

Reflect:

- What does it mean to us to be “reconciled to God”? In what ways is God calling us to be “ambassadors” for his message of reconciliation?
- Talk can be very “cheap”. But what was involved at a practical level in the “peace” between Jew and Gentile?

Sons and Daughters of God

“Like father, like son”. “He’s (or she’s) a chip off the old block”. These common expressions are used to describe family likenesses of appearance, manner or character.

Jesus is saying that the peacemakers will be called sons and daughters of God, because, above all other peacemakers, God is the great Peacemaker.

He who has taken the initiative and paid the costly price of restoring peace with us. As we ourselves are peacemakers, it becomes clear that we are members of God’s family.

To be a peacemaker isn’t easy. It can be very costly – it cost Jesus his life! But it is part of the way of supreme happiness.

Reflect:

- In what new directions has the Lord been speaking to us through this study? What are we going to do about it?

Study 9 – ... the Persecuted. Readings: Hebrews 11.32-30; Matthew 5.11-12; 1 Peter 3.13-18.

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Ten Studies on the Beatitudes

by Peter J Blackburn

8. ... the Peacemakers

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.11-21; Ephesians 2.11-22

The quest for happiness is mirrored by the quest for peace. In a very real sense the two go hand-in-hand together. We can’t really be happy without peace.

Perhaps the parents have had a late night out and need extra sleep – they want to be “left in peace”. Or it may be an issue that has troubled a couple’s relationship. One of them seems to insist on bringing it up all the time – “Can’t you give me a bit of peace?”

We live in an age unsettled by “wars and rumours of wars”. In our country we are alarmed by an increase in violent crimes, though, up to the present, there has never been all-out war. Worldwide, there are many “hot spots”. Many seem to centre on the Middle East – on Jew and Moslem, and whether there should be a state of Israel.

The conflict has wide and sinister implications. The rise of global terrorist organisations puts a measure of risk into every country. Do we drive? Do we fly? Should we mingle with city crowds? Are we safer to live a lonely, reclusive life? Where can we be absolutely certain of safety?

But the present-day threat isn’t just physical. Our life-style and values are being questioned from within. Magazines that we had assumed to be bastions of goodness seem to promote a different life-style now. Faith in God has become less fashionable. In any case churches themselves can no longer be automatically depended on as reliable moral guides.

The struggle for the “survival of the fittest” has led to strife on so many fronts. The guiding principle seems to be, “Happy are those who eliminate all opposition – they will make their mark in the world!”

Yet the Master Teacher is saying to us, “Blessed (happy) are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Mt. 5.9).

Reflect:

- “The quest for happiness is mirrored by the quest for peace... We can’t really be happy without peace.” Do you agree? In what sense is war a misguided quest for happiness?

Peace

In the Bible, “peace” is not simply the absence of war, but a positive quality of wholeness, well-being and prosperity.

We are inclined to think of peace as inactivity, idleness and restful sleep. We think of peace in the liquid smoothness of a lake at early dawn, the songs and sounds along a pleasant bush walk... Especially, it is peace when the day’s work is done and the children sound asleep in bed. Finally, when we have completed all our last things, we hope to “rest in peace”.

Biblically, peace would be better represented by the throbbing power house or sugar mill, functioning properly and purposefully.

At the root of the strife and discord in the world is the breakdown of peace between humanity and God because of human sinfulness. These breakdowns between persons and groups and nations flow from this basic estrangement within human personality and experience.

Finally, peace must mean the reinstatement of our relationship with God and the restoration of the quality of life God has intended for us.

Reflect:

- How does the Bible view of peace relate to our own understanding?
- “Finally, peace must mean the reinstatement of our relationship with God and the restoration of the quality of life God has intended for us at all levels”. Do you agree? If this is so, what limitations does it place on human peace-makers?

Peacemakers

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.11-21.

The Christian “good news” is based on what the peacemaking God has done. In Romans 5, Paul declares, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Rom. 5.1-2a).

Later on, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (v. 8). Significantly, peacemaking can begin on one side – that may be the side that has been wronged. This beginning doesn’t depend on the other side being willing to change.

Paul further writes in 2 Corinthians 5.19-20, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God”. This is a call, not just to end hostilities against God, but to enter a new and living relationship with him as his people.

The “ambassador” is a representative of the sending authority. He has no authority of his own. His purpose is to pass on clearly the communication that someone else has given him. Christ’s ambassadors are his messengers, bringing the message of what God has done in Christ and calling on people to respond.

In the past strife has permeated society and the world, flowing from the basic estrangement of people from their Maker. Now reconciliation to God must radiate out into all of life’s relationships.

In v. 16 Paul states that “from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view...” All are now to be viewed in terms of the “new creation” made possible in Christ (v. 17).

In all areas of life, we are to be “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Mt. 5.13,14). This is why Paul writes, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12.18).

Reading: Ephesians 2.11-22.

In Ephesians 2 we see the peace of God worked out in terms of the relationships between Jew and Gentile.

Christ is their peace, having reconciled both Jew and Gentile to God through the Cross, and having reconciled Jew and Gentile to each other within the fellowship of His body.

Where is there a lack of peace? At that point, the peacemaking God calls us to be peacemakers – whether it be in the home or in the community, within the Church or at work, in management-labour relations or as citizens of the world...

In all of these areas, we will be prayerfully mindful that the full and complete restoration of peace can only come about as people return to God.