

# BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

MATTHEW 5:9, JAMES 3:8-18

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**L**ouis B. Mayer, founder of a large company, once told about an experience during his childhood. He had a fight with another boy and lost. While his mother was bathing his black eye, he told her how it was entirely the fault of the other boy that the fight had started. His mother said nothing, but when the bathing was completed, she took Louis to the back door of their home. Nearby were several hills that created a fine echo. She told him to call those hills all the bad names he could think of. He did so and the bad names all came back to him. "Now," she said, "call out, 'God bless you.'" He did so and back came "God bless you." Louis never forgot that lesson. What you give to others you get back from them.

I think that we can all understand this principle. The way to be at peace with our fellow man is not to hurt him. We develop peaceful relationships with others when we help them, not when we do them harm.

But if this is so easy to understand, then why is there so much war in our world? Why do people argue and fight each other? Why do people kill each other? The reason that we don't get along with one another must be more than just a lack of education. Many religions teach us to be at peace with one another. Many popular songs also stress the importance of peace. But people who know that peace is right and good still say and do things that cause conflict and even war.

The Bible makes it clear that the reason why we have conflicts and wars is not because we lack moral teaching; rather, the problem comes from within. It is a problem of the heart. In MARK 7:20-23, Jesus said, "What comes out of a man is what makes him unclean. For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean." In other words, the reason we lack peace is because of the sin that is present inside of us. So the solution to problem of war must be more than just teaching people to stop fighting. Our attempts to bring about peace in this world must deal with the problem of sin that lies within the hearts of men; otherwise, the attempts will certainly fail in the end.

In MATTHEW 5:9, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." But we must look at that verse of

scripture as much more than just a statement that teaches us to work towards peace. We must see it in relationship with the other Beatitudes that precede it. It is part of a whole set of statements that force a person to come face to face with himself and the sin that lies within. The virtue of being a peacemaker is the last in a list of seven virtues. Jesus placed it last, because being a peacemaker is dependent on experiencing the first six virtues. It is dependent on recognizing the sin that is present within us and feeling bad about it. It comes only after a person has been humbled to realize that when it comes to being righteous, he has nothing to boast about. In that sense he is a meek person. But the feelings of humbleness and sadness are only useful if they create a strong desire to be saved from sin and the forces of evil which control our minds, emotions, and wills. Genuine change comes only after we are driven to seek God to save us from our sins. Only after God fills us with the power to overcome the evil forces which rage within us are we able to show true mercy to others. We become peacemakers only after our hearts have become pure. It is impossible to take these beatitudes and just put them into practice. Only a new man can live this new life.

This means that true peacemakers are more than just easy-going people. A person can be easy-going by nature. But as I have mentioned before, these virtues that Jesus taught have nothing to do with natural abilities or personality. They are the product of God's grace and the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life.

A peacemaker is also not a person who seeks peace at any price. Ambassadors are trained to make concessions on all levels in order to obtain peace. But true peace cannot be experienced without there first being peace with God. Thus, a true peacemaker will not do anything that will hinder himself or others from knowing and obeying God. Trying to obtain peace by violating Biblical principles is a terrible contradiction. Any such attempt will only increase conflict in the long run. In Taiwan, government leaders often enter local temples and pay homage to the false gods so that the nation may be blessed with peace. But such activity will do more to bring about war. History has proven this to be so.

So the virtue of being a peacemaker is not something we are born with, nor is it something we can receive through training. It comes only after someone

has received a new life. People must have a new outlook on everything before they can become peacemakers. When God changes us, we see ourselves differently. When God changes us, we also look at others in a new way. And when God changes us, our whole definition of success changes. It is this three-fold change in the way we look at things that qualifies us to be peacemakers. Let's take a moment to consider in more detail this three-fold change of outlook. First of all, let's consider how a peacemaker views himself.

Peacemakers must have a new outlook about themselves. Before God changes us, we tend to look at issues in terms of how they affect us. But when everybody is primarily concerned with the question "What is this going to mean to me?" then conflict and war become inevitable. You see, before a person changes to become a peacemaker, he is primarily concerned with questions about his own rights. Questions like "Is this fair to me?" and "Are my rights being violated?" are very important questions before a person has experienced change. But when two people or

two groups of people or two nations are primarily concerned with these questions, then there will never be lasting peace. As long as both sides are primarily concerned with their own rights and how they will be affected, then it is just a matter of time before one side feels that their rights are being violated.

Now a peacemaker is a changed person with a new outlook about himself. He no longer is concerned about his own rights. He already realizes that he deserves nothing but death, so he demands nothing. He will stand opposed to any solution that violates Biblical principles, but he will be willing to sacrifice his own rights in order to obtain peace. Only a person who believes he has no rights in the first place can enter into a conflict without feeling threatened. As long as we feel we have something to lose, then we will not be able to remain neutral. And unless we are neutral, we will never bring two opposing sides together.

But it is not just being neutral that makes someone a good peacemaker. The attitude of the peacemaker must be accompanied with action. Good peacemakers pay a price for their neutrality. It's easy to tell people to stop fighting when the conflict or the issues that started the conflict are not affecting us. But people engaged in conflict tend to be reluctant to listen

to a person who is far removed from the situation telling them to be at peace with each other. However, if they see the person who is making the plea for peace giving up his own rights in order to see peace come about, then they will be more likely to listen. We rarely see people with this kind of unselfish attitude and unselfish behavior. And when we do see such people, they challenge us to become unselfish ourselves. And when we do become unselfish, when we are more concerned about serving than being served, when we are more concerned about the rights of others than our own rights...then peace is at our doorsteps.

Our natural self desires to be treated with fairness. Our natural self asks the question "What is society doing for me?" When we don't get what we think we deserve, then the natural self cries out in protest. And sometimes the protest becomes violent. All this must change if we are to become peacemakers. And every Christian is called to be a peacemaker. One of the best tests of whether or not we are truly Christian is this: "Do I hate my natural self?" In JOHN 12:25, our Lord said,

"The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life." By this Jesus meant that we must reject the natural self within us, which urges us to fight for our rights in this world. It's as if we have two voices within us. The voice from our past tells us that being treated fairly in this life is what matters the most. But the other voice tells us that what comes after this life is what is most important. We must hate the old voice. We must say to it, "silence, leave me alone." If we can do that, then we can become peacemakers.

But a peacemaker not only has a new outlook on himself; he also sees others from a completely different perspective. When he sees people engaged in conflict with each other, he is able to see beyond the ugly facial expressions and the rude behavior. He is able to see people who are being controlled by the god of this world, and he is able to realize that the only way for them to be truly at peace is for them to be right with God.

The peacemaker fights the temptation of talking about people when they are offensive or difficult. He does not ask, "why are they like that?" He knows. They are like that, because the god of this world governs them. Satan is involved in every human conflict, and the peacemaker never forgets that fact.

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

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### Matthew 5:9

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And then again, the peacemaker has a new outlook on what is important. He has a new way of looking at success. Winning is no longer the most important thing. People say that lawyers who are more concerned about winning than they are about justice, and this has ruined the American judicial system. You see, sometimes it is necessary to loose in order to achieve justice. But lawyers only want to win.

What is the most important thing in this life? Is it that people cease fighting with one another? People achieve political success when they can stop other people from fighting with each other. But is that the most important thing? For the true peacemaker it is important, but it is only important if God's authority is reigning in the lives of people. Again, it must be stated that it is impossible to have lasting peace among men unless there is first peace with God. For the peacemaker, the most important thing is for God to be glorified among men.

So, to sum it all up, a peacemaker is more than just a person who hates to see people fighting with each other. He is that, but he is much more than that. Most important of all, he is a person who has undergone change. The change that has made him humble enables him to maintain neutrality. The change has caused him to want to do everything to promote God's glory. He is even willing to suffer wrong and injustice from others so that God's authority will rule in the hearts and lives of men. He realizes that true peace happens only after men are right with God.

And let me assure you, it is much easier to preach this than it is to practice it. The hardest place to be a peacemaker is in our own homes. Husbands and wives who are honest with each other will testify how hard it is to put these principles into practice. Even with the grace of God at work in our hearts, this virtue has proven to be the most difficult one for people to experience on a consistent basis. Human beings are prone to fight with one another.

For this reason, even the best of peacemakers need constant encouragement and practical advise to live according the principles we have just talked about. Peacemakers must ask God to help them practice certain disciplines.

They first must practice the art of not speaking. "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and

slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." That is a quote from the New Testament found in JAMES 1:19-20. It is God's practical advice to those who desire to be peacemakers. We don't want to say or repeat things we know are going to do harm. If we think they might do harm, then it is best to remain silent. But refraining from speaking when we are angry is probably the hardest thing for most people to do, especially in the context of our own homes, when we are with our parents and our siblings and our children and the ones we are married to. One perfects this art only by trusting in God for strength over a long period of testing. For the peacemaker, learning not to speak is probably the most important practical thing he can learn.

But learning not to speak must be accompanied by another discipline, which is learning how to think. We must always remind ourselves that true peace can only come about when people are right with God. We must never loose sight of that goal. So when we face volatile situations and we are deciding what to do, we must think how our

actions will affect others in their relationship to God.

Several years ago, while I was living in Taiwan, the relationship between Taiwan and Mainland China became very tense. At that time, a Christian who was a self-proclaimed prophet came to the island from the United States. But the advice he gave was not advice that helped people grow in their relationship with God. He predicted that Mainland China would attack Taiwan in 1996. He advised all the Christians to buy gold and get ready to flee the country. Many Christians took that prophet's advice.

But let's stop and think. This is not the kind of advice that a peacemaker gives. When war seems inevitable, peacemakers will see the conflict as an opportunity to draw closer to God. The advice the Bible gives to people who will inevitably face war is two-fold. One is to increase their activity of prayer. The other is to increase the activity of preaching the gospel. When war is inevitable we pray more and we evangelize more. These activities will bring people closer to God and ultimately lead to peace. Peacemakers realize that even wars are under God's control, and God allows wars to happen so that people will be driven to see their need to trust in God. The peacemaker thinks about God's purpose in letting the

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## Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

### James 3:18

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conflict begin in the first place, and then he works to fulfill that purpose. The peacemaker always thinks how the conflict should affect others in their relationship to God.

And finally, the peacemaker does practical things to produce peace at his own expense. ROMANS 12:20 says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." Peacemakers should strive to be selfless, lovable, and approachable.

In 1920 a man named Lewis Lawes was made warden of a large prison. Conditions there were terrible in those days. Lawes was later to become famous for the humanitarian reforms he instituted. However, Lawes gave much credit to his wife, Kathryn.

Kathryn Lawes treated the prisoners as human beings. She would take her three small children and sit with them, gangsters, murderers and the rest, while they played baseball and basketball.

She found a blind prisoner in utter despair, so she had him taught Braille and brought in Braille books for him to read. She learned sign language to talk with a deaf-mute prisoner.

One day in 1937 Kathryn Lawes was killed in a car accident. The next day her body lay in a casket in a house a quarter of a mile outside the prison wall. The acting warden found hundreds of prisoners crowded around the main gate. He knew what they wanted. He said to them, "I'm going to trust you, boys. You can go to the house." Then he opened the gate. No count was

taken. No guards were posted. That night every single man had returned to prison.

People change when they see someone sacrificing their own rights and their own comforts in order to bring about peace.

Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. Look at the sacrifice He made on our behalf. Notice how His primary concern was to bring men and women into a relationship with God. Observe how He remained silent when He knew His words would do no good.

Jesus did not stand upon His own rights and His own dignity. If He had, we would all be condemned. All that we need to know about being a peacemaker is found in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the Prince of Peace. He is God, and we are to be sons of God. It is natural for sons to imitate their fathers.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." To be like our heavenly Father is our crown of glory. All God's children should want to imitate their heavenly Father. All God's children should want to be peacemakers.

**Application:** Can you share a current example from your own life where you have an opportunity to be a peacemaker? How can others pray for you as you work to bring about true peace in the lives of the people involved in the conflict?