

Sermon Title: Purveyors of Peace

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 5:9 (Sermon on the Mount #8)

Date: 8-30-20

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This morning, we're going to return to our series in the Sermon on the Mount. I almost said something really silly like, "We're going to return to *normal*"—yeah, right! But at least, back to our normal pattern of working through a portion of Scripture.

We've been away from this for several weeks now, but we come back today, where we're devoting a message to each of the so-called "Beatitudes." "Beatitude" is just the Latin word for "blessing," and as you know, Jesus began this great master-sermon with a series of pronouncements of blessing on certain kinds of people who are the kinds of people who stand in His grace. He was giving, if you will, a precursor of a description of what a Christian is.

This sermon was delivered by Jesus on a day of tremendous significance. He had spent the entire night before this in prayer (Lk. 6:12); and then, first thing that morning, He had publicly named the Twelve Apostles (Lk. 6:13-16), distinguishing them from all the others that were following Him (see Acts 1:21-25; 2:42-43; Rom. 1:5; 1 Cor. 9:1; 12:28; 2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 2:20; 1 Thess. 2:6; 2 Pet. 3:2; Rev. 21:14). And then, this sermon was delivered a little later that same day.

The crowd was enormous. This was delivered at the height of Jesus's popularity during His ministry in Galilee. Though the Scripture doesn't exactly say it, as I've looked at the Gospels, I believe Jesus probably had announced in advance that something special was going to happen on this day—the announcement of the Twelve, and then this longest-recorded sermon of His in all of the Scriptures—all on that same day.

The crowds seeking out Jesus were huge (Lk. 6:17). The interest was at a fever pitch, but not everyone was happy about that. Especially the party called the Pharisees were fuming over Jesus's popularity (see Matt. 27:18; Jn. 11:47-48). They wanted to get rid of Him. They had already begun working with their arch-enemies, the Sadducees, to put together this plan to get Jesus killed, and they worked on it for over a year before it was actually God's timing, not theirs (Acts 2:23). There were many Pharisees present to hear this sermon; and as you will see when we get a little bit farther down the page in Chapter 5 of Matthew, this sermon was, by design, a frontal assault on the Pharisees' theology and their legalistic view of righteousness. Exposing the flaws of the system of the Pharisees begins with the Beatitudes.

To get you up to speed with what we've been doing here, I want to consider a couple of New Testament descriptions of a Christian. There are many; I'll just pick out two. One is Second Corinthians Chapter 5, Verse 17—"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." (NASB, and throughout, unless otherwise noted) The Pharisees taught that to know God began with this process that would start out with circumcision, and it would include all kinds of sacrifices and rituals and learning all of these things—and that's completely contrary to being "in Christ." Being "in Christ" is not a process of improving yourself until you achieve righteousness and forgiveness and salvation (Phil. 3:9); it's a miraculous transformation that makes you into "a new creature." It's so radical that Jesus called this being "born again" (Jn. 3:3, 7; cf. Ezek. 36:25-27).

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Peter reiterates that in First Peter 1:3, 23. It's also called "new life" (see Rom. 6:4; 8:2; Eph. 2:5), or "regeneration" (Titus 3:5). Nothing less than a work of God can accomplish a transformation like that (Deut. 30:6; Jn. 1:13; Jas. 1:18).

Let's look at another definition of a Christian. This one is from the beginning of the Book of Ephesians—Chapter 1, Verse 3. This is just the first little bit of a sentence that is 134 words long in Greek—the longest sentence in the Bible. But here's the head of it: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—that's where blessings come from; it's the innate blessedness of God, and He bequeaths it upon us—"who has blessed us with"—get a load of this—"every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." "Every spiritual blessing" is an *astounding* statement!

Let's review the Beatitudes that we've seen so far, and think of this—as they really are—as enumerating *some* of the "spiritual blessings," *some* of the things that are the characteristics of that "new creature" that you become in Christ (cf. Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 2:13). So follow along with me as I read to you the first several of the Beatitudes, starting at Verse 3 of Matthew Chapter 5—"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the gentle"—or, "meek"—"for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And then, for today, Verse 9—"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Those are *spectacular* blessings! How amazing! We get to be part of the Kingdom of God, we get to be comforted, we get to inherit the earth, we receive spiritual satisfaction, we receive mercy, we get to see God—*how incredible!*

In pronouncing these blessings on those who truly follow Him—put their faith in Him—Jesus is setting up what He is going to say in plain words a little bit farther down the page. I'm going to sneak you to the theme-statement of the Sermon on the Mount: Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 20, where Jesus says: "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Now, on that day, in that place, at that time, in that culture, if you asked anybody there: "Who is the most righteous person you know?" they would say, "Well, where's the nearest Pharisee?" They pronounced themselves righteous (Lk. 16:15). They were utterly confident that they had achieved a righteousness all on their own. How do we know that? Jesus said so. The system of the scribes and the Pharisees was that they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Lk. 18:9), and that begins the story about the Pharisee and the tax collector who went to the temple to pray; the Pharisee was so proud, and the tax collector was so humble.

When you compare what the Pharisees taught, believed, and acted like, compared to the Bible's description of true believers, it's quite a contrast. The scribes and the Pharisees were proud of their spiritual accomplishments; they loved to be addressed the right way (Matt. 23:5-7), and they loved to say their prayers on the street corners and make a big deal about their offerings (Matt. 6:1-6). But Jesus says true believers acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy.

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They believed they were righteous; they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous." Jesus said true believers mourn over their sin.

The Pharisees were dominant and judgmental. Jesus said His people are meek and gentle.

They were confident of their own accomplishments, and Jesus said the ones who follow Him are constantly hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

They were merciless in how they treated people. Jesus said: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."

They did all of this to cover up their impure hearts (Matt. 23:25-28), and Jesus said His people are made "pure in heart" (see Acts 15:9).

The very word "Pharisee" comes from a word that has to do with the horizon—marking off one line from another. They drew lines, they drew distinctions, they said who was in, they said who was out, and "It's our way or the highway," and they were divisive and cruel (Is. 65:5). And Jesus said: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

We're going to follow the same pattern. We have this Beatitude and then one more, the longest one—it might even take us two sessions; I'm not sure. We'll follow the same outline that we've been using for all the Beatitudes: Who Is Blessed? and, What Does The Blessing Include?

Very simple—just four words. Who Is Blessed? Matthew Chapter 5, Verse 9—"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

"Peacemakers" has a specific meaning. We're not talking about a political process or a political assembly of some kind that creates a system of peace. We're not talking about a military alliance. We're not talking about anything like what the United Nations might do. This describes people who have "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1, 10), and therefore they live in peace with one another (Mk. 9:50; Eph. 4:3)—and with "all men," if at all "possible" (Rom. 12:18), and they become the kind of people who help others to make peace wherever they go (2 Cor. 5:20).

As with every other Beatitude, this character of being a "peacemaker" is rooted, first and foremost, in what we have in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Let me point you to what we have said is the theme-passage for Heritage Bible Church. We started our pulpit ministry in Romans Chapter 5, Verses 1 and 2. Look carefully at this: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." That is worded very precisely, and you should make sure to understand that it is worded in such a way as to be crystal-clear, and the Greek could not be more clear than this: "justified by faith" comes *before* "we have peace with God." The *only way* to have "peace with God" is to be "justified."

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What does that mean? "Declared righteous," to have the righteousness that you are incapable of generating on your own (Ecc. 7:20)—the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ (Matt. 3:17)—"credited" to your account (Rom. 4:3-5), so that God looks at you and, instead of seeing you in your sin, He sees you wrapped in the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Is. 61:10; Phil. 3:9).

Now, with this Beatitude, as I've said with all of them: it describes not only the character of a disciple, it describes the goal of discipleship and the nature of practicing walking with Christ. I want to move to the "goal" part of this. I want you to see something very important, and often misunderstood, about what it means to be a "peacemaker," and about peace between people.

You're probably quite familiar with Romans 12, Verses 17 and 18; it's in a strongly practical exhortation section of Romans. It says this: "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." That's pretty direct! "Be at peace with all men." Now, there's also an understanding of fallen humanity there: "If *possible*, so far as it depends on *you*, be at peace with all men." You might say: God wants you to be a "peacemaker" (see Ps. 34:14; 120:7; Prov. 12:20; 20:3; Titus 3:2).

Or, skip ahead two chapters in Romans, to Chapter 14, Verses 17 through 19. Here is a context of things that people may differ upon—the so-called "adiaphora," or the "gray areas"—and how we treat each other when we have different convictions about things. Paul writes this: "For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking"—eating meat sacrificed to idols, or all those things he was talking about—"but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." So, "Blessed are the peacemakers"—oh, and by the way: we are *ordered* to be "peacemakers," because now we understand what it *means* to be at peace, because we have "peace with God" because we've been "justified by faith."

It's not difficult to understand the instruction: We are to be "peacemakers." But the question that we need to answer is: What are "the things which make for peace"? What kinds of things must I do in order to be known as a "peacemaker"?

Well, one of the most vivid descriptions of your salvation is that statement in Romans 5:1-2 that you now have "peace with God," so, how *you* came to have peace with God is the pattern that God has established—the pattern from which we should learn how to make peace. What did God do in order to make peace with you? Well, He sent His Son to die for your sins (see 1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Is. 59:2; Rom. 8:7-8; Col. 1:20; 1 Jn. 2:1). He addressed the issues of "righteousness" and "truth" (Ps. 85:10).

He initiated the process; we're told in Romans 5:10 that He did all this "while we were" His "enemies." It's a *very* one-sided thing! You might say: "If possible, so far as it depends on you..." It's *one hundred percent* your responsibility to be *trying* to make peace. Will it always happen? Not in *this* world. But He initiated the process.

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This "peace" that we're talking about is *not* merely the absence of hostility. God did not make peace with you by saying, "You know, I'm just going to tone down that 'wrath' thing. 'Judgment'—that sounds pretty harsh. 'Lake of fire'—I think I'll make it 'local hot-tub' instead." He didn't do anything like that (Nah. 1:3).

God's peace is *not* the *absence* of something. It is the *presence* of righteousness and truth (Is. 32:17; 1 Cor. 13:6). If you want to be a peacemaker, you must go about it by doing what God did to make peace with you. Now, that does *not* mean: get yourself over to Jerusalem and try to find somebody to crucify you. But, in principle, you do it by addressing the issue of sin. You pursue righteousness and forgiveness. You address the issues of lies, and you pursue the truth. Peace is *more* than stopping war. Peace is creating righteousness that brings former enemies together in love (Eph. 2:13-18).

This peace does not evade issues. It's not what people refer to as "peace at all costs," or, "peace at any price." It is peace that *conquers* problems, and actually *builds* relationships that become bridges through which people can come together. This peace is not just "cooling down" from anger.

Boy, do we have enough anger going on in our world these days? This current crisis about so-called "social justice" and so-called "racial reconciliation"? There's a *lot* of pent-up anger in there! And we have the answer! We have the *only* answer! It's not just changing the *structures*. If you take a situation in which some people are not treated fairly, and you turn that upside down—you still have a situation where some people aren't treated fairly! What you need to do is get a situation where people are treated fairly! *That* happens in Christ! *That's* the answer! Just changing the dial of who gets to beat up on whom doesn't accomplish it. The Gospel is the answer! Now, *getting* to this peace—that's the hard part! It's not necessarily easy; it's usually not without pain, but it's the only genuine peace which satisfied and lasts.

Over in James Chapter 3, a chapter about wisdom, there is embedded this wonderful little statement that we can pluck just for the nugget that it is. It's also great to see it in its context in the chapter. James 3:17 says this: "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable."

When we counsel someone who is in a conflict with someone else, and they want to make peace, this is the stumbling point to almost *every* situation that can't be reconciled: "Are you willing to be 'first pure'? Are you willing to bring *your* sin before God? Are you willing to be right as you stand before God, and to be His instrument?" And he might say, "But-but-but—*she* might not agree!" That doesn't matter! If you want "the wisdom from above," it starts with *your* purity—and *then* can come God's peace. "Justified by faith"—*then* "we have peace with God."

You cannot make God's peace between two parties until they have seen the sin, seen the error and the wrongness of the bitterness and the hatred, and they've been willing to deal with their own hearts. Only in bringing it to God can it be made right. Peace begins with purity (cf. Is. 48:22).

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Now, if I don't say the next thing I'm going to say, you might make it halfway to your car and say, "Oh, wait a minute! What about that passage over in Matthew?" Alright—let's look at that passage over in Matthew—Chapter 10, Verses 34 to 37. Let's put this alongside something else that Jesus said. "Blessed are the peacemakers! Be a peacemaker! That's what I want you to do!" But, *look at this*—Matthew 10:34-37. Jesus—the same guy who said "Blessed are the peacemakers"—says: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth..." What do You mean, Jesus? Every decent Christmas carol we have talks about You being the "Prince of Peace" and bringing "peace on Earth"! Well, He goes on to say: "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to"—and here comes a quote from Micah 7:6—"I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me."

Now, you might read that and say, "Wow! I'm more spiritual than I thought! Did you see our house last Thanksgiving? My in-laws can't stand me! I must be *really spiritual!*" That's not *exactly* the right application of that. But this is another side of the same coin. How do you have "peace with God"? By being "justified by faith." How do you get "justified by faith"? You put your faith where it belongs. Your faith in what? Your faith in "Christ" who "died for" your "sins" (1 Cor. 15:3) and took "the wrath of God" on your behalf (Rom. 5:9; cf. Is. 53:5, 8, 10). That is how you get "the peace of God." *You won't have godly peace with anybody else who won't accept that standard of peace!* (Lk. 10:6)

What Jesus means is that His peace is peace rooted in righteousness and purity. That's why I say: often, there may be strife before there can be peace, because problems have to be *faced*, and there has to be a genuine reconciliation. And those who are unwilling to face their sin, unwilling to face their own problems—that will cause them to resist God's peace, and it will cause them to be *severely* irritated with God's *peacemakers*, because if they "hated Me," says Jesus, they'll "hate you," too (Jn. 15:18; cf. Prov. 29:27b). And by the way, if you didn't know this: that can even cause a rift in a family! That's what He's saying. It gets right down to the ones you love the most! And sometimes it erupts *most spectacularly* with those you love the most!

You see, when you deal with *truth*, it will cause division with all the people who *don't want truth* (cf. Jn. 8:44). If you deal with truth, you disturb some people, and you disrupt their sense of balance, and your righteousness may all the more expose the blackness of their hearts (1 Pet. 4:4; 1 Jn. 3:12-13).

Now, let's massage this just a little bit further. I'd also like you to think about the difference between being a "peacemaker" and being a "peacekeeper." I'm toying with English words here, but I think there are some things here to help you understand. A "peacekeeper" is someone who wants to end conflict, or avoid conflict. A "peacemaker" goes after righteousness and truth (Jas. 3:18). There are people in the world who are pretty good at not getting into fights—verbal or physical or emotional; they try to end all conflict as soon as possible, by all means available. They're very good at *burying* things.

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Peacekeepers love to smooth things over; they love to make awkwardness pass as quickly as possible, by "changing the subject"—and there *are* times when it's just decency, that you might want to do something like that. But that kind of peacekeeper hates conflict so passionately, they would rather end up living with bitterness and frustration than working out an actual problem, and solving it for the glory of God.

Now, there are *other* peacekeepers who use their position—and they are unilateral exercisers of authority and strength—and they use it to prevent or to squelch conflict. What do we call it when the United Nations sends troops into a warzone? We call that a "Peacekeeping Force." Do you know how they keep peace? It's a very simple principle: "My guns are bigger and better and more numerous than your guns; and if you hurt someone on my side, I'm going to hurt you *more*, and I'm going to hurt you *faster*." That's "peacekeeping," in one sense of it. It *does* slow down war, but it doesn't have a *shred of anything* to do with the kind of peace that we're talking about in this Beatitude.

And then there are other peacekeepers who become really adept at the art of compromise. Now, there *are* times to compromise; if you've ever bartered with somebody for the price of something, that's compromising. But the idea of "compromising" is: you give up something, and I'll give up something; when we're satisfied that we've each given up an equal amount, or we've each hurt each other the same amount, and we've both gotten something we want in order to save face, then we'll stop hurting each other, and we'll call that "peace." Is that how God did it with you? "I'll meet you halfway. I'll give a little; you'll give a little." No! He took it all on Himself (Heb. 10:141 Jn. 1:7).

The peace that God gives *does not compromise* when it comes to the truth! What Jesus had in mind when He said, "I came to bring a sword, and to make enemies of people," He was saying: "You can't compromise on the truth!" If so-called peacemaking requires you to not tell the truth, and not deal with its consequences, then you're not really being a godly peacemaker.

So, what *is* a true peacemaker? A true peacemaker pursues the truth; he or she seeks genuine understanding of all the facts, *and* takes into account the feelings that are involved in the conflict. Peacemakers talk about—and provoke others to talk about—the *real* issues, until the issues are *resolved* instead of buried.

If you are a peacemaker, you deal with *facts*, regardless of your feelings. You'll *have* feelings, but you need to deal with the truth, the reality, the sin, the righteousness, the judgment involved. You'll say things like, "What do *you* think needs to be done?"—so you're taking into account the other person's feelings and perspective. You won't say things like, "Well, I suppose you have a *stupid* idea how we might solve this!" You'll say things like, "I feel uneasy when you do that, or when this happens between us; so I wonder if we could handle situations like this differently"—instead of: "You never care what I think, you selfish pig!" What's going to be your attitude? Do you *want* God's peace, or do you want to *win*? We want *God* to win.

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If you're a peacemaker, you will not make other people dangle on the end of your emotional rope, twisting in the wind until you think they've paid enough for you to cut them loose. When there's something wrong, a peacemaker addresses it; a peacemaker doesn't call it "nothing," and then go sulk and pull away and withdraw—that's a *devastating* thing that we all know how to do, by nature. "You hurt my feelings, so I'm not going to talk to you." When our son was about three years old, he did something that required some firm words; nothing wrong was done, but Marsha spoke the truth in love. He looked up at her, and he did it *perfectly*: a little tear in his eye, and that really sweet voice, and he said, "Mom, you hurt *all* my feelings!"

We all know how to deal that way, right? Think of a man who has been through an *excruciating* day—full of frustration, relentless annoyances, temptations and pressure to compromise; and they've wound him up tighter than a baseball; and he comes home to his wife, who says, "How was your day, Dear?" A typical response is to say something deep and meaningful, like, "Oh, the usual," and then clam up. And later that evening, his wife reaps the fringe benefits of his emotional turmoil. She feels rejected, and she feels shut out of his life, so *she* assumes that *he* thinks that she's done something wrong; and now, you have a *new* conflict. And if we're not careful, that kind of stuff can *systematically* make people feel alienated and distant from us. When somebody won't talk to you, you assume they're mad, right? Well, you won't know otherwise, unless they talk. That works the most, even in the ones closest to us—the ones we care about the most.

On the other hand, there are some people who reserve that isolation kind of behavior for times of conflict. Feelings are hurt; somebody doesn't speak for a while, so the other one says, "Is something wrong?" From the perspective of the wounded one, something *is* wrong—something's *desperately* wrong. But he or she answers: "No." You press a little more to find out what's wrong, and what you hear is that famous word: "Nothing." Every single time that we play out a scenario like that, we put *real* peace further out of reach, because we hide it behind layers of emotional garbage.

I said we have to deal with truth, regardless of our feelings. Now, you can't deal with human conflict without *having* feelings—but you need to deal with them through "truth" spoken "in love" (Eph. 4:15). It *is* possible to bury your feelings, and you can achieve a semblance of peace; there are some who have called it "compartmentalizing." I mean, you don't want a soldier worrying about something back home; you want him focused on the task right now, and not worrying about other things. But in real life, when you bury your feelings, it's like burying your garbage in your backyard instead of disposing of it properly. It works for a while. You can go out in the backyard, dig a little hole, put the garbage in it, cover it back up; you can even put the turf back over it, and in a few days, it'll look just the same. But eventually, if you keep burying that garbage, it's someday going to work its way to the surface—just give it a couple inches of rain. And when it surfaces, it's going to be in a form *much uglier* than when you first buried it. Emotions are like that. When emotions are buried instead of processed and resolved, they surface in an *uglier form* than we originally refused to deal with. And when they come back to the surface, they usually get spewed all over people, even people who had little or nothing to do with the original issues.

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Be a peacemaker! The answer is always rooted in truth and purity, and humility to apply those things. Jesus blesses that kind of character, but *wow*—get a load of the promise that is attached to being the kind of person who is a peacemaker! Who Is Blessed? "Blessed are the peacemakers." What Does The Blessing Include? Look at the second part of the verse: "for they shall be called sons of God." It's the same thing that you've seen with all of the Beatitudes: the pronoun "they" is emphatic. It means: "they *and they alone*!" This is the *only* kind of person that is "a son of God" in this situation—not like Jesus being God the Son; we're not talking about deity here, but we're talking about adopted children in the family of God (see Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). This is the kind of person who is "a new creation" (Gal. 6:15; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:10). This is the kind of person who is "blessed...with every spiritual blessing," including the blessing of being a peacemaker.

The word here for "sons" that Jesus chose is the word for sonship that implies the "legal" status of the son. There is another word for "son" in the sense of "born of," or it can be "child of." That one is also used in the sense of the new birth that is required for you to be "born...of God" (Jn. 1:13). But this one means that we have all the privileges of sonship, *including* the rights to inherit what our Father has for us (Lk. 12:32; 1 Pet. 1:4). Remember: "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall *inherit* the earth"—Why? Because they're the adopted children of the King of the Earth! We have it over in Romans Chapter 8, Verses 16 and 17—"The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him."

There is a common denominator to the application of all of these different Beatitudes. It has to do with the fact that you have to stop seeing things through the eyes of your own feelings, your own will, your own comfort, your own affluence, your own ease, your own pleasure. You have to start focusing your attention on God and what He desires of you, instead of what fulfills your immediate desires (Matt. 16:23; Col. 3:2).

Do you want to be a peacemaker? Look at situations as God looks at them. Ask things like: What is true? or, What truth needs to be applied to this situation? What would be righteous? What would be the thing here that we could do that would demonstrate the justice of God, the righteousness of God? What would be honest? What, in this situation, does purity demand of me? And then you humbly pursue those things with all the grace and kindness you can muster, by God's goodness—and watch God use you to make peace (Prov. 25:4; 2 Tim. 2:21).

I want to wrap this up with one more way to look at all of this; it's over in Philipians Chapter 4. By the way: in the Book of Acts, Chapter 26, where Luke records what Paul said to King Agrippa, understand that when Paul said that, he was in the midst of *quite the conflict*; people were pledging to make sure that he was killed—there was a little bit of difference of opinion there about things. He had already been in jail for *two years*, and he still has to make it all the way across the Mediterranean Sea as a prisoner, and then *two more years* in prison in Rome; then he'll be set free for a little while, and then he's going to be re-imprisoned—and *that* time, he's going to be *martyred*.

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This guy understood conflict. And you know what? That's the same guy who penned these words, during that first Roman imprisonment, near the end of it: Philippians Chapter 4, Verses 8 and 9—"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and"—get a load of this—"the God of peace will be with you."

Do you want to be God's peacemaker? How do you *cultivate* that kind of thing? Well, "dwell on" certain things; focus your thoughts on them, concentrate on them, read about them, build up the patterns in your life for "whatever is true...honorable...right...pure...lovely...of good repute...worthy of praise..." And then he goes on to say: 'Oh, by the way: and *practice* these things." Follow my example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). Pick out somebody who is down the road further than you are, and practice doing things that demonstrate that kind of inner attitude (Phil. 3:17).

And what's the promise? "The God of peace will be with you." (cf. Is. 26:3) That's a lot like saying: "Blessed are the peacemakers"—the ones who concentrate on true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, etc. "The God of peace will be with you" in *all* of those thoughts, and in *all* of those pursuits. Why, you *might* even say that Jesus is calling us to be "Purveyors of Peace," because He uses us to bring people to have peace with Him (2 Cor. 5:20), and then *live it out* in our relationships.

Let's pray:

*Father, how we thank You that we can truly say that, because we have been "justified by faith," we have "peace" with You. Have Your way with us to use us to be peacemakers. Thank You for Your promise that, as "the God of Peace," You will be with us as we pursue these things. Father, remind us that sometimes, speaking truth is perceived as drawing a sword. Some will hate us because they hated Your Son; but always, the message is the same. Give us the message of peace. Make us people of peace. Make us people of purity and truth and lifting up the right things, so that we can say to others who come behind us: "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things." Dear God of Peace, thank You for making peace with us through Your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.*