

PEACE MAKERS



in a noisy world

06 *When to Bend, When to Burn the Bridge*

Because faithfulness sometimes requires flexibility and sometimes requires resistance, Christian peacemaking depends on knowing the difference between cultural accommodation and gospel compromise.

EMBARK

Three Situations

Read the following situations and discuss whether the wiser response seems to be loving flexibility or principled resistance.

Situation 1 Ben is invited to dinner by a new family in the church who recently immigrated to the US from Peru. The meal, table customs, and evening routine all feel unfamiliar to him. Nothing clearly violates Scripture, but he feels awkward and out of place.

- *What would loving flexibility look like for Ben?*
- *Why might refusing every unfamiliar custom create unnecessary offense?*

Situation 2 Rachel is asked to participate in a community event because she is known as a thoughtful leader in the area. But she is also told that if she speaks, she should avoid mentioning the Trinity, because some of the other participants would find that offensive.

- *Why is this different from simple flexibility?*
- *What would faithfulness require from Rachel?*

Situation 3 Emily joins a Bible study where several people insist that unless she stops wearing leggings and begins wearing only skirts or dresses, she cannot really be considered spiritually mature or fully committed.

- *Why is this more serious than a simple matter of courtesy?*
- *What kind of gospel confusion could result if Emily gives in?*

Follow-Up Questions

- *Which situations seemed easiest to answer?*
- *Which situations felt more difficult?*
- *What makes it hard to tell the difference between wise flexibility and dangerous compromise?*

EXAMINE

READ Acts 16:1-5 and Galatians 2:1-5

Timothy

1. What did Paul choose to do with Timothy?
2. Why did Paul make that decision?
3. What does this suggest about cultural sensitivity and gospel mission?

Titus

4. What did Paul refuse to do with Titus?
5. Why did Paul refuse in that situation?
6. What was at stake in this moment?

Paul's
THEOLOGY
did not change.
The
SITUATIONS
did.

READ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

7. What kinds of flexibility does Paul describe in his ministry?
8. What goal shaped Paul's willingness to adapt?
9. What limits still remained on that flexibility?

EXPOSE

At first glance, Paul's decisions regarding Timothy and Titus may seem inconsistent. In Acts 16, Paul has Timothy circumcised because of the Jews in those places. In Galatians 2, Paul refuses to let Titus be compelled to be circumcised. Paul's theology did not change. The situations did.

In Timothy's case, circumcision was a matter of cultural sensitivity and ministry access. Paul was removing an unnecessary obstacle to hearing the gospel. In Titus's case, circumcision was being demanded as a requirement for full standing among the people of God. Paul recognized that yielding there would compromise the truth of the gospel itself. Not every act of accommodation is compromise. And not every act of resistance is faithfulness.

Christian peacemaking requires discernment. Sometimes love calls us to bend. Sometimes truth requires us to burn the bridge and say no. The challenge is knowing which is which. Paul's aim was never self-protection, cultural comfort, or personal consistency for its own sake. His aim was gospel clarity. That means the question is not simply: "What am I comfortable with?" or "What will people think?" The deeper question is: "What best serves the truth of the gospel in this moment?"

ENGAGE

Why This One and Not That One? (8–10 minutes)

Paul circumcised Timothy in Acts 16, but refused to let Titus be circumcised in Galatians 2. As a group, discuss the difference between the two situations.

10. What made Timothy's circumcision a matter of loving flexibility rather than compromise?
11. What made Titus's circumcision a matter of gospel compromise rather than wise accommodation?
12. What do these two situations teach us about the difference between:
 - removing a barrier to hearing the gospel
 - and adding a requirement to the gospel
13. Which error seems more common among Christians today?
 - treating flexibility as compromise
 - or treating compromise as harmless flexibility
14. What kinds of questions should believers ask when trying to discern whether a situation calls for flexibility or resistance?

For further discussion...

15. Why do some Christians instinctively view flexibility as compromise?
16. Why do others instinctively avoid confrontation even when truth is at stake?
17. How does Paul's example challenge both cowardice and combativeness?
18. What might it look like for our church to grow in this kind of discernment?

MEMORY VERSE

1 Corinthians 9:22–23 (CSB) "I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. Now I do all this because of the gospel, so that I may share in the blessings."