

Matthew 5:9
The Peacemaker
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Jesus lived during one of the most celebrated periods of peace in the history of the world. Jesus lived during the Pax Romana or the Pax Augusta. In 31 BC, Octavius, later to be known as Caesar Augustus, defeated Mark Anthony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium. That victory ended a prolonged period of civil war, and Octavius emerged as the sole master of the Roman world. Rival powers no longer fought for control of the territory surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. In 29 BC, Augustus closed the doors of the Temple of Janus in Rome, an act which symbolized that the entire Roman world was then at peace. Those doors had been closed only twice before in all of Roman history. Then in 9 BC, just a few years before the birth of Christ, the Roman Senate consecrated the Altar of Peace, constructed on the Campus Martius (the Field of War), in honor of the Pax Augusta, the peace of Augustus.

Caesar Augustus was a peacemaker of sorts. Because of his military victories and his consolidation of power, the world of that day was at peace. But the peace Augustus brought to the world was the peace of tyranny and coercion, much like the civil peace experienced within the old Soviet Empire. It was an externally imposed peace, a peace imposed by sheer power.

Back during the days of the old American west, the lawman Wyatt Earp named his Colt 45 revolver "Peacemaker." That is

the sort of peacemaker that Caesar Augustus was. He imposed the peace of brute force and justified it with the ethic of "might makes right."

It was during the reign of Caesar Augustus that Jesus was born. The reason Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when Jesus was born was because a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered, everyone to his own city. And Joseph, being of the house and lineage of David, went to Bethlehem, the city of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angels heralded His birth and cried out,

Luke 2:14

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

Jesus, the prophesied Prince of Peace, would bring peace on earth, but many of His contemporaries in Israel misunderstood what this meant. Many in Israel expected the Messiah to be a military and political ruler who would be just a Jewish version of Caesar Augustus. They expected the Messiah to conquer with His armies and to impose a Pax Judaica upon the Gentile world and to replace Rome with Jerusalem as the political center of world government. But they were wrong, so very wrong. Jesus came to establish not a military peace but spiritual peace. Jesus came to establish not the external peace of coerced imposition but the internal peace of spiritual transformation. Jesus came to conquer not with armies but with the preached gospel combined

with the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus came not merely to stop wars between nations but to stop war at its very source.

Why is this world a place filled with wars and rumors of wars? The ultimate reason is the human heart. Jesus said,

Matthew 15:19

19 "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

Here is the root of the problem. In our natural state, we are peace breakers but Jesus changes us into peacemakers. Jesus doesn't merely put a cap on the problem. He eliminates the problem at its very source, and the source is our sinful heart. He changes us from peace breakers to peacemakers.

The prophet Isaiah prophesied that the age of the Messiah would be a time when "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together" and "the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah 65:25). The age of the Messiah is here pictured as a time when wolves and lions peaceably get along with lambs. This is possible only because their very nature is supernaturally transformed. Instead of feeding upon the lamb, the transformed wolf feeds together with the lamb, and the transformed lion eats straw like an ox. This is a prophecy of the removal of the sin and the curse which makes the world a place of the bloody tooth and claw. It is a prophecy of a return to the peace of the garden of Eden which existed before sin came into the world through the disobedience of the first Adam. This is a picture of the new peace that exists in the hearts of God's people when they are redeemed by the saving work of Jesus, and the perfect peace that will come in eternity

when Jesus perfectly applies to creation His work of redemption. The same God who is able to transform the blood thirsty lion into a vegetarian, can transform the peace breaker into the peacemaker by applying the redemption accomplished by Christ.

Such a transformation is not merely the result of persuasion. You can no more persuade someone to change their sinful hearts than you could persuade a tiger of the virtues of vegetarianism. Such a radical change requires a supernatural inner transformation, which the Bible calls the new birth. It is a change so basic, so radical that it is as if the person had been born all over again, been born a new person.

We can see this supernatural inner transformation of the peace breaker into the peacemaker in the flow of thought in the beatitudes. By nature, we are proud, self-centered people. If anyone does anything against us or anything that we interpret as disrespectful, our natural tendency is to get angry and to lash out at them and to retaliate. But the new birth changes us. We become the poor in spirit. Instead of being proud, self-centered people, we become those who recognize that we are spiritually bankrupt people. Instead of being people who demand to get what we deserve, we become people who are ever so grateful that God hasn't given us what we deserve. Because what we deserve is God's wrathful judgment against our sins.

We become those who mourn. God delivers us from hardened hearts and calloused consciences and self-deception. The result is that we are inwardly pained and distressed that we have sinned against a holy God. Our focus of concern becomes not what others do to us but our own sins against God.

As a result of the new birth, we become the meek. We recognize our weakness, and we look to Christ for our strength. And even as we look to Christ to treat us with gentleness, we learn to be gentle toward others.

We become the merciful. As we experience the mercy of Christ, we want to be merciful to others, and are enabled through the transforming power of our salvation to be merciful to others. We glory in overlooking transgressions against us, and we want to forgive others even as Christ has forgiven us. Christ's forgiveness of us becomes both our example and our inspiration for our forgiveness of others.

Through the new birth, we become the pure in heart. We are delivered from the dominion of sin, and we are no longer filled with the envy and jealousy and evil thoughts which bring forth the bitter fruits of warfare and strife.

As a result of this inner transformation, we who were peace breakers become peacemakers. This involves a different attitude toward ourselves. We no longer have that proud, self-centered point of view. We no longer evaluate everything in terms of how it affects us. We no longer act and think as if the whole world revolves around us. Jesus said that we must lose our lives if we are to find our lives. We learn to lose our lives in the sense of no longer living for self. We learn to live for Jesus. And by losing our lives in that way, we actually find our lives. Our lives become meaningful, purposeful and even enjoyable in a deep and significant way.

We are no longer proud. When we consider ourselves, we no longer glory in how great we are. Instead we cry out, O wretched man that I am! We recognize our own sinfulness, and it grieves us. And we glory not in ourselves, but in Jesus because He forgives our sins and also delivers us from them.

Being a peacemaker also involves a different attitude toward others. When someone sins against us, we are no longer so much angry at them as we are sorry for them. We remember that we once were in the same situation, living in bondage to our sinful inclinations and desires, and we would still be were it not for the saving grace of Jesus. Instead of thinking how much better a person we are than others, we remember that it is only by the grace of Christ that we are now different. And instead of focussing on any harm someone may have done to us, we focus on their predicament. They are in bondage to their sinful inclinations. They have been taken captive by Satan to do his will. They are on the road to hell. And so instead of being angry at them, we are sorry for them, and we pray for their salvation.

We don't want to focus on any harm done to us because we have better things to do with our lives. We don't want to devote our life energy to self-pity, and we don't want our hearts filled with bitterness. The peacemaker is too busy living for the glory of God to get bogged down in holding grudges against others. He learns to be angry without sinning, and he doesn't let the sun set on his wrath.

Instead the peacemaker is pursuing peace with others as the hunter pursues his quarry:

Romans 12:18

- 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Romans 14:19

- 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.

Hebrews 12:14

- 14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

Now we are not here talking about peace at any price. We are not to give up holiness in an effort to be at peace with someone. We are not to try to appease people by setting aside the Bible's standards of morality. We simultaneously pursue peace with all people and holiness.

We also are realistic and realize that peace with some people is not possible. Sometimes the other party simply will not let us be at peace with them. There are limitations. But if it is possible, as much as it depends on us, we are to live peaceably with all and we will pursue peace with others without abandoning our commitment to holiness.

We can't pursue peace by being an appeaser or by setting aside Biblical morality, but we can pursue peace by being careful in what we say. We are often too quick to express ourselves, and we express ourselves without thinking about the effect it will have on the other person. Our words can hurt other people, and we must remember that.

We can pursue peace by controlling our own temper. James said,

James 1:19-20

- 19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;
20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

We can pursue peace by following the Golden Rule and doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. We need to seriously consider how we would appreciate it if others were treating us the way we are treating them.

Now Jesus says that when we do this, when we behave as peacemakers, we will be called the sons of God. When we are peacemakers, we are demonstrating a family trait of the people of God. We are demonstrating that we have been born again and that the image of God has been renewed within us.

To be a peacemaker is to reflect the image of God in our lives because God is a peacemaker. Think of what God was willing to do to make peace with us:

John 3:16

- 16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

In order to make peace with us without setting aside His holy law and His justice and holiness, God sent His only begotten

Son to suffer on the cross, to pay the penalty for our sins so that God could forgive us our sins while at the same time meting out the just punishment which our sins deserve.

God the Father is a Peacemaker, and so is Jesus. Think of what Jesus was willing to do in submission to the will of the Father to make peace with us:

Philippians 2:4-8

- 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
- 5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,
- 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
- 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

We know that God has worked His grace in our hearts because we are not little Caesars who lord it over others and wage war against others. Instead we are little Christs, little Princes of Peace who are being transformed from glory to glory into the image of Christ.

Are you a peacemaker? Or is your heart still filled with murder? Go to the Savior. Trust Him to save you, to save you from hell and to save you from yourself. Come to Him, and He will whisper to you in His still small voice, "Peace be with you!" He will make you at peace with God, and He will transform you from a peace breaker into a peacemaker.

