



Christian Peacemaking, #1

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I used to work in downtown Chicago. In the mid-1980's, there was a construction boom. Contractors were building major skyscrapers throughout the city. The construction sites always drew spectators who watched the workers lay the foundations for the skyscrapers that were being built.

The foundations required massive digging and work that would not be visible when the building was completed. But that foundational work was utterly essential. Everything about the skyscraper depends and rests upon the quality of the foundation.

A skyscraper's foundation illustrates both the importance and care that you should take as you study the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. You should no more hurry through the Beatitudes than you would hurry through building the foundation of a skyscraper, because the Beatitudes are the foundation of Christian life. These attitudes frame everything about your Christian life and determine the direction it will go.

When you have those parameters established in your heart, you have laid the foundation for a fruitful relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. But it is all hidden work in the inner man. It is not visible to onlookers. And yet, the Lord makes it abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount that God is entirely interested in the secret life of a believer.

Jesus repeatedly calls us to secret devotion. For example, no fewer than three times in chapter 6 He emphasizes that your Father who sees in secret will reward you. These things are hidden and intangible, but they are absolutely essential. They are the key to the blessing of God. That's why we spend time on it.

In light of that, you can see that many of us are preoccupied with the wrong things. We worry about appearance and numbers. "How many people go to that church?" "How does my dress look?" "How many people came to the latest church conference that we put on?" "What's my grade point average in seminary?" "How much money do I have in the bank?"

Rarely do we ask the questions that would actually provoke the blessing of God in our lives. "Why don't I hate sin more than I do?" "How can I respond rightly when people criticize me?" "How can I better seek and do the will of God?" "To whom can I show mercy today?"

Those are the questions we should ask. Our indifference to them shows how shallow and immature we truly are. So we cover our spiritual nakedness with the fig leaves of appearance, worldly prosperity, and external success. Numbers become more important than godly character; external poise more important than prayerfulness. We can't deny that because our mouths speak from that which fills our hearts.

The Sermon on the Mount calls us out of that carnal slop and unto the higher ground of a godly life. Rightly understood, Jesus' great sermon here leads us to stark choices about what we want our lives to be like. We cannot walk away from it unchanged.

Just to review the Sermon on the Mount very briefly. Jesus began His public ministry with a summary statement found in Matthew 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Just a few short verses later, Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount which begins with the words:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The phrase, "the kingdom of heaven," links repentance with everything that follows in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is explaining the life of repentance. This is the life that flows from the redeemed heart. It shows us how the new man lives and thinks and orders his priorities.

I. A Call to Righteousness

First of all, in the broadest of terms, the Sermon on the Mount is a call to righteousness. For example, in one of the better-known verses of the entire Sermon, Jesus says:

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matthew 6:33).

He calls His hearers to seek the kingdom and righteousness of God as the surpassing priority of life. As we live this earthly life amid all its anxiety, uncertainty, and difficult circumstances of various kinds, the Lord calls you to be righteous in the midst of it. You cannot postpone your concern to pursue righteousness until the circumstances work out the way you want them to or until God answers your prayers exactly like you want.

No. Right now, right where you're at, Jesus' command is to seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God. Our difficult trials and conflicts do not excuse us from that surpassing priority. Righteousness is more important than the solutions to your problems. So the Lord calls us all to live our lives in submission to His will—and His will includes the cultivation of the deep heart attitudes found in the Beatitudes that reflect the humble character of Christ Himself.

It takes spiritual effort to pursue this. It requires thought. It requires meditation. It requires prayer.

Jesus said only people whose lives reflect these priorities truly belong to the kingdom of heaven. Look around. *Can anyone seriously argue that far more people claim to be Christians than actually pursue this kind of life?* Jesus warns us—that disparity speaks to vast numbers of people who think they are on the road to heaven when in fact they will face His judgment in hell (cf. Matthew 7:21-27).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus makes a searching call to righteousness that has eternal implications.

II. A Call to Blessing

But the Sermon on the Mount is also a call to *blessing*. We must remember that because otherwise we would be prone to discouragement and even despair.

Why do I say that? The Sermon on the Mount cuts us and makes us bleed. It exposes our spiritual superficiality. It forces us to recognize the blackness of our sin and even the inadequacy of our own repentance. It calls us to mourn over our spiritual failure.

Yet that repentant mourning leads to spiritual blessing from our heavenly Father. Nine times in the Beatitudes alone Jesus says that the person of this character is blessed. “*Blessed* are the poor in spirit,” “*Blessed* are those who mourn,” “*Blessed* are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,” “*Blessed* are the merciful,” and so on. In chapter 6, Jesus promises the reward of God upon those who pursue this life of righteousness and sincere devotion to God.

So while He calls us to a standard of righteousness that convicts us, He simultaneously promises deep blessings. That motivates us to seek this life even though it may be demanding. We want the reward God has promised for this kind of life.

Scripture actually commands the hope of that reward as an inherent element of faith. Hebrews 11 says that the one who comes to God must believe that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. You must believe God will bless you for seeking Him even if your experience of that reward is delayed as it was with righteous Job.

So the Sermon on the Mount calls us to righteousness. It calls us to blessing. We must understand the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount in that context. Every verse in the Sermon on the Mount must be interpreted in light of those broad themes.

III. Review of the Beatitudes

So, in this broad ranging sermon, Jesus starts with the Beatitudes. The starting point is strategic and lays the foundation for everything that flows in the rest of the sermon.

The Beatitudes describe Christian character. You can’t talk about how a Christian should live apart from the fundamental element of Christian character. It does no good to call men to devotion to Christ apart from an understanding of Christian character.

Salvation is utterly transformational. It makes an old man new and progressively transforms him into the image of Christ until he is one day glorified in heaven. The righteousness and blessing of this Sermon depends upon the dynamic of the redeemed heart. Here in the Beatitudes, we see the nature of the redeemed heart.

You can evaluate your spiritual condition by looking at the Beatitudes as in a mirror and evaluate whether you see yourself somehow reflected back. If you claim to be a Christian, you should see these foundational desires for mourning and gentleness and righteousness in your own heart even if the “mirror” is clouded with your imperfections. The Beatitudes express the nature of the new heart God always gives to those whom He saves. You can only be indifferent to the Beatitudes to the peril of your own eternal soul.

So if you see these desires welling up in your heart, you can say, “My salvation is real. It is no credit to me, but I do see this work of God in my heart.” That’s why these Beatitudes are important.

As we follow the development of the Beatitudes, there is a certain spiritual logic to them. In verses 3 through 8, we have learned that the Christian is someone who is broken before God. He is mourning over his sin. No one comes to a true saving knowledge of Jesus Christ who is not utterly convicted of his sinfulness. Jesus said that He came to call people to repentance. The self-righteous—those who do not see themselves as sinners—He had nothing to say to (Luke 5:31-32). The Christian understands that.

So the Christian profoundly believes that God does not owe him anything. He understands that he has forfeited any claim on the character and person and gifts of God. The true Christian does not insist on having his own way, because his will has been broken before the throne of God. He doesn’t have to have it his way because he understands that he doesn’t deserve anything in the first place. His sin has robbed him of any right to make demands before God or men.

As a result, the Christian is marked by meekness. He is predisposed toward submission to God and peace toward men. He doesn’t even want to assert his demands. He does not retaliate in the face of criticism or wrong treatment because he wants to reflect Christ in all that he does. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness because he wants to conform to the will of the God who saved him and because he wants to separate himself as much as possible from the sin that formerly characterized his life.

The Christian also sees the place of mercy. He has received undeserved mercy and therefore he wants to spread a mercy that is like what he himself has received. He is not a cul-de-sac but a river of that mercy. It doesn’t stop with him; it flows through him. He doesn’t receive God’s mercy for his own sins and then condemn others mercilessly for their faults. He sees the connection which says, “God forgave me, so I can forgive you.”

As he pursues that kind of righteousness, his heart is purified and his devotion to Christ comes to a single focus designed to worship, praise and honor God.

Jesus promises abundant blessing on the people of this character. Despite its challenges and implicit self-denial, this pursuit of righteousness is not a meaningless pursuit! It is a profound interaction with the God of your salvation. You will be comforted in your sorrow over sin. Your spiritual longings for righteousness will be satisfied. You will receive mercy now in the cleansing of your sins. And one day—one great and glorious day—you will see the God of your salvation face-to-face.

That brief review builds the momentum we need to consider Matthew 5:9:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Once again, we see that Matthew 5:9 follows logically from everything that has preceded it. The transformed life of the Beatitudes leads to a subjective sense of internal peace that comes from having objective peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins.

With that peace with God and peace within, the true Christian becomes someone who seeks to bring peace to others. He calls the unsaved to peace with God through the proclamation of the gospel. In every earthly relationship—at home, at work, in his neighborhood—he desires and pursues peace with others.

The implicit self-denial of the Beatitudes makes that possible. As long as you insist on your rights in a relationship, as long as you are preoccupied with the concept of “how does this affect me?” you are on a collision course for conflict. The people you meet will be insisting on *their* rights even as you insist upon yours. So conflict is inevitable. As long as people are dead in their sins and preoccupied with themselves and getting their rights, conflict will be man’s lot until Christ returns.

The Beatitudes speak into the despair of human selfishness. Jesus says, “Live differently. Think differently. Have different motivations.” When you truly understand your own guilt before God, you won’t have time to stew over the lesser wrongs someone has committed against you. You will be eager to share mercy with those who have wronged you because you understand that without *God’s* mercy, you would be totally condemned.

That transforms what you want in relationships. You want peace because God has given peace to you. The people of the Beatitudes leave peace in their wake. As they walk through life, there is an aroma of peace that they leave behind.

When we talk about “peace,” we mean the idea of *righteous harmony* (both words are important). Peace is *righteous* because it must be conformed to the truth.

But peace is *harmony* because there is an absence of conflict. There is an overall sense of well-being and unity. It is the antithesis of strife and discord.

You intuitively recognize that if you have been around the Christian church. Someone who claims to be godly should somehow be marked by peaceful attitudes and relationships. Conflict is at odds with any personal claim to godliness.

I remember when I first recognized that as a young Christian. I went to a friend's house for a Bible study. He was still living at home. His dad was an influential leader in our church and enjoyed the respect of many people.

I walked up to his home and found the main door open. As I reached to knock on the screen door, I couldn't help but look in.

I wish I hadn't.

The church leader was on top of his son, beating him with his fists. You should have seen his look when he saw me at his door.

At the time I had no paradigm through which to understand that. Why is a reputable church leader beating his teen-ager with his fists?

Whatever the explanation for that awkward moment, it is safe to say that the man was not what he appeared to be to the congregation. *Godly* men are peacemakers. Peacemakers don't settle disputes with their fists, *especially* at home. Those of us who are Christians know that instinctively. We mourn the lack of peace that it represents.

But I want to help you understand why peace and harmony must *necessarily* be part of the Christian life. Peace is inevitable because it is rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ whose life and teaching are the foundation of these Beatitudes.

I want to consider four aspects of the person and work of Christ that inevitably make a true Christian a peacemaker. You'll find these aspects will change the way you respond to conflict and potential conflict in all your relationships.

1. The Person of Christ

Jesus Christ Himself makes it inevitable that His disciples will be peacemakers. Peace is so intrinsic to His nature that He is known as "the Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Ephesians 2:14 says, "He Himself is our peace." The reality of Christ's peaceful character will directly impact the character of every true Christian.

When God saves a sinner, he does much more than simply wipe his slate clean of sin and spare him the judgment of hell. A spiritual change occurs in which the sinner is brought into intimate union with Christ. The spiritual reality of that union guarantees that in some way *peace* will flow out of the true believer's life, because the power of Christ's life in him is greater than the power of remaining sin.

I remember vividly how I first came to understand that principle. Before I became a Christian, I was an angry, bitter man. At the time I put my faith in Christ, I was conscious of repenting from my sin and making an unconditional surrender to His Lordship. I knew that I was trusting Him for my salvation. But that's I had no expectations about peace. I had never heard of such a thing.

But in the days that followed, as I started to read the Bible and grow in my salvation, it started to dawn on me—I was so satisfied and content. Nothing had changed about my circumstances whatsoever. But I was conscious of a sense of peace with God, peace within, and peace in my relationships that I had never known before. I wasn't *trying* to be peaceful or *seeking* peace. I just *was*. The anger that had marked my life . . . was *gone*.

How do you explain that? That kind of peace is the natural and inevitable byproduct of being brought into union with Christ, who is the Prince of Peace. Christ Himself produces that peace in our hearts. That early peace is one factor that gives me assurance that my salvation is genuine. I thank God for it.

As we grow in Christ, we have certain spiritual responsibilities to preserve that peace in our hearts (cf. Philippians 4:6-9). That doesn't obscure my fundamental point here. Because of the presence of the person of Christ in our lives, there should be a foundational orientation and sympathy toward the principle of peace.

This would be a good time to step back and ask yourself whether you know that kind of peace. Have you put your faith in Christ for salvation? If you have, you know something about peace. That's the mark of a true Christian.

But beloved, if this discussion about peace sounds foreign to you, you need to go back to the beginning. Go back to the fundamental truth that you are a sinner under the wrath of God. You need a Savior, who is Jesus Christ—the Prince of Peace. Start there. Christ can give you peace and turn you into a true peacemaker.

But there is more than the *person* of Christ that makes a peacemaker out of the true Christian.

2. The Work of Christ

“The work of Christ” refers to His death on the cross in which He took God's punishment against our sins into our body so that we could be forgiven. The Bible describes His work as producing *peace* in the sense of bringing us into an objective peace with God. As a positional matter, we have been reunited to God in Christ. We are no longer His enemies because Christ has reconciled us to Him. Colossians 1:19-20 says:

It was the Father's good pleasure through all the fullness to dwell in [Christ], and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

One dimension of the work of Christ is that it was a work of peace—a work of reconciliation. Someone who has appropriated the work of Christ through faith in Him has the most important peace of all—a full and permanent reconciliation with the God who will judge the living and the dead. Romans 5:1 says:

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

In an objective sense, the Christian's war with God is *over*. You are at peace with Him. Though you were an enemy, the cause of the antagonism has been removed through the death and resurrection of Christ. Romans 5:10:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

That objective peace leads to the outworking of subjective feelings of peace in your heart and in peaceful relationships as well. The Prince of Peace did a work that produces peace in His disciples. It is utterly necessary. To one extent or another, peace must mark the intrinsic character of every true Christian.

We can go still further. Christ has done even more to give peace to His disciples.

3. The Gift of Christ

In John 14:27, Jesus was talking with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. He went out of his way to emphasize the reality of peace He was bequeathing to them.

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

Then in John 16:33 He said:

These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Jesus promised a peace to His disciples that is in stark contrast with the things of this world. His peace is in stark contrast with the agitation of a troubled heart. His peace transcends tribulation. His peace gives courage that overcomes discouragement and opposition. As part of His gracious work in salvation, Jesus plants that principle of peace in the heart of all His disciples. That is why we can say the outworking of peace is inevitable in the life of every true believer. The operation of that peace in a believer's heart will make him a peacemaker.

So you have the person of Christ, the work of Christ, and the gift of Christ all driving you to know and manifest this peace. Peacemaking is inextricably woven into the fundamental realities of your salvation.

A fourth point further insures that you will be a peacemaker as a Christian. This point shows how fundamental peace and peacemaking is to the Christian life.

4. The Command of Christ

God repeatedly commands believers to pursue peace. This theme runs throughout the Scriptures, as shown in a handful of examples.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18).

So then, we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another (Romans 14:19).

Pursue peace with all men (notice the active command) and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).

The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it (1 Peter 3:10-11).

Christ not only gives peace, He *commands* peace. The person and work of Christ point you to peace and the work of peacemaking. All these spiritual dynamics drive us to the pursuit of harmony in our relationships and bringing others to peace with God through the gospel. Christianity and Christian character are fundamentally about peace—peace with God and peace with men. That marks a true believer.

Jonathan Edwards says this:

The Scripture knows no true Christian who has a selfish and contentious spirit. Nothing can be a greater absurdity than a hard, spiteful, true Christian (Works, 1:307).

Beloved, if Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace (and He is), if He gives peace to His disciples (and He does), and if the fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy, and peace (and it does), then peace is an issue we have to come to grips with.

We need to pursue peace. It is fair question to ask, “What is your home life like?” “Does your family describe you as a peaceful man, peaceful woman?” “What would your neighbors or business contacts say about the way that you conduct yourself?”

If you known as someone who should *not* be crossed . . . someone with a hot temper . . . someone who cannot be reasoned with because you are so hard and stubborn, you need to

understand that your argumentative spirit is an abomination to Christ. You are denying Christ no matter what you say about Him with your lips.

We must love peace if we say we know the Prince of Peace.

Lord Jesus, thank you for Your gift of peace. Your work on the cross gave us peace with the Father and now we have an inner peace because we belong to You and no one can ever take us out of Your hands.

Let us recognize the obligation of peace now that we know You. Let us seek peace and pursue it as an honor and tribute to You.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.