

Birthmark of the Believer: Peacemaking

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be ~~XXX~~ called the Children of God." Matthew 5:9

~~XX~~ The presence of Jesus always make a marked difference wherever He was. No one ever ignored Jesus. ^{On the contrary,} You could always tell when He was on the scene. The quality of conversation always changed. Where there was fear, there became hope and peace. Where there was sadness, there became joy; where there was a funeral, there was a resurrection. Jesus' presence always made a difference.

Jesus said, "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you. " Does your presence make a difference? A Christian's presence in an office, at home, or at school OUGHT to make a difference. It ought to be like salt to decaying meat; it ought to be like light to darkness; it ought to be like medicine to a sick man. Christians are to affect the world in which they live. Jesus didn't say, Blessed are the peace lovers." He said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Blessed are those who do something ^{Blessed are those} whose presence has an active effect on the world in which they live. Yes, our method of affecting the world is through this quality of peacemaking.

If you study carefully the Word of God, you'll find that the word peace has two aspects to it--~~negative~~ and ~~positive aspect~~. Negatively, the word peace means the cessation of hostility ^{or} the end of war. But, there is also a positive element to peace. There is a bringing about of the blessing of God. Illustrations abound in American history. We bomb a city and then we build it. We go into a country and we absolutely demolish it, and then we give all the money we have to rebuild it. Peace doesn't simply mean that we stop bombing.

peace means that we start rebuilding what we've bombed.

The Bible talks about us having peace with one another, and this doesn't simply mean that we have stopped fighting with one another, but it means that I bring into your life a quality of life whereby the blessings of God come upon you. We should bring a quality of life to a school, home, or office, where the blessings of God are inevitable.

There are two significant things about the position of this beatitude. It obviously comes as number seven out of eight. However, this beatitude is the last beatitude that describes the character of the Christian. The next beatitude, number eight, doesn't describe the Christians' character but the character of the world in which the Christian lives. The last beatitude describes how the world reacts to the kind of person that ^{embodies} makes up the first seven ^{qualities} beatitudes. Thus, the last beatitude that defines what it means to be a Christian is this one, number seven, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Now, the first significant thing about its position is that it comes last in the list of characteristics of a Christian. By that, God is saying that the apex of ~~xxxx~~ Christian character is my relationship to other people. Did you think the climax ^{is} the ultimate of my Christian character was my vertical relationship with God? The Bible never indicates that. On the contrary, the Bible repeatedly teaches that the apex of my Christian character is my ability to get along with other people, my horizontal relationships.

John 4:20 says, (Dunn paraphrase) "If a man doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how in the world can he love God whom he hasn't seen?" Thus, the proof of my love to God is my love to my fellow man. The proof that my relationship to God is as it should be is that my relationship to other people is as it should be.

This is extremely important, because some of us will come to church on Sunday morning and sing the great songs, testify, teach a Sunday School class, and look so pious that you'd think we're waiting for a vacancy in the Trinity. Yet, if you'd call that person Monday through Saturday, you'll find that he's touchy, quarrelsome, irritable, rude, impolite, and that being with him is like being in the eye of a hurricane. He's stirring up trouble everywhere he goes. He's complaining ^{and} critical, ^{and} unable to get along with anybody.

Yet, if you ask this person, "Are you a great Christian?" he would say, "Yes, because on Sunday I sing the great songs and I teach a Sunday School class. God says that if that's the extent of your religion, you're a phoney. You're just a fraud, a hypocrite, because God is not at all impressed with what you testify. What impresses God is how you get along with people Monday through Saturday. The climax of Christian character is ~~this~~ your relationship to other people. "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Now, the second significant thing about the position of this beatitude is that it comes after all the others. Jesus is saying, "Listen, you can't be a peacemaker until first of all, you've learned to be poor in spirit. You can't be a peacemaker until, first of all, you've mourned over your own failures. You can't be a peacemaker until you've learned what it is to be meek, being controlled by God and not your emotions. And did you know that if we were really hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we'd all be peacemakers? Did you know that if all of us were pure in heart, we'd be peacemakers? Did you know that if all of us were merciful as God is merciful, we would be peacemakers? You cannot have your relationship right with your fellow man until first of all you get your relationship right with God. This beatitude, this characteristic,

can be true in a person's life ONLY after he has experienced the previous six beatitudes.

Now, what does it mean to be a peacemaker? I think we could understand the word better if we would translate it as reconciliation. ~~Blessed are the reconcilers,~~ "for they shall be called the children of God." This promise is very important. I am most like God when I am doing the work of a peacemaker. When my relationship is as it should be with others, when I am bringing men together, ^{and} when I am bringing in a quality of life that promotes peace, unity, and harmony, I at that moment am most like God. I shall be called---not by God, but by the world--a child of God. Then and only then, shall I be recognized as a child of God. The most ignorant sinner in Texas knows that the characteristic of a Christian is that he ought to be able to get along with other people. Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Let's look now and see how Jesus describes and demonstrates this quality of peacemaking in his sermon.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Matt 5:23-24

First of all, this matter of making peace with other people and being reconciled is INDISPENSABLE TO MY FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD. My relationship with other people is one of the most fragile relationships, and God says to handle it with care because you cannot have fellowship with Him if you are not having fellowship with one another. Therefore, if my brother has something against me, before I try to worship, before I try to fellowship with God, I must be right with my brother. Then I can fellowship with God.

Let's suppose that ~~you~~ we are in the same church and you are sitting on the front seat on the west side of the church. I am sitting on the west side of the church, and we both want to move near to the pulpit, but I don't like you. You did something I don't care for, so I don't want to get close to you, but I can't get close to that pulpit without getting closer to you. It is a physical impossibility for two people to draw near to the same object without drawing near to each other.

Likewise, it is a spiritual impossibility for us to draw near to God without drawing near to each other. You want to worship God, ^{+ fellowship w/} ~~you~~ ~~and~~ ~~you~~ want to fellowship with God, but you don't care for Miss So-and-So. Then, forget it. You are attempting a spiritual impossibility. Fellowship and reconciliation ^{with them} are indispensable to your fellowship with God. It is indispensable to your worship. God will not accept your offering if you're wrong with your fellow man. Now, the church will accept it, because the church doesn't know if you're right or not. Man may accept your gift, but God will not.

I see a tremendous encouragement in this Scripture. I see that when I preach, God doesn't look at my preaching, he looks at my heart. When I teach a Sunday School class, he doesn't look at the quality of my teaching, he looks at the quality of my heart. When I'm out witnessing, he doesn't look at how wonderfully I present the plan of salvation, he looks into my heart. When I seal my envelope on Sunday morning and drop it into that plate, he doesn't look at the amount, he looks into my heart. When I sing in the choir, God doesn't listen to how beautiful the quality is, but he looks into my heart. He tests my offering by my heart. Here is a law of the spiritual world that you must know: the quality of the gift is determined by the quality of the giver.

The acceptability of any act of worship is determined by the acceptability of the worshipper. We as humans put all of our attention on the things that we do or give. God does not see those things first ~~of all~~. He looks to see what's in our heart, and if the heart is not right, God rejects what we are offering. Thus, Jesus makes a very startling challenge. He says that if you are in the very act of offering something unto the Lord--serving, praying, worshipping--and suddenly you remember that Miss So-and-So has ought against you, stop what you are doing, go, and be reconciled.

Can you imagine what pandemonium this would cause in the average Baptist church? If all of a sudden, the Preacher closed his Bible and said, "Excuse me, folks," walked over to a man sitting on the fifth row, and said, "I want you to forgive me for what I've done." But that's what Jesus said to do. Can you imagine what would happen next Sunday morning if everybody in ^{the} choir refused to come out and sing until they were 100% right with everybody in the world--at least tried to get right? We might not be able to start the service until twelve o'clock but I guarantee you that when we start it, God would be there in power.

Can you imagine what would happen in Sunday School next Sunday morning if every Sunday School teacher decided to be obedient to the Word of God--to take it seriously as well as taking it literally--and said, "I'm not going to offer my gift of teaching until I'm right with everybody?" We might not have Sunday School until Church Training time, but I guarantee you, when that teacher stood to teach, he'd be anointed by God and God would accept him.

Do you plan to pray today? Do you remember that someone has ought against you? God will not accept your prayer until you are reconciled. One of the most painful things we do is to be reconciled. It hurts us to go and say, "I was wrong; I want you to

forgive me." We'd rather do anything else. I know there was a time in my own Christian pilgrimage several years ago when somebody had ought against me and I had a little bit of ought against them. I knew I should go and make it right and make reconciliation, but I didn't want ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ my church to lose their image of a pastor that I had spent years building up. I didn't want to humble myself and admit that I was wrong. I remember foolishly, stupidly, deciding to pray more. I decided to give more time to Bible study, to start witnessing more, and to give more money. I was making all of these new commitments because I had guilt feelings and I was going to compensate for not being a peacemaker.

God wasn't at all impressed with my bargains. He didn't want me to pray more. He wanted me to go and apologize. He didn't want me to preach better; he wanted me to go and apologize. He didn't want me to double my tithe; he wanted me to go and apologize. He didn't want me to win 100 people to Jesus in one day; he wanted me to go and apologize. There's no substitute, my friends, for reconciliation--for getting right. God will accept no substitute. It's indispensable to our worship and to our spirit-filled life.

If you read carefully the book of Acts, you'll find that every time the Spirit of God poured out upon them, there's a little phrase that keeps occurring again and again: "They were all of one accord, one heart, and one mind." In the upper room on the day of Pentecost, they were of one accord. Unity and reconciliation is indispensable to your prayer life. I imagine some husbands don't know 1 Peter 3:7, Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." Husbands, if you don't treat your wife right, forget about praying. There is absolutely no substitute for reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not only indispensable, but, second of all, it is to be INITIATED BY US, the ones of us who do the remembering. Have you noticed how your memory is quickened when you start to pray? ~~Then, the first thing that comes to your mind is that unconfessed sin, that unapologized offense, that unreconciled brother.~~ Everytime you start to pray, the first thing that comes to your mind is that unconfessed sin, that unapologized offense, that unreconciled brother. Then, it becomes your responsibility to stop what you are doing and FIRST, before anything else, be reconciled to thy brother. YOU are to take the initiative.

Notice, it says, "If thy brother has ought against you." Sometimes we excuse ourselves by saying, "Well, I'm not mad at him; he's mad at me." Jesus doesn't care. You may not have ought against him, but if you know he has ought against you, even though it may be all his fault, you must go. You must take the initiative and you must make it right.

Now, it's a different case when I have ought against somebody. Let's digress and discuss the matter of having ought against someone else and they do not know about it. Perhaps they've said something or have done something, and they were even unaware of their offense, but I took it in such a way that it hurt my feelings. In Mark 11:25, Jesus says, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." If I'm the only one that's aware that you've hurt me, it is not necessary for me to go and tell you, "Listen, I've hated you for the past five years." Only if they KNOW that you have had ought against them should you go to them. If it's just between you and God, all you have to do is to forgive, according to this Scripture.

Immediately, somebody says, "I just can't forgive." Yes, you can. God won't ask you to do something you can't do. ~~XX~~ Forgiveness is not an emotion. It's a decision. It's simply tearing up the IOU

that you're holding against somebody else. We're marvelous bookkeepers of somebody else's sins. Did you ever notice that? Miss So-and-So said something I didn't like. I owe you one for that. And Mr. So-and-So hurt my feelings, so I owe him one for that.

Jesus says, "Forgive," and forgiveness is simply taking all the IOU's and tearing them up and holding nothing against them. It's not a feeling in our hearts. It is wrong to think that if you can't forgive, you haven't really forgiven. God is the only one who has the ability to forget. You can't forget. You'll never find "Forgive and forget," in the Scripture. If, as an act of your will, you have torn up that IOU and you hold nothing against that person, then you must treat them as if they are your best friend.

Now, back to our primary subject--if somebody has ought against you. You must go to them and reconcile--make it right. The word RECONCILE means to be restored to another's favor. You do whatever is necessary to be restored to another's favor. In some instances, it means that we're going to have to make restitution. Just don't do it the way one dear Christian lady did it. God began to speak to her about the feeling she had against the next-door neighbor. So she got on the phone and said, "I still believe it's your fault but I want you to forgive me." Then she couldn't understand why her efforts didn't work.

Jonathon Goforth, a great missionary to China, was forty-five years old before he ever discovered what it meant to be filled with the Spirit. He experienced one of the greatest revivals there in that area of Manchuria, and his book, BY MY SPIRIT, is a marvelous account of how God moved. Do you know how it started?

There was a fellow missionary that Jonathan just couldn't get along with, and it really wasn't Jonathan's fault. This man had

ought against Jonathan and the man was in the wrong! Jonathan Goforth had a hungering and a thirst to have real revival, and someone sent him a pamphlet written by Charles Finney on How to Have Revival. Before Goforth ever saw the list, he promised God that he would take the conditions and fulfil them so they could have revival. He committed himself, and then he started reading it. Do you know what number one was? "Go and get right with anybody that has anything against you." He couldn't even say, "So far, so good." The very first one!

He stopped. He said, "I will not do it. It's his fault. He's in the wrong." and Jonathan Goforth continued to pray and pray for revival. God spoke to him, "Jonathan, until you make that right, no revival." It just kept getting worse, the conflict in his heart, and one night around midnight Goforth couldn't take it any longer. His heart was bursting, and he said, "Okay, I'll go and make it right."

At midnight (and midnight back in those days was about three a.m. in our day) he went, knocked on the door, and woke the missionary up. When he saw Jonathan standing ther, he was scared to death, but Jonathan said, "It's all my fault," asked for forgiveness, and threw his arms around him and said that he loved him. They stood there in the door in the midnight hour embracing each other. God honored his Word, and revival came. But it started at that point.

It takes humbling yourself, but if you humble yourself, it will keep God from having to humiliate you. If you're going to seek the Lord's face, you've got to be willing to lose your own. That's what Jonathan Goforth did.

Finally, this reconciliation is not only INDISPENSABLE to our fellowship, not only to be INITIATED by those of us who remember, but it is to be done IMMEDIATELY.

In verse twenty-five we see the word "quickly." Do it now. There are two reasons for that. Number one, the longer it goes, the longer you wait to reconcile, the more deeper entrenched those roots of bitterness and hatred become. Paul says, "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath." Bitterness grows faster at night than any other time. Number two, do it immediately because you're on your way to the Judge. All of us are heading for the great Judge who says, "I, the Lord, look not on the outward appearance, but I, the Lord, search the heart." Do it quickly.

Blessed are the peacemakers because they shall be recognized by the world as the children of God.