

The Heavenly Citizens Charter 7

Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called God's Children.

Philippians 4:1-9

Matthew 5:1-10

Wherever there are people there are tensions and disagreements. There are wars between countries and wars within countries; disputes between companies and disputes within companies; conflicts between races, between families, Churches, Governments, Classes and individuals. In virtually every school, factory, office, street and home there is some sort of trouble and strife. Children bicker about who has the largest slice of cake, the fastest bike, the most expensive trainers, the longest turn on the computer, the best phone, and the latest bedtime. Parents argue about money, sex, disciplining children, standing up to the neighbours and visiting in-laws. Governments disagree about interest rates, trade embargoes, unfair subsidies, reducing emissions, immigration policy and human rights. From the smallest child to the most powerful president, they all want their own way. And they use the same weapons of words, threats, blackmail, violence and money to get it. And Jesus says: MT5: 9

This is the seventh of the eight Beatitudes, which all true Christians are meant to possess, and it's the third consequence of being filled by God. The attitudes follow a logical order, and each one is harder than the one before. The only people who are allowed into God's heavenly Kingdom are those who are genuinely poor in spirit - that is, they're convinced of their absolute nothingness in comparison with the All-powerful All-loving God. Some people are paralysed by their poverty of spirit, but others make spiritual progress and mourn for their failings. Some of those who begin by mourning end in moaning, but others go on to become meek: they allow others to comment on their failings as well. Some of the meek stagnate and become passive and weak, but some make good progress

and start to hunger and thirst for God and His righteousness. Some people who taste God's righteousness become harsh and judgemental, but a few are filled with mercy for others. Some of the merciful settle for second best, but others go on to become pure in heart. Some people who are pure opt out of the world and become no earthly use to anyone, but a few progress to become peacemakers: they reach the point where their attitudes become actions, their character shows itself in conduct, their filling by God has a practical result.

Each of the 8 attitudes is matched with a promise, and just as each attitude becomes harder so each promise gets better. The promises begin with guaranteed entry into God's glorious Kingdom, and God then goes on to offer comfort, to bequeath earth, to fill with Himself, and to lavish mercy. The sixth promise, that the pure in heart will see God appeared to be the unsurpassable climax of Christianity, but the seventh promise beats even that.

Peacemakers will be called 'children of God'. They won't be clients or spectators or guests, they won't be citizens or visitors or saints, they won't be servants or friends or disciples - they'll be adopted into God's family. They'll have new brothers and sisters, and a new name as well. They'll have a new identity to go with their nature, and a new relationship, which matches their attitudes. They'll be God's sons and daughters and he'll be their Heavenly Father.

It's a basic feature of flawed humanity to want to control, to dominate, to be powerful. Wherever you look you see people, companies, institutions, congregations, nations trying to grab power for themselves. But it's not Jesus' way. When He was on this earth, some of the people wanted to make him their king. They hoped that he'd free Israel from its Roman Oppressors and make them a powerful nation again. Several times they tried to make him their king, but he always refused and said that he rejected their concept of power. Five days before His death Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey to

show that he was not a powerful military leader, but a peacemaker instead.

Some Christians make the same mistake today as the people did then. They want to make Jesus King. They want the church (and by that they often only mean their congregation and their tradition) to be powerful, successful, influential and large.

They want to be in a position to control, to dominate, to lead, to decide, to impose. But Jesus did not commend the warriors or the rulers, and he did not congratulate the powerful or the strong leaders. Instead he said: Blessed are the Peacemakers for they - and only they - shall be called children of God.

The attitudes show that people who are filled with God have three positive characteristics - mercy, purity and peacemaking; these are the ingredients in authentic Christian people, in Christ-like congregations and in all Christian thinking. Take one away and its no longer Christ-like, for Jesus showed all the attitudes in balance throughout His life. Nobody is naturally a peacemaker. Some politicians might be paid a vast sum to negotiate an end to war, and some counsellors might have a vocation for helping married couples, but that doesn't mean they're peacemakers in private. Peacemakers aren't easygoing people who do anything to avoid trouble, who compromise the truth, and who have no sense of justice. Peacemakers aren't quarrelsome or argumentative; they don't go out of their way to make trouble; and they aren't concerned with themselves. Instead they are peaceable people who do all they can to produce peace and maintain it. Peacemakers go out of their way, at great personal cost, to bring people together in a peace-filled relationship, which is based on God's justice. Peacemakers aren't sensitive, or touchy, or defensive. They don't look at situations and ask how it'll affect them or their group - when people do that the inevitable result is disagreement and conflict. Instead they're pure and humble and meek. They're dead to self and empty of self-interest: when they look at situations they only ask how they'll affect

others. Peacemakers must first mourn and be merciful. They look at people in their anger, their arrogance, their bitterness, their tensions; and they realise that they're the sad victims of selfishness and sin. They know these people are heading for hell, and this knowledge increases their mourning and mercy. Some of them want to do something about it, and when they do, they are peacemakers. Peacemakers are deeply practical, for no one can make peace from an armchair or pew.

Peacemakers do all the things that the rest of Jesus' sermon on the mount prescribes - they make reconciliation a priority; they go the extra mile; they turn the other cheek; they love their enemies; they give to everyone who asks; they keep their righteousness and their generosity to themselves; they serve God not money; and they set their hearts on God's peaceable kingdom - rather than on smart clothes, good food and a comfortable life.

In one sense the rest of Jesus' sermon is only a lengthy description of practical peacemaking. It follows on from the attitudes and is a list of the consequences of being filled with God's nature. Jesus' hard sayings are impossible to keep by even the hardest human effort, but they are the natural result of progressing from poverty of spirit right through to peacemaking.

The sequence of thought from purity of heart to peacemaking is natural, because one of the most frequent causes of conflict is intrigue, while openness and sincerity are essential to all true reconciliation.

Every Christian, according to this attitude, is meant to be a peacemaker both in the community and in the Church. True, Jesus was to say later that "He had not come to bring peace but a sword", for He had come "to set a man against His Father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, so that a man's enemies would be those of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36). And what is meant by this, was that conflict would be the inevitable result

of His coming, even within one's own family, and that, if we are to be worthy of Him, we must love Him best and put Him first, above even our nearest and dearest relatives (Matthew 10:37). It is clear beyond question, however, that we should never ourselves seek conflict or be responsible for it. On the contrary, we are called to peace, we are actively to pursue peace, we are to strive for peace with all people and so far as it depends on us, we are to live 'peaceably with all'. (1 Cor 7:15, 1 Peter 3:1, Hebrews 12:14, Romans 12:18).

Now peacemaking is a divine work. For peace means reconciliation, and God is the author of peace and reconciliation. Indeed, the very same verb which is used in this beatitude of us is applied by the Apostle Paul to what God has done through Christ. Through Jesus God was pleased 'to reconcile to Himself all things.....making peace by the blood of His Cross.' And Christ's purpose was to 'create in Himself One New Man in place of the two, so making peace.' (Col.1: 20, Eph.2: 15) It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the particular blessing, which attaches to peacemakers, is that 'they shall be called children of God'. For they are seeking to do what their Father has done, loving people with His Love, as Jesus is soon to make explicit in his sermon(v44/45). It is the Devil, who is a troublemaker; it is God who loves reconciliation and who now through His children, as formerly through His only Son is bent on making peace.

This will remind us that the words 'peace' and 'appeasement' are not synonyms. For the peace of God is not peace at any price. He made peace with us at immense cost, even at the price of the life-blood of his only son. We too - though in our lesser ways - will find peacemaking a costly enterprise.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has made us familiar with the concept of 'Cheap Grace'; there is such a thing I believe as "cheap peace" also. To proclaim 'peace, peace,' where there is no peace, is the work of the false prophet, not the Christian witness. Many examples could be given of peace through pain. When we are

ourselves involved in a quarrel, there will either be the pain of apologising to the person we have injured or the pain of rebuking the person who has injured us. Sometimes there is the nagging pain of having to refuse to forgive the guilty party until he or she repents. Of course a cheap peace can be brought by cheap forgiveness. But true peace and true forgiveness are costly treasures. God forgives us only when we repent. Jesus told us to do the same: "if you brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him' (Luke 17:3). How can we forgive an injury when it is neither admitted nor regretted?

Or again, we may not be personally involved in a dispute, but may find ourselves struggling to reconcile to each other two groups of people who are estranged and at variance with each other. In this case there will be the pain of listening, of ridding ourselves of prejudice, of striving sympathetically to understand both the opposing points of view and of risking misunderstanding, ingratitude or failure.

Those individuals who make peace between people their priority will be claimed by God as His children. That's why so many of Jesus' words suggest that the issue on judgement day will not be prophecies, doctrine, miracle or demons, but welcoming strangers, washing peoples feet, feeding the hungry, visiting prisoners and housing the homeless. To be a child of God is to be a sibling of Jesus. He showed all the eight attitudes all of the time, but His highest priority was to make peace - peace between God and ourselves, and peace between people. He was called 'The Prince of Peace' - the supreme peacemaker - and all of his followers are meant to be like Him.

Pastor David

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