’s complaint about that seriously when she often neglected to replace an empty roll of toilet paper.

Sometimes they didn't see eye to eye on decisions they needed to make, like the argument they had over Tom's birthday and whether they should spend it with family or go away for the weekend to enjoy it alone.

Thankfully they befriended an older couple in the church who helped them understand that neither those minor disagreements nor their minor offences needed to turn into conflict.

Instead of responding to one another sinfully,
they should pursue peace with each other **by being slow to take offence.**

As they learnt to overlook minor offences and productively work through their disagreements,
they found that there was more harmony and happiness in their home.

Sadly, we often do the opposite as we are **quick to take offence and slow to forgive.**

We respond sinfully with the **“peace breakers”** that Paul lists in **verse 31.**

Let's look at those six “peace breakers” in detail.

In **verse 31** Paul describes the **sins that turns disagreements into conflicts**—

³¹ **Let all bitterness and anger and wrath and shouting and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.**

Paul lists **six “peace breakers”** that damage and even destroy our relationships.

Bitterness

The idea of “bitterness” comes from plants or water that tasted bitter.

It soon came to refer to the hard-heartedness that harbours resentment about the past.¹

As **one author** described it, bitterness is—

*“a smouldering resentment, a brooding grudge-filled attitude.... It is the spirit of irritability that keeps a person in perpetual animosity, making him sour and venomous.”*²

Simply, bitterness is long-term anger.

When you do not resolve your anger towards another through the peace-making process of forgiveness, then it settles in your heart as bitterness.

Bitterness eats away at relationships like cancer.

It is often silent and unseen, but absolutely deadly as it spreads through our thoughts and emotions until it has destroyed the relationship.

¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 308.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 190.

Though he wouldn't admit it at first, **Jim had long nursed bitterness** in his heart towards Kevin because while he and his wife struggled to parent their difficult children,

Kevin's seemed to be picture perfect in their behaviour and achievements.

To make matters worse, Kevin's attempts to help his friend with advice from lessons he had learnt always seemed to come with an air of superiority and judgement—at least, that's how Jim perceived it.

Anger

The Greek term θυμός that Paul uses here points to passionate outbursts,³ and the initial explosion of rage in a conflict.⁴

We often speak of things we say and things we do **"in the heat of the moment"** which is what Paul is referring to here.

After a relatively easy first year of marriage, **Tom and Emma had started to struggle** with more significant and damaging conflict in their relationship.

Tom particularly struggled with this kind of anger and in his worst moments, he would respond to Emma with the glowing heat of his rage.

³ William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 104.

⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 308.

He would deliver passionate rants about how he felt wronged by her, but would end up saying such unkind and hurtful words that his anger quickly started to damage their marriage.

Wrath

Though similar to the previous idea, **the Greek term ὀργή** points to a lingering, settled animosity.⁵

One author called it a “*settled feeling of gnawing hostility*.”⁶

This is what we call **a smouldering anger**.

It is the anger that we feel deep inside as we **internalise our outrage** at being wronged rather than **express it externally** with words and actions.⁷

We don’t always recognise this kind of anger,
but Paul uses these two related terms “**anger**” and
“**wrath**” to highlight the **sinfulness of blowing up and and bottling it up**.

Emma didn’t recognise it at first either. While she didn’t blow up like Tom in their conflict, her approach of bottling it up inside we just as sinful.

If Tom’s anger was visible by its fiery heat, Emma’s invisible wrath was just as damaging to their relationship through the frigid cold that she brought into their marriage.

⁵ Larkin, *Ephesians*, 104.

⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 308.

⁷ Cf. MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 190.

Though she didn't burn Tom with angry words, she did ice him out as she became cold and distant in her wrathful actions.

Shouting

As our anger is expressed, it is most frequently expressed first in our words and “**shouting**” and “**slander**” both describe angry speech.

The Greek term κρᾶνῆ refers to “the clamour of excited persons in quarrelling, shouting.”⁸

It describes the progression of our sinful response to others to the point that **we lack restraint and erupt in angry yelling.**⁹

This outburst of words reveals that we have lost control.¹⁰

It was this “peace-breaker” of shouting with which Kevin responded to Jim’s accusations.

Deeply offended by his friend, Kevin decided almost instantly that he would “**let him have it,**” as we say, and tell his friend exactly what he thought.

He gave full vent to his anger as he yelled at Jim instead of calmly and quietly responding with words that pursued peace.

⁸ BDAG.

⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 308–309.

¹⁰ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 190.

This kind of angry speech is exactly what **Proverbs 15:1** warns against—

¹ **A gentle answer turns away wrath, / But a harsh word stirs up anger.**

Slander

This is another form of angry speech that uses profane or abusive language.¹¹

The Greek term βλασφημία refers to abusing and vilifying others with our words.¹²

As **one author** wrote, “*Slander is the ongoing defamation of someone that rises from a bitter heart.*”¹³

Though Jim wasn’t the one to yell and scream at his friend, his words were just as destructive as he expressed his anger by criticising and complaining about Kevin to everyone who would listen.

He never admitted to anyone else that he was angry, but he used every opportunity to say unkind things about Kevin that made others start to think of him poorly.

This is what **Proverbs 10:18 (NASB)** means when it says—

¹⁸ **He who conceals hatred has lying lips, And he who spreads slander is a fool.**

¹¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 636.

¹² Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 309.

¹³ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 190.

Soon Jim's bitter speech about his friend was **becoming less and less truthful**, even as it became more and more divisive within their church, just as **Proverbs 6:19** warns—

19 A false witness who breathes out lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers.

Now as you can tell, each of these terms describes a distinctly sinful response, but **they also clearly overlap**.

That is because Paul is using these **first five** “peace breakers” to describe **the various forms of anger that we are prone to**.

That's why Paul starts off by referring to “**all bitterness and anger and wrath and shouting and slander....**”

That word “**all**” is an important word that refers to **everything belonging to the class of things**.¹⁴

We can translate it as “*all sorts of, every kind of, every form of.*”

Here Paul uses the word to group these **first five** “peace breakers” together to **describe the sin of anger** in its various forms.

So Paul has every kind of anger from the fiery intensity that blows up, to the freezing cold that bottles it up in mind.

His use of “**all**” must even include the words that we use today to try an excuse our anger by calling it by another name—

irritable, upset, annoyed, frustrated, offended.

¹⁴ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 633–634.

One of the keys to pursuing peace is to **recognise the many forms that anger can take** and acknowledge the damage and destruction that every kind of anger brings to our relationships.

You might blow up in anger and scorch those you are offended by with your red-hot rage, or you might bottle it up in anger and freeze those you are offended by with the icy winter of your disinterest.

Every sort of anger needs to be dealt with in order to pursue peace with one another.

Paul has very effectively *described* anger for us, but it is once again necessary for us to *define* the terms we're using.

So how do we define anger?

The best definition that I have come across is by **David Powlison** who writes—

“At its core anger is very simple. It expresses ‘I’m against that.’

It is an active stance you take to oppose something that you assess as both important and wrong.

You notice something, size it up, and say, “That matters ... and it’s not right.”

You encounter something in your world that crosses the line. Anger expresses the energy of your reaction to something you find offensive and wish to eliminate.”¹⁵

¹⁵ David Powlison, *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 39.

Or, if you prefer, he puts it in simpler terms when he writes—

*“What is anger? It’s the way we react when something we think important is not the way it’s supposed to be.”*¹⁶

Anger, as Paul; describes it in **verse 31** includes both our dispositions and our deeds, our attitudes and our actions.¹⁷

That is, Paul’s terms “**anger**” and “**wrath**” to describe, primarily, the **angry attitudes** we carry in our hearts.

Paul then uses the following terms, “**shouting**” and “**slander**,” to describe the way these attitudes erupt into **angry actions**.

In other words, as Paul; describes the complexity of anger in our hearts, it is **something we do**, not just **something we have**.

It is a response to a disagreement or offence.

It is a response to a perceived injustice that we suffer.

It is when we look at something and go,

“That’s not right, and it matters!”

That is, in anger we perceive some action, object, situation, or person to be unjust.

¹⁶ David Powlison, “Anger in Action,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Number 4, Fall 2006 24 (2006): 9.

¹⁷ “To summarize, first noun ‘bitterness’ in verse 31 deals with attitude. The next two nouns ‘anger and wrath’ deal with disposition, and the last two ‘shouting and abusive’ refer to the manner of speech.” Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 636.

Of course, **our perception doesn't have to be accurate** and anger doesn't require the objective reality of injustice, only injustice according to our judgement or perception.

Tom responds in anger to the perceived injustice of his wife's nagging complaints, and Emma responds in anger to the perceived injustice of her husband's inattention and neglect.

With that definition to clarify what Paul has described as sinful anger, let's look at the **sixth "peace breaker."**

Malice

Paul adds malice, which is the general term for evil that is the **root of all vices because it describes the evil intent of our hearts.**

The Greek term κακία refers to, "*any attitude or action which intends harm to one's neighbour.*"¹⁸

It has also been defined as "*a mean-spirited or vicious attitude or disposition.*"¹⁹

The reality of human conflict is that while our responses to one another are often sinful and self-focussed, **we often don't deliberately intend to hurt or harm those we love.**

Tom and Emma certainly didn't intend to bring the emotional pain that they inflicted on one another, nor did they mean to break the peace that they wanted to enjoy in their marriage.

¹⁸ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 309.

¹⁹ BDAG.

Similarly, Jim and Kevin considered each other to be dear friends when their anger tore at each other—they didn't intend to harm their friendship or one another's reputations.

The damage that sin wrought was **nevertheless very real**.

However, **in the escalation of human conflict**,

there is also a point at which we DO intend to harm one another.

Usually this is when our perception of injustice that leads to our sinful anger is left unresolved and it festers into an attempt to get justice for ourselves.

That is what we call vengeance.

In **Romans 12**, Paul's exhortation in **verse 18** to "**pursue peace with all men**" is sandwiched in between **verse 17** that warns us never to pay back evil for evil to anyone, and **verse 19** that forbids taking your own revenge.

That kind of deliberate attempt to hurt others back is at least in part what Paul means with this **sixth "peace breaker"** of every kind of malice.

Now as we step back from the details of these **six "peace breakers"** we see Paul's description of **two kinds of sin that break the peace of our relationships**—anger and malice, in all their various forms.

Once these sins are injected into our disagreements, we are face with **the painful reality of conflict**.

STEP ONE in pursuing peace with one another is to avoid such conflict by being slow to take offence.

If we fail at **STEP ONE**, we must move on to **STEP TWO**.

STEP TWO in pursuing peace is to deal with your own sin.

That's what Paul means when he exhorts us in **verse 31** to **"put away"** the sins of anger and malice, to **"put away"** those six "peace breakers" that damage and destroy our relationships.

Paul is referring to the **paradigm for dealing with our sin** that he described earlier in **Ephesians 4:22-24**—

²² ... **lay aside [put off], in reference to your former conduct, the old man, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,**

²³ **and ... be renewed in the spirit of your mind,**

²⁴ **and ... put on the new man, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.**

While Paul uses a different word in **verse 31**, the concept is clearly meant to be the same.

In **verse 31**, Paul teaches us the vitally important lesson that when we are in conflict with another,

we need to deal with our sin before we can deal Biblically with their sin.

We need to our our sin away.

That is precisely what Jesus taught us in **Matthew 7:3–5**—

³ **And why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?**

⁴ **Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?**

⁵ **You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.**

This is a step in pursuing peace **that we often overlook and neglect.**

Perhaps the reason is that when we are angry, **we remain focussed on the perceived injustice**—whether there was real, objective injustice or not.

We remain so focussed on the other person's sin that we never examine our own hearts to consider our own sin.

However, that is not God's plan for overcoming our sin and restoring peace to our relationships.

When you remain focussed on the other person's sin,
that only breeds the long-term anger of **"bitterness."**

Jim and Kevin experienced that in the breakdown of their friendship.

As their conflict escalated, it brought with it more damage to their relationship,

and the more hurt and harm that they each suffered, the more they focused on what the other had done wrong and how they ought to be the one to make things right.

They were **caught in a stalemate**, each expecting the other to make the first move of apologising and acknowledging they were wrong.

But as days turned into weeks, the more they focussed on the other's sin, the less they were able to see their own sin.

That's why Paul instructs you to examine your own heart first, to deal with your own sin first.

As Jesus said, you need to get the **log out of your own eye** before you try to deal with the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Tom and Emma also struggled with this step because, though they could still see enough of their own sin to acknowledge that they had responded with sinful anger, they each waited for the other to make the first move because they believed they had sinned first.

Neither Jesus nor Paul are concerned with who gave the first offence.

Regardless of who started the conflict, regardless of who first sinned, you must deal with your own sin first.

There are **three principles** that we find in Scripture that help us at this point to understand why we have to deal with our own sins first.

Principle one:
Your sin is against God before it is against another

King David was a man well acquainted with sin and conflict.

Yet one of the reasons why he was called the man after God's own heart (**1 Samuel 13:14**) is that he had a **God-centred view of his sin.**

David knew that his sin was an offence against God before it was an offence against anyone else.

After his adultery with Bathsheba and his conspiracy to murder her husband Uriah, David wrote of his repentance in **Psalms 51:4**—

⁴ **Against You, You only, I have sinned / And done what is evil in Your sight**

At first glance, that is an astonishing statement. What about Bathsheba? What about Uriah?

David understood that his sin was primarily an offence against a holy God.

As **Robert Jones** writes—

“All sin is always against God, even if it is also against another human being. In other words, all horizontal sins are also vertical sins.

Violations of our Lord Jesus’s second great commandment (love your neighbour) also violate the first great commandment (love God).”²⁰

Joseph had the same **God-centred view of his sin** which is why he rejected the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife by saying in **Genesis 39:9**—

⁹ **“How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?”**

Therefore, you need to deal with the sin that you bring into your conflicts first, because your sin **affects your relationship with God** before it affects your relationship with another.

Principle two: You are never blameless

There is only one man who has ever lived a sinless life—
Jesus Christ.

Whenever He experienced conflict with others, it was always their fault and not His.

His conflicts with others were the only ones to ever be purely one-sided.

There was never a conflict in which He contributed sin.

²⁰ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 85.

The same **can NOT** be said of us and our conflicts.

As Paul wrote in **Galatians 5**, he warned of the devastating effect of sin on our relationships in **verse 15**—

¹⁵ **If you bite and devour one another, beware that you are not consumed by one another.**

In **the verse just before** that he wrote—

¹⁴ **The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in this: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”**

In other words, all of our conflict can be traced back to the sinful failure to obey the second greatest command of loving your neighbour as yourself.

Since there is never a moment nor a relationship in which any of us can ever claim to be sinlessly perfect in our obedience to love others as God has commanded us,

we must recognise that we are never blameless in any of our conflicts.

You might not have started the clash, but your sinful responses might have prolonged or escalated it.

Principle three:

You should be more concerned about your sin than another’s

Jesus’ instruction in **Matthew 7** doesn’t only teach us about the priority of dealing with our sin, but also that we should be more concerned about our own sin than another’s.

We should regard our sins as **more serious, or “weighty,”** regardless of their objective measure.

As Jesus spoke to the crowd, it was logically impossible that everyone had a weighty “log” of offence in their own eye while everyone else had a less serious “speck.”

Objectively, someone’s sin was certain to be more serious.

But that is not how Jesus taught us to think about our own sin.

Even if our offences may be objectively less serious,
Jesus calls us to weigh them as more serious—
they are planks, not specks.²¹

Of course there will be conflicts in which the other person’s sin is objectively more serious and is objectively more harmful to the relationship.

Even if you have contributed **as little as 1 percent** to the conflict, you should be more concerned about your sin than the sin of the other who **contributed the 99 percent**.

As **Robert Jones** wisely states—

*“I must give 100 percent attention to my 1 percent contribution.”*²²

As the elders brought Jim and Kevin in for counselling, these principles helped them each recognise the priority of dealing with their sin first.

²¹ Jones, *Pursuing Peace*, 81.

²² Ibid., 82.

CONCLUSION

Though we have only studied **verse 31** and Paul's instruction on **sins that break peace**, we've already discovered **two steps** in pursuing peace with one another.

These two steps are **often overlooked**, but they are essential if you want to be a peacemaker with you family, friends, or local church.

Step one in God's plan for pursuing peace with one another is being slow to take offence.

We learnt that the best way to deal with conflict is to avoid it by overlooking disagreements and minor offences.

Step two is to deal with your own sin.

God makes dealing with your own sin the priority over dealing with the other person's sin.

That means that you must first go to God to confess your sin and seek His forgiveness.

After doing that, you can then ask for God's help in confessing your sin to the other person and seeking their forgiveness.

Confessing and forsaking your sin is exactly what Paul meant by putting away the peace breakers of every kind of anger and every kind of malice.

BENEDICTION

Hebrews 13:20-21—

Now the God of peace,
who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the
sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant,
our Lord Jesus,
equip you in every good thing to do His will,
by doing in us what is pleasing in His sight,
through Jesus Christ,
to whom be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.