

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
at the West University Church of Christ, Houston, Texas,
on May 15, 2011**

The beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount are some of the most popular sayings of Jesus of Nazareth. These beatitudes are not commands but declarative statements of the spiritual delight and inner happiness and joy of Christ followers who exhibit the characteristics named. “Blessed” is the Greek word *makarios*. Jesus says that we live *makariosly*, i.e., with God’s approval.

There are eight of these beatitudes.

- “Blessed are those who are spiritually broken and dependent on God.”
- “Blessed are those who grieve and mourn over their sin.”
- “Blessed are those who depend on God and are gentle with their strength under control.”
- “Blessed are those who show mercy to others.”
- “Blessed are those that hunger and thirst after righteousness.”
- “Blessed are those who are single focused and concentrated on doing one thing, serving God.”
- “Blessed are those who make peace.”
- “Blessed are those who are persecuted because they are serving God and doing right.”

Today we are looking at the seventh beatitude found in Matthew 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.”

We need this message today. There’s plenty of division, dissension, alienation, hatred, prejudice and war in our world. Will and Ariel Durant in their book, The Lessons of History, say, “In the last 3,421 years of recorded history, only 268 have seen no war.” [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968, p. 81]. Peace seems to be a brief glorious moment when everybody stops to reload. Washington, D. C., has lots of peace monuments because they build one after each war. The nations were tired of war so in 1945 the United Nations was formed with the motto: “To have succeeding generations free from the

scourge of war.” Yet, since that time there has not been one day of peace on earth. Not one. Of course, without the United Nations, the wars and conflicts might have been much, much worse.

There’s also trouble in our families, our marriages, our churches, our schools, our communities, our states, and in our national government. There’s also a lot of chaos going on inside individuals today.

What is the biblical meaning of peace?

The Hebrew word for “peace” is *shalom*, a word that occurs over 300 times in the OT. *Shalom* is a word that means not just the absence of hostility but it is a positive word that goes much further. *Shalom* means “well-being, wholeness, health, security and safety for the total personality.” When fellow Jews meet each other, they greet and depart with this word, “*Shalom.*” They are not just wishing an absence of war or trouble but they are bestowing a blessing and wish for goodness, wholeness, and well-being.

God is called a God of peace in the Bible. One of the greatest priestly blessings in the Bible is found in Numbers, chapter six, beginning in verse 23: [read vs. 23-26].

The prophet Isaiah saw a future day coming when God’s Messiah would bring peace to men. Hear his words: [read 9:6-7; 61:1-2].

In the NT our word, “peace,” translated from the Greek word, *eirene*, occurs 88 times and is in every book of the NT. We get the name “Irene” and the adjective “irenic” from this word. Jesus uses a word combination from the word *eirene* here when she speaks of “peacemakers.” This particularly word in the Greek, “peacemaker,” only occurs here in the NT. Something similar to it is found in the letter of James, the Lord’s brother, in chapter 3. Here the Bible says, [read 3:13-18].

“Peace” refers to a spiritual attitude, status or position that Christ followers occupy or receive because they have peace with God. Jesus is called “the prince of peace.” He preaches the gospel of peace. He came into the world to bring peace with God and to create peace among men. When he was born, the angels announced, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

This peace is a relationship with God that gives serenity, tranquility and calmness to our inner selves. When Jesus died, he gave away his garments to the soldiers who gambled for them at the cross, he gave his back to be scourged and beaten, he gave away the care of his mother to his disciple John, he gave his blood as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins,

he gave his head to wear a crown of thorns, he gave his spirit back to God who gave it, and he gave his peace to his disciples. In his last conversation with his disciples before the cross, hear what he told them: [read John 14:27; 16:33].

Jesus says that “in the world you will have trouble.” Jesus the Prince of peace who came preaching peace with God had plenty of trouble himself. The Bible says in Luke 23:5: [read it]. The greatest peacemaker of all time was tortured him and nailed him to a cross by evildoers. He died for our sins. He told us that while he will give us his peace, we will suffer persecution in this world, just like he did. The next beatitude speaks of this, “Blessed are those that are persecuted for righteousness sake.” Peacemaking and persecution often go together.

Biblical peace does not mean an absence of war, hostility and hatred from the world toward us as Christ’s disciples. Because we follow Christ, we will suffer more than those who do not oppose the wickedness of the world. But, in spite of all the trouble we may have because we are following Jesus, we have a relationship of peace with God and peace within ourselves. It is a peace that the world knows nothing of and cannot take away from us.

Jesus brought peace with God and peace among those who follow him. Our sins separated us from God and condemned us. Jesus brought peace with God by forgiving our sins through the blood of his cross. The Bible says, “We have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). The Bible says that there is one mediator through God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5). A painting in a London museum illustrates this point. It is a painting of a soldier in the war front who is sent out under enemy fire to connect an important telephone communication line that has been severed. The broken wires are too short to be spliced together. The soldier takes one line in one hand and the other line in the other hand and the wire then transmits through his body. The painting is entitled, “Through.” That’s what Jesus did for us. He being God the spiritual Son took the hand of God the Father in one hand and Jesus, and also being man, took the hand of man in the other hand and made the complete connection between the two.

Jews and the nations of the world, called Gentiles, were separated from each other by the Jewish law with its rules and regulations. Jesus took that law away and made Jews and Gentiles one new humanity, Christians. Hear how the apostle Paul explained it: [read Eph. 2:13-18].

As Christians, we are bought with the blood of Jesus. We are united through and at the cross of Jesus. The blood of Christ that saves us and

unites us is greater than anything that can divide us. Some North American Indian tribes used to practice the rite of becoming blood brothers. They would make a small cut on their hand or wrist and mix that blood with another person who had done the same on himself. They were thus united in blood, a bond of loyalty and commitment to each other to be broken only by death. We are blood brothers through the blood of Jesus shed at the cross for us. We do not belong to ourselves any more. We belong to Jesus. Therefore, since through Jesus we have peace with God and peace with one another, we are to be people of peace who preach peace, practice peace, and work for peace. The peace we have received and that we enjoy and that we work for does not originate with us. It comes from God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit of God in us produces his fruit in us. The Bible says, [Gal. 5:22].

The Bible says that we should always strive to maintain the peace among us that God created among us in our new births into his kingdom. Hear Paul in Eph. 4:3 [read].

Jesus says that the peacemakers are blessed by God. It is not the peace lovers or the peaceful who are blessed. It is the peace makers, i.e., those who actively work and suffer to bring peace to and among others.

Where are we to work for peace?

We are to work for peace wherever there is division, dissension and disunity. This may be in our own marriage and family. It may be in our church family and our brotherhood of believers. It may be in our work place and in our community. It is anywhere in our world where we can influence others and help them come to peace with God and peace with each other.

We need to start with ourselves first, of course. We begin at home in our own marriage and family. I know that occasionally I like to talk with my wife, Judy, and ask these questions: "Are you happy in our relationship? Am I doing anything that annoys you? Is there something I can do to better meet your needs?" Talks like this between husbands and wives will bring better understanding and peace.

The other day Judy and I were playing dominoes. I could tell that she had a hostile attitude. I asked, "What wrong? Are you upset?" "Yes," she quickly replied. "What's wrong?" I asked. "You just sit there and drink your coffee and I have to do all the work in the game. I keep the score, I shuffle the dominoes, and you just sit there. I think you are just using me," she responded. "Wow, I didn't realize I was hurting you. Thank you for

telling me,” I responded. “From now on, let’s make a deal, one person will keep score and the other will shuffle. OK?” “OK,” she answered. That solved the problem. If I had not spoken up, and if we had not faced the problem, then we would have both gone to bed angry with bad dispositions. Peacemakers must be proactive when they recognize a problem. Problems usually will not solve themselves.

How do we work for peace? What do we do?

Peacemaking is hard work that involves persistence, patience, and maybe even persecution. When we work to bring separated peoples together we may be maligned and opposed by both sides. Peacemakers cannot ignore the divisive and divided status quo.

Here’s what it takes to be a peacemaker:

1. We must go out of our way to try to be reconciled with others. Jesus spoke of this a few verses down in chapter 5 of Matthew. Hear what he said [read vs. 23-24]. Jesus teaches that if someone has something against me, then I am to go to him; I am not to wait for him to come to me. On the other hand, if I have something against someone, I am to go to him. Hear Jesus in Matthew 18:15 [read]. Both the offender and the offended have a responsibility to get together. Literally, they meet each other half way as they are each going to see the other. This means that we do not nurse our grudges. We do not bury our wounds and say they don’t matter. We don’t suffer in silence and harbor ill-will in our hearts. We speak up, we seek to resolve the issue, we do something. Remember the father in the prodigal son story? He went put of the house, left the party for his returned son, and tried to reason with his older son who had been offended (Luke 15).

I read about a divorce hearing where a couple was arguing back and forth. Their four-year-old boy became teary-eyed watching the conflict. He took his father’s hand, then his mother’s hand, and kept pulling until he pulled the two hands together. He became a peacemaker. That’s what peacemakers do. They get estranged people back together again.

2. We must be gentle, kind, merciful and loving toward people in trouble and with problems. The Bible says that when we try to restore people with a spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:2) that we fulfill the

law of Christ, which is the law of love. Arrogance, hardheadedness, pride, meanness, cruelty, gossip, and tale bearing all work against unity and restoration of relationships.

3. We must be willing to talk about the problems and the issues that divide us. Some people wish to run from their problems, never to talk about them, and many of us, are reluctant to confront them about their life. If there is anything that we cannot talk about as spouses or as brothers and sisters in Jesus, then the issue is not the issue. The real issue is the underlying lack of trust and credibility and the anger accompanying them.

When a husband and wife have a problem or when we have a problem with someone, we need to face the music and kindly say, "Can we talk about this?" If the other party says, "No, not now," then we need to ask, "When can we talk about the problem?" Then try to set a time within the next 24 hours when we can talk about it. A person who refuses to communicate at any time is not following the instructions of Jesus. They are not submitted to his Lordship over their attitudes. We cannot make a person communicate but we can kindly recommend, suggest, and facilitate conversation. This means that peacemakers need to be proactive. We cannot sit back and wait for others to act. They may never do so and the hurts often grow deeper and more divisive the longer we wait.

4. We must listen carefully to what others are saying to try to understand their perspective. The Bible says, "Be slow to speak, quick to listen" (James 1:18). This will help us gain trust and rapport with both sides. I have learned something about this myself. In the early days of my ministry, whenever someone approached me with a criticism or with a different view than I had, I usually lit into him and tried to convince him to change his mind. Now I have learned to listen. First, I want to agree with my critics in every area I can, and then move into a constructive discussion. The words, "I appreciate your viewpoint," "Thank you for telling me that," and "Yes, I agree that we need to . . ." have a way of softening opposition and removing heat from the encounter. I have learned that it is more important to win a brother than it is to win an argument.

5. We must work toward peaceful solutions. In a marriage, at church, at work, and in the community, nobody gets their way all the time. There must be give and take. Each party must assume and admit their part of the conflict and take responsibility to correct what they can.

In counseling couples where one of them is blaming the other for all the problems, I usually ask that person, “Do you feel that in any way you contribute to the problem? Are you even 10% of the problem?” Most people are honest enough to say, “Yes, I know that I am a little responsible, maybe 10%.” “OK,” I respond. “Can you tell us about that 10%? How do you feel that you contribute to the problem?”

6. Sometimes we who are in the right must recognize the problems the issue creates for our brothers and sisters and we willing to give up that practice at the time when we are in the presence of those brothers and sisters. For example, in I Corinthians chapter 8, the issue was about eating meats sacrificed to idols. The Jews saw nothing wrong with going to the meat market and buying meat that had previously been offered in worship to an idol god. They knew that idols were nothing, just “pretend” gods. The Gentiles, on the other hand, had come out of idol worship, and to eat that meat, was a danger to their souls because it tempted them to revert to idol worship. The Jews had no tradition or past practice with that but the Gentiles had lived their lives before Christ honoring those idols in dinners and festivals featuring that meat. So what would Paul say to a congregation made up of Jews and Gentiles in Corinth? Hear him: [read I Cor. 8:1, 11-13].

We are not here to offend our brothers and sisters; we are here to love one another. A conflictive church does not honor Jesus. The Bible says, “The Spirit of God is not in a church that is full of division and controversy” (James 3:14-15). No optional practice is worth dividing the church. Sometimes those who are in the right need to forgo that right in order to unify the congregation. This is what Paul taught in Romans chapter 14. On optional matter and personal matters, those that are more traditional must not judge their brothers who are more progressive; and vice versa. We are all going to be judged by God; we are not to be judges of each other.

God’s spirit produces peace and joy, not ill will and disharmony. Paul believed in working for peace among people. That is why he wanted the Jewish boy, Timothy, to be circumcised because he was going to work

among the Jews (Acts 16:1-3). Paul explained, [read I Cor. 9:23]. This is working for peace.

7. Up to this point, I have assumed that we are working with Christ followers. Sometimes those who are not Christ followers are causing the division in our marriages, our work, our community, and even in those who are adherents to the church but not disciples themselves. We cannot have the peace of Christ unless we have peace with God through Christ. The most important thing to do is to try to get a person to be reconciled, or put right, with God through the gospel. Paul explained it this way: [read 2 Cor. 5:18-21].

We can bring peace by teaching a person how to be saved. When two divided parties both want to obey Jesus, it is so much easier to get them united than when one party is serving a different Lord. The sharing of the gospel of Jesus is the greatest way to begin the peace process. If a person is not right with God, then they cannot be right with others. I like the three questions that the late brother Gus Nichols, a preacher of the gospel in Jasper, Alabama, used to ask people with whom he counseled. He would ask the questions: "Do you want to do right? Are you willing to let God tell you what is right? Are you willing to do what's right now?"

When is it right to not agree or work for peace?

The only time this principle does not apply is when there is a matter of salvation at stake, and even in a case like that; there is a right and wrong way to react. Jesus did not preach appeasement or "peace at any price." He said that he came to "bring a sword, not peace" (Matt. 10:34-35). That sounds contradictory to what he said about peace, but it is not. When it comes to salvation, going to heaven, having our sins forgiven, being right with God, we cannot and must not compromise the gospel. That's what Jesus meant. That's why the unbelievers hated him so much. That's why they put him on the cross. Jesus never compromised the truth of God in order to have peace. Jesus did not promote appeasement or compromise with evil or false teaching.

The same things happened with Paul. He urged us to work for peace if at all possible, but sometimes it is not possible (Rom. 12:18). That is why Paul refused to circumcise the Gentile Titus because to bind a Jewish ritual on him would be to say that Christ was not enough to save Gentiles but that

they must also practice Jewish law and rituals. Paul said, “Absolutely not. I will never give in to that. God forbid. No, a thousand times No” (Gal. 2:3-5)

If a matter arose in this church family that greatly offended me, and I thought that it was a matter of salvation, then I would take these steps:

1. I would talk with the brothers or sisters teaching these ideas or doing these things and try to get them to stop because what they are doing is offending Jesus, as I see it. Maybe I or they will see more than we see now.
2. If that did not work, I would go to the church leadership, the elders, and talk with them about the situation, and urge them to ask that such things not be taught or done. A person can hold a different view and still be in Christ as long as that view is not taught or practiced.
3. If that did not bring about a change, then I would not gossip, get on the telephone and call members to stir up dissension, or send emails with threats or slander or ill-will, but I would either quietly go about what I thought was right. I would quietly leave, if necessary, and find a group of believers more in harmony with my thinking. I would not divide the church over the issue. The division would create more infection than the issue itself.

Peacemaking is hard work. It is also difficult and dangerous work. But it is a necessary work if we are to be Jesus’ disciples and to receive God’s blessing. It is the work of Jesus who brings reconciliation with God and with each other.

What does it mean to be called “sons of God”?

To be called “sons of God” means that we have the characteristics of God. The Greek text says “sons of God,” not “children of God,” even though the KJV translates it that way. There is a slight difference in the meaning of the Greek words for “children” and for “sons of.” The words “son of” in the Bible mean “having the characteristics or qualities of” whatever follows those words. The Hebrew language does not have many adjectives. Have you ever noticed that there are no adjectives in the 23rd Psalm? Barnabas was a “son of encouragement” meaning that he was an

encouraging person. James and John were called “sons of thunder” because they had explosive dispositions. Some unbelievers were “sons of the devil” meaning that they had the characteristics of the devil. Believers are called “sons of light” meaning that they have those qualities. In our language, we use “son of,” not to describe just parents, but to describe the person addressed, as in the saying, “son of a gun” which means a person is as wild and explosive as his parents.

When Jesus said, peacemakers would be called “sons of God” he meant that peacemakers have the qualities of God himself, that they are engaged in the activities of God, and that they are God-like. Jesus uses this expression again in this chapter in verse 45, where he says that if we love our enemies we will be “sons of our Father in heaven” because God loves all persons, too. You can readily see this in a parallel passage in Luke, chapter 6, verses 35-36: [read them].

When we work for peace among people, we are doing God’s work. That’s when we are most like God who loves all people and wants unity and peace among them. When we work for peace, we are doing the work of Jesus and we have the blessing and approval of God. Let’s live *makariosly*. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God.”

cwarpula@westchurch.com