

## **Living At Peace with Enemies**

Proverbs 16:7; Romans 12:18

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The Lord has commanded us through the Apostle Paul to live peaceably with all men as much as we are able: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). Notice that in this world we cannot (as hard as we may try) live at peace with all men, but we are to love peace to such an extent that we seek to promote it as much as lies within us. Here we see that we are not to be like those who enjoy bitter conflicts or whose lives become boring without stirring up some trouble in the family, in the church, or at work.

Furthermore, we are called by our blessed Savior to be peacemakers in promoting reconciliation rather than division: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Dear ones, one of the many delights that will make heaven the heaven that it is, is that there will no longer be conflicts, wars, disagreements, or divisions in families, churches, or nations. What sorrow and heartache attends the fierce conflicts in families between spouses or between parents and children? How families need the peace of Christ actively working in them to remove these painful battles. How the Church of Jesus Christ needs the peace, purity, and unity of Christ in order to heal her many divisions and to fulfill the prayer of Christ found in John 17:21: "That they all may be one." For our backbiting, backstabbing, and name-calling destroys this peace which Christ has purchased between family members and church members. How foolish we are to think that the evil reports we spread concerning one another will not sooner or later end up in the ear of those against whom we have spoken. God will select His own messenger to wing the evil report to them (Ecclesiastes 10:20). Even if what we share concerning a family member or church member or co-worker is true, how have we promoted peace by venting our anger or frustration to others? Where is our shame, where is our embarrassment, where is the conviction of the Holy Spirit in our lives when we can destroy the peace of Christ and despise those whom we are called to love and without the slightest care or concern for the blessed peace Christ has purchased at the cost of His own blood? For if we can go about destroying the peace of Christ which He has purchased and do so without the slightest conviction of God's Spirit, our spiritual condition is serious indeed. May the Lord prick our consciences today and grant us repentance.

This Lord's Day, let us probe the chief way in which peace is promoted through the life of the Christian. There are two main points to the sermon this Lord's Day: (1) A Condition: "When a man's ways please the LORD." (2) A Promise: "He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

### **I. A Condition: "When a man's ways please the LORD."**

A. When we speak of a condition to a promise (or a conditional promise), we do not imply that the promised blessing is suspended and dependent upon our works of obedience to earn or merit that which is promised (as if we were under some Covenant of Works).

1. The conditions which we perform are NOT the cause or the basis for our enjoying promised blessings in the Christian life. They are rather THE DIVINELY APPOINTED ORDER AND MEANS by which we enjoy promised blessings in the Christian life. For neither can we earn or merit our justification and salvation at the very outset of the life of grace, nor can we earn or merit our sanctification and growth in Christ thereafter in the life of grace. To understand that God's promises ultimately depend upon our performance to enjoy them is to rob God's promises of their most essential character: namely, that they are FREELY purchased for us by Christ and FREELY given to us by God's Spirit. Thus, to view the conditions attached to promises in the Scripture as our righteousness and not Christ's, as our merit and not Christ's, as

dependent upon us and not Christ is to cast ourselves back under the Covenant of Works wherein we may have reason to boast before God and man.

2. Thus, IN A STRICT AND FORMAL SENSE, we may say that all of the promises of God in Christ Jesus are unconditional to us, for the formal condition of all the promises of God to His people is Christ's obedience rather than ours. In fact, we might also say that the "conditions" by which we come to enjoy all of the promises of God are unconditional for the same reason: they too have been earned for us and purchased for us by the obedience and righteousness of Christ.

3. Thus, in Proverbs 16:7, the condition of making our ways pleasing to the Lord is NOT the cause of peace, but the graciously appointed means by which God brings peace. For even when our ways please the LORD, it is all of grace (God's free gift to us) even though we are made active in this process (read Philippians 2:12-13). And do not think that this promised blessing of peace with man is any less a precious gift paid for by the life and death of Christ than is peace with God. Peace with God in reconciliation does indeed precede peace with man (as to the order of nature), but both are free gifts to us because they have been earned for us on the ground of Christ's perfect obedience.

B. How do a man's ways please the Lord?

1. The word used for "please" is also translated as "delight" or "take pleasure in." Thus Proverbs 16:7 may also be understood to say, "When a man's ways delight the LORD" or "When the LORD takes pleasure in the ways of a man." Just as man is to delight and take pleasure in the LORD His God, so we are told that the infinitely holy God delights and takes pleasure in His people (and not merely those heavenly saints who are glorified, but also those earthly saints who are yet infected with sin and corruption and are in the process of being sanctified by the grace of Christ).

a. Here is one of those amazing truths concerning which our meditation and contemplation can never plumb the depths (even in an eternity of contemplation). The God who delights not in sin, yet delights in sinners who have been justified and are being sanctified by his amazing grace (according to Psalm 149:4).

b. You may understand today that you have been called to rejoice in the Lord (as taught in many passages such as Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always"), but do you also know and understand that you rejoice in the Lord only because he first rejoices in you whom He has saved on the basis of His free grace in Christ Jesus your Lord (Zephaniah 3:17). In fact, God rejoices in sinners He is saving, only because He rejoices in and is well-pleased with Christ the Mediator of the Covenant of Grace (Isaiah 42:1; Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5). God rejoices in you because you are IN CHRIST.

2. It is essential that you realize and acknowledge that your ways can only please the Lord because you have been united to Christ and your persons are only acceptable through the righteousness of Christ. Dear ones, your works of obedience are never acceptable IN YOU or IN THEMSELVES, but only acceptable IN CHRIST in spite of their many weaknesses and imperfections (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 16:6).

3. Let me list some ways in which your ways please the Lord.

a. Your ways are pleasing to the Lord when you are fair and just in the way you work (Proverbs 11:1). Joseph found favor with Potiphar and was entrusted with the care of his whole household due to his fairness and honesty. He worked in the light of God being His Master and not merely Potiphar. Do you merely work for your earthly master, or do you work for your heavenly Master?

b. The Lord delights in your ways when you are upright and pure in your heart toward the Lord and towards your neighbor (Proverbs 11:20). The uprightness of your heart or the lack thereof is revealed by the way you speak of one another, gossip, name-call, or spread evil reports. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh", Jesus said (Matthew 12:34). Do your words reveal an uprightness of heart or a perversity of heart?

c. The Lord takes pleasure in your ways when you are faithful to the truth and refuse to utter lies or embrace errors (Proverbs 12:22). Lying is not a way which pleases the Lord, but is rather a way which leads one to eternal destruction (Revelation 21:7-8). Dear ones, God cannot lie and He delights in those who love the truth, pursue the truth, and embrace the truth.

d. The Lord rejoices in your ways when your prayers and worship flow from an upright and sincere heart (Proverbs 15:8). The sacrifices of the wicked proceed from an impenitent and unforgiven heart, from a heart of merit and works, from a heart of pride. Whereas the sacrifices of the upright proceed from a heart of faith in Christ alone as one's righteousness, from a heart of brokenness over one's sin committed against not only the holiness of God, but also against the love, mercy, and grace of God in Christ Jesus, and from a heart of forgiveness and loving thankfulness for God's mercy in Christ Jesus (Psalm 51:16-17).

e. The Lord delights in your ways when you fear Him, reverence Him with a holy awe and wonder, and take Him and His commandments seriously in your life (Psalm 147:10-11). Those who look to their own resources, their own gifts, their own abilities, their own possessions, their own intellect, their own works as their safety and security in this life or in the life to come do not fear the Lord. For that in which you trust and that in which you ultimately place your safety and security is that which you fear and take seriously. Dear ones, who or what do you fear above all else? Do you fear those who can merely destroy these mortal bodies, or do you fear Him who is able to cast both body and soul into Hell (Matthew 10:28)? Never forget that courage is not the absence of fear, but rather it is fearing God (reverencing God for His greatness, power, and majesty) more than you fear anything else. That which you fear is that which you serve. That which you fear is that which you implicitly acknowledge to control your life. God delights in those who fear Him (Psalm 27:1).

f. God takes pleasure in your ways when you are thankful to the Lord for His many gracious benefits to you (Psalm 69:30-31). Your discontentment, envy, covetousness, anger over God's providence, murmuring against your lot in life, and even your mere forgetfulness of His many benefits leave you with an unthankful heart wherein you walk in the paths of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness complaining against God's provision for them and murmuring against God's leaders He had set over them. In so doing, they despised the blessings of God's salvation in their deliverance from Pharaoh. Dear ones, there is not a more pleasing sacrifice to the Lord than that of thankful lips. Thankful speech reveals a trusting and dependent heart. Thankful words reveal a humble heart. It is easy to be thankful when everything is going well; however, the grace of thankfulness is tried in the fire seven times when you are afflicted, impoverished, abandoned, burdened, mocked, hated, and called names. Consider the words of thankfulness found in Habakkuk 3:17-19.

g. Remember God does not rejoice in your ways because they are perfect (for indeed they are not), but because they are in Christ Jesus who is perfect.

## **II. A Promise: "He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."**

A. Man has so many ideas as to how he can live at peace with others. Most of the ideas of man have in view a compromise of that which is righteous and true. Man's concept of peace involves this question: What am I willing to give up in order to have peace? In such a worldview righteousness and truth are sacrificed at the altar of a so-called peace. Peace becomes an end in itself rather than the end being to glorify and enjoy God (and doing what is pleasing to Him). According to this view, you may do evil that good may come. However, this is not the Lord's way to be at peace with one another. The Lord's way to peace with one another is to do that which is pleasing to Him. It is to uphold righteousness and truth, rather than to destroy or compromise righteousness and truth. For "when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

1. That truth sets you free. You don't have to play games to be at peace with one another. You don't have to compromise righteousness or truth to be at peace with one another. You don't have to plead and beg (forever and a day) to be at peace with one another. You don't have to take on some sense of false guilt to be at peace with one another (if the enmity is not due to your sin). You can rest, relax, and cast yourself upon the promise of God: "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him." With this promise of peace, God's grace may be manifested in your seeking the Lord's joy, delight, and pleasure by your loving obedience to His commandments. Here is a God-centered view of peace with man, rather than a man-centered view of peace with man.

2. According to this view of bringing peace, your job is to be pleasing to the Lord and God's job is to make your enemies to be at peace with you. How often do we act the part of the Holy Spirit in seeking to change someone from an enemy to a friend? Dear ones, only God can change the heart of a sinner. You will likely make more enemies than friends if you try by your own resources and good intentions to change people around you from enemies into friends. Or if changing enemies into friends becomes an idol to you (where truth and righteousness are compromised), you will find that your ways are no longer pleasing to the Lord and the godly themselves will become our adversaries.

B. Remember the peace brought to Jacob because his ways pleased the Lord. Laban pursued Jacob and Esau awaited Jacob. Yet by God's sovereign power, Laban departed from Jacob with a kiss and Esau greeted Jacob with a kiss. Remember as well how the Lord gave to Daniel and his three friends favor in the sight of pagan kings due to their willingness to please the Lord even at the cost of their own lives (when Shadrach, Meshech, and Abed-nego endured the fiery furnace and when Daniel endured the lion's den). They did not compromise either truth or righteousness, and yet God brought peace and life out of enmity and death.

1. This promise as with all promises is fulfilled by God's sovereign power. For He that holds the king in His very hand and turns the king's heart wherever he wills is able to make peace even with those who are hostile to you. If you did not believe this, how could you believe that God could take an heretical Saul and make him into the Apostle Paul?

2. Dear ones, let trust in the power of God to change the hearts of men (whether in your family, in the church, or at the work place). Realize your own inability to change adversaries into friends apart from the grace of God. Keep your faith firmly in Christ seeking in all that you do to please Him in the way you speak and act before others. Even the national enemies of ancient Israel were held back by a fear imposed upon them when their ways were pleasing to the Lord (2 Chronicles 14:14; Esther 8:17).

C. Dear ones, you must be careful that you do not make peace with man and at the expense of making enmity with God. It has been said, "The best way for your enemies to be reconciled to you, is for you to be reconciled to God." Your fear ought ultimately to lie not in the anger of your enemies, but in the anger of an offended God; for you cannot be touched by your enemies apart from the loving decree of God (as in the case of Job). And when you are touched, afflicted, persecuted, and even martyred by those who hate you, it is for the testimony of Christ and is brought to you by the love of Christ. Remember those kings who thought they might have peace with their enemies at the expense of God's truth and righteousness? Jehoshaphat befriended Ahab and nearly lost his own life in battle when the Syrians mistook him for Ahab. The returns of a compromised peace are damaging and hurtful to yourself and to others. For a compromised peace is not pleasing to the Lord.

D. Herein is stated your hope and confidence for that millennial reign of peace upon the earth. It will not be brought about by a compromise of righteousness and truth, but as God's people stand squarely upon Christ, His righteousness, and His truth.

E. Dear ones, ultimately all your enemies will be either silenced or reconciled to those whose ways please the Lord. There is coming a day when your enemies will never hurt you again (whether sin, temptation, death, diseases, Satan, or the ungodly). For when Christ returns and death issues forth into life, all of your enemies will be swallowed up in the victory which Christ has purchased by His death and has won by His resurrection. So the Lord will fulfill this promise whether you see your enemies at peace with you in this life as God converts them or as God subdues them or whether your enemies are finally subdued once and for all at the appearing of Him who is the Prince of Peace.

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