

# Lifeword.org

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

## Peace Seekers

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

**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.

Text: Ephesians 4:1-6.

INTRODUCTION—The peace of God which comes in salvation will manifest itself as peace with God and with men. Spiritual peace is not some indescribable experience which bears no relation to daily living. To be justified by faith and have peace with God (Romans 5:1) begins a reign of peace in the believer's heart. He now can manifest this spirit of peace in the midst of the most trying experiences and it will give him a balance in all occasions.

Peace with God will manifest itself in a spirit of peace toward men. The Baptist church Covenant obligates each member “to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.” There are to be no contentions and factions among those who call themselves by the name of Christ. Christ is not divided, I Corinthians 1:12-13. Those who live in anger and malice, hateful and hating one another, are living according to Satan and not according to Christ, Titus 3:3. So important is unity among Christian brethren that Jesus has given rules by which reconciliation is to be effected. The aim of the lesson today is to inspire each reader to live at peace with God and his brethren, even as he is so taught by the Prince of Peace.

### I. Peace From God, Ephesians 2:14-18.

1. Jesus is our Peace, 2:14a. Perhaps no man has yet comprehended the depths of the simple statement, *“For he is our peace.”* It is spoken from a context which describes the degree of man's alienation from God (verses 2-3, 11-12) and the amazing grace of God which provided redemption in Christ (verses 1, 4-10, 13). When Jesus was born the angels sang, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,”* Luke 2:14. This promise soon became a reality as men received Him as Saviour and found forgiveness in Him. The basis of this peace is reconciliation to God: *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”* Romans 5:1. Men have peace with God and one another because they have made peace through the Prince of Peace! All peace conferences between nations will be ineffective unless the principles of the Prince of Peace are followed. Each person who has not made peace with God in Christ is a stranger, alien, and enemy of God. *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,”* Acts 4:12.

2. Jesus has made peace exist between men, 2:14-18. Problems between men are settled when each has peace with God! Racial tensions existed between Jews and Gentiles in Paul's day worse than present day racial problems. The Jews had a long and honorable religious heritage. The Ephesian Gentiles were former worshippers of the idol god, Diana, with its attendant evils. The Jews wanted nothing to do with the pagan Gentiles! Yet, Christ came into the hearts of each. The result was that Jew and Gentile became one in Him! The middle wall of partition between them had been broken down! The enmity formerly existing had been abolished! Both Jew and Gentile were reconciled to God through the crucified and risen Christ, the consequence being that they two formed “one new man” in Him, and thus peace was restored! When men are in Christ, they are brothers to one another and sons of God, it, matters not what may be their racial heritage. All other differences can be worked out to their mutual good and the glory of God when this basic relationship exists. The consequence of Jesus' sacrifice is both peace with God and peace with men.

3. Jesus opens the way to perfect communion with God and men. Since the believer (being made a new creature in Christ, II Corinthians 5:17) has peace with God and men, he may now live in free communion with each. There are no sins to separate from God. There are no barriers to divide between men. People of all backgrounds become “one new man” in Christ and live as children of God. God makes no distinction between saved men for through Christ all the redeemed—Jews and Gentiles, white and black—

have access by one spirit unto the Father (2:18). How can any man call God his Father and fail to call God's children his brothers? *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus,”* Galatians 3:26.

## **II. Peace Within Ourselves, Matthew 5:21-24.**

1. Worship is a privilege. In worship a man comes before God and through prayer, praise and meditation (including offerings) he communes with God. The most blessed worshipper is the one who comes with sins confessed and forgiven. Then he can delight himself in the very presence of God and come to know more about Him. The will of God can there be determined. The guidance of God can be received for difficult decisions. The inspiration of God can be received to strengthen the discouraged heart. There the worshipper can present his offerings to God, the most important of which is himself! Oh, the blessed experience of coming before God with peace within one's heart and freely communing with Him. Such a person will, like the Psalmist, be glad to accept the invitation, *“Let us go into the house of the Lord,”* Psalm 122:1.

2. Worship may encounter hindrances, 5:23. One of the most subtle hindrances to worship may be differences between brethren! This passage teaches that if one comes before God with unreconciled wrongs in his life, he cannot worship God. A specific example is taken—differences between brethren—and one is told how to deal with it. The person who comes before God must be a person of purity, Psalm 15. Differences left unreconciled are sin 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 that difference is settled. Hindrances to worship would include any sort of sin that is unforgiven. Evil speaking against another (Matthew 5:21-22) is sin against God. Thus the scripture seems to say that he who is wrong with his brother cannot be right with God! He cannot truly worship God until the wrong is made right!

3. Worship is possible only to one right with God and his brethren. The person who has bitter envying and strife in his heart is manifesting a mind that is earthly, sensual, devilish, James 3:14-15. Such envying and strife leads on to confusion and every evil work, James 3:16. Thus strife seems to be the key that opens the door to many kindred evils. No wonder the person of strife cannot worship God acceptably. The very absence of peace and the presence of strife is evidence that Satan, not God, is leading that person's mind. Let the rule of Satan be overthrown—let a man learn to live at peace with his brother *“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,*

*shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus,*” Philippians 4:7.

### **III. Peace With Others, Matthew 18:21-22.**

1. Christians should give no offense to another. Jesus warned the disciples that it is impossible but that offenses would arise, Luke 17:1. However, he pronounced a most severe judgment against the person who was the cause of an offense. It is even better that such a man was dead than that he be a cause of offense, Luke 17:2. Paul encourages the Christians to suffer personal wrong rather than seek to retaliate in such a way as would involve sin, I Corinthians 6:7. How careful each one should be of his speech, actions, and attitudes. To offend one of God's little ones is a most serious offense. (Note: Those who seem to delight in disturbing church fellowship by evil speech and actions may well note the Lord's warning. Such a judgment is justly due all who create offenses within the Lord's flock!)

2. Christians should be always ready to forgive. Sometimes trespasses will occur. When such happens, the Christian should be faithful to seek reconciliation immediately. Rules for such a reconciliation are given in Matthew 18:15-17. These are the rules which the Church Covenant binds us to follow in seeking reconciliation. Jesus informs us that the offended party should tell the offender of the trespass and be ready to forgive at the first sign of repentance by the offender, Luke 17:3-4. To harbor unforgiveness and enmity is like the devil rather than like God. Christians are marked by their willingness to forgive. Thus they follow the example of God who has forgiven them for Christ's sake, Ephesians 4:32.

3. Christians should forgive without reservation, Matthew 18:21-23. Peter realized that true forgiveness was a serious problem for most people. Therefore, he asked Jesus if one should forgive an offender as many as seven times. (Even this is going a long way in grace. One who offends seven times seems to reveal an evil heart.) Yet, Jesus' reply is that one must forgive seventy times seven. (Four hundred and ninety times is simply a way of saying forgiveness is to be unlimited.) One is not to keep a record of how many times he forgives another. It is likely not true forgiveness if each offense is added to those already past and kept faithfully recorded. Again, Jesus says that if seven offenses occur within one day the Christian is to be able to forgive them all, Luke 17:4. This calls for largeness of spirit, closeness to Christ, and a selfless dedication which does not seek one's own personal profit. There never can come a time when one can say, “I have gone as far as Christ now. I do not need to forgive any more.” Jesus teaches us that God has forgiven us a debt we could never pay. If we do not forgive

trespasses against one another God will surely call us into judgment. See the parable teaching this truth in Matthew 18:23-35.

**CONCLUSION** — The great hindrance to living in peace is the twin problem of offenses and unforgiveness. In salvation God set us at peace with Himself and His children. The only reason offenses come is because Satan inspires them. He who falls into a vengeful spirit upon being offended is falling into a snare of the devil. Our Church Covenant obligates us to patience (“slow to take offense”), readiness to be reconciled with an offender or the offended, and bound to the rules set out by Jesus Christ to make the reconciliation, Matthew 18:15-17. Let each reader set a guard upon his life that he be neither offensive nor offended. When differences do arise, let him be willing to confess his fault and ready to make reconciliation. *“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God,”* Matthew 5:9.

#### QUESTIONS

1. How does one receive peace with God? Romans 5:1.
2. Read and explain the portion of the Church Covenant studied today.
3. Describe Jesus Christ as the “Prince of Peace.”
4. Explain Ephesians 2:14-15.
5. What is the teaching of Matthew 5:23-24?
6. What are some hindrances to worship?
7. What effect will peace with God have on our relationship with men?
8. Briefly explain Matthew 18:15-17.