

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

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Introduction.

- A. Among the least controversial words of all that Jesus said are the ones recorded in Matthew 5:9. If there's anything that the world and the Bible are agreed on, it's that peace is good. Everybody knows that. Even those brainless beauty pageant contestants, when asked what their greatest desire is, will breathily express their hope for world peace. They might not be able to tell a map of the planet Earth from a map of Narnia, but they are still convinced that world peace is a Good Thing, as indeed are we all.
- B. Of course, once it gets down to the things in which we actually have the capacity to make peace, the number of people who are still interested in peacemaking dwindles dramatically. We like the idea of being at peace with our spouses, our other family members, our brethren at church, and so on, but we don't want to be the ones who reach out across the divide of conflict. If we are, we prefer to be operating from a position of such overwhelming strength that the peace is made on our terms. One of the famous guns from the days of the Wild West was a Colt revolver that its manufacturer named the Peacemaker, and it seems like a lot of folks would rather engage in the Colt Peacemaker style of diplomacy than in genuine peacemaking.
- C. When we put that into practice, it typically doesn't work so well, and it especially doesn't work well in our dealings with God. Unless we are clued in about the way that peace works in the Bible, we don't know how to achieve it, how to help others achieve it, or even what it truly is. Without that understanding, we are doomed to conflict here and in the hereafter. Let's look, then, at the meaning behind, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

I. Making Earthly Peace.

- A. The most logical place to begin exploring this concept is by looking at what most people think of when they think of peacemaking—making earthly peace. This is certainly something that the Bible emphasizes, and we see an example of this sort of command in Titus 3:1-2. As is often the case in Scripture, we can look at the other words and commands surrounding "peaceable" here to figure out what being peaceable takes. The first item in this cloud of ideas is speaking evil of no one. This can be a real challenge for us, and it certainly is for me. Back in high school, I was known for being mouthy and sarcastic, and naturally, as I ran my mouth that much, it got me in a lot of trouble and made me a lot of enemies. I'm here to tell you, folks: it might be a lot of fun wandering around, spouting off with the first cutting remark that comes to mind, but it is not the way to remain at peace with all men. We need to learn only to speak well of others if we wish to please God.
- B. Likewise, gentleness is an important building block of peacemaking. As Solomon writes in Proverbs 15, it is the soft answer that turns away wrath. When someone comes to us fuming about some wrong they think we've committed, if we really want that conversation to go nuclear, all we have to do is answer a harsh word with a harsh word. On the other hand, if we want to make peace with that person, the way to do that is by hearing them out and responding to what they have to say calmly, kindly, and fairly. Finally, humility is another important part of being peaceable. We're able to be humble when we trust in God to exalt us, rather than worrying about exalting ourselves. When we have this humble frame of mind in the midst of a confrontation, we're not concerned about saving face or coming out on top or any of those other expressions of pride that only add fuel to the fire. Instead, we're able to focus on the other person and healing the breach between us.
- C. This kind of peacemaking behavior is important in every area of our lives, but it is especially important in the church. Anger and conflict have negative repercussions everywhere, but when they arise between Christians, they can cause churches to be shattered and souls to be lost. That's why we see the admonition recorded in Romans 14:19. If God's plan for the church is to work at all, we must desire only to have peace with and to edify one another. Of course, the devil is constantly working to keep us at one another's throats instead. He's always working to turn brother against brother, and to make that conflict as serious and widespread as possible. It may be that right now, we've succeeded in getting crossways with some other Christian. If that's the case, we need to do what we can to resolve the dispute. We need to sit down with them and talk the issue through, so that we can have the peaceful, harmonious relationship God wants. Only a congregation that has this kind of good interpersonal relations can work usefully to further the kingdom.
- D. Of course, when it comes to peacemaking, our efforts are not necessarily always destined for success. Paul warns us of the possibility in Romans 12:18. It may well be that when we make our overture to the person who's unhappy with us, that he responds rationally and politely, and works with us to resolve the disagreement. However, people are just as likely to reject the olive branch as they are to take it. When that happens, we need to bow to the inevitable and not waste our time trying to reach someone who has refused to listen. That accomplishes nothing, and as we continue to pound our heads against the brick wall of hostility, we can even harm ourselves. At times like that, it's best to let things go and limit the damage as best we can.

II. When Peace Doesn't Happen.

- A. Not only does the Bible acknowledge that peace is not always within our power to achieve, it also spends quite a bit of time exploring the spiritual situations when peace doesn't happen. We see one of the more shocking Scriptural quotations in this area in Matthew 10:34-36. One of the titles of Jesus is Prince of Peace, yet here, He says that He didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. What's going on with that?! In reality, Jesus' words here are just a logical extension of what Paul said back in Romans 12. Sometimes, it's impossible for us to have peace with others simply because we're Christians and they aren't. The Bible commands us to teach things and do things that can generate violent hostility from others, and when that happens, we don't have the choice to stop obeying God simply so we don't offend someone else. Our discipleship leads us to conflict.
- B. As Jesus predicted here, some of the most brutal, bitter conflicts about Christianity come within our own families. It happened all the time in the first century, and sadly, it happens all the time today. The problem is twofold. First, it is in our home life and our relationships with our families that our faith should be most obvious and important, and second, we can drift away from our friends and leave our jobs, but we're stuck with our families until the day we die. That can easily set the stage for decades of hostility.
- C. When we're in that situation, when it's our home that is torn apart by religious strife, here's what we need to do: We need to be as polite and non-confrontational as we can be, but we still have to remember that it's our responsibility to please God first and to obey Him first. We can't stop going to church or contributing to the Lord's work or rejecting evil practices just because it offends our parents or our spouse. For the sake of our souls, we have to continue doing what's right, even when we know it will anger our families.
- D. If that's the case, if being a Christian can actually create conflict in this life rather than ending it, it seems almost logical that we should be peacemaking atheists rather than peacemaking Christians. The thing is, though, that Biblical peace is not the same thing as freedom from earthly conflict. That's the point that Jesus makes in John 14:27. There is additional peace to be gained by becoming His disciple, but it is not the peace that the world recognizes as an absence of conflict. Instead, it is the peace that comes from a Lord the world doesn't acknowledge, working on a level the world does not comprehend. That's what Jesus is talking about.

III. The Peace of God.

- A. This is our opening, then, to the peace of God, the kind of peace that He really wants to see us make. Paul explains what this peace is based on in Ephesians 2:14-16. In the preceding verses, Paul has just finished describing the spiritual landscape before Jesus. It's a bleak place. In the earthly realm, Jews and Gentiles were bitterly divided and hated each other. In the spiritual realm, both of them were separated from God by their sins. What Jesus did is that in one single act, dying on the cross, He made peace among all these different disputing parties. First, the death of Jesus signaled the end of the Law of Moses, which is what had divided Jew from Gentile for all those centuries. Once the Law was done away with, Gentiles could join together with Jews on an equal footing in the search for the same God. They could worship together, eat together, intermarry, and engage in all those other acts of sharing. More importantly still, though, Jesus, through His death on the cross, reconciled both Jew and Gentile to God. By dying in their place, He made it possible for God to forgive their sins and count their spiritual death sentences as already carried out. Where before people were separated from God by their sins, now they could come to Him as a holy people.
- B. This, then, is why Jesus said back in Matthew 5 that peacemakers would be sons of God. One of the most profound ways that we can understand His coming to earth is as the bringer of spiritual peace. Whenever we do things that also create spiritual peace, we are walking in His footsteps and serving the same Father.
- C. One of the main ways that we need to make this spiritual peace is by making it on our own behalf. Peter explains this in 1 Peter 3:10-11. Jesus did a marvelous job of laying the groundwork for our peace. After what Jesus did, we don't even have to meet God and His people halfway. However, we still have to do something. We have to seek peace for ourselves in the way that God prescribes. It's not hard to become a disciple of Christ, but it is necessary. Unless we do, no matter how much we come here on Sundays, no matter how many Christians we have as our good buddies, we are still not a part of the church and cannot expect to share in the fellowship that Christians share. In just the same way, unless we obey the gospel, we can sing all the hymns we want and try to live the best life we want, but God still does not count us as His children. Neither God nor His church will reject us if we do what is necessary, but we still have to do it. We have to seek peace.
- D. It's a wonderful first step when we make peace with God and His people on our behalf, but that's not the end of our peacemaking endeavors. Look at James' discussion of the topic in James 3:17-18. Once we understand just how wonderful the peace of God is, and just how blessed we are if we have it, we won't be content to just claim that peace for ourselves. Instead, we will sow the seeds of peace in the hearts of others by teaching them the gospel. We'll go to people, point out that they're in a state of conflict with God, then explain how they can be reconciled to Him. That's the seed we sow. Just like any earthly seed, this heavenly seed does not always sprout in the hearts of men, but it always does sometimes, and when it does, we've made peace.

Conclusion. If you want peace with God this evening, you can come to Him by repenting and obeying His word.