

“Coping with Cranky Co-Workers”

Text: Romans 12:18

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Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

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PRAY!

We continue our series on “Your Work Matters.” The key passage this morning comes from Romans 12:18, *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

- Circle “as far as it depends on you”. Have you realized that there are some people you can’t please? No matter what you do or what you try or how nice you are to them, you just can’t please them. Some people you just can’t please. God can’t please everybody. Even Jesus didn’t try to please everybody. John 5:29, *“I only seek to please Him who sent me.”*
- Let’s keep this in mind as we look at “Coping with Cranky Co-Workers.”

In her book, Never Work for a Jerk, Patricia King tells the story of Marilyn Maranda, a secretary in the treasurer’s department of a large packaged goods company. *“A relentless slave driver, Maranda’s boss often called her at home to dictate reports so she could get to work early to type them. One winter night, Maranda was driving her usual route home from work and it was cloudy and the roads were very dark. Maranda sensed that someone was following her. The car overtook her and forced her off the pavement. She started to panic then recognized her boss. When she rolled down her window he barked, ‘Take a letter.’”*

- Some of you work for bosses like that.

The source of most stress is people. What does God have to say about job stress, related to people? Today we’re going to look at five biblical principles specifically dealing with inter-personal conflict, or how to cope with cranky co-workers.

1. REFUSE TO RETALIATE.

- A. The Bible says to refuse to retaliate when people come out with their guns, trying to attack you. 1 Peter 3:9, *“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.”* When somebody insults you, what is your natural reaction? Get ‘em back! Insult them back. Americans are pro at this. We are masters at the art of put downs and come back “one liners.”
- B. The book Three Thousand Putdowns is a “good” book. Only as a pastor I can’t use it. Like, “She thinks her chin is her best feature. But to me it looks like a double feature.” Or, “She sure has big ears. From the front, she looks like a taxi with both doors open.” Great book, I just can’t use it!

- C. The Bible says don't return insult for insult. Don't retaliate. Don't get even. Proverbs 12:16 (Good News), *"When a fool is annoyed, he quickly lets it be known. Smart people will ignore an insult."* A mark of maturity is a controlled reaction. If you are immature, you are offended easily. It is impossible to offend a mature Christian. They just let things slide off their back. They don't take things personally.
- D. Smart people don't listen to insults. Jesus refused to be intimidated by insults. He wouldn't even listen to them. He wouldn't waste any time or energy responding to them. We see this from Jesus throughout His trial before Pilate and on the cross when hurled insults. Leave revenge to God. Don't take it in your own hands.

2. REFUSE TO ARGUE

- A. The Bible teaches very clearly – refuse to argue. Don't be drawn into an argument with cranky co-workers. The best illustration of this is Jesus, whom the Jewish religious leaders were constantly trying to trap and draw into an argument. Matthew 22:15 & 18 (Good News), *"The Pharisees went off and made a plan to trap Jesus with questions ... Jesus was aware of their intent, however, so he said, 'Why are you trying to trap me?'"* Jesus would not play their game. He would not be drawn into an argument.
- B. Realize that there are some people who love to get you into arguments. That's the way they get attention. When they draw you into an argument, they feel like they're controlling you. Refuse to argue. Don't be drawn into that trap.
 - 1. Baptist pastor
- C. Proverbs 26:21, *"Wood keeps a fire burning and troublemakers keep arguments alive."* Some people thrive on office politics. They love it. They get one group of people arguing, then they get another group complaining. They get their kicks out of spreading discontent.
 - 1. Proverbs 22:10 (Living Bible), *"Throw out the mocker and you will be rid of tension, fighting and quarrels."* Don't put up with them. The person who stirs up strife and wrath, warn them once, twice and then say, "Bye." If you have a troublemaker in your business, don't put up with it. You owe it to your people to maintain a positive morale in your business.

3. REFUSE TO CAVE IN when you're dealing with difficult people.

- A. A lot of people don't understand this. They think Christians are supposed to submit and let everything happen. No. Don't cave in. Don't allow yourself to be manipulated.
- B. Romans 12:2 (Phillips), *"Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold."* Here's the point: No one can pressure you without your permission. If you feel controlled or manipulated at work, you are allowing yourself to be controlled or manipulated. It says, "Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold." It's ok to stand up and be assertive when you know something's right. Many Christians don't understand

this. They're afraid to speak up. I meet Christians all the time who let people around them get away with murder as if it's more spiritual to just be quiet and put up with it all. The fact is, God never made you to be a wimp. He doesn't expect you to be a doormat. The Bible doesn't say that it's spiritual to be a doormat.

- C. Two people are called meek in the Bible – Jesus and Moses. Neither of them were weaklings, wimps. They were strong people of conviction; strength under control. God doesn't expect you to just cave in every time somebody wants to manipulate you or control you.
- D. Let's apply this to your life. Let's say a co-worker or boss asks you to do something that is immoral or illegal or unreasonable, an unrealistic demand on you, on your life and time. How do you deal with that?
 - 1. Jesus said in Matthew 5:37 (Jerusalem Bible), *"All you need to say is 'Yes' if you mean yes, or 'No' if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one."* Christians need to learn to say "No" and have convictions in their lives.

4. RESOLVE CONFLICT QUICKLY

- A. Don't let it go on and on. If you've got conflict in your business with people you work with, or in your home or at school, you deal with it quickly. You don't let it fester. That's a big mistake. "Let's ignore it and hope it will go away." From experience, does that work? No way! It does not work. Ignoring conflict does not get rid of it.
- B. Ephesians 4:26-27 (Good News), *"If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin and do not stay angry all day. Don't give the devil a chance."* Should a Christian get angry? Yes. Did Jesus ever get angry? Yes. Did Jesus ever sin? No. Evidently there's a right way to get angry and there's a wrong way to get angry.
- C. The wrong kind of anger is when it is not resolved quickly. *"If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin and do not stay angry all day."* That's giving the devil a chance. Resolve it quickly. Don't be angry all day. Phillips translation says, "Never go to bed angry." That will keep a few of us up sometimes. If you said, "In our marriage, we'll never go to bed angry" you might resolve problems a little quicker. Don't let anger hang on.
- D. How do I deal with conflict quickly? The solution to conflict resolution is one word – confrontation. Lovingly go to the person and in truth, speaking the truth in love, you deal with it right off the bat. It's the only way to resolve conflict.
 - 1. Margaret & I

5. RESPOND WITH LOVE

- A. That's the bottom line. In spite of their behavior, in spite of their attitude, you respond with love. God want you to remember two things with every person you meet this next week:

- B. 1. God loves them. That may be hard to believe, but God loves that jerk at work. In fact, God loves that jerk at work as much as he loves you. That's hard to believe. But God loves unconditionally.
 2. Not only that, God wants to teach you how to love the unlovely. The Bible says God is love. If we're going to become like God, then we've got to learn to be loving. It's difficult to love the unlovely. But if God's going to teach you genuine love, He is going to put you around some unlovely people. That's why they're there. God wants to teach you real, genuine love.
- C. Jesus gives us four actions with people who antagonize us. Matthew 5:44 (KJV), *"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you."* It says, You love them, You bless them, You do good to them, You pray for them. If you'll do the last one first, the other three will come automatically. It's much easier. If you will start praying for those people who irritate you on your job at work, or at home or at school, if you start praying for them, it's much easier to love them and bless them and do good to them because you cannot pray for somebody without having your attitude eventually change. God starts working in your own heart.
1. Pastor Chris

Think of that one person you're having the hardest time with in your life. It could be someone at work or at school. Think of that person who really gives you a difficult time. Let me ask you two questions:

1. What is your normal way of dealing with that person? Review that in your mind. How do I normally respond to that person?
2. Is it working? Is it reducing the stress in your life or do they still really irritate you?

There's a beautiful promise of God in Proverbs 16:7, *"When the Lord takes pleasure in anyone's way, he causes their enemies to make peace with them."* When God looks down on my life and sees me responding and reacting to people in the manner in which He has laid out in His word, and when my ways are pleasing to Him, He makes even my enemies live at peace with me. What a verse! What a promise!

PRAY!

Father, relationships are so central in our Christian lives. Help me not to retaliate this week or to insult back or to try and get even. God, help me to guard my mouth and to not be drawn into arguments, to realize that they are useless. Help me not to be squeezed by the world, when I'm asked to do things that I know are wrong or unnecessary or just unrealistic. Help me to speak the truth in love. Help me to say 'Yes' when I mean yes, and 'No' when I mean no. Father, help me to go to that person with whom I've been having a conflict and see if I can resolve it. And regardless whether or not they ever change, help me to love them and pray for them the way Jesus would. In Jesus' name. Amen.