

PROMOTERS OF PEACE

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9.

In the first section of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ delineated the character of those who are the children of God and citizens in His kingdom. They are portrayed as individuals in whom a divine work has been wrought. In the first four Beatitudes, Christ sets forth the negative graces of their hearts. He tells us that they are not self-sufficient, but consciously poor in spirit; they are not self-satisfied, but mourning because of their spiritual state; they are not self-willed, but meek; and they are not self-righteous, but hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of God. In the next three Beatitudes, the Lord names the positive graces of their hearts. Having tasted of the mercy of God, they are merciful in their dealings with others; having received a spiritual nature, they now hate impurity and love holiness; and having entered into peace with God through the shed blood of Christ on the cross, they now want to live peaceably with all.

This seventh Beatitude is one of the most significant and characteristic utterances of our Lord, Who Himself was the Prince of peace. There is a real significance in the position of this verse in the context. The one which precedes it speaks of the blessedness of "the pure in heart: for they shall see God." It is important that we understand the fact that we are to be "first pure, then peaceable."

In the Bible God is called "the God of Peace." That indicates that He is the source, the dispenser, and the rewarder of peace. Christ is called "the Prince of Peace." Christianity is the religion of peace. Real peace is produced by the presence of God in human hearts and affairs.

What our world needs today is peace. The world in which our Saviour lived had many features in it very much like our own. It was seething with strife of various kinds. The cauldron of hatred was always threatening to boil over. In the light of the same prevailing conditions, our world needs the peace of God, the peace which Christ gives, the heavenly peace which comes from perfect adjustment with God and with one's fellows.

Having been reconciled to God through the death of His Son on the cross, Christians have been brought into a state of peace. Therefore, every one of them ought to be able to say, "This glorious blessing is for me."

Our text has to do with both the character and the conduct of Christians. It is quite obvious that there must be a peaceable spirit before any real efforts will be put forth to make peace. Be it remembered that the making of peace is not only the primary concern of statesmen, but it is the major task of Christians. Regardless of what else they may be here for, Christians are here primarily to preach, with their lips and by their lives, the great message that Christ is our peace, that is, our Peacemaker, and that through Him God is reconciling lost souls unto Himself.

Peacemakers are needed because there is such a widespread lack of peace. Discord and strife, misunderstanding and hate, are on every hand. Think of the discord and strife between man and his Maker. This discord is as old as human history. The supreme tragedy of this hour is that there are so many in our world who are not on friendly terms with God. It is a certainty that where peace is lacking between man and God there will not be any peace between man and his better self. "There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked." Isaiah 48:22.

What is peace? Peace is a condition. The fundamental thought in the word "peace" is that of harmony with the will of God and conformity to the Word of God. Some count other things for peace. For example, the lazy man thinks peace consists in not having anything to do; the busy man thinks peace consists in having plenty to do; the needy man thinks peace lies

in a good income; and the rich man thinks peace consists in having much more than he can use. From the Word of God we learn that no soul can be at peace until he is reconciled to God. Prior to that experience there is a deep inward conflict—the soul is agitated, the mind is ill at ease, and the heart aches for something which wealth cannot buy.

Christ wants His followers to enjoy the same peace which characterized Him on earth. Bidding His disciples farewell, just before He left them, peace was the gift which He singled out to bestow upon them as a parting legacy. Peace with God is the only real support amid the trials and sorrows of life. Christ gives us this peace by bringing us to God and by making us one with Him.

Some of the Beatitudes are difficult to apply in practice in a world like this, and this is one of them. It certainly brings a needed message in these days of stress and strife, when people live in such a hurry, and hearts and homes are so full of worry.

God is peaceable in both His creative and His redemptive work. Peace is music; the lack of peace is discord. A piece of machinery makes music when it runs according to the maker's plan. Peace makes harmony in any realm. A man who removes the causes of discord is a peacemaker.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." This statement takes note of the horrible contention and enmity which sin has brought into the world, for if there were no strife there certainly would not be any need for peacemakers.

Peacemakers are needed because there is such a widespread lack of peace. There is strife between man and his Maker. The supreme tragedy of this hour is that there are so many in our world who are not on friendly terms with God. Enmity between man and God is the source of all wretchedness.

All human quarrels are at bottom symptoms of a lack of peace with God. The good news of the Christian message is that God, righteously angry with man's flouting of the laws of justice and love, has nevertheless taken the initiative in removing everything that made for estrangement. In Christ's death on the cross, when and where love ultimately conquered sin, God was reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning men's trespasses against them. God has made peace, and Christians are sent to plead with men to accept peace at God's hands and on His terms. This text shows blessedness pronounced as alighting upon people, not for some personal quality or virtue, but for their works' sake in the interest of others.

A peacemaker has a great likeness to his Heavenly Father. God is peaceful, longsuffering and tender; full of lovingkindness, pity and compassion. A spiritual peacemaker is a promoter of peace with God. Such a peacemaker is an excellent person. He lives in such a way—so calm, so well poised, and so peacefully happy—that his life is a demonstration of what the peace of Christ will produce in a human soul. Such a life is real proof of an experience of grace in the soul.

Christ alone can give this peacemaking spirit. When Christ enters the human heart, the evil spirits of selfishness, discord, bickering, contention, stubbornness and malice are driven out. The only way that one can ever become a member of the fraternity of peacemakers is to have Christ in the heart and life. When Christ comes into the heart there is produced the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance: against which there is no law."

A peacemaker has the elements in his own soul which would prevent the spirit of selfishness, prejudice, malice, hatred and contentiousness from rooting in his heart. Peace is a great blessing, and being a peacemaker is a big task and privilege.

After a person has been reconciled to God, he is desirous that all men shall become partakers

of His peace. He gladly uses the means which are at his disposal to the end that was expressed in Isaiah 55:7, that "the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Disagreement between God and man, and between man and man, grieves true Christians. Those who are new creatures in Christ cannot observe strife without sorrow. In spite of this fact, there are some church members who think that the happy and blessed are the sowers of discord and the fomenters of strife.

Promoters of peace are pronounced blessed by the Lord Jesus. They cannot keep from being happy. Next to the enjoyment of peace itself is the delight of knowing that we are the means of diffusing peace and love around us.

This word "peacemaker" reminds us of a duty which we ought to have performed, but which for the most part we have left undone. The holiest peacemaking in the world is that of bringing God and man together. This holy work God has entrusted to us as His children. What have you done with His word of reconciliation which He has committed to you? Have you done any of this blessed peacemaking? Next door, or somewhere near you, there lives one who is a total stranger to the saving power of Christ. Have you ever spoken to that person the word of reconciliation? Have you ever tried to lead him into peace with God? One of the surest ways of being happy and blessed is to do what you can to influence those who are estranged from God to become reconciled to Him. The reason why some church members are troublemakers instead of peacemakers is that they are too much concerned about self, and not enough concerned about the salvation and welfare of others.

Before anybody can be a peacemaker he must be in the right relationship with Christ. To be a lover of peace and a worker after peace is one of the distinguishing marks of those who are followers of the Prince of peace. The one who has peace with God finds it easy to long for peace and to promote it. Inasmuch as Christ has committed unto His followers the ministry of reconciliation, it is their glorious task to strive to put an end to quarrels and to mend broken fellowship.

Nobody can compute the damage which is wrought by discord and strife. For instance, who can estimate the misery which is caused by discord in the home, by strife between parents and child, between husband and wife, and between brother and sister? Who can reckon its disastrous results in broken hearts and blighted lives? Who can calculate the harm done? The consequences of discord are immeasurable and incalculable.

This is a world where great storms arise about very little things. Much strife has its roots in the friction of opposing temperaments. There are people of whom we just make up our minds that we do not like them. "I do not like thee, Dr. Fell--the reason why, I cannot tell." If that is our spirit and attitude, then nothing such people can say or do will win our approval or pass our censorious eyes.

Hatred is the most expensive thing in all the world. How costly is hate between man and man! I have never seen anything as deadly as hating somebody. How many an organization has been disrupted by it! How many a church has had its usefulness impaired and its spiritual strength weakened by it! It is absurd for anybody to expect the blessing of the peacemaker, which Christ mentioned in our text, so long as he fosters hate and cherishes enmities in the heart. It is the business of the Christian to strive to promote harmony and goodwill among others.

Anybody can be a peacebreaker. A child, an ignoramus or a madman can produce commotion, proofs of which are indeed abundant. Any fool can stick a match to a haystack and make a blaze, but it takes more sense and effort to put the fire out than it did to light it. It is easy to promote strife, but there is no nobler office for Christians than to seek to extinguish the devil's flame of jealousy, envy and animosity. We have to do it by making very sure that we do not answer scorn with scorn, gibes with gibes, or hate with hate, but

by "seeking to overcome evil with good." It takes two to make a quarrel, and a quarrel simply cannot take place where one of the two refuses to be quarrelsome. Your most hostile antagonist cannot break the peace unless you help him. If you are resolved to keep peace, kept it will be.

Whoever is a promoter of strife, whoever makes for misunderstanding and discord within a church, is surely the foe of Christ. This is true regardless of his claim to loyalty or his professed orthodoxy. Christ came to break down dividing walls. He came to abolish unbrotherliness and hate. If one's life is making for discord, he has arrayed himself against Christ.

Since it is true that "Blessed are the peacemakers," it necessarily follows that cursed are the peacebreakers. Therefore, every Christian should be on guard against a quarrelsome and contentious spirit. The things of God are too sacred for wrangling. It is highly important that Christians give earnest heed to the admonition recorded in Ephesians 4:3, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In order to develop a peaceful disposition one must cultivate the grace of "lowliness," which is the opposite of pride, for "only by pride cometh contention." Proverbs 13:10. There must also be the cultivation of "meekness," which is the opposite of self-assertiveness, the determination to press one's will at any cost. God has certainly spoken His anathemas against those who destroy this peace.

God's Word says, "Be ye therefore imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love." Peacemakers are the children of God, and they shall be acknowledged as such. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." The peacemaker is a great benefactor. Let us never be peacebreakers; evermore let us be peacemakers!