

What Does It Mean To Live At Peace With Others?

Galatians 5:22; Romans 12:18

August 24, 2014

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What does it mean to live at peace with others? Does it mean that we are to join hand in hand with Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland, Billy Graham in visiting and honoring the pope of Rome and to unite with other “Protestants” (who signed the Manhattan Declaration [2009] or who signed the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification [1999] between Lutheran Churches and the Church of Rome) in building bridges with the pope and the Church of Rome? Does it mean that we are to voice our support along with those who promote a homosexual agenda (including same sex marriage)? Does it mean that we are to compromise sound doctrine, pure worship, and faithful church government in order to unite with other professing Christian Churches (even Reformed Churches)? Does it mean that we are to loosen our commitment to the commandments of God because God’s commandments separate us from our neighbor?

Dear ones, there is much confusion over what it means to live at peace with one another, or what it means to be a peacemaker. As we wrap up today our study of the fruit of peace (that third fruit of the Spirit mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 5:22), we turn our attention to that final aspect of peace: peace with others (first, peace *with* God—our heavenward peace; second, the peace *of* God that passeth all understanding—our inward peace; and third, peace with others—our outward peace).

The main points of the sermon this Lord’s Day are the following: (1) What it does NOT mean to live peaceably with all men (“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you” Romans 12:18a)? (2) What it does mean to live

peaceably with all men (“Live peaceably with all men” Romans 12:18b)?

I. What it does NOT mean to live peaceably with all men (“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you” Romans 12:18a)?

A. At the very outset of this verse there are two general qualifications made by Paul which make clear that he is not issuing an absolute command or exhortation to live peaceably with all men. To the contrary, there are cases and situations (some of which we will be considering shortly) in which it is not possible and in which we cannot (without compromising biblical principles) live peaceably with all men. Before doing so, let’s back up for a moment to consider the context leading up to Romans 12:18.

B. In Romans 1-11, the Apostle Paul lays the theological foundation of our righteous standing before God through faith alone in Christ alone. And beginning with Romans 12, Paul shifts to practically applying that sound doctrine of the first 11 chapters to the lives of those who are justified before God on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ and received by faith alone. This shift to the practical is particularly observable as love in its many applications in the life of the Christian is presented in verses 9-21 (beginning with verse 9: “Let love [agape] be without dissimulation [i.e. without pretense, mere appearance, or hypocrisy—GLP]”). Then follows in the remainder of chapter 12 a number of short exhortations as ways in which love is practiced in the life of the Christian.

C. This brings us to the exhortation in Romans 12:18, which we are to practice as an expression of God’s love: “live peaceably with all men.” But, as noted earlier, there are two general qualifications or exceptions to this exhortation to live peaceably with all men.

1. “If possible.” This exception seems to imply that there are people outside of our control that will not allow or permit peace and reconciliation to exist. Thus, no matter how much we may desire, work toward, and pray for peace, there can be no reconciliation because others bring unrepentant sin and error into our relationship (and thus rend apart the wholeness of peace through division). Therefore, “if possible” focuses upon what others do or say that prevents our living peaceably with them. As Calvin rightly notes:

Thus, the wickedness of many is still the reason why the Church is troubled by divisions, and why contentions are kindled. Yet those who disturb the peace, throw the blame on us, and call us schismatics; for the principal charge which the Papists bring against us is, that our doctrine has shaken the tranquility of the Church. Yet, the truth is, that, if they would yield submissively to Christ, and give their support to the truth, all the commotions would immediately be allayed [i.e. put to rest—GLP] (*Commentary on John 10:19, XVII:411*).

2. “As much as lieth in you”. This qualification seems to imply that there must not be anything within us that would hinder or constrain us from living peaceably with all men. In other words, if there is a rending asunder of peace and wholeness between us and others, let it not be due to something within us that refuses to walk in the paths of righteousness and truth. Let the reason for not living peaceably with all men be not due to our failure to bear the fruit of peace, but rather to the failure of others to bear the fruit of peace. Dear ones, this is simply to say that we as Christians (we who have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ [that heavenward peace before the throne of God] and we who have the peace of God that passeth all understanding [that inward peace]) must love peace with others to such a degree that we would humbly pray that God would reveal our own sin and error that has led (or might have led) to a division and separation with others. We may not be able to change others (when that is the source of the division), but we can (by God’s grace) exercise ourselves to repentance, forgiveness, and godliness so that the cause of division is not due to our sin or error.

D. There are generally two types of people that destroy a biblical peace with others.

1. When we or others are **Troublemakers**, a biblical peace is destroyed. These are they who *actively* stir up and raise up trouble with others and destroy peace due to their own sin or their own corrupt doctrine (which they raise up to divide a relationship, a marriage, the church, or the nation). Troublemakers are divisive, contentious, quarrelsome, argumentative, and work to disrupt relationships. Troublemakers are not content to wallow in their own sin and error, but want others to accept and to join with them in their sin and error. Troublemakers may be lovers of controversy and debate rather than lovers of a biblical peace. They may despise lawful, biblical authority. They may see a better opportunity to gain leadership where people are divided into factions. Thus, they are relational, marital, ecclesiastical, and national pyromaniacs—wherever they seem to be they are starting fires of sin and error that destroy a relationship, a marriage, the church, and the nation (Proverbs 6:19; James 4:1-3).

a. Such troublemakers were the false teachers that brought their heresies into the church and disrupted the peace of the church (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; and we are to turn away from them—Romans 16:17).

b. Such troublemakers were those whose sinful practices disrupted the peace of the church (Revelation 2:20; 3 John 9; 2 Thessalonians 3:11; and we are to withdraw ourselves from them—2 Thessalonians 3:6).

c. However, let me be quick to add that they are not troublemakers who desire to ask questions, or to discuss and resolve differences in a brotherly and peaceable manner with the Pastor or Elders in an orderly manner (in fact, it is our duty to do so when the profession of Christ's truth is at stake).

2. When we or others are **Compromisers**, a biblical peace

is destroyed. These are they who *passively* destroy peace due to their willingness to pursue an unbiblical peace at any price (even at the price of sacrificing the truth of Christ revealed in Scripture and confessed in faithful Terms of Communion, Covenants, Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, and Directories of Worship and Church Government). One is not a peacemaker who joins hand in hand with those who sacrifice sound doctrine, pure worship, faithful church government and discipline, and godly practice on the altar of compromise. Compromisers love peace and unity at almost any price (which is really a counterfeit peace—a mere absence of outward hostility). Compromisers pretend to promote a biblical peace, but in reality it is a counterfeit peace in which mere outward divisions are removed. This is the basis of the Ecumenical Movement in the Roman Catholic Church in seeking to draw all religions under the umbrella of the Papacy (Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.). Pope Francis was the first pope to visit a “Protestant” Church recently. This likewise is promoted within Reformed Churches that seek to remove all doctrines, practices in worship, and church government that divide Reformed Christians and unite them under one large banner.

a. Biblical peace is a peace anchored in the truth not in compromise of the truth (Amos 3:3; John 17:17,21-22; 1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3-6,13-15; Philippians 4:16).

b. Biblical peace is not only surrendered in compromise of the truth, but is also surrendered when our fear of man or fear of circumstances is greater than our love of Christ and His truth (Proverbs 4:13; Hebrews 10:23; Revelation 2:25; 3:3,11; Revelation 12:11—a justifying testimony, a verbal testimony for Christ and His truth, and a sacrificial testimony).

3. Troublemakers and compromisers will be found in families, among friends, at work, at school, in the Church, or in the nation. Although the situation may be different, the work of an *active*

troublemaker and of a *passive* compromiser will lead to division and to a counterfeit peace (where there is not a true reconciliation in which the sin and error that divides us is removed, but rather where the righteousness and truth that divides is removed, so that there can be a truce in which the white flag is waved and outward hostilities merely removed).

II. What it does mean to live peaceably with all men (“Live peaceably with all men” Romans 12:18b)?

A. We now move from consideration of those who hinder or destroy a biblical peace (troublemakers or compromisers) to those who promote and advance a biblical peace. Jesus calls these peacemakers (Matthew 5:9).

B. We have in a previous sermon noted that biblical peace is not the mere absence of war, fighting, conflict, contention, or trouble (because a temporary truce and outward silence may simply hide the bitterness, resentment, hatred, and envy that burns within the soul and passions of one toward another). However, biblical peace is a wholeness, at-one-ness, or reconciliation between people in which the sin or error that divided them has been removed through repentance, forgiveness, and love. Thus, a peacemaker is not one who pretends that there is no division with others due to sin or error, but is rather one (who by God’s grace) humbles himself/herself, removes the beam out of his/her own eye, and goes forward in love to remove the enmity and restore wholeness to the relationship.

1. This will inevitably bring the peacemaker into conflict with others, not because he/she desires conflict, but because he/she desires wholeness where there is presently division and separation. The world despises (and sadly even Christians despise at times) biblical

peacemakers because they will not compromise what they know and believe to be the truth of Christ, even among family, friends, and fellow Christians. Being a biblical peacemaker may be hazardous to your health when the peacemaker is caught in the middle of two warring parties. Being a biblical peacemaker will not usually win a popularity contest because he/she makes Christ and His truth (rather than mere “loyalty”) the foundation of the relationship. However, loyalty to family and friends over steadfastness in sound doctrine, pure worship, faithful church government, and godly practice is disloyalty to Christ (Matthew 10:32-38—due to the hostility of the world to Christ, His coming did not bring peace between family and friends, but rather division as the loyalty of Christians was to Christ even over loyalty to family). The godly and learned Samuel Rutherford had this to say about charges of disloyalty or treason (he was addressing matters in the civil realm, but it could equally apply to family, friends, work, school, church, or state):

Christ, the prophets, and apostles of our Lord, went to heaven with the note of traitors, seditious men, and such as turned the world upside down: calumnies [i.e. slanders—GLP] of treason to Caesar were an ingredient in Christ’s cup, and therefore the author [i.e. Mr. Rutherford—GLP] is the more willing to drink of that cup that touched his lip, who is our glorious Forerunner: what, if conscience toward God, and credit with men, cannot both go to heaven with the saints, the author is satisfied with the former companion, and is willing to dismiss the other. Truth to Christ cannot be treason to Caesar (*Lex, Rex, or The Law And The Prince*, Sprinkle Publications, [1644] 1982, p. xxi).

2. A biblical peacemaker will boldly stand against idolatry, covenant breaking, Sabbath breaking, abortion and “reproductive rights”, adultery, fornication, pornography, sodomy, and same-sex “marriages”, even though from the perspective of the world this is bringing a sword (in reality, it is those who stand against Christ and His gospel and His law that have brought the division into the family, church, or nation). For it is the Prince of Peace and the gospel of peace alone that can bring peace to a family, church, or nation, when God grants the grace to repent of sin and error, to seek forgiveness, and to live a godly life.

- C. Are you a biblical peacemaker in your family or in the church?
1. Do you weep and mourn in prayer over division in the family, in the church, in the nation (Psalm 119:136)?
 2. Do you first deal with your own pride, anger, bitterness (and any other sin) before going to others about their sin (Matthew 7:1-5)?
 3. Are you sure there has been a clear and grievous violation of God's commandments (Galatians 6:1—"overtaken in a fault [transgression like that of Adam in Romans 5:15,17,18])?
 4. Do you begin by asking questions or making accusations? Are you first on a fact-finding mission before a fault-finding mission?
 5. Do you desire to cover in love or to expose in pride the private sins of others (Proverbs 10:12; Proverbs 17:9; James 5:20)?
 6. Have you only involved witnesses to the private sin of others after you have humbly and lovingly sought to address the clear sin/error, but have met with resistance and obstinacy (Matthew 18:15ff)?
 7. Have you put a fair and just construction on a person's words or actions (John 7:24)? Where is honesty and integrity when we misrepresent what others believe, so that we can gloat over having destroyed a mere straw man?
 8. Have you resisted sinful anger and wrath as a response, and rather listened closely to what is said by others (James 1:19). Sometimes just waiting a day or two to respond to an email can make the difference between hostility and peace.
 9. Do you desire the glory of Christ more than self-vindication even when you have been offended (1 Corinthians 10:31)?

Dear ones, the only hope of a true, biblical hope is the Prince of Peace who offers to us the gospel of peace. For only Jesus Christ can remove from our hearts, our words, and our behavior the sin and error that offends Him and offends others, that divides us from Him and from

others. We so often focus upon the sin of others that causes division, but dear ones, the gospel of Jesus Christ would have us begin with the sin within us that causes division. If that is the focus and point at which we all begin, there would be far less division among us. According to Christ, that which particularly characterizes the child of God is seeking by God's grace to be a peacemaker (a biblical peacemaker): "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God."

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