



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

Peacemakers

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

L455. Date: May 1976. **Text:** Ephesians 2:14-18; Matthew 5:21-24; 18:21-22. **Topic:** Church Covenant; Peace: With Man; Reconciliation: With Man.

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

What is one of the great distinctions between the righteous and wicked? God expressed it in Isaiah 57:19-21, **“I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him. But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”** The righteous have peace, but the wicked do not. The people of God are a people of peace.

Peace is to rule in the believer's heart and in his relationships in his church. That is why the Church Covenant carries the commitment, “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.” The commitment is threefold. (1) We will be slow to take offence. (2) We will remain ready to reconcile any offended brother or sister. (3) We will follow the rules which Jesus set forth for reconciling the offender and the offended. If he follows those guidelines, peace will reign in the Christian's heart and in his church.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Those who trust Him are people of His peace. Today's lesson aims to lay upon your heart that “the Prince of Peace would have His followers to seek and pursue peace.” As you study,

remember the words of Jesus, **“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God,”** Matthew 5:9.

I. SLOW TO TAKE OFFENCE (Ephesians 2:14-18)

The Christian should be tender and patient. He ought to be longsuffering and kind. He should be willing to overlook real or imagined wrongs. He ought to be glad to bear the sins of another that a schism would not arise between them. He should be concerned that the peace of God in his heart will mark his attitudes toward his fellow believers and the world at large. The Christian must be like Christ, **“Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously,”** I Peter 2:23.

A. Christian peace is based upon a peace between God and each believer. By nature man is a sinner; he is alienated from God (Ephesians 2:2, 3, 11, 12). The grace of God, however, was extended toward him in Jesus Christ so that the alien sinner might become a redeemed saint and a member of God's dear family. It all is possible through Jesus, **“For he is our peace . . .”** Ephesians 2:14. The Holy Spirit caused Paul to express it: **“... 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.

Peace between God and man is extended to each person who trusts Jesus. There is no distinction as to race, nationality, age, sex, or culture. Each is personally reconciled to God by faith. Where can pride or boasting be justified? How can contentions and divisions be tolerated? Brother must deal with brother in the light of their mutual relationship to God.

B. Christian peace is expressed by absence of antagonism between brothers. Examine Ephesians 2:14-18. It recognizes that there are almost insurmountable barriers which separate man from man. Those barriers are political, social, economic, racial, geographical, national, and religious. Antagonism is to be expected among such differences, but that antagonism is absent in Christian relationships.

What is the explanation of peace among differing Christian people? Jesus has removed the barriers from among them. Even antagonistic parties like Jews and Gentiles (or blacks and whites, Oriental, and Caucasian, Asian and European) are united in Him. “The middle wall of partition” has been removed, Paul explained (Ephesians 2:14).

Something tremendous happens to the human spirit when Jesus establishes peace between man and God and between man and man. A

“new” man is created. “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”—Curtis Vaughn. Each is reconciled to God; therefore, each is reconciled to the other in Him.

Brethren who live with an antagonistic spirit are overlooking the redemption and peace which is theirs in Christ. By insisting upon personal privileges, they are forgetting redemption's change. The Christian who lives in the peace of God will live in peace with his brother in Christ. That is why each Baptist church member commits himself “to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation.”

Offence is usually caused by selfishness. “He did not do ME right” one insists and pursues a course for self vindication. As a result, he suffers, his church suffers, and God's Holy Spirit is grieved. If one refuses to allow self to rule his life, offences will cease.

II. READY FOR RECONCILIATION (Matthew 5:21-24)

Jesus said, “. . . **It is impossible but that offences will come . . .**” Luke 17:1. Satan will see that believers are tested in that way. How will a Baptist respond to an offence? He has covenanted to be “always ready for reconciliation.”

Reconciliation is “the restoration to harmony and friendship.” It is a good word to describe a man's experience when God forgives him and restores him to peaceful relationship. It is also a good word to use to describe the renewed fellowship between brethren. Jesus has given believers specific instructions not to harbor ill will nor to permit an offence to continue unreconciled.

A. Reconcile every offence which arises (verses 21, 22). It may be a trespass by attitude (anger), by words (harsh speech), or by attitude. Whatever the nature or cause, never rest until peace is restored. He who trespasses against his brother is also trespassing against God (Matthew 25:40). That is sin. Sin must be dealt with in order that peace with God may be maintained.

“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.

B. Reconcile the offences immediately (verses 23, 24). Fellowship among Christian brethren is so important that it should never be neglected. Absence of fellowship hinders true worship. He who comes to worship God must be a person of purity (Psalm 15). Differences left unreconciled are sins against God. If a Christian comes to worship and remembers that he has a difference with a brother, he must not try to worship until he has sought reconciliation with the brother. The principle is that one is right with God only when he is right with his fellow Christians. Never delay setting wrongs right.

Jesus taught disciples to pray, **"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors,"** Matthew 6:12. Do not try to fellowship God when the sin of bitterness is in your heart. Bitterness, envy, unforgiveness, strife, or a vengeful spirit manifest a mind which is sensual, earthly, and devilish (James 3:14, 15). That kind of attitude leads to confusion and every evil work (James 3:16). An unforgiving spirit is the key which opens the door to many other evils. It is no wonder that God commanded His people to be forgiving.

Do not delay to be reconciled to an offended or an offending brother. To delay is to suffer spiritual loss. Make an honest and sincere effort to effect reconciliation. If the other person refuses to be reconciled, you have delivered your soul. You can carry a spirit of forgiveness and peace whether he will or not. You can be at peace with God about it.

III. THE RULES OF OUR SAVIOUR (Matthew 18:21, 22)

Offences will arise. Because of their inevitability, Jesus gave rules for Christians to follow in seeking peace.

A. Do not be offensive. A severe judgment is pronounced upon the person who is a cause of offence. Jesus said that it is better that such a one be dead rather than to offend a believer in Him (Luke 17:2). So serious is that offence, Paul said, that it is better for a Christian to suffer wrong than to be a cause of offence by retaliating against a brother (I Corinthians 6:7).

Many offences would be prohibited, if Christians would show grace one to another. Never insist upon your own rights. Surrender your rights rather than to cause an offence. Watch your attitude, as well as your actions, that good words or deeds may not be misinterpreted. Manifest the same attitude toward others that you want God to manifest toward you.

B. Always be ready to forgive any personal offence. Follow the Biblical

injunction, “. . . **Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving: one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you,**” Ephesians 4:32. Christians manifest the spirit of Christ when they are “. . . **Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another . . .**” Colossians 3:13. If God has forgiven your offences against Him, surely you can by His grace forgive another's offences against you.

C. Seek the help of the church in reconciliation (Matthew 18:15-17). Differences between brethren should be settled privately, if at all possible, in order that the matter not spread. If it cannot be settled between the two Christians involved, let two or three spiritually-minded believers be called to try to effect reconciliation. If the difference is settled then, rejoice and let it rest. If one party refuses to be reconciled, take the matter before the assembly of Christians. Let the congregation express her opinion. If any member refuses to abide by the voice of the church, exclude him from the fellowship; he is acting more like a heathen than like a Christian.

Jesus' instructions place a solemn responsibility upon all believers. The offended and offending brothers are responsible to settle their differences without disturbing the church. The two or three spiritual Christians who are called in to counsel are responsible to follow the mind of Christ in guiding the brethren toward reconciliation. The church, when the matter comes to her attention, should follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in making her decision. Every one involved has a solemn responsibility resting upon him.

Let the offended party forgive at the first sign of repentance by the offender (Luke 17:3, 4). Where there is no repentance, let the offended party be exonerated by an act of the church.

D. Seek to make reconciliation as soon as the offence is known. Meditate on the teachings of Matthew 5:23, 24. Can you imagine anyone leaving Sunday School or the worship service to go to be reconciled to a brother? That is what Jesus said should be done, if the memory of unreconciled differences should come when one is in the presence of God. Why? It is too serious a matter to be delayed. For brethren to be divided means that the body of Christ is divided, for they are “members one of another” in the church (I Corinthians 11:12). That is most serious. It is deserving of immediate attention. No believer should rest before the differences are settled. Broken fellowship affects one's relationship with God and man. Settle the matter immediately.

E. Forgive a penitent brother without reservation or limit. Simon Peter asked, “**Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?**”

Jesus reply was, “**I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until**

seventy times seven,” Matthew 18:21, 22. Jesus did not mean to say, “Forgive four hundred ninety times, and then you are under obligation to forgive no more.” He taught that forgiveness is to be unlimited. A truly Christian spirit keeps no records concerning the number of times it has forgiven. Even if a person sins against another seven times in one day, and seven times turns again to express repentance, the offended Christian is to forgive fully and freely each of the seven times. That is what Jesus taught. Forgive without reservation or limit.

Today's study has dealt with a serious subject. Many churches have been severely crippled because peace did not reign among her members. Your church needs to maintain the spirit of fellowship, the unity of the Spirit, in order to do an effective work for God. Make it a goal that you will not be offensive nor take offence so as to handicap your church.

When offences arise, let the Prince of Peace rule in your relationships with a fellow Christian. The Spirit of peace will minister through you to restore fellowship and maintain harmony in your church. Go out of your way in your efforts to strengthen the fellowship of your church.