

Living as Pilgrims in Peaceful Paths

INTRODUCTION – We’re not all created equal, and we don’t all have equal experiences. Thus, nature and nurture produce quite a variety in adult human beings. One area of difference in our personalities is that some people are quite aggressive and assertive while others are more passive and peace-loving. Where is the proper biblical balance?

A. The priority of peace

1. Where do we place peace? – How high is it on our scale of values and goals in life?

a. How high is peace on our priorities list?

b. How high is peace on our PRAYER list?

2. How do we practice peace? Not all Bible-believers are in agreement on being peacemakers.

a. Perverted peacemaking – Some think we should strive for peace at any or almost any price – do ANYTHING to keep peace (not rock boat, not upset applecart – be total passivists). Such “pragmatic peace” often lets wickedness win.

b. Proper peacemaking (balanced) – Some, though, see a few (at least) apparent exceptions to total passiveness. God’s Word and our lives teach that there are times that we must express passion and principle for what’s right and true and best. It’s been rightly said that we must stand for something OR we’ll likely fall for anything.

No matter what position one takes, keep in mind that in Bible times God actually ordered His chosen earthly people (Israel) to NOT be peaceful – to go to war – to literally obliterate / eliminate / exterminate other human beings and nations (who were quite wicked). Also, remember the Flood, when God directly upset things, destroying the peace on the planet.

B. Our authority for peace – the Bible. What does the Bible say for us (living in the Church dispensation)?

I. Essentials for Bible peace – First, consider the essentials needed to experience true Bible peace. They’re in three areas:

A. Ethically right – “*There is* no peace ... to the wicked” (Isa 48:22; 57:21; cf. 59:8; Jer 14:19). This could mean:

(1) The reality (peace existentially) – i.e., “There is no peace” (the wicked never are at peace personally).

Yet, is it really true that those who live wickedly never really experience inward peace?

(2) The penalty (peace eventually) – i.e., “There will be no peace.” This is the more likely meaning.

God’s judgment on them will eventually destroy any degree of peace that they might temporarily experience (see Isa 66:24).

B. Doctrinally true (what the Bible actually teaches) – **Never make peace with heresy!!!!** “After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you.... Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Ac 20:29-30) “Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” (Rom 16:17) “Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.” (2Th 3:6) “Be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” (Eph 4:14)

C. Mentally wise (prudent / logical) – “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.” (Eph 5:15) The Epistle of James has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament. His advise for being wise is clear: if we lack wisdom, we should ask God for it (Ja 1:5). An unsettled, undecided mind is not good. “A double-minded” (the Greek word is *diphsuchos* – literally, “two-souled” – used 2x in the NT) man is unstable in all his ways.” (Ja 1:8) James goes on to say “Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.” (Ja 4:8). James says, in essence, “**make up** your mind.”

II. Exhortations to be peaceful – I’m not questioning Will Rogers’ honesty, but his famous slogan (“I never met a man I didn’t like.”) does not seem true to life – at least nowadays. How peaceful things would be, though, if it **were** always the case! Believers are exhorted in four slightly different ways to be peaceful:

A. Follow peace – Peace is one thing Bible writers clearly exhort believers to “follow” (Greek *diōkō* – used 44x in the NT, meaning to pursue or run after, or [negatively] to persecute – to run after someone – so that person has to run away). “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. (Rom 14:19) Paul tells Timothy to “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2Ti 2:22) Similarly, “Follow peace with all men [all types of men] and holiness.” (Heb 12:14) Peter gives general principles too: “He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue [pursue / follow] it.” (1Pt 3:10-11) This includes guarding our words. You’ve heard the definition of a political war. It’s where everyone shoots from the lip!

B. Live in (be at) peace – The Greek verb *eirēneuō* (from *eirēnē* [from which we get the name Irene]) occurs four times in the NT. Jesus had told His disciples “Have peace one with another.” (Mk 9:50) Paul instructs those who are

trusting in Jesus for salvation: “Be of one mind, **live in peace**; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.” (2Co 13:11) “**Be at peace** among yourselves.” (1Th 5:13) “**Live peaceably**.” (Rom 12:18)

C. Keep unity – “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:1-3)

D. Be in peace – “Be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” (2Pt 3:14)

III. Emphasis on peacemaking – One of Paul’s exhortations to peacefulness includes some important qualifications. He says “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” (Rom 12:18)

A. The possibility – Paul correctly includes the idea that – at times – it’s not possible to be peaceful. The wording “if it be possible” (KJV – similarly, ASV, NIV, NKJV, and WEB) rendered literally is “if possible” (the one Greek word *dunatos* – from which we get “dynamic, dynamite, and dynamo”). It occurs 35 times in the New Testament and is translated as “able,” “mighty,” “possible,” and “power.” The word is used here to say that, if circumstances allow it, be peaceful.

B. The potentiality The words in the **KJV** (and also ASV, KJV, WEB) – namely, “as much as lieth in you” – reflects the literal Greek words for “out of [*ek*] you.” Peacefulness depends on inner strength, not just on circumstances.

(1) **With our natural personality** – God gave us all different personalities and different abilities.

(2) **With our supernatural ability** – Ultimately, our peacefulness depends on God’s strength working in us. You may have heard of the somewhat humorous definition of strength that says it’s the ability to break a chocolate bar into four pieces with your bare hands – and then eat just one of the pieces! God can enable believers to do what He desires.

C. The pattern (“live peaceably”) Many Bible translations (e.g., ESV, KJV, NASB, NET, NKJV, NIV, NLT, RSV, WEB) render the Greek as if it’s an imperative form of the verb – but it isn’t. It’s a present active participle – and so should be translated “being at peace” or “living peaceably” – as in the Darby Translation, LSB (Legacy Standard Bible), and YLT (Young’s Literal Translation). It grammatically continues the thought of verse 17 (“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”). In practice, it could involve one or both sides of being a peacemaker:

1. **Don’t disturb the peace** – Avoid provoking undue strife (don’t undo peace unnecessarily).

2. **Do make the peace** – Strive for peace – by being the calming element (do peace whenever possible).

D. The people (“with all men” – also in v 17)

1. **It can’t be just males.** The Greek word is *anthropos* (human being), not *anēr* (male, man, husband).

2. **It can’t be every human being.** None of us believers ever even contacts all humans.

3. **It means all TYPES of humans.** For example, when Ananias told Paul “Thou shalt be a witness for Him to all men” (Ac 22:15), he did not mean that Paul would testify for Christ to every person or every man alive. Also, when Paul says that before his conversion he was “punishing them [saints, believers] in all the synagogues (Ac 26:11), he did not mean that he had done this in every synagogue around the whole world (or even all around the Roman Empire).

IV. Examples of peacemaking

A. Marital disputes – Notice the four parts of Paul’s instruction for peacemaking in marriage – the departure, the allowance, the freedom, and the peace: “If the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.” (1Cor 7:15) Believers are to do their part in preserving marriage and peace.

B. Personal disputes – Paul also deals with believers’ disputes outside of the marriage bond.

1. **Philippians 4:1-2** – Two women in one local church couldn’t get along (and didn’t live up to their names. Euodias (meaning “prosperous journey”) & Syntyche (“pleasant acquaintance”) – whose names could be modified (according to their disagreement) to be Uodious and soon-touchy! They were contentious, not content, believers.

a. Paul beseeched them to “be of the same mind in Lord” (to somehow see things alike).

b. Paul beseeched a faithful companion or partner (Greek *susugos* – “yoke-fellow” – only here in the NT) in God’s work to help them get along. Perhaps the word is the name of a person who lived up to the meaning of his name

2. **1 Corinthians 6** – Believers were going to court against fellow-believers. Paul forbade it. Instead, he said, do one of two things:

a. Settle properly using **lowly** church judges (v. 4 – people in the church who might be considered despised (6x), set a naught (3x), least esteemed (1x) as judges) OR

b. Suffer personally wrong (be wronged or defrauded – v. 7)

C. Ministerial disputes – There were problems in early Church even among its leaders.

1. Different activities – reasonable, biblical solutions

a. Acts 6:1-7 – division of task

- 1) The problem – Greek believers' widows were being neglected (v. 1).
- 2) The solution – (vv. 2-6 – letting deacons rather than Apostles handle widows' business).
- 3) The result – Many were saved (including priests – v. 7).

b. Gal 2:6-10 – division of territory

- 1) The problem – Judaizers attacking gospel liberty (v. 4; Gal 1:6-8) must be stopped – and
- 2) The solution – Other leaders of the believers recognized that God had chosen different

gospel truth spread.

messengers to deliver the same gospel to different audiences (vv. 8,9) – different directions, not different doctrines. The genitive case in “The gospel of uncircumcision was committed unto me as of the circumcision unto Peter” (v. 7) has confused some believers.

(a) Not “from” (origin – a gospel begun by Jews and one begun by Gentiles)

(b) Not “for” (content / message – a different gospel for different audiences would

have been heresy – cf. Gal 1:6-9)

(c) But “to” (recipient – as proven by vv. 8 and 9) – the same gospel to different

groups

2. Duplicious actions (hypocrisy – Gal 2:11-16 – Paul withstood and rebuked Peter's hypocrisy.

a. Peter ate with Gentiles, then stopped because he feared the Jews (cf. Est 8:17: 9:2; Jn 7:13; 19:38;

20:19).

b. Peter (a Jew) lived like a Gentile (not a Jew) – yet compelled Gentiles to live as Jews.

V. Exceptions to peacemaking – Is it ever right to show (even shout) one's righteous indignation regarding what may be taking place? Is it ever **impossible** to be peaceful? Let's consider apparent exceptions to being peace-makers all the time.

A. Personal errors

1. Restoration – Instead of making a public (not really peaceful) scene, believers are to privately restore sinning saints: “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”

(Gal 6:1-2)

a. First, see the “fault” (translated “trespass” 9x, “offence” 7x, “sin” 3x, “fall” 2x, “fault” 2x – i.e.,

to fall, lapse, deviate) b. Then do something about it (“restore” the sinning saint).

2. Condemnation (“rebuke / reprove”)

a. Privately – “Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove.” (Eph 5:11)

b. Publicly – assuming private correction fails – “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” (1Ti 5:20 – The Greek verb for “rebuke” here [*elegchō*] means to confute, convict, or correct.)

B. Doctrinal errors

1. Mark (don't just ignore) – In the following verses Paul tells the Roman believers to mark those who are dividing believers contrary to the doctrine they have been taught. The Greek verb for “mark” here is *skopeō* (which means “to fix eyes or attention on”). “Now I beseech you, brethren, **mark** them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid** them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches they deceive the hearts of the simple.” (Rom 16:17-18)

2. Avoid – In the same passage (Rom 16:17) Paul gives another directive – the Greek verb *ekklinō* (“avoid, eschew, go out of the way – i.e., shun, turn away or aside”). That's a strong command – go out of the way to avoid! How different from the current tendency (for some, urgency) to want to get all Christian denominations and groups together!

3. Rebuke (Gr. *elegchō* – also “reprove”) **sharply** (*apotomōs* – “cut abruptly, curtly”) Paul uses *elegchō* three times within the space of seven verses (Tit 1:9,13,15). Notice his strong words to Titus: “There are **many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers**, specially they of the circumcision, **whose mouths must be stopped**, who subvert whole houses, **teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake....** Wherefore **rebuke them sharply**, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.”

Remember what Jesus told the Laodiceans (Rev 3:19 – “As many as I love, I rebuke.”). Shouldn't we do the same? What is a believer to do who sees error or evil in a fellow-believer? True love for the other believer – and for what's right and true – should help boldness overcome timidity, enabling one to confront and perhaps convince the sinning believer.

CONCLUSION

A. Positively peaceful and peacemakers – We are to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph 4:3)

B. NOT pricelessly peaceful – The peace is not at **any** price – but, instead, when possible as the situation allows.

C. Properly peaceful – Biblically, proper peacefulness does not tolerate evil and error.

D. Particularly peaceful – Biblical peacefulness is characterized as true, right, wise, and kind.

E. Purposefully peaceful – **Three main aims of peacefulness** should prevail – namely, adoration (glorification) of the Lord, demonstration (affirmation) of the Word, and maturation (edification) of the saints.