The Wisdom of Peaceful Relationships

Text: Proverbs 6:12-19

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**Scriptures:**  1 Peter 3:8-12; 2 Corinthians 5.17-21; Proverbs 6:12-19; 16:27-30

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 359, 280, 133b, 502, 180

**Series: Proverbs.** Sermon 9.

**Theme:** The troublemaker who sows discord acts in ways which are an abomination to the Lord and will certainly be judged by Him

**Proposition:** As a new creation in Christ, be wise and seek peace

**Introduction**

On the world stage, the relationship between the USA and China seems strained; as does that between the USA and Russia. In the past year there have been major wars/conflicts in Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Mexico (drug war). A ‘major war’ is categorised as being one where more than 10,000 violent deaths take place in one year. 14 countries have had conflicts where there have resulted in between 1,000 and 10,000 violent deaths: including Philippines, Ethiopia, Somalia, Nigeria, Algeria, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan.

The world today is **not so very different** from the state of peoples prior to the global flood in Noah’s time: When the earth was ‘*filled with violence*’ (Gen 6:11b). Today the creation continues to ‘groan’ (Rom 8:22). We could accurately say that instead of experiencing global peace this world is increasingly ‘discordant’ or ‘conflicted’.

Many relationships between nations, families and individuals are broken, strained, fractured, and divided. There is much discord. The word ‘discord’ is not one we use very often in everyday speech. (Some younger member of the congregation may know that Discord is the name of a popular software application which enables computer gamers to communicate over the internet).

When a piece of music is discordant it sounds harsh and jarring because it lacks harmony, it grates against the ears. When human relationships are **discordant** there is disagreement, conflict, opposition, disharmony.

In contrast, when human relationships are **concordant** there is agreement, harmony and peace.

In our text from Proverbs 6:12-19 ‘discord’ translates a Hebrew word you likely will have read in the Bible: ‘midian’. The name ‘Midian’ means strife or contention. Midian was the son of Abraham by his concubine Keturah (Gen 25:2). Later it was the Midianites (&Ishmaelites) who took Joseph to Egypt (Gen 37:28,36). The Midianites are associated with the Moabites in seducing Israel into immorality and pagan worship at Baal-peor (Num 10:29-32). True to their name, the Midianites greatly disturbed in the peace amongst God’s people.

It was for this reason that God commanded Moses to execute a war of vengeance against them (Num 31:3) in judgement upon the discord which they had spread amongst His people.

From our text in Proverbs 6:12-19 we are going to see:

a) The ways in which peaceful relationships are broken under the heading ‘Spreading strife’.

b) The response of God in judgement under the heading ‘Being broken’.

c) The repairing of relationships in Christ under the heading ‘Pursuing peace’.

1. **Spreading strife**

I find the study of human anatomy very interesting, there are so many different body parts which work together as we live, move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Each one of us is most certainly ‘*fearfully and wonderfully made*’ (Ps 139:14). Made in His image, we are designed to reflect the glory of God. As the David wrote of humankind in Psalm 8 ‘*You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour*’ (Ps 8:5)

However, due to sin (that is rebellion against God), the different members of our body can work together, not for good, but for evil. This is what we see in our text. Can you spot all the different body parts? Eyes, feet, finger, heart, tongue, hands.

Here the whole person is engaged in **sowing discord** - that is spreading strife, disagreement, conflict, friction, hostility and disharmony thereby destroying peace in relationships with others. This destructive person is described as being ‘worthless’. The Hebrew word translated here is ‘Belial’.

We find this word used in the OT in a number of places to describe troublemakers who disturb the peace of God’s people e.g.

* **Deuteronomy 13:13** “*that certain* ***worthless*** *(belial) fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known,”*
* **1 Samuel 2:12** “*Now the sons of Eli were* ***worthless*** *(belial) men. They did not know the LORD.”*
* **Nahum 1:11** “*From you came one who plotted evil against the LORD, a* ***worthless*** *(belial) counsellor.”*

We find the word Belial also used in the NT. **2 Corinthians 6:15** “*What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?”* Here the Apostle Paul equates Belial with Satan.

A person who spreads strife, who sows discord, is functioning as a disciple of the Devil – seeking to disrupt the harmony of God’s created order. Spreading strife is evil. How does such a ‘worthless’ person use his or her body parts to do this nefarious, wicked, work?

**Firstly**, in our text, with ‘crooked speech’ – the sower of strife is not a ‘straight talker’. His or her speech is ‘shifty’. He or she does not speak the truth, but has a ‘lying tongue’ (v17). This person uses their mouth to bear false witness against others (v19). This person is a liar (v19) who breaks the 9th commandment.

Communication flow within the Reformed Church ‘grapevine’ can be incredibly fast and this can be a blessing when what is spoken is true and builds up. However, gossip, slander and untruths can rapidly spread division in the church and churches. **Proverbs 18:8** warns “*The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body*” (also 26:22)

When I hear someone unnecessarily passing on information about another person; talking in a way which does not build up (Eph 4.29 I firstly think ‘I wonder what they say about me to other people’. Then I might respond with ‘why are you telling me this?’.

A note here about passing on information about others. This is **not always** gossip. Sometimes doing so is absolutely necessary e.g. in the case of referring child abuse or other crimes to the Police. In the covenant community of the church, if you find out that someone else is sinning, you demonstrate your love for that person by going to them and showing them from Scripture the error of their ways and calling them to repentance. If they refuse to listen to you, you are not gossiping when you wisely tell an elder or a mature believer so that you can go back to see the erring brother or sister with that person (Matt 18:16).

In contrast to this situation, the slanderer and gossip either convey true information unnecessarily or falsehoods which pull down the character of others.

Proverbs 16:28 says that “*A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends”.*

It is important to be careful around those who use their tongues unwisely. Proverbs 20:19 wisely warns that “*Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with a simple babbler*”

How does a ‘worthless’ person use his or her body parts to do wicked work?

**Secondly**, with the eyes (v13) which are used to deceive by winking. (The Proverbs here are not warning against winking itself – which can be playful and harmless. Here the proverbs identify the circumstances when this rapid eyelid movement is being used for evil purposes). **Proverbs 16:30a** “*Whoever winks his eyes plans dishonest things.”* Here the eyes are used to communicate deceptively. This gesture implies that this winker has followers who agree and conspire with him/her and who understand this non-verbal speech.

Notice the eyes of the ‘worthless’ person are described as being ‘haughty’ (v17) The wicked person who sows strife is ultimately motivated by selfish pride – having contempt for the reputation of others and seeking to elevate themselves by demeaning those around them.

How does a ‘worthless’ person use his or her body parts to do wicked work?

**Thirdly**, with the feet and fingers (v13). These additional body parts are used to communicate in a concealed, secretive manner to others. The feet are used to run rapidly towards evil (v18).

**Fourthly,** with the hands which are used for violence, shedding innocent blood (v17).

**Fifthly** and most fundamentally, with the heart(v14,18) - **not** the cardiovascular, four-chambered blood pumping organ, but rather **the centre** of our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual life as human beings made in the image of God. The heart of the worthless person who destroys peace is ‘perverted’, ‘devising evil’ (v14), making ‘wicked plans’ (v18).

The whole person is engaged in spreading strife, planting the seeds of disharmony, conflict and disagreement amongst people with the intent of destroying harmony and peace. Why would a person engage in such evil? They may nurse an offence against themselves, either real or imagined. They may resent the progress, success or position of others. They may have allowed a root of bitterness to take hold within themselves.

Have you ever used your mouth, or some of your other body parts to spread strife in your family, church or workplace? For people like you and me, we may well have likely sinned in this area more often than we might care to admit; either to ourselves or to others.

The Apostle Paul expressed deep concern for the Corinthian church that he might come and find there amongst the congregation: “*Quarrelling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder*” (2 Cor 12:20).

Evils like these destroy relationships. In the life of a church, the congregation will likely shrink in size and the fellowship of believers can become a place nobody really wants to be. When strife is spreading the church becomes a toxic environment of discord sadly reflective of the broken, groaning creation around her rather than being an oasis of peace in the midst of a world at war.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord desires that we reflect the harmony and peace of the perfect relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit here in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that is why He will judge those who spread strife.

Which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **Being broken**

As human beings made in God’s image we are all moral beings (Rom 2:14-15). Although the consciences of fallen men, women and children are to a greater or lesser degree damaged/seared/ broken, yet we all have an inherent sense of right and wrong. We want the guilty to be punished. We naturally yearn for justice.

None of us need live very many years on this earth before we start saying or thinking “that’s not fair” or “that’s not right”. Another child plays with your toy car and then breaks the wheels off. Some other student at your school ‘borrows’ a friend’s notebook and copies the answers to an assignment. A fellow worker is promoted ahead of you because his family is good friends with the boss.

How do you respond to iniquity like the virtual enslavement of young children in overseas “sweat shops” or the rape of an elderly woman in her home in your home town? Do you not want the score to be settled? Do you not desire justice? Assaults on elderly, child abuse, torture are evil. We could use the word ‘abominable’ for these crimes.

Abomination is a strong word which conveys the sense of detestation, loathing, hatred, aversion, revulsion, repugnance, abhorrence, disdain, contempt, and distaste. ‘Abomination’ is a term used in both OT and NT

Here are some examples from the book of Proverbs:

* **11:20** “*Those of crooked heart are an abomination to the LORD*”
* **15:26** “*The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the LORD*”
* **16:5** “*Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD*”

(also 11:1; 15:8,9; 17:15; 20:10; 21:27; 28:9)

Notice the way in which verse 16 is written: There are **six** things that the LORD hates, **seven** that are an abomination to him. This pattern of having two numbers in a sequence – here 6 and 7 is used elsewhere in Proverbs (e.g. 30:15-31). The idea of the 6&7 here is to convey a list which is not exhaustive. Like abomination, the word ‘hate’ is very strong and has a similar meaning – which the Oxford English dictionary gives as ‘intense dislike’.

God is **against** 7 things which lead to broken peace between people:

* haughty eyes,
* a lying tongue,
* hands that shed innocent blood
* a heart that devises wicked plans
* feet that make haste to run to evil
* a false witness who breathes out lies
* one who sows discord among brothers.

That which God hates is sin. Sin is contrary to His nature. Sin is rebellion against our Creator. Sin is taking the good design in which God has made us, body and soul, and turning it against Him and against others. The sin of breaking peaceful relationships by sowing discord is ultimately an offence against the Triune God in whose Godhead there is perfect peace now and forevermore.

Sin declares war on God. Because of God’s perfect justice - the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23a). God does not allow any crime to go unpunished. Sooner or later His perfect justice will prevail. This consequence is inevitable (Heb 9:27).

**Just as** the Midianites came under God’s just judgement because they greatly disturbed the peace amongst His people (Num 31:7-10), **so**, the worthless person who spreads strife is certain to come under God’s righteous wrath. v15 expresses the **certainty** of judgement in these words: “*therefore calamity will come upon him suddenly; in a moment he will be broken beyond healing*”. In judgement, the breaker of peace will be broken. The one who spreads strife will themself experience strife.

God does not overlook this, or any other, crime committed by creatures made in His image. “*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap*” (Gal 6:7). The timing of God’s judgements can be divided into two periods:

1. **Temporal** – during this life.
2. **Eternal** – during the everlasting existence following this life.

There are many examples of God’s **temporal judgement** in Scripture including His actions against nations e.g. “*I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I am the LORD*” (Eze 25:11). God also acts against named individuals e.g. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), Elymas the magician (Acts 13:8-11). The temporal judgement of God is expressed in Romans chapter 1 with regard to homosexuality where ‘*men who commit shameless acts with men receive the due penalty for their error*’ (Rom 1:26-27). God’s judgement in this life may also be used by Him as part of His gracious work of disciplining those who loves (Heb 12:5-9).

God’s **eternal judgement** is complete and final separation from Him forever. It is the state Scripture calls ‘Hell’. To be in Hell is to experience a painful existence of continuous punishment “*away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might*” (2 Thess 1:9)

Remembering again that the book of Proverbs does not contain mathematical formulae for the way in which cause and effect always operate in this life, those who break the peace of human relationships **do not always** experience personal consequences which we might describe as calamities, nor are they necessarily ‘broken beyond healing’ in this life. Although often in their own personal lives sowers of discord experience fractured relationships and may have few if any true friends. However, in His mercy God is pleased at times to withhold his judgement, being patient, longsuffering and gracious thereby allowing guilty sinners like you and me time to repent (2 Pet 3:9).

If you wish to avoid complete calamity and being broken beyond healing, then you must come to Christ whilst there is still time. Perhaps this sermon today has convicted you of your own sin against God and others in spreading strife in your church, family or community.

You, and the rest of us all need Christ, which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **Pursuing Peace**

Jesus said, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matt 5:9). Would the people who know you well describe you as a person who pursues peace? (Ps 34:12-14; 1 Pet 3:11)

In contrast, to the things which are an abomination to the Lord, peace-breaking attitudes and activities which He hates…**God likes, God loves, God approves of**:

* kind and humble eyes,
* a truthful tongue,
* hands that bring healing and protect the vulnerable
* a heart that develops righteous plans
* feet that make haste to run to good
* a true witness who breathes out what is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, commendable (from Phil 4:8)
* one who sows harmony and peace among brothers.

The ‘body parts’ of Christ functioned harmoniously in this way when He lived on this earth. He is approved of God. He is the beloved Son in whom the Father is well-pleased:

* He is ‘gentle and lowly in heart’ (Matt 11:29)
* He always speaks the truth in love with grace (John 1:14)
* He works to bring healing and to protect the vulnerable
* He followed God’s righteous plan for Himself – all the way to the cross
* He walked on this earth, tempted as we are, yet without sin
* He is a true witness, being the image of the invisible God
* He has sown harmony and peace,

2 Cor 5:17-21 expresses what God has done through Christ having: “*reconciled us to himself*’. To ‘reconcile’ is to restore friendly relations, to bring about complete peace in a relationsship.

We, brothers and sisters in Christ, who were once ‘discordant’ with God are now ‘concordant’. We who were once at war against God are now at peace with Him. We who were once enemies are now His precious children!

This is why Christ is rightly called ‘The Prince of Peace’ (Isa 9:6). This is why at His birth the angel and a multitude of the heavenly host praised God saying: "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!*" (Luke 2:14). This is why we can truly experience the peace of God which surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7) even when the world around us is discordant, in conflict, at war and troubled by turmoil.

How is this peace possible?

Because, brothers and sisters in Christ, “*For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). Christ willingly became His Heavenly Father’s enemy on the cross. His relationship with God the Father broken, it become discordant, in conflict with the Most High God, because he bore our sin, brothers and sisters on that lonely cross.

In the unnatural darkness of the cross, Christ cried out "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"* (Matt 27:46) By means of Christ’s completed work at Calvary, God has reconciled to himself all who trust in Jesus.

But there is more! He has also ‘*given us the ministry of reconciliation*’. We are called by Christ to implore others to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). Our gospel ministry will be greatly strengthened when we display peaceful relationships with others, as much as it depends on ourselves (Rom 12:18).

People will be drawn to the church community as to a light on a hill when they see how much we love one another. When conflicts do arise, they will see how quickly we resolve them, forgiving one another as we have been forgiven in Christ and thereby restoring peace within the body of Christ. The church is called to be an oasis of peaceful relationships in a world at war.

Therefore, in light of what Christ has done for you, brother and sister, will you use all your body parts, eyes, feet, finger, hearts, tongue, hands to ‘*seek peace and pursue it*’?

AMEN