

Righteousness, Peace, and You

Christian Peacemaking

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Bible Text: Matthew 5:9
Preached on: Sunday, December 21, 2014

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Well, it's, as you know, that time of year where people love to talk about peace who actually show very little interest in peace at any other time of the year and we are grateful that we have a Gospel of peace to proclaim to sinners that God will receive sinners who are hostile to him through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who came to earth and laid his life down on a cross, bearing the brunt of the wrath of God on behalf of sinners so that those who would believe in him and deny themselves and come to Christ could find reconciliation and eternal peace with God. We are very grateful for the Gospel message here at Truth Community Church. It is the Gospel that changed my life, that has changed the lives of so many in this room, and it's that Gospel that we seek to honor through our preaching week by week. We preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and we consider it a privilege to direct people's attentions to Christ rather than to anything about our church or about man and we want to lift up Christ and Christ alone.

When you lift up Christ, you inevitably come to the topic of peace and we've come to it naturally in the course of teaching through the book of Ephesians over the past several months. We try not to artificially conform our pulpit to the calendar; we let our pulpit drive the calendar of what we teach and think and quite often as has happened this month, God brings us to topics that conform with what people are already thinking about and today we're coming back to the topic of peace. Ephesians 2 says that Christ is our peace and that he reconciled Jews and Gentiles to one another. And last time, we kind of pulled off the road to park and take a little bit of a scenic view of the topic of peace because it's so very fundamental to the Christian message and the Christian life and what we have to say to you here today is going to be very personal and very applicable in your own life. We prayed for everyone as elders this morning knowing that this is the kind of message that we all need to hear, even though it may bruise us a little bit in the process; God bruises us in order to heal us.

Last week, we saw that the Christian priority of peace comes from the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ himself is peace. He is the gift of peace. He is peace incarnate. He commands us to be peaceful people. He gives us the gift of peace and we addressed that last time and for all of you who are visitors, there are so many copies of the CDs, please take them and use them and they kind of set the context for the message today.

Well, what we're going to do this week and next week is we're going to work out that concept of peace in terms of how it applies in our lives. Last week was a very Christ-centered message in the sense that we see that peace is necessary because of who Christ is. He came to establish peace and that means that if we name the name of Christ, if we profess to be Christians, if we truly are Christians, then the principle of peace is going to animate our very characters and our very lives. Where Christ is, peace is. Where Christ is inside someone's heart, in one manner or another there is going to be an orientation and a disposition toward peace in the life of that person. Today we're going to work that out and I invite you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew for a cornerstone text that will help us walk through these things this week and next. I'm very delighted to share these things with you, especially in light of the world in which we live today.

Matthew 5:9 simply says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." In light of what we've just said, you can see why that would be true. We've said that Christ is the Christ of peace; that God sent him in order to reconcile men to himself. God is a God of peace. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy and peace, and so this idea of reconciliation and harmony is central to who God is and what he wants to accomplish in the lives of those that he calls to himself in the Gospel. And so if we are born from a Father like that, if God gives birth to spiritual children and we are truly sons of God, then it is obvious and evident and very plain and apparent and simple that those who are truly born of God will somehow have a peaceful orientation at the very core of their character. Their orientation will be toward peace, not arguments and conflict and turmoil, and that's why the text says here, "they shall be called sons of God." The son bears the nature of his father and if God is a God of peace, if Christ is a Christ of peace, then those who belong to him who have been born into his family are going to somehow reflect and manifest that peace themselves.

And notice what the text says here, Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers." To be blessed is to be on, biblically speaking, is to be on the receiving end of divine favor. It means that God has displayed his goodness and kindness and bestowed it upon you. You are on the receiving end. You are a privileged recipient of favor from God if you are a peacemaker. And the reason that you're on the receiving end, the reason you can be a peacemaker in the first place is that God initiated peace with you. Well, that means something for us as a church. It means something for us as those who claim the name of Christ. There is an individual and a corporate dimension to this within the kingdom of God. What this means is, the impact of everything that we've said here today is that if we are Christians, if we are a Christian church, and we are, then we aim at peace. We make it our goal to be peaceful. We aim to be like the one who gave birth to us and we do that with the expectation that God will bless us for aiming after that as a result of being born-again. If you're not a Christian today, you need to come to Christ in the first instance. You need to make peace with God before you can think about making peace with men and the only way that you can make peace with God is to receive it on his terms. Christ is offered to you in the preaching of the Gospel. Christ offers himself and says, "I will save you from your sins. I will reconcile you to God. I have the authority to do that. I have the righteousness and I paid the price to do that." Oh friend, come to Christ to be reconciled with God and find peace with him.

As we enter through that door of peace and as we contemplate now being Christians, now we're seeing how we work all of that out in our lives and in our individual lives, in our home lives, and in our church life, and so the question here then for today that applies to each one of you directly and personally, in that sense it's a very intimate message because this applies and affects every one of us in different ways, the question is: how does the biblical priority of peace affect you? How would you respond to the fact that God is a peaceful God? That Christ is a reconciling God? How do you respond to the fact that the Holy Spirit of peace dwells within you? How does this work itself out in real life? That's what we're going to look at here today and I'm going to structure this as I often do around three primary points.

But, first of all, here's the thing, here's the thing, beloved: peace does not passively happen. You cannot just go through life and think that this is going to live itself out if you don't make a conscious effort to pursue it. Point 1 this morning is: you have to work at peace. You have to work at peace. Look at Matthew 5:9 with me again. I want to keep the verse fresh in your mind. The day is coming when we'll go through the entirety of Matthew 5, 6 and 7. I can't wait for that time but it's several months, if not a couple of years down the road for us. For now we just get a foretaste of it. Matthew 5:9, look at it with me. Put your finger on the text. Let it sink into your eyes and into your heart. Verse 9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." You have to work at peace.

The term "peacemaker" is a compound word in the Greek language. There is an active component to it. You could translate it "a peace doer" because it's from the same word, the Greek word that means "to do or to make." The peace doer, the peacemaker. It assumes that there is, and it informs you that there is something for us to do that we must pursue and not simply passively avoid conflict, and that helps us set our expectations here this morning. You should be thinking as we go through this message, you should be thinking of the context of all of your close relationships, those within your home, your family, your friends, your work relationships. This is where we are called to work these things out and the concept of a peacemaker or a peace doer helps us to set the expectations. Being a peacemaker doesn't happen by default. It's not simply a matter of passively letting life go by. There is an approach, there is an energy, there is an effort that we make to be a peacemaker or we're not making peace, we're simply sitting back. So what this means is that peace as we are going to define it and work it out in the rest of the message, this kind of peace must be a priority in your life. This must be something that is important to you; that matters to you; that is something that you search after and try to bring about as relationships come and go in your life.

Jesus said, look at it with me again. I may go back to this again but I want you to see something and see the context to the full verse, "Blessed are the peacemakers," he says, these are the people that are receiving divine favor, the ones who make/do peace, "for they shall be called sons of God." And the language here is very significant. This verse makes it evident that peacemaking is not optional. You can't be a non-peacemaking Christian. It just doesn't work that way. The idea of this verse is, "Blessed are the

peacemakers, for they, and they alone shall, be called sons of God." There's an emphasis in the structure of the language here that makes it emphatic that says, "It is only the peacemakers who are truly the sons of God." Someone who is not a peacemaker is not a son of God which is another way of saying someone who is not a peacemaker is not a Christian no matter what their verbal profession may be; no matter how many times they may have asked Jesus into their hearts. You see, there is a real spiritual reality, a real spiritual change that takes place in true conversion. We're truly regenerated. We are truly born again. The Spirit truly does impart a new nature to us that, in part, that nature is peaceful in its demeanor. So someone who has truly been born again receives a peaceful spirit that comes into his life, into his heart, a new disposition, and therefore we must be peacemakers because it's a reflection of the nature that gave birth to us. So what you do is you reason backward, someone who is not a peacemaker must not have received that nature to begin with.

You see, this matters. This is a consequence of the nature of salvation that God makes us a new creation, the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. So that's why Jesus could say, "It is they, and they alone, that are sons of God," because to not have a peaceful disposition is to be a stranger to the Spirit of peace himself. And this works its way out; this goes into the very corners of your life. God brings this, let me encourage you because I know this is going to be convicting as we go through. God brings light upon our lives in order to help us clear out the dirt that is remaining and we shouldn't resist the convicting force of the word. We just need to let God have his way in our lives and he does that through the teaching of his word, okay? So that's kind of the start of things. You have to work at peace.

Let's ask a preliminary question here: why is there a lack of peace to begin with? Why is there conflict in the world between nations? Why is it that so many marriages end up in divorce? Why is it that people love the ultimate fighting displays? Why was it that people loved the blood fests in Rome and gladiators would fight and kill each other? Why is it that that's appealing to the human heart? Why do police officers get assassinated when they're just trying to do their jobs? Why is there conflict in your personal life? The answer is profoundly theological. It's not because people need to know better. People know better. The answer goes deep into the human heart. Why is there a lack of peace? Why is there conflict? Why is there murder? Why is there all of this rotten stuff that makes life so miserable? It's because men are sinners who are driven by, animated by, controlled by, pride, lust and a desire for advantage.

Turn over to the book of James. We'll go to James a couple of times here. Scripture makes this so very clear. James 4, in the first two verses. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have." It's not just a sexual desire, but you have strong desires for things that you cannot have. "So you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask." James answers the question right there. For all of the political punditry and different opinions that can be voiced on all kinds of different news channels about what's going on, Scripture alone makes it clear and makes it obvious and puts the responsibility for

conflict right at the center of the human heart. You fight because you can't get what you want. People kill because they want things that they don't have. There's a reason why most, so many of the killings that take place are borne out of family disputes and lovers quarrels. It's because it's bound up with desires and things that drive people, "I can't have what I want and that makes me angry and so I'm going to kill the person who makes me angry." You say, "Well, I'm not like that." Well, don't be so sure. Don't be so sure. The seed of anger and jealousy and ambition, you might restrain it, but the same seed that drives the people to kill is the same seed that resides in our own hearts and we manifest it when we get angry and react against those who don't do what we want to do. Scripture calls this sin and Scripture makes it plain that the problem of sin is more than just external behavior, it goes to the very heart; it goes to the core of the human being; it goes to the very thing that drives him, to his mission control center. His heart is the source of his anger and his lust and his pride and his murders and all the other sins that Scripture describes. It starts in the heart.

So this passage here in James 4, what's the source of quarrels? It's your pleasures that wage war in your members. You don't have what you want, you get envious and so you fight and quarrel. Wow. Do you realize what that passage just did? That passage just explained war, social unrest, family conflict, and why young men love violent video games. It's because the inner sins of pride, envy, hatred, selfishness, and bloodlust drive people to outwardly express the insanity of their hearts. So we are wasting our time as a society when we try to explain things by economic or racial models. We need to go right to where Scripture lays the core at, it's inside.

Now, this is a message about peacemaking not war-making. Why is it vital for us to understand that, that the inner dimension of sin that creates all of these other ugly manifestations? Why is that vital for us as we contemplate what it means to be a peacemaker? Here's why, beloved: it lets us see the battleground. It lets us see that as peacemakers, as those who love peace and are seeking to manifest and bring peace about in our sphere of relationships in this world, we are operating on hostile ground. We are soldiers in enemy territory. Our efforts and our love for peace are not going to be reciprocated in kind by those who do not know Christ. Peacemaking is not automatic, in other words. Peacemaking occurs in the midst of those who prefer the lusts and wars of their heart and the lust and wars of social conflict more than they love actual peace. There is no real political power, there is no financial gain to be had in peace but if you can whip up people into emotional blind frenzies over these kinds of jealousies and ambitions, then you can use them to your advantage. What do we say about the environment in which we are trying to be peacemakers in this fallen world? The devil, the world system, and the sin in the hearts of men work against peace and so we realize that we are up against something that is beyond our natural capacities to bring to pass. It highlights for us the problem and makes us dependent on the indwelling Spirit to help us rise above that and to give us any sense of progress as we try to pursue it.

Beloved, here's what it means also: you have to make peace and to make peace often comes, oh, this is going to sting just a little, it often comes at a personal price. Think about it this way: what was the price of your peace with God? The price of your peace

with God was the sufferings and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was such a peacemaker, he was so directed toward the concept of reconciling you to God that he paid the price of the incarnation, the cross and his shed blood. His death was a reconciling work of peace. We enjoy the benefits of salvation because Christ Jesus paid the price of peace and it cost him. The groanings on Golgotha were for your good. The blood splattered from the nails were so that you might have peace with God. Our Lord Jesus went into the crucible, as it were, and was crushed under the weight of the wrath of God, was crushed under the human instruments of his torture so that he could be a peacemaker and it's from that crushing that the life that we now enjoy found its root.

Well, beloved, could it be any other way than the fact that we would pay a price to be peacemakers? If our Lord paid a price for our peace, then isn't it obvious that there are going to be times where we will pay a price, there will be a cost to us in peace? You see, you can't be a Christian and expect and demand to always have it your way. That's just so contrary to the Spirit of our Christ that gave birth to us. It couldn't be that way. We enjoy the benefits of a cost that Christ paid for us. Well, we receive that and then we pass it along with the way that we live our lives. And here's the thing: a true Christian, a true Christian, embraces that. A true Christian is so overwhelmed and in awe of what Christ, the sinless Son of God did in order to bring peace to his heart, in order to reconcile him to a holy God. He's so overwhelmed by that that his sense of personal advantage and principle has been crucified. We love the work of peace that came and all that we can do in response is say, "I want to be like that too. I want to resemble, I want to imitate the Lord who saved me. I want to be like him." Well, you know what that means then, it means that we're willing to pay a cost for peace in a way that sometimes is going to work against our advantage. In other words, we love peace enough to work at it. We love peace enough to pay a price for it. I'm not talking about a financial price but a life price as we'll see in what is still to come. We love peace. We want to work at it.

Now, that raises some really important questions that we have to think through. Here's one of them: should we therefore avoid conflict at all costs whatsoever? Should we avoid conflict in the name of peace? In other words, should we avoid any sense of confrontation with the world or with those around us or inside the church simply so there won't be conflict? Well, the answer to that is no and it's found in the second point that we have here this morning and we're going to put it this way, point 2: peacemaking requires righteousness. Peacemaking requires righteousness and now we're going to define, try to define a little better exactly what biblical peace means. We can't define it as our world would define it. We can't define it by the sloppy liberal theology that wants no conflict with anyone and therefore lets all things run rampant just for the sake of avoiding a difficult conversation. No, no, peacemaking requires righteousness. Biblical peace, oh, you're just going to have to follow me all the way through on this, okay, because this is all connected. This is a train pulling cars that are all linked together so you've just got to follow me all the way through to the end here and the caboose will come next week. But point 2: peacemaking requires righteousness. Here's a key thing. If you're taking notes, write this down. If you're not taking notes, memorize it instantly because I want you to remember this: biblical peace is not the absence of conflict no matter what. It's not that. Peace is more than the absence of conflict biblically defined. No, you see, our Lord Jesus

Christ was not simply a peacemaker in his own right, our Lord Jesus Christ was righteous and he calls us to righteousness. You see, Christ brings a righteous peace that is in harmony with the will of God.

Go back to Matthew 5 and notice the context of his statement about, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Notice the context. Context is everything in biblical teaching and understanding. Verse 6 of Matthew 5 says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Verse 8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Now, we're going to look at this more in the future but just notice something very simple and basic as we are contemplating verse 9 here. This idea of hungering for righteousness, this idea of being pure in heart, united in spirit in pursuing the righteousness of God, that precedes the concept of peacemaking. In other words, righteousness precedes the pursuit of peace, the order of the verses is not coincidental.

If you need further clarification of that, look at Matthew 6:33. Jesus said, "seek first," seek first, "His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." The preeminent priority is righteousness for a true Christian and so when we talk about biblical peace, biblical harmony between people, we're talking about a situation where parties have embraced in mutual submission to Christ; that there is an acknowledgment of a standard and both parties bring themselves into conformity with that standard. Peace comes from righteousness and because we recognize that, we are unwilling to accept cheap knockoff substitutes where sin is approved of in the name of avoiding confrontation.

Look at the prophet Jeremiah 6 for a view of this, verse 13. This is just an illustrative passage. Jeremiah 6:13, "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is greedy for gain, And from the prophet even to the priest Everyone deals falsely." Greed and deception and yet the message being proclaimed in the midst of people like that, verse 14, "They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace." There is no peace because there is no righteousness. The deception and the greed are contrary to peace and so we see that righteousness has to come first. It's not peace at all costs, it's peace through the vehicle of the pursuit of righteousness. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness."

Go back to the book of James here. All of this is going to come together for us before we're done today. Righteousness comes first. Look at James 3. Righteousness comes first. James 3:14, "If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth." Verse 15, "This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But," verse 17, "the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

So what I want you to see if we're just going to try to latch on really big principles here, what I want you to see is that biblical peace is woven and subordinate to biblical

righteousness; that we pursue righteousness and peace comes from that. One writer defined peace as "the presence of righteousness that causes right relationships." Stay with me, beloved, this is all really important; this all just has such far-reaching implications for us individually and corporately as the body of Christ. True peace does not gloss over sin. It does not accept error in order to achieve a superficial harmony that is actually enshrining sin against God. We don't tolerate false teaching in the church and refuse to speak against it in the name of peace because righteousness and truth come first and a God who is truth cannot have in his kingdom those who teach fundamental error. There must be a separation that takes place. We seek peace but we seek it through the vehicle of righteousness and truth.

So peacemaking requires truth and righteousness. When sin is rampant, you can't talk about peace, you have to preach the Gospel, you have to confront sin first. So we don't silence the Gospel so that sinners will like us. We don't make our church service pleasing to the most carnal mind so that he can sit comfortably without feeling confronted in his rebellion against God. That's not peace, that's just compromise. In the church within life in the body, this has far reaching implications. Beloved, in the church, we do not allow open unrepentant sin in membership to go unopposed just for the sake of trying to maintain some kind of harmony. Jesus said in Matthew 18, "When your brother sins, you go and you rebuke him." Well, there's an element of conflict there, isn't there? There is confrontation that's involved in that. Why is it like that? It's because the church is first a place of righteousness and purity and truth and when sin is open and flagrant and unrepentant and it is happening there in the midst of those who claim to be a part of the body of Christ, we don't in the name of peace say, "Well, I'm not going to say anything because I don't want any conflict." No, in the name of biblical righteousness and seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness, we go and say, "Hey, brother, you can't live that way. You're sinning against God and I want to call you to repentance. You need to turn away from that course of life that you're pursuing."

So true peace requires righteousness, in like manner, beloved, we don't allow people who have a settled attitude of contentiousness and an argumentative spirit, they can't abide in the church like that because their anger and their conflict and the divisive spirit they bring is contrary to the true peace of the church. So we hold up a high standard of righteousness and sometimes in order to protect and preserve that, we have to deal in uncomfortable conversations and confrontations that say, "Brother, you can't be that way. You're sinning against God. You're sinning against the people of God. You're bringing a divisive spirit amongst a people who are meant to be one." So in the name of righteousness, in the pursuit of righteousness, we deal with these things because peacemaking requires righteousness. We confront sin and conflict and we try to resolve it and most of the time you can. Sometimes you can't and when that happens, those who refuse the correction cannot abide in the church because Christ requires righteousness and peace in his kingdom. We want to honor the Christ who is righteous. We want to honor the Christ who is peaceful, who made peace for us. And it's not out of our own sense of what we want or don't want, we're just servants of the Lord. A true church belongs to Christ and this is what he wants and if we're going to be a part of his church then we have to honor his principles in the way that the church life carries out. So we preach the Gospel to

sinners outside the church and we confront sin and division inside the church, all in the name of pursuing righteousness and peace in order to honor the Christ who saved us. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God. You see, this has consequences. The authority and the nature of Christ lead us places.

But let's get personal, shall we? We are very prone to self-deception. When you hear that righteousness precedes peace, you are tempted to justify yourself. If it helps, you might take your shoes off here because we're going to step on toes here in the name of Christ. We're going to step on toes. You're tempted to justify yourself. When you hear that truth and righteousness must precede peace, you are quickly tempted whether you realize it or not to, watch this, you are tempted to define your personal relational issues as matters of truth and righteousness so that you can have your own way. "I've got to be confrontational and bold with this guy because he insulted me. You know, that guy never paid me back my 20 bucks. It's a matter of truth. It's a matter of righteousness. I want it to be my way and my way is the way of truth and therefore, yes, I'm going to try to burn the house down with my angry spirit." We're prone to self-deception. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Beloved, that's not peacemaking. That's not honoring the principle that you must have righteousness in true peace. That spirit is not peacemaking. Do you know what the word for that spirit is? Selfishness. You see, beloved, the purity of the Gospel is not at stake in your financial dispute. The purity of the true church does not rise or fall in that simmering dispute that you have with your spouse or with your child. You see, it is precisely in those kinds of areas in your personal life that you're called to be a peacemaker. It's precisely in those areas where peace might cost you where you're called to make peace. That brings us to our third point this morning which I'll title this way: righteousness requires peacemaking. Do you see what we did there? We reversed them. Peacemaking requires righteousness. True peace is built on righteousness. Point 3 here is saying something different, it's saying as you pursue righteousness in your pursuit of biblical sanctification, you are required, you are commanded by the word of God to be a peacemaker. This isn't an optional add-on like adding power seats to the new car you want to buy. "Yeah, I'll take righteousness and truth. Peacemaking, ah, that's not that important." No, this is all required. This is standard equipment to the true Christian.

So, beloved, what we're about to talk about over the next 15 or 20 minutes, maybe it won't take that long. Ha, I know it will. Beloved, what we're about to look at may very well redefine your life and your very character. It's that important and we're so prone to dismiss it, we're so prone to justify ourselves that we kind of sometimes build up a wall to prevent the convicting work of the word of God to go where this needs to go for each one of us and so follow along here. Go back to Matthew 5:9. I'm going to repeat myself for just a moment. Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they, and they alone, shall be called sons of God." They and they alone, only they will be called sons of God. Only peacemakers are the sons of God, called sons of God by God himself. It's a divine passive. They will be called. By whom? By God. "My son, that's my daughter there. Do you see that peacemaking spirit? That came from me. They belong to me." That's the idea.

You see, beloved, and look, look, I'm on your side here today, okay? This convicts me too. I'm on your side but we have to deal with this and let the Scripture speak to us plainly and without varnish, without wax. And I know that the nature of life is that where your real conflict comes, you know, here on Sunday morning we don't really see it. We can cover it up. We're going to your home life here with what we're going to say and I want you to see that this is unavoidable. True Christians pursue peace, otherwise their profession of faith is false. They're not even born again.

So let's think about what this means. First of all, on a negative sense, the peacemaker is someone who does not enjoy an argument. The peacemaker is someone who doesn't enjoy conflict for conflict's sake. You know that there are people like that. They just thrive in controversy: in giving birth to it, in engaging it, in fighting it, and they love it that way. Not a true Christian. A true Christian will engage conflict for the sake of righteousness but he doesn't delight in war and anger and disputes. He doesn't enjoy that. On the positive side, a Christian actively makes peace by resolving conflict and promoting harmony in his sphere of relationships.

Look, those of you that saw the news from last night are like I am, shocked and dismayed by what happened to the New York police officers gunned down in their own vehicles. We hate the social unrest and conflict that gave birth to that but, beloved, that's not what we're talking about here. It's in one sense, it's cheap for us to decry that and decry the lack of peace and unrest and war and bombings and all of that, it's cheap to say, "I'm against that," when you're neglecting the spirit and the harmony of your own home and family and relationships. If you really love peace, if you're really a peacemaker, you're going to want to pursue it especially in the area where you have some control over it, not simply condemn people on the outside who don't manifest it. We have to have enough integrity in our hearts to say, "For me, peacemaking starts where I have relationships," and not neglect that in a pious affirmation that our society should be at peace. Anybody can say that, beloved. There is no virtue in saying that. The virtue here is in those who manifest it in their private lives.

You say, "What does that look like?" Well, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the holy name of Jesus who came to earth not only to die but to teach and he gave us specific instruction for what that looks like. He didn't leave us to guess what he wants when he says, "You must be a peacemaker." It's right in the text. It is unavoidable. It is immensely personally practical. What does it look like? Well, let's just follow the flow of thought through the rest of the Sermon on the Mount and we're just going to touch on these things. Righteousness requires peacemaking, what kind of peacemaking, you might ask. Well, first of all, this would be a sub point if you really like to outline your notes, first of all, you reconcile before you worship. You reconcile before you worship.

Look at Matthew 5:23, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar," if you're there for an act of worship, "and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your

brother, and then come and present your offering." This concept of peacemaking is so crucial that Jesus says, "When you recognize as you're starting to approach God in worship, if there is unresolved conflict, do something about it." Don't taint your worship by bringing it in a spirit of conflict with your horizontal brother. That's how important it is. You deal with these issues as an ongoing pattern of life rather than continually presenting yourself in prayer, in church, before God, "Everything's fine. Blessed be the name of Jehovah," when you are spitting nails at the people that you drove to church with. That's a mockery of the holiness and the omniscience of God. We don't do that. We reconcile first.

Look over at Psalm 66:18. You see the priority of this. You see we just can't go through the motions. We just can't be a people that are satisfied to go through the external trappings of Christianity without it having actually revolutionize the way that we live. Christ didn't do the revolutionary aspect of violating the order of the universe and leaving heaven to come to earth in the form of a babe to do a reconciling work for us to go through the motions. What an insult to the incarnation. We have to live differently if we belong to him. Psalm 66:18, "If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear."

Look over at 1 Peter 3. I know for a fact that some of you men need to hear this. 1 Peter 3:7, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life." Be a peacemaker with your spouse. Show her love and kindness. You say, "I don't want to. Do you know what she did to me?" It doesn't matter. You do that, verse 7, "so that your prayers will not be hindered." The realm of Christ, the realm of his people doesn't have room for the guy to show up on Sunday looking good and gladhanding, that is a bear at home. It doesn't work that way. That's not Christianity.

So what does peacemaking look like? You reconcile before you worship and you realize that that call to reconciliation is not for you to make peace between blacks and whites, it's a call for you to walk in peace in the four walls of your own home. You reconcile before you worship. Do you know what else you do? You reject that spirit of retaliation that wells up within you when someone offends you. Go back to Matthew 5:38. Ladies, that other thing, it goes both ways. Don't bruise your elbow hitting your husband in the ribs there too quickly. Matthew 5:38, you reject that spirit of retaliation when someone offends you. Verse 38 of Matthew 5, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you." Beloved, Jesus is talking about so much more than external actions here. He's talking about so much more than literally pivoting your head on your neck from your left to your right shoulder so that the guy has access so he can hit you on the other cheek. It's much more than that. That's just incidental to his main point. What happens when somebody gets slapped on the cheek? "You hit me? I'll hit you back." What Jesus is addressing here is that retaliatory spirit that says, "You hurt me, I'm going to hurt you back." So he lays forth the extreme that says, "You be such a peacemaker, you be so self-

contained and self-controlled that when someone offends you, when someone attacks you, your response is not one of retaliation but you are calm in your response because you are a biblical peacemaker."

You young people, you young kids especially, you know, you're five, six, seven, eight years old. We've all been there and we know what's in your heart. Somebody hits you, man, you want to hit them back. Well, right there is the spirit of sin that the Lord is talking about. He says, "Don't be that way." And do you know what? Do you know what Christ did after he said this down the road a year or two later? They plucked out his beard, they spat in his face, they beat him with their fists, and he who could have called legions of angels to his defense didn't retaliate. "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." That's the blessed Spirit of peacemaking. That's the blessed refusal to retaliate that Jesus is talking about. He lived it. He manifested it. He didn't moralize from on high. He lived it. You see, you see, you see, here's the thing, beloved: those of us that follow Christ, we don't just talk about it, we live this way. Really, genuinely live this way because it's a reality of heart and spirit that captivates our conscience, that controls our affections, that says, "Oh, how blessed is the person of my Savior. I so much want to be like him that I'll tolerate earthly indignities. To be like him, that's how much he means to me," you say to yourself.

So you reconcile before you worship; you reject that spirit of retaliation; you show kindness to your enemies. Your enemies. Matthew 5:43. Those of you who think you just can't live with your spouse, "Do you know what that person did to me?" and you almost hate them. Well, do you know what? If they are your enemy, you're commanded to love them anyway. All of their provocations don't justify a sinful response by you. If it so bad that they are your enemy, here's what Christ commands you to do. Verse 43, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Do you know what Jesus is saying? He says, "Your heavenly Father is so good that he gives rain and blessing to those who love him and to those who hate him, he shows goodness and blessing all the same." We therefore have no justification for acting any differently. We can't despise and hate and retaliate against our enemies as Christians. That violates the very spirit from which we say we've been born. Jesus says, "You love your enemies because God your Father does." That's all the authority that you need. You say, "But this makes me angry!" It doesn't matter if it makes you angry. God is like this and that has ethical implications for you as well.

Do you know what else you do? You pray with integrity. You pray with integrity. Look at Matthew 6:11, actually let's start in verse 9, "Pray, then, in this way," here's the spirit, here's what you say in prayer, "'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" God, I praise you. I honor you. I seek your will in everything that is to be done. Verse 11, God, I need your help. "Give us this day our daily bread." Verse 12, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Don't ask for forgiveness from God that you're not willing to

extend to men. That's what Jesus says. This is so plain. It's right on the surface of the text. It's not difficult to understand. Those of you that have been carrying a bitter, angry, grumbling spirit because you've been offended by somebody in the past either recently or long-term, look, you've got to let that go. You have to forgive them if you're a Christian. You can't ask God to forgive you when you're not willing to forgive. There's no integrity in that. You have to change your whole outlook on life because, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they, and they alone, shall be called sons of God."

Let that sink in. Think about it this way: you define the limits of how you want God to forgive you in part by how willing you are to forgive. If you want God to be meager and miserly in his forgiveness, then you be a shriveled, self-justifying, hateful person. Or you say, "Lord, to the best of my knowledge I have no, I carry no grudges against anyone. I'm not angry at that person who cursed me. I'm not angry at that spouse that left me. Lord, you forgave me, I forgive them. Father, forgive my sins of this past day." You see, this goes to the very core of who we are as people. This goes to the very core of your character. This goes everywhere.

Primarily what this means as we think about all these things, we could sum it up this way: primarily you start with yourself. Look at Matthew 7:3. Look, I know you've been wronged in life. You live in the same world I do. We get wronged. The point is that we don't get bitter. And in response to this, no one in this room should be thinking, "I know how So-and-so should apply this. I can't wait to point this out to her or to him about what they should do." No, don't do that. Don't do that. Matthew 7:3, start with yourself. Deal with your own heart. There is plenty there to keep you busy.

Matthew 7:3, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye?" You're complaining about a speck in his eye but there's a beam coming out of yours, that's the picture. "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." By the time you're through dealing with your own sins of the heart and your retaliatory angry spirit and you've dealt with that honestly before the Lord, suddenly the sins of other people look pretty small in comparison. That's the way that supposed to work. You're so humbled vertically before God that all of a sudden you don't even want to complain about other people. You're just grateful to be in the kingdom of God. "You forgave me of all of that? Hallelujah, I can live with anything." Because your heart is just so joyful to be forgiven.

Let's bring this home. A Christian, a true Christian, does not lament the state of the world, does not rant about social unrest and the perceived causes of it while at the same time living before his home in a sphere of relationships with an argumentative, angry spirit or by giving, on the passive side of it, giving people the silent treatment to punish them for what they did wrong to you. We don't do that. We're not so consumed about what's happening in society as if that's the priority. Look, look, look, look, look, look, look. Maybe I should say listen, listen, listen, listen, listen, listen. Here's the test of your integrity; here is the test of whether this stuff is real to you or not: a true Christian, a true

peacemaker has peace as such a priority to his heart that he starts to pursue it right in the sphere of where he lives. He doesn't jump over that to talk about what other people are doing while ignoring the state of his own life and relationships. If peace really matters to you, then it matters in the relationships closest to you. A true Christian has the integrity to say, "Where in my sphere of relationships do I need to spread peace today?"

Let me be pastoral here as I close: our church, those of you who are visiting wouldn't have any way to know this but if you were here for a few weeks you would see it instantly, our church has a sweet spirit because we have so many peacemakers in our midst. A spirit of peace corporately comes from individuals who carry that spirit of peace and I'm grateful for that. I can't believe that God has been so good to me to let me be a pastor to people like you. You deserve better. At the same time, beloved, we are all fallen. You're like I am and you fall short. In that realm where you fall short, beloved, I beg you, I would get on my knees and beg but the theatrics would get in the way of the spirit in which I appeal to you, don't brush this message off. If you have a quick temper, if you harbor bitterness toward some family member or past work associate, if you happen to deep in your heart take pride in the fact that you're the one that others just don't mess with because they'll pay a price, if there's anything like that in your heart, you need to take some spiritual inventory. Christians are peacemakers so what's up with you being like that? We need to resolve those inconsistencies in our lives. Don't hide from it. Run to it. Embrace it. "Lord, I've got to change. This is urgent. Help me talk to that person that I've been so cold to." Just maybe you're a Christian and you need to confess sin and deeply repent. That would be an appropriate response. Next week we'll see how we work out some of these things that is even more practical than this week. Maybe you need to confess sin and deeply repent and say, "Oh God, I do love you. God, you have forgiven me. I am so sorry that I have short-circuited the way that's supposed to flow out through my life. God, I'm sorry. Forgive me and let me pick up the phone, let me go to the other room and start the conversation. Look, I want to be a peacemaker and I haven't treated you that way. I am sorry and God helping me, I'm going to be different going forward." Maybe you're a Christian and you need to repent like that. Maybe you're not even born again. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they, and they alone, shall be called sons of God.

Bow with me in prayer.

Father, by the wonderful, gentle, persuasive power of your Holy Spirit, apply these things to our hearts and lives. Thank you for the peacemakers who have made this their church home. They are so abundant, it is a blessing to know them and to share life together with them. Father, for those that have been convicted, have mercy on them. Let them not despair but look fresh to Christ who is so ready to forgive, whose blood cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness. Yes, Father, together collectively we confess that we have fallen short as peacemakers. We ask you to forgive us and to help us go forth with a changed demeanor that would redirect the course of our character and priorities in life. And Father, for that simmering, irreconcilable person that's in the room today, Lord, I pray that you bring the power of a majestic conviction upon their heart that they would cry out to Christ for mercy and salvation and that henceforth and forevermore their life would be known as a peacemaker because they repented of sin;

that they put their faith in Christ; that they denied themselves and took up their cross and followed after you. Lord, we would follow you under the banner of righteousness and we would follow you also under that mutual banner of peace. Make us individuals of peace. Make us a church of peace. Give us a testimony of peace in our lives individually and corporately that would be worthy of what you have called us to do and to be. Father, we pray these things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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