

**Intro:** The Personnel Journal reported this incredible statistic: since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than eight percent of the time! In its study, the periodical discovered that of 3530 years of recorded history, only 286 years saw peace. Moreover, in excess of 8000 peace treaties were made—and broken. (Moody Bible Institute's Today In The Word, June, 1988, p. 33)

## Work Hard for Gospel Unity

1. Peace is a part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, evidence that one belongs to Christ is the evidence of peace-making (Gal 5:22, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...)
  - a. We are told to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit”
    - i. We do not create unity, but rather “keep” or “maintain unity”
      1. The unity is there from the Holy Spirit making us one in Christ
      2. We *are all* One New Humanity by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit's transforming call
    - ii. We must work hard, making every effort, to remember and act upon this truth
      1. Keep the gospel as our unifying commonality at all times
      2. Reject any other reason as the source of our unity (nationalism, interests, economics, race, etc.)
    - iii. This unity comes from the Holy Spirit
      1. He is its source and its Creator
      2. In the gospel of GRACE, we are all called the same way
      3. “One body with one Spirit; one hope of one call; one Lord; one faith; one baptism; one Father over all and in all and through all” (4-6)
  - b. This fact, our *received* (see act of God's grace) calling of God is a work of His transforming Spirit, places us every one in Christ upon the exact same foundation: God's gracious creation in Christ.
    - i. The Gospel of grace shows us all that we are One. We are the Body of Christ, placed here by the grace of God, not by our performance or wisdom or righteousness, but rather on the performance, wisdom, and righteousness of Christ
    - ii. We are to “make every effort” to unify around this Truth!
      1. Hebrews 12:14  
Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.
2. We are to be imitators of God
  - a. We do not *create* unity, but rather “keep” or “maintain” the unity that is already our true state in Christ, through the Spirit's call
    - i. Our work is not to find some commonality outside of the gospel, nor is it to ignore differences pertaining to gospel, but rather to discover our unity IN the Gospel of Jesus
      1. We are together in worshipping the One True God
      2. We are together dependent upon Jesus Christ to make us holy
      3. We are together creations of the Spirit through the same gospel
    - ii. We are NOT unified with those outside of the gospel
      1. We are respectful, humble, gracious, and loving, but not unified
      2. Because we are saved by God's grace alone, we have NO justification for being disrespectful, spiteful, or belittling to unbelievers, but rather to love them and do good to them
  - b. We must look to God's gracious work in our salvation and recognize our humility and His praise and respond in like manner to each other.
    - i. As we see Jesus, really see Him in the gospel, we are transformed to be like Him
    - ii. 1 Co 11:1  
Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

## How Do We Make Peace?

1. Keep Your Eyes on Jesus: His Peace-Making Work for You!
  - a. FIRST: SEE THE GOSPEL!
    - i. *Applying the Gospel* to your heart is the Spirit's powerfully transforming act of making you into the image of Jesus. The Gospel is a life-giving River: shallow enough for newbies to wade in, and deep enough to delve into and never reach the bottom of God's refreshing grace.
    - ii. *ILLUST: Sahalie Falls – Upper McKenzie*

The gospel is not the first "step" in a "stairway" of truths, rather it is more like the "hub" in a "wheel" of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A-to-Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the Kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the Kingdom.

~Timothy J. Keller

- iii. Just as Jesus tore down the barriers that you set up in your wronging of God.
    1. Eph 4:32-5:2  
Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, **as God in Christ forgave you.** Therefore **be imitators of God, as beloved children.** <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, **as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us**, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.
  - b. His peace toward us leads to our peace towards others
    - i. See your sin as egregious (as BIG and HEINOUS) as it really is between you and God (JESUS **HAD TO DIE FOR YOU**)
      1. sin causes death, God HATES sin, it is completely unlike Him and rebellious against Him as King, it saddens His heart, grieves His Spirit, angers His justice, and invokes Him to wrath: it is a dangerous and terrible thing to fall into the holy hands of the living God
      2. Seeing the reality of the heinousness of your own personal sin keeps you from puffing yourself up and depending upon your own goodness as the means for your self-importance
        - a. When we don't treat our sin as great as it really is to the HOLY God, then we will look down on those who haven't performed as righteously as we perceive ourselves to be
        - b. We will draw the line between the "big sinners" (like *those* people) and the "little sinners" (like me) and so disintegrate and destroy God's people
    - ii. Recognize that God has forgiven you this large debt by paying it for you in Jesus!! You are loved and forgiven and free b/c Jesus made peace by His blood! (JESUS **DID DIE FOR YOU**)
      1. When we are walking in the light of the gospel, i.e. by the Spirit, it is possible, even natural, for the Spirit-transformed and fully-forgiven heart to completely make peace with those who have sinned against you
      2. When we see *how much* we have been forgiven in the light of God's holy perfection and our deep depravity, and we see *how far* God went in sending Jesus to make peace for us, we are humbled into the dust and make peace with those who wrong us
      3. Matt 18:21-35
        - a. Others' sins against us are a pittance compared with our sins against God
        - b. To demand vengeance and repayment of others is to treat God's grace toward us with contempt and presumption
    - iii. See the vertical peace we have with God so that we can give horizontal peace w/each other
2. Remove the Obstacles of Contention in Your Relationships (as much as you are able, see Rom 12:18)
  - a. The unity of the Spirit is maintained in the "bond" of peace
    - i. We are "tied-together" in Christ, interdependent and forever deeply and spiritually a part of each other

- ii. We cannot exist and grow apart from each other, for God has bound us together in the gospel of grace to the praise of His glory
  - b. When you have wronged another, go and repent!
    - i. Because of the Gospel of grace we can repent freely
    - ii. I can admit my wrong because the gospel shows me that it is not my righteousness that makes peace with God, but rather the blood of Jesus. I don't have to defend my so-called rightness. I am not afraid to lose my reputation or my glory b/c Jesus had made me a son-citizen of heaven.
      - 1. I can hate sin within me AND rest in His payment for that sin
      - 2. REMEMBER:
        - a. My sin is so egregious that Jesus had to die!
        - b. Jesus loves me so much that He DID die to save us from the wrath to come
    - iii. As far as you are able to remove the obstacle. Remember, it is the offended party's right to forgive or demand justice. Our desire when we wrong someone is to repent and to either:
      - 1. Accept their forgiveness GRATEFULLY if offered
      - 2. Bear up their justice GRACIOUSLY if they do not forgive
        - a. You are forgiven in Christ
        - b. Cling to Him when someone does not forgive
        - c. If the offended is a brother or sister in Christ, humbly remind them of the gospel, too.
  - c. When someone wrongs you, don't retaliate, forgive!
    - i. Because of the gospel of grace, we can forgive freely
    - ii. I can admit that my righteousness, even in this situation, does not gain me any advantage with God. I, too, am a *great* sinner, and God has forgiven me freely in Christ by paying down my debt
      - 1. I can hate sin within another AND forgive the debt they owe to me
      - 2. REMEMBER:
        - a. Jesus paid down my debt freely and my debt against God was infinitely larger than any debt owed to me!
        - b. I have been given the righteousness of Jesus, I don't need to prove *my* rightness or defend *my* rightness to anyone.
        - c. I can pay down the debt against me by not demanding retribution or "justice" to my offender. I will swallow the retribution b/c Jesus swallowed the justice owed to me.

### 3. Make Peace from the Heart

- a. Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule your hearts"
- b. The peace with God that Jesus Christ has made for us should "umpire" our relationships with each other.
  - i. The peace of Christ brings unity. When we are securely loved and completely forgiven, we can securely love and completely forgive others as well, thus letting the peace of Christ establish peace with each other. How?
- c. In the midst of contention, remember the Peace-Maker:
  - i. My sin against God
  - ii. God saved me by His grace alone through Jesus
    - 1. Undeserved and unsought for
    - 2. He chose me, adopted me, redeemed me, sealed me in Christ
  - iii. Because Jesus has done all that I NEED, I can forgive (not exact repayment) my brother for his sin against me by removing the obstacle between us (take up your own cross)
  - iv. The greater degree that the gospel is known and believed in our hearts is the greater degree that forgiveness and peace will flow through our lives.**
- d. Beware the twin evils of accusing and excusing (Eph 4:15-16)
  - i. Accusing: When we operate outside of the truth of the gospel we will only speak the truth (w/o love) in our relationships. This is where we find ourselves pointing out other people's failures in an accusatory way.

1. Gal 5:26 - Let us not become conceited, challenging one another, envying one another.
  - a. Challenging: calling one out in order to defeat them
  - b. Envying: looking up to someone else's righteousness
2. Underlying this action is the belief that it is *my righteousness* that has made right with God and the person whom I am accusing is not righteous. Therefore, I must show them their error *so that they can be like me*.
  - ii. Excusing: When we operate outside of the gospel (bold humility of the cross) we will excuse sin in our relationships as well (we will only "love" without truth).
    1. *Peace-keeping* by saying nothing, not speaking the truth of what needs to be said out of the fear of hurting someone's ego or making them angry.
    2. We must inform a party who has hurt us (injustice) that they have hurt us. Not in an accusatory way, as if we want them to pay, but in an informative way so that they know that they have sinned against us.
      - a. This must be done "in love" or else is simply "accusing" again. Humility with one's own sin in a situation, in light of the gospel (I am so sinful that Jesus had to die), is imperative.
      - b. This communication of truth is the key to dealing with contentions in all relationships.
      - c. By speaking the truth we give opportunity for repentance and forgiveness, to see Jesus again together, as fellow sinners.
        - i. Without repentance of our own power and our own righteousness, Jesus will not receive the glory nor the praise that is due to Him only
4. Ultimately, the peace of Christ is incomprehensible. It is spiritual, not natural, so doesn't make natural sense. The world will not understand it, for it is not of the world, it is of the Spirit
  - a. Phil 4:7 - And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
    - i. Retribution and proving one's rightness in self-acknowledgement, self-approval, and self-preservation is what drives our flesh to raise up obstacles and keep them there.
    - ii. The peace of God is based upon grace. Giving up one's own power for the sake of another. It is paying down debt that doesn't belong to you for the sake of reconciliation. It is incomprehensible to the world, just like Jesus' atoning substitutionary death is not understood.
  - b. The peace of God guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus.
    - i. The peace, security in God's grace toward us, is actually what protects us from sin and an unloving heart. Do you want to love better? Forgive from the heart and let go of anger/wrath? Take joy in people, real joy? Then we must see again the complete grace of God in Christ and His cross!
    - ii. We must see, acknowledge, and accept that our peace with God comes only because of His great grace to us through the blood of Jesus. We were the enemies of God, and while we were still enemies, Jesus broke down the barrier of the dividing wall of sin and established peace with God for us! This truth, deep within our souls, by the power and transformation of our hearts by the Holy Spirit, thus will establish peace with others as we obliterate their debts against us, just as Jesus has done for us.
5. Remember the Holy Spirit!
  - a. It may be very difficult to forgive someone (esp. if they've hurt you severely)
  - b. Jesus did not leave us as orphans (John 14:18-19) to scrape along trying your best to do what he said. He is with you to lead you (John 16:13), to strengthen you to hope (Rom 15:13; 2 Ti 1:7), to produce His fruit in you (Gal 5:22-23). You are not alone in your struggle to forgive.
  - c. The more we realize that God is control and that He must change hearts, the more that we ask Him to do so, rather than trying to change people ourselves
 

Let me urge upon you the importance of cultivating faith if you are to be able to walk in love and spiritual power. Without faith it is impossible to please God, but

those who believe are given more grace than they can handle. Believing is to expect God to be with you and change you and change others. Therefore, expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.

~C.J. Miller (Jack)

Conclusion: Quote from Octavius Winslow in *The Fullness of Christ Unfolded in the Life of Joseph*

“Are we not all of us, as saints of God, dependent upon Jesus? – are not all of us hanging upon Jesus? – Do we not all receive from Jesus? The blood that cleanses us, the righteousness that justifies us, the grace that sanctifies us, the sympathy that comforts us, the hope that cheers us – is it not all derived from the fullness that is in Christ? Are not all clinging to that one dear Savior, depending on His finished work, and all drawing from His infinite resources? Oh, yes! Where do the saints of God the most frequently meet? Is it not at the feet of Jesus?...of His fullness have we all received; and all alike living upon Christ’s fullness, nourished by His grace, kept by His power, soothed by His love, fed by His hand, guided by His counsel, and bound together in the same heart of God, supplies us with one of the strongest and most persuasive motives why we should love one another...”

Let us be peace-makers, like the One who made our peace with God, like God Himself. We, when we are offended, let us live up our name, Christian. It means “little Christ.” Let us step in the gap to forgive, removing the obstacle of contention by paying down justice ourselves. We must give up the right to retaliate when we have been treated unjustly, for that is what Christ has done for us. Let us fix our eyes on the Him, on His cross, and let us trust His Holy Spirit to guide us into the truth, to see the gospel clearly, and to empower us by His fruitful and effective influence to transform our hearts into the hearts of the peace-making people of God.

Let us speak the truth to one another in love, not letting sin remain or injustice to prevail in our relationships, but neither letting sin and injustice become obstacles to peace among us. Fix your eyes on the great Peace-Maker.

Remember the gospel. At all times of contention, see Jesus. Train yourself to see Jesus quickly: to repent of your wrong and to forgive when you are wronged. For the more greatly that we seize the gospel within our hearts, the greater that we will find peace in our relationships to the glory of the great Peace-Maker. Soli Dei Gloria.