

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

by Harold S. Martin

Used by permission of the **Brethren Revival Fellowship (BRF)**, published in **BRF Witness, September/October, 1986, Volume 21, Number 5**

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (**Matthew 5:9**). What is the meaning of these words for us? How does peacemaking affect our witness for Jesus? In a day when much emphasis is being placed on peace, the Christian needs to contemplate the meaning of this Beatitude most seriously.

1. WHAT IS PEACE?

We must begin with a proper understanding of what is included in this key word. The Greek word for “peace” (“eirene”) is a beautiful word, full of meaning. The word is a picture-word, calling to mind specific mental images when heard. The word means tranquility and is used to describe a boat sailing on a calm sea. It means harmony and describes a song in which all notes and cords blend in perfect agreement. And it conveys the idea of an absence of strife, calling to mind two people walking hand-in-hand along the road. (Our English word “peace” comes to us from the Latin “pax” from which we derive “pact.” A pact is a treaty between two parties/governments).

The Hebrew equivalent is the word “shalom.” This word is also rich in meaning and was, for the Jew, the common word of greeting. It means all of what the above Greek word means yet adds another aspect. Not only does shalom convey the negative — the absence of strife and evil — but also the positive, the presence of all good things. To wish shalom on another was in essence to say, “I wish for you not only the absence of all that may harm, but also the presence of everything that makes for a person’s good.”

From the above definitions we see that the word “peace” has to do with the state of harmony, tranquility, and unity as it exists between two parties. However, there are some things that peace does not mean:

a) For some, being at peace is the same as having a truce. A “truce” is “a suspension of fighting especially for a considerable duration by agreement of opposing forces”

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary). During the Vietnam War, a truce was drawn for Christmas Day. For that one day there would be no shooting, even though the sides were not at peace with each other. The hostility still existed; the hatred was still present. This is the difference between a truce and peace. When there is peace, the issues have been dealt with; the hostilities cease; the war is over.

b) For others, pursuing peace means evading the issues. Some see peace as simply ignoring that which causes the hostilities among us — a sort of sweep-them-under-the-rug-and-hope-they-go-away approach to problem solving. However, ignoring reality is not peace. True peace never evades the issues, but rather deals with them, building the right bridges and moving through the pain until harmony is established.

c) For still others, peace is sought at the expense of truth. Peace is paramount and it is “peace at any price.” Most persons want to avoid needless strife, but there are times when standing for the truth will stir up strife. Sometimes the way to lasting peace includes addressing issues which will be painful to work through. Truth and righteousness are just as important as peace, and these factors cannot be compromised. For example, **Jude** wrote his epistle encouraging the believers “to contend for the faith” (**verse 3**), an activity which undoubtedly caused some turmoil. Jesus taught that at times faithful discipleship would place a “sword” between loved ones (**Matthew 10:34**), indicating that following Him could cause strife. And Paul implies that not all strife can be avoided when one is following Christ (**Romans 12:18**), although we are to do all that we can to live at peace with everyone.

d) And for still others, peace is the essence of the Gospel. The ideal of living at peace with all becomes the thrust of Christianity for certain believers. Peace needs to be seen as a vital part of the Gospel message, but it must be given its rightful place. It is a fruit of the Gospel — a result of experiencing the grace of God (**see Romans 5: and Galatians 5:22-23**) — not the Gospel itself. Paul outlines for us the essence of the Gospel in **1 Corinthians 15: 1-8**.

So then, this is peace — what it is, and what it is not — but what is a peacemaker?

2. WHO ARE THE PEACEMAKERS?

Notice at the start that the promise of this Beatitude is to the “peacemaker” and not to the “peace lover.” Passivity is not the answer; activity is. “Peacemaking” is an action word, implying that the Christian’ is to be busy making peace in this world. There are many who love peace and few who work for it. (It should be noted here that we are not condoning a peace activism which ignores other important biblical principles).

The call to peacemaking implies the presence of contention. Indeed, the world today is full of conflict and strife. What is the cause of this hostility? In order to know how to go about establishing peace, we need first to know something about why individuals are at odds with themselves.

James says that evil desires within are the source of conflict (**James 4:1-2**). People are at war with their neighbors because they are not at peace with themselves. And they are not at peace with themselves because they are at war with God. The heart of the peace issue is the spiritual condition of the human soul. Any peacemaking effort which does not take seriously this truth is at best merely a “truce tactic.”

If the Scriptures teach that the hostilities which exist in the world are results of the strife between God and His creation, then it is logical to believe that it is this aspect of peace which concerns Jesus in the Beatitude. Also, the nature of the Beatitudes is spiritual and personal, not political, and global. In light of this fact, biblical peacemakers have a three-fold agenda:

- a) First and primarily, Christians are called to lead others into a peaceful relationship with God their Father. This is the basis for peace without which no lasting harmony can be found.
- b) Second, the biblical peacemaker works to establish harmonious relationships between individuals and their neighbors, based on their spiritual relationship with Christ, the Prince of Peace.
- c) Third and finally, Christians attempt to lead their nations into peaceful co-existence. They must realize however, that this is not their primary calling nor will the effects be long-lasting (**see Matthew 24:6**). As long as the leaders of nations remain hostile toward the God who made them, they will continue to be hostile toward their global neighbors.

This leads to an important question. Since lasting peace can only be established upon the basis of spiritual harmony with God, what does one do in those situations where persons who are hostile to one another are not open to the truth of the Gospel?

For example, consider the pastor who counsels a family in which the teenager is extremely hostile toward the parents. Several times the teen has run away from home. The parents nor the teen are willing to assume blame, although clearly both sides are in the wrong. They are not open to spiritual counsel. What does the pastor do since lasting peace is not very likely possible? Throw in the towel? Cast up hands in despair? Ignore what can be done? No, of course not! As with many things in life, the ideal is not always within reach. At such times, the spiritual leader must be willing to work for whatever peace can be found – even if it is less than complete. A little peace, an improved condition, is always better than no progress at all.

This is really where we stand regarding world peace. As Jesus said, there will be hostilities until the end of time (**Matthew 24:6-7**). Nevertheless, what peace can be enjoyed, even if temporary or partial, is better than war. And because lasting peace is only certain when based on conversion to Christ, Christians do not rest content with mere secular peace — but continue to work at introducing individuals to the Messiah who provides a basis for true peace.

3. HOW ARE THE PEACEMAKERS BLESSED?

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” What does it mean to be a son of God? It is important to note that the Greek here is the word “*huios*” which is clearly “son,” and not “*teknon*” which is “child” (see KJV). Although both of these words are used in Scripture to identify believers (see **John 1:12** where the Greek is “*teknon*”), the word “son” is the more frequent term. It is also, of course, used often as the title for Christ, both connected to “man” and God.”

In Greek, the word “*huios*” (son) is used primarily three ways:

- a) It is used in its natural sense to indicate the male child of a man or woman. An example of this can be seen in **Matthew 13:55** when the people asked concerning Jesus: “is this not the carpenter’s son?”
- b) It is used in a divine sense, to specify that Jesus was God in the flesh. For example, see **Matthew 16:16** where Peter confessed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God.”
- c) And it is used in a figurative sense, to imply that someone shares the character qualities of another. For this reason, James and John are called “Sons of Thunder” (**Mark 3:17**). Their personality reminded Jesus of the roar of thunder. Barnabas is referred to as the “Son of Consolation” (**Acts 4:36**) because he demonstrated kindness and compassion. And the disciples were called the “Sons of Light” for they were chosen to bear the light of the Gospel to the world (**John 12:36**).

Since it is obvious that we could never be the literal, physical offspring of God, and since we most certainly cannot be divine, the meaning of “son” here in this Beatitude must be that of number 3 above. Peacemakers are blessed with the title “Sons of God,” for they are manifesting in their ministry a Godlike work. They are living out in their lives a character quality and an aspect of activity which is true of God himself. The Apostle Paul says: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting man’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through

us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5: 19-21). See also the larger context in 2 Corinthians 5:16-6:2, and Ephesians 2:11-22.

This promise—to be called “a son of God”—is perhaps the most significant of all. Sure, it is good to be promised the Kingdom of heaven, comfort, inheritance, satisfaction, mercy, and a glimpse of God (as all of the other Beatitudes pledge). But to arrive at the place where one's life demonstrates the characteristics of God, that is the highest compliment and blessing of all. To be so involved in the lives of others, leading them into peaceful relationships with their God and their neighbors, that one is seen as doing a Godlike work is most certainly the greatest tribute which can be made to our heavenly Father.

Are we about the business of peacemaking or are we content to have truces, temporary cease-fires? Are we about the ministry of sharing the Gospel with those who have not yet heard so that they may find peace with God? Or, having found this tremendous peace, are we keeping it to ourselves?

The following **SELF-CHECK QUESTIONS** are designed to help the reader review and remember some important facts in the lesson just presented:

- 1) Define the word “peace” — giving attention to both the Greek and the Hebrew background of the word meaning.
- 2) List the four things which are clearly not a part of the concept of biblical peace.
- 3) According to the Scriptures, what is the root cause of the hostilities present in the world, and where is the passage found?
- 4) List the three items on the Christian's peacemaking agenda.
- 5) What should be the Christian attitude toward world peace, and on what basis should it be sought?
- 6) List the three uses of the word “son” in Scripture, and what is the meaning of the word “son” in **Matthew 5:19**.