



## Christian Peacemaking, #2

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One of my best lessons from seminary did not come from a book, a seminary professor, or a chapel message. Bob—a humble high school graduate in his 70's with no formal biblical training—taught me an indispensable lesson about Christian living through the sheer force of his Christian character.

One day, Bob and I got together for lunch. Bob treated me like a son and had proven his love to my family by supporting us financially through our seminary years. He was always a sympathetic ear. At the time of this particular lunch, I was involved in a business dispute with another Christian that threatened my life savings. The dispute was becoming increasingly acrimonious as we dug in our heels to protect our financial interests from each other.

When I met with Bob at that time, I outlined the dispute and the legal justification for my position. I was agitated because my financial future seemed to be at stake. After listening to my concerns for a while, Bob leaned forward and said, “Here’s what we need to do. We need to *win* him.”

It was Bob’s way of saying, “Don, we need to make peace here. How can we do that?”

I confess to you that Bob’s words didn’t resonate with me at that moment. After all, I was an *attorney* before I came to seminary. I was trained to win *cases*, and I wanted to beat this Christian businessman in more ways than one.

But Bob perceived the biblical issue. My responsibility wasn’t to win the *dispute*. My responsibility was to win the *person* on the other side of the dispute. I needed to make peace.

Bob’s wise words pierced my conscience. Whatever the merits of my dispute were, I had been more concerned about my bank account than righteousness and peacemaking. I was completely missing the point.

In time, the dispute was resolved after some mediation and peace was brought to the situation. The lasting effect of the dispute, from my perspective, had nothing to do with the financial settlement. Through that dispute, Bob taught me something about experiential Christian living.

Peace is a greater Christian priority than demanding our rights.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:9:

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

The Beatitudes mirror the spiritual progress of a true Christian. Mature Christians like Bob are marked by peace. They seek relational peace with men because they have positional peace with God. They seek peace with men because God has already planted peace in their hearts in seed form.

In our last chapter, we put peace in a Christological context. Christian peacemaking flows from the very person of Christ. He is the Prince of Peace. He is our peace. His work of atonement was a work of peacemaking. He gives peace and He commands peacemaking from His disciples. Peace is a dominant theme in Christian life. So as we work out the implications of the peaceful person and work of Christ, we find ourselves in the midst of peace and with the desire to pursue peace.

I want work out the implications of Christian peace in your personal life. What are the parameters of peace? Should we avoid all conflicts in order to pursue this verse?

As we've emphasized throughout this series, you always start with broad principles before you consider individual issues. That's a primary principle of interpreting the Scriptures and, incidentally, simply a good way to think.

If you put peacemaking in the broader context of the call to righteousness in the Sermon on the Mount, you can quickly understand that Jesus is calling us to *righteous* peacemaking. We do not seek peace at any cost. We do not seek peace in disregard to righteousness and truth.

You can see that clearly from the context.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matthew 5:6).*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Matthew 5:8).*

*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10).*

Throughout Matthew 5:6-10, Jesus has emphasized righteousness. In the middle of that call to righteousness, he calls us to peacemaking. Righteousness is the dominant theme; peacemaking is a secondary theme within that context. Indeed, the blessing on those who are persecuted "for the sake of righteousness" *assumes* that the Christian will face unavoidable conflict as he walks on this earth.

So when Jesus calls us to be peacemakers, we must understand that he is describing a righteous peace. We do not make peace by yielding to sin or error within the church. Elsewhere, the Scriptures call us to confront sin in the lives of fellow believers (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1-2). We are called to discern true from false teaching (cf. Acts 17:11; John 4:1). Peacemaking does not turn Christians into passive, undiscerning louts who let sinners and false teachers run amok.

So we must think more deeply about peacemaking to follow Christ in this matter. To do that, we're going to consider six different aspects of biblical peace and peacemaking.

## 1. You Must Have Righteousness in True Peace

You must have righteousness in true peace. John MacArthur defines it this way, "Peace is the presence of righteousness that causes right relationships" (*Kingdom Living Here and Now*, 137). True peace means that the truth is known and acknowledged. Issues are settled and the parties embrace each other.

Stated differently, peace is more than a stony silence that comes from the refusal to deal with the issue. Peace is active. Peace is righteous. But righteousness comes first. As James 3:17-18 says:

*The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.*

The Bible links true peace with true righteousness. Peace is not appeasement for the sake of avoiding conflict. Righteousness comes first.

You can see this illustrated in Jeremiah 6:13-14. Jeremiah describes the nature of the wicked spiritual leadership of his day.

*From the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for gain, and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace.*

Peace doesn't exist simply because someone declares it to be so. Where sin or error exists, peace does not exist. We cannot tolerate sin nor compromise essential biblical doctrine to have a superficial harmony with heretics and false teachers.

Understanding that principle will help you discern the serious error of the so-called evangelicals who reach out to Mormons and Catholics in an effort to create what they call "peace" and concord. That absolutely contradicts the nature of biblical peace. Peace is built on truth and righteousness. The biblical Christian cannot have "peace" with those who proclaim false deities and false ways of salvation.

True peace does not compromise with sin or false teachers. It doesn't gloss over these issues to achieve a superficial harmony at the expense of true righteousness. To the contrary, it confronts them with truth. So you must have righteousness in true peace.

With that firmly in mind as something of an introductory thought, we can now consider:

## **2. You Must Be a Peacemaker**

Let's keep Jesus' words fresh in our minds, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*"

Jesus once again is making an exclusive statement. Only peacemakers will be called "sons of God." No one else will that title. For the professing Christian, the implications of Jesus' words are absolutely immense.

You *must* be a peacemaker. Peacemaking is not an optional accessory for spiritual life which can be set aside so you can avoid particularly difficult people or circumstances. Peacemaking is at the very heart of being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. People who are characteristically contentious or bitter cannot truly claim to be Christians. Their core approach to life betrays the truth about their hearts.

Who is this peacemaker? The word "peacemaker" is a compound word in Greek that has an active component. You could almost translate this word as a "peace-doer."

In a positive sense, the peacemaker brings reconciliation to conflict and promotes harmony in the sphere of relationships which the Lord has given to him. He actively seeks to maintain peace in his relationships. He goes out of his way to produce peace.

In a negative sense, the peacemaker is not quarrelsome. He does not love a fight or delight in arguments. They prefer harmony in relationships to disputes. He is willing to engage conflict for the sake of righteousness, but the conflict itself is distasteful. He is quick to set aside personal wrongs so he can avoid a bitter and resentful spirit.

A mature understanding of the nature of salvation will establish the foundation in your heart to go through life as a peacemaker. If you understand that God has forgiven your great guilt for breaking His law through the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ, and that His salvation was a free gift to you when you were an undeserving sinner, then you will be eager to share that same kind of grace to people who have sinned against you.

You are so humbled and grateful before God for His grace to you that you cannot help but have a similar attitude toward men. The Bible insists on that natural conclusion and heart mindset.

*Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:32).*

*So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you (Colossians 3:12-13).*

In light of these two points so far, you can see the careful balance we must maintain as Christians. You must have righteousness in true peace; yet at the same time, peacemaking is an optional component in your life. It is a divine mandate. Jesus demands it and emphasizes that only peacemakers are true sons of God.

A true Christian does not want to argue against peacemaking. When he understands that peacemaking is intrinsic to his nature as a son of God, then he wants to respond. How can we be peacemakers? The Bible gives us *so* much help.

### **3. You Must Forgive**

Jesus' theme of peacemaking dominates the Sermon on the Mount. He introduces it in the Beatitudes then expands on it throughout the rest of the Sermon. His subsequent teaching helps us understand what He means in seed form in Matthew 5:9. For example, in Matthew 5:23-24, He says:

*Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*

Jesus says reconciliation is a priority over formal worship. The offering can wait. Reconciliation cannot. Take care of the broken relationship first. I can only imagine how empty the next Sunday's worship services would be if professing Christians took Jesus' words seriously!

Again in Matthew 5:38-42, you see this principle of peacemaking even though the term itself is not used.

*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.*

That passage is rather challenging to interpret and apply. Basically, Jesus tells his disciples put away their desire for retaliation when someone does wrong to them. If someone hurts you or tries to take advantage of you, you have to depend on the mercy and goodness of God in the midst of your circumstances and resist the urge to strike back or get even.

The peacemaker refuses the spirit of retaliation. Jesus insists on it. But He goes still further. In Matthew 5:43-45 He says:

*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*

Do you see the direct link to Matthew 5:9? *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."*

Matthew 5:43-45 extends the concept. As you think about the difficult people in your life and wondering what you should do about them, here is your answer. Love them. Pray for them. Do good to them. In that way, you will be a peacemaker and you will reflect the character of God who is good to *you* despite your transgressions against Him.

One more place we need to look is chapter 6 in the Disciples' Prayer. Jesus teaches us to pray and identifies the recurrent themes which should run through your prayer life over time. Included in that crucial passage is this:

*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil . . . For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matthew 6:12-15).*

Let's step back for a moment. When we talk about Christian peacemaking, we affirm that we will never have "peace" with false teachers who deny the deity of Christ or justification by faith. We are their sworn enemies. We will never have "peace" with those who name the name of Christ but live in open sin. That's why we practice church discipline (or church restoration if you prefer that term). We will never ignore such things for the sake of avoiding conflict. Those things are absolutely essential.

But beloved, for most of you, your daily battles in peacemaking do not come in the front lines of theological conflicts or the latter stages of church discipline. Most of your conflicts are *personal*.

Your temptation in personal relationships is to define your relational conflicts in terms of absolute truth and righteousness so you can have your way. You say, "Truth is at stake here. That's my 20 bucks." "Truth is at stake here. You know what my neighbor did?"

Beloved, you have to deal firmly with yourself on this very point. Do not deceive yourself. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not at stake in that financial dispute that you have. So don't frame it in terms of truth and righteousness. The cause of Christ will proceed even if you don't get your way in that simmering dispute with your spouse. The church of Christ will not rise and fall with your problems at work.

So in your thinking, you should not wrap up your *personal* issues with transcendent issues of truth and righteousness. Those *personal* issues are precisely where you are called to be a peacemaker. Just as the Lord Jesus Christ suffered for sins that He did not commit, so sometimes you will suffer as a peacemaker because you value peace over getting your way. You may have to sacrifice what you think you deserve in the situation.

Beloved, it is precisely in those personal areas where you willingly suffer wrong in order to achieve peace. It is precisely in those areas where you bring about reconciliation even if the other person is the wrongdoer. That is the sense of loving your enemies. That is the sense of praying for those who persecute you.

These are the principles of the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is the king. He sets the way it works. You can't quarrel with these principles without quarrelling with the Lord Himself. If you want to be in His kingdom, you have to embrace what He commands.

How do you find the power to live that way? Remember that if you are a Christian, God has forgiven your sins. Forgiveness is now the operative principle in your life. Having *received* forgiveness, you now *extend* forgiveness where you have been wronged.

Listen. Jesus is *presupposing* you have been wronged and even hurt badly. You are not excused from His imperative simply because you got a raw deal. The Christian does good to his enemies. He makes peace in his household. Beloved, that is the heart of Christian living. Has someone stung you personally and left you resentful? Beloved, that relationship is precisely where God most wants you to cultivate peace.

To see this principle fleshed out in the Scriptures, consider 1 Peter 3:7:

*You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way . . . so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

Men, if you are not talking with your wife, you are not talking to God when you pray. Your prayers are hindered. Marital conflict hinders your walk with God. God will not bless you as He would if you were actively cultivating peace in your marriage. You need to take that seriously.

Ladies, the reverse is true for you too. Psalm 66:18 says:

*If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.*

Beloved, Jesus has spoken clearly on these issues of forgiveness and peacemaking. It is not for lack of biblical clarity that we continue to have conflict in our personal relationships. It is for lack of obedience and a lack of working through the implications of your salvation. Only an ungrateful believer would refuse to seek peace in light of the priority Jesus has established for peacemaking in the believer's life.

If you are a true Christian, you embrace that even if your conscience stings you right now. The true Christian looks at this and says, “Yes, of course.” He says, “I love Christ. I know something about the depth of my sin. God has forgiven me of my greater debt toward Him. I am not going to complain about the lesser wrong someone has done to me. That would be unthinkable. That would violate the fundamental ethics of right and wrong.”

So you must ask yourself: “Christ has forgiven me so much. Now where in my sphere of relationships do I need to spread peace and bring harmony?” Until these Beatitudes get us to this fundamental, ground level of life, we have never dealt with them at all. We have never understood them, let alone practice them. When you understand the Beatitudes, you see the utter necessity of these implications and you are compelled in conscience to respond.

When you have geared your mind to pursue peace, you understand that you must forgive. But that peace doesn’t just “happen.” The Bible gives us a dose of reality on this matter that we will now see.

#### **4. You Have to Work at Peace**

Peace doesn’t just happen. If you have an unrealistic expectation that you can be passive, let disputes go unaddressed, and in that find peace in troubled relationships, you will be sorely disappointed sooner or later.

Let’s come back to a theological context for just a moment. Why is there conflict in the first place? Why don’t we just naturally live in peace?

The Bible gives the answer which we must understand if we are going to be peacemakers. We have conflict because we are sinners. Unless we are consciously pursuing righteousness in our lives, we will be driven by pride, lusts, and a desire for personal advantage. We have a heart problem that causes conflict. Listen to James 4:1:

*What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?*

James says source of quarrels and conflicts is rooted in our hearts, not something external. Why is that important?

You have to understand the nature of the battle. The peacemaker seeks peace in foreign territory. Indwelling sin pushed us toward conflict. When you add the hostile spiritual forces found in the devil and the very world system in which we live, you can see that there are great obstacles to peace. The entire environment in which we live provokes conflict in relationships.

That spiritual truth has practical consequences. Peace does not just happen passively. You have to pursue peace intentionally and consciously. You have to be proactive. Peacemaking comes at a price.

If you are the one who has done wrong, you have to be the one to humble yourself and go seek forgiveness. If you have been wronged, you may need to lay it aside for the sake of reconciliation and say, "I'm not going to hold that against you."

Peace may take your time and your money. But as a disciple of Christ, you are indifferent to those consequences because peace is a transcendent priority in his life. The true son of God loves the peace of God and believes the pursuit of peace is worthwhile even if he has to sacrifice to achieve it. He has been transferred into a different kingdom where different principles of justice apply. He embraces that and as a result, peace is a greater priority to him.

The true believer doesn't bristle against that when he is thinking rightly. He says, "Of course I want peace. God has made peace with me through the cross of Christ. I want to live out my life toward others on the same principle of generous, undeserved grace that God has shown to me."

So this searches our hearts deeply. You must forgive and you must sometimes *work* at it. You may sacrifice without getting a pat on the back for it. That's okay. You are not living for the praise of men? You are living for the commendation of God. You want Him to say, "There is one of My sons. See the way he lives? See how he deals with people that wrong him? He's mine. He is like me. He is imperfect, but he is living out the principles upon which I have dealt with him. Oh, that brings joy to my heart."

What about some practical keys to peacemaking?

## **5. Keys to Peacemaking**

This first one doesn't necessarily fit squarely in the context. But we need to think about peacemaking first of all in terms of what I would call *gospel peacemaking*.

### **a. Gospel Peacemaking**

Gospel peacemaking. Being a peacemaker with sinners who are separated from God in Christ. When you share the gospel, when you preach Christ to the unconverted, you are being a peacemaker. When people trust Christ in response to the gospel, their war with God is over. They are brought to peace with Him. Sharing the gospel is peacemaking.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 talks about the ministry of reconciliation that God has entrusted to us. Your first thought with an unbeliever as a peacemaker should be "How can I be used to bring him to peace with God?" That's the transcendent governing thought even as you work out these other things.

(As an aside, if you want a good book to help you share the gospel, you should go to Charles Spurgeon's book, *The Soul Winner*. Every Christian should read that book.

So gospel peacemaking is the first key to peacemaking. The second key to peacemaking:

### **b. Develop a Peaceful Mind**

Develop an attitude of peace. In your mind and heart, abandon the quarrel before it breaks out. That's a verse from Proverbs. Just let it go for the sake of peace and for the sake of being like Christ.

Peacemakers love peace. They want to see it spread. The psalmist in Psalm 1:20 says: "I am for peace. I prefer peace." That means that you don't cherish and agitate conflict in your thoughts. You don't rehearse the wrongs people have done to you. You guard your heart for from it flows the issues of life. As a man thinks within himself, so he is. You are the only one that can answer the question whether you are a peacemaker deep in your heart or not.

The third point after gospel peacemaking and developing a peaceful mind is this:

### **c. Shhhhh**

Peaceable conversation. James says the tongue is like a fire and sets things on fire.

This is a negative observation, but I say without fear of contradiction that this is where most of you fail the most in peacemaking. Most of you would improve your peacemaking capacity if you would simply be quiet more often and hold your tongue. Instead of responding verbally when you are offended, hold it for the sake of peace. You don't have to vindicate yourself when someone criticizes you.

The book of Proverbs points us in this direction repeatedly.

*There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of the sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing (Proverbs 12:18).*

*The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin (Proverbs 13:3).*

*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).*

So beloved, don't be in a hurry to explain why the problem at hand is not your fault. Don't be in a hurry to point the finger at someone else. When gossip comes your way, don't repeat it. When someone slanders an acquaintance of yours, don't run to your friend and tell them all the details. There is no point in that.

Unkind and untrue things are not worth repeating and the retelling of the sin only sows strife and discord. There is no point in it. I say it kindly, but just be quiet. It is a greater stain on your character to be angry with someone than for you to bear a personal insult without defending yourself.

The question every one of us needs to deal with is this: Are you noble enough to hold your tongue and forgive a wrong for the sake of Christ?

#### **d. Initiate Peace**

We have been talking about initiating peace. You settle the conflict. You make the call. You bring the gift that brings peace. You call them. You pray for them. You say the good word. 2 Corinthians 13:11 says:

*Brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be likeminded, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

Christ gave Himself so you could be at peace with God. Now you in turn go and make peace with others.

Now with all of that said, I realize that the consequences of this for some of you could be financial. They could be relational. They could be pretty difficult. The last key to peacemaking is extremely crucial and holds all of this together.

#### **e. Commend Your Cause to God**

Peace may be costly. That's all right. Entrust yourself to the God who reigns over every detail of your life and who intends to bring good in every trial to you. Entrust yourself to Him. Passing on a conflict may mean you get treated unfairly or some slander goes unanswered. Trust Him. Say, "God, you called me to peacemaking, not to vindicate my own name. So I am going to be a peacemaker and entrust my cause to you."

Cotton Matther, the great Puritan divine from hundreds of years ago, understood this. He received a number of letters from opponents which gravely insulted him and made false slurs against him. He read those letters, put a piece of paper around them, and put them on his shelf. But before he put them on the shelf, he wrote on the outside of the paper, "Libels. Father, forgive them."

That's it. "Father forgive them. I am not going to fight this battle. I don't even ask you to justify me in the eyes of men. I just ask you to forgive them." That's the spirit of Christianity.

So beloved, what if you dropped that dispute and simply trusted God for the sake of being a peacemaker? What if you dropped that lawsuit? What if you dropped that business dispute and just said, "I'm going to trust God because I want to be a peacemaker." What if?

One other point here that I need to say in this commending your cause to God is that you may not be able to obtain peace. Romans 12:14 says:

*If possible, in so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*

There will be times where you want peace but someone else won't have it. They won't talk to you. Peace is impossible because of the response of the other person. You still commend your case to God. You accept it patiently, pray for them, and entrust that matter to God. You have done all you can do. God understands you can't always bring about reconciliation. But your heart should desire peace and pursue it until it is plain it cannot be achieved.

It would be enough to pursue peacemaking simply because God pursued us and brought us to peace with Him. That is all the motivation that we need. But look at Matthew 5:9 again:

*Blessed are the peacemakers (here is the promise), for they shall be called sons of God.*

## **6. God Rewards Peacemaking**

God is no man's debtor. There is no debt here on earth that you forgive for the sake of Christ that He won't honor you doubly in return. Peacemakers are blessed because they will be called sons of God. The term emphasizes that the peacemaker shares and reflects the very character of God Himself. God was a peacemaker at the cross. When you make peace, you reflect His character. You are a son of God. You reflect what the Father looks like.

Now in the prior Beatitude, Matthew 5:8 He says:

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

We said last time that the pure in heart would see God face to face in all of His glory. This verse expands even on that glorious promise.

We will not only see Him, we will see Him as our Father. We will see Him with family privileges. We will belong there. We will share His character. When you see Him, having been pure in heart, when you see Him as a peacemaker, having worked out your salvation with fear and trembling, when you see Him, you will see Him in the context of love and trust. You will see the uncreated God of all glory in peace without fear, without blemish, without sin. And you will belong there, beloved, because the son is always welcome in the presence of the Father.

Jesus Christ will claim you as His own. And if He is going to so grandly bless you, so abundantly pour out goodness and mercy on you, then He can certainly work out all the things in this life and the cost of being a peacemaker for your good as well.

Beloved, this is your Christ. Love him. Trust Him. Worship Him. Proclaim Him. Make peace like He did with you. Let's pray.

*In the words of the apostle Paul, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all."*

*Amen.*

*This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.*