



**“Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it,” Psalm 34:14.**

## **Peace Seekers**

**Covenant:** We further engage . . . to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation and, mindful of the rules of our Saviour, to secure it without delay.

**Aim:** To realize that the Bringer of Peace would have His followers to seek and pursue peace.

**Text:** Ephesians 2:14-18; Matthew 5:21-24; 18:21-22

**INTRODUCTION** — The Prince of Peace would have His disciples to seek and pursue peace. Therefore the Baptist church members covenant, We further engage . . . to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation and, mindful of the rules of our Saviour, to secure it without delay.”

Spiritual peace is a practical calmness of heart which expresses itself in fellowship with God and man. Peace with God always manifests itself in a spirit of peace toward men. This Christian is obligated before God to be slow to take offense but when offense does arise to be always ready for reconciliation as Jesus taught.

There are to be no contentions and factions among church members. Those who live in anger and malice, hateful and hating one another (Titus 3:3) are not living according to Christ. Christ is not divided and there must be no division between those who call themselves Christians, I Corinthians 1:12-13. Jesus said it was impossible but that offenses would come, Luke 17:1. Even between brethren an offense will occasionally arise. But rules for reconciliation are given that immediate peace may be restored. This is the theme of today’s study.

This study might be pursued with this scripture in mind: **“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God,”** Matthew 5:9.

## EXPOSITION

### I. SLOW TO TAKE OFFENSE, Ephesians 2:14-18.

How tender and patient Christian brethren must be toward one another. How longsuffering and kind. How willing to overlook real or imagined wrongs that schisms should not arise. How glad to bear the sins of others that they might know the peace of God in their own hearts. How concerned about the unity and welfare of the church where they hold membership. The Apostle Paul gives two great reasons why Christians should live in peace with one another.

1. Jesus has brought us peace with God, verse 14. A world of grace is encompassed in the simple statement, **“For he is our peace.”** Paul has just written of man's alienation from God (2:2-3, 11-12) and the grace of God which provided redemption in Christ (verses 1, 4-10, 13), **“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ,”** 2:13. **“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”** Romans 5:1.

Whether we be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, black or white, we are all on the same level before God. Through faith in the atoning Christ, we have each one been reconciled to God and spiritual peace now rules. There is no place for pride nor boasting. There is no place for contentions nor divisions. Each Christian brother has exactly the same relationship to God as every other. Brother must deal with brother in the light of their mutual relationship with God.

2. Jesus has brought peace between antagonistic parties verses 14-18. Those who enter into peace with God must have peace with one another. Nothing but the change which comes by the gospel of grace can remove the barriers between men. These verses say that Christ in His death made the antagonistic parties (Jew and Gentile) a unity. In like manner He reconciles differences between men today when they believe in Him.

“The middle wall of partition” has been broken down. Paul probably had in mind the wall in the temple which separated the court of the Gentiles from the inner courts where the Jews may go. Affixed to this wall was a notice in Greek and Latin warning Gentiles to keep out on pain of death. The

relationship was most hostile but became one of peace.

The thought is not simply that two races (Jews and Gentiles) were made into one man, but that they were made into one new man. See II Corinthians 5:17. “The thought is not merely that the two races are brought together, with the Jew remaining a Jew and the Gentile continuing as a Gentile. Nor is it that the Gentile becomes a Jew, nor that the Jew becomes a Gentile. The idea is of the creation out of the two of something entirely new—a new humanity, a new people of God . . . So long as Jew and Gentile are unbelievers they continue to be at enmity with one another. It is only as each is united to Christ that they come to be at harmony one with the other!—Curtiss Vaughn.

Because each is reconciled to God, they can be reconciled to one another in Christ. Because of their common relationship to God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, they will be at peace with each other. What Paul goes to some pains to elaborate as being true of the Jew and Gentile is equally true of brethren in His churches today.

Brethren who live with an antagonistic spirit between them are overlooking the redemption and peace which is theirs in Christ Jesus. They are forgetting redemption in their selfish insistence on personal rights or privileges. The Christian who lives in the light of the peace of God is sure to be at peace with his brother in Christ. This is why Baptist members are pledged “to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation.” Is this your attitude?

## **II. READY FOR RECONCILIATION, Matthew 5:21-24.**

Reconciliation is “the restoration to harmony and friendship.” It is a proper word to describe man's experience with God in forgiveness. It is also a proper word to describe the renewed fellowship between brethren who have had differences arise between them. Baptist church members have covenanted themselves “to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation and, mindful of the rules of our Saviour, to secure it without delay.”

1. Reconciliation of all types of offenses should be sought, verses 21-22, Jesus suggests that a person may commit a trespass by anger or by words as well as by deeds. It matters not what the nature of the offence might be there must be no lasting offence taken. He who trespasses against his brother is also trespassing against God, Matthew 25:40. It makes little difference what caused the offence nor under what circumstances it arose. The

important matter is to have the difference with a brother removed,

**“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also,”** I John 4:20-21.

2. Reconciliation should be sought immediately, verses 23-24. So important is fellowship between Christian brethren that its absence will hinder true worship. The person who comes before God will be a person of purity, Psalm 15. Differences left unreconciled are sins against God. Therefore, if one comes to worship and remembers he has a difference with a brother, he must not try to worship God until an effort is made to be reconciled to the brother. Jesus is simply saying that he who is wrong with his brother cannot be right with God. Moreover he cannot truly worship God until the wrong is made right.

Jesus taught believers to pray, **“Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,”** Matthew 6:12. He who tries to worship God without having peace with his brethren is saying by his actions that He does not desire peace and fellowship with God.

When bitter envying and strife is in the heart they manifest a mind that is earthly, sensual, devilish, James 3:14-15. Those bitter attitudes lead on to confusion and every evil work, James 3:16. Strife is the key that opens the door to many other evils. No wonder the person of strife cannot worship God acceptably. Do not delay to be reconciled to a brother. He who delays suffers loss of spiritual approval of God until the matter is repented of. An honest dedicated effort should be made to effect reconciliation. If the other brother is hard and refuses to be reconciled, at least the spiritual brother can carry a spirit of forgiveness and be at peace with God.

### **III. THE RULES OF OUR SAVIOUR, Matthew 18:21-22.**

While the believer is to be slow to take offence at any word or deed or attitude, he is to be always ready to be reconciled concerning any offence which might arise. In reconciliation, he is to be “mindful of the rules of our Saviour.” What are these rules governing reconciliation?

1. Be careful to keep free from being an offense. Jesus warned the disciples that it is impossible but that offences would arise, Luke 17:1. However, He pronounced a severe judgment against the person who was the cause of offence. It is even better, Jesus said, that such a man was dead than that He should offend one who trusted in Him, Luke 17:2. Paul adds that the

Christian should be willing to suffer wrong rather than to seek to retaliate against a brother, I Corinthians 6:7.

Often offences arise when the offender has no intention to trespass. Sometimes efforts to reclaim a wayward brother will only increase hard feelings. This is why Paul advised, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness: considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted,” Galatians 6:1.

The first “rule of our Saviour” is: “Do not be a cause of offence.” Those who seem to delight in disturbing church fellowship by empty speech and base actions should hear these words with solemn attention.

2. Always be ready to forgive any offence against yourself. To harbor an unforgiving spirit and enmity is like Satan rather than like Christ. When Christians are willing to forgive they follow the example of God who has forgiven them for Christ’s sake. **“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you,”** Ephesians 4:32. **“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye,”** Colossians 3:13. It is only a self-centered pride which refuses to be reconciled to a brother. The second “rule of our Saviour” is: “Always be ready to forgive any offence against yourself.”

3. Seek the help of the church in making reconciliation. Matthew 18:15-17 sets out some rules in seeking help to resolve offences. If a brother trespass against a brother, let them first seek to settle the matter privately. If settled, well. If not settled, let one or two other brothers be brought in to counsel and witness the efforts made at reconciliation. If the matter is settled, well. If it is not settled, let it be brought before the church for their counsel and decision. If a brother will refuse to listen to the voice of the church in the matter, let him be as if he were a heathen — let the church exclude him from her membership.

The offended party should always be ready to forgive at the first sign of repentance by the offender, Luke 17:3-4. If the offender remains unwilling to be reconciled, let the church take action and the innocent person will be exonerated. So, the third “rule of our Saviour” is: “Seek the help of the church in making reconciliation of difficult cases.”

4. Seek to make the reconciliation immediately. Matthew 5:23-24 sets forth the urgency of immediate reconciliation. If one comes to worship and there remembers a brother has an offence against him, let him go immediately and be reconciled to the brother. Then returning, let him worship God in spirit and in truth. Can you imagine one leaving Sunday

school or a worship service of your church to go and be reconciled to a brother? This is what Jesus saw should be done. Offences should not be allowed to go unreconciled. So, the fourth “rule of our Saviour” is: “Seek to make reconciliation for an offence immediately.”

5. Forgive without reservation or limit. Simon Peter realized forgiveness was most difficult for the carnal man. He asked Jesus if one should forgive an offender as many as seven times, Matthew 18:21. Peter was going a long way in grace with this question. He should not be rebuked until the reader has forgiven the same person for the same offence seven times. Then the extent of grace to which Peter had grown will be evident.

Jesus replied that it is not enough to forgive an offender seven times (though that is good), but that he should be forgiven seventy times seven, Matthew 18:22. Jesus is not recommending the forgiveness of a man 490 times. He is rather saying that forgiveness should be unlimited. Again, Jesus said that if a man trespass against another, “seven times in one day,” each time turning to ask forgiveness, he should be fully and' freely forgiven, Luke 17:4.

**CONCLUSION** — The two-fold problem of offences and unforgiveness is a great hindrance to the work of many churches. In salvation God set believers at peace with Himself and with one another. The only reason offences even come is because Satan inspires them. He who falls into a vengeful spirit upon being offended is falling into a snare of the devil.

## QUESTIONS

1. What portion of the Covenant is studied today?
2. Why are peacemakers called the children of God?
3. How can one be slow to take offence?
4. What is reconciliation?
5. How can brethren be reconciled?
6. How does Luke 17:1-2 relate to this study?
7. How does Ephesians 4:32 relate?
8. What does Matthew 18:15-17 say about it?
9. What are the five rules Jesus gives for reconciliation?
10. How does this study relate to next week's study?