



THE THEOLOGY OF PEACEMAKING



MATTHEW 5:9
— FELLOWSHIP —

A Theology of Peacemaking

Our theology directly impacts our understanding of God's mission in this world and our role in it. Many Christians struggle to prioritize peacemaking because they lack a theological framework. They may believe that the work of peacemaking is a peripheral activity, but we believe that it is central to the Christian gospel. The Theology of Peacemaking explores what biblical peacemaking is and why it should matter to all who claim to be followers of Jesus.

Peacemaking is central to the character of God and of his people.

Throughout the Scriptures, God is often characterized as the “God of peace” or “the Lord of peace.”

God also describes himself as a giver of peace. In the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24-26, God says of himself, “the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” David writes in Psalm 29:11, “May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!” Additionally, God repeatedly describes the special relationship with his people as a “covenant of peace.” The God of the Bible longs to make peace with his people.

But what does it mean to make peace? Some may assert that peace is simply the absence of conflict, but the Hebrew word *shalom* (which we often translate as “peace”) is much more multifaceted.

What Does It Mean to Make Peace?

Job describes his tent as being at peace (*shalom*) when he counts his sheep and finds none missing. After Solomon completed the building of the Lord's temple, the sentence “he finished the house” is literally “he *shalom-ed* the house.” What does it mean for a tent to be at peace or for a temple to be at peace?

Shalom in the Bible isn't conflict avoidance—*shalom* connotes wholeness. In his book *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, Cornelius Plantinga writes, “In the Bible, *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully

employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights. *Shalom*, in other words, is the way things ought to be.”

When God designed humanity, he intended for us to experience true *shalom*—a remarkable state of flourishing and wholeness. This *shalom* ideal was momentarily experienced in the Garden of Eden, in which all things were the way they ought to be. Unfortunately, when the Garden of Eden was lost, so was true peace. Isaiah proclaims of the wicked in Isaiah 59:8, “The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.”

Since then, the world has searched in vain for true biblical peace. But throughout the Old Testament, God prophesied that one day he would bring about a new era of peace, in which people lived in abundance, settled disputes, saw wars end and fear gone. Notably, this era would be ushered in by the Prince of Peace himself.

Self-Reflection Questions

How does the biblical concept of shalom differ from some ways the world at large defines peace?

What are some positive ways that the world has sought peace? And why do these ultimately fall short of lasting peace?

What Does It Mean That Jesus Is the Prince of Peace?

When Jesus Christ was born, angels appeared to shepherds and proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” Jesus was this prophesied Prince of Peace who would usher in the restored Eden. Ironically, however, the bringer of peace would be a victim of violence himself. Jesus Christ was betrayed, convicted in a sham of a trial, and crucified between thieves.

But in a grand twist of history, his death by violence brought about a new way of peace for the world. The apostle Paul writes that Jesus Christ “[made] peace by the blood of his cross.”

There are two dimensions of this peace. Firstly, because of Jesus’ death, we now have peace with God. Paul writes, “Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Similarly, Isaiah writes, “[Jesus] was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds, we are healed.” The death of Jesus on our behalf has atoned for our sins before God, and we are now enabled to experience an Edenic relationship with him.

Secondly, because of Jesus Christ’s death, we now have peace with humankind. Paul writes about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.” The God of the Bible is in the business of breaking down walls between himself and humankind and breaking down the divisions between humans and other humans.

Self-Reflection Questions

Why is it important for followers of Jesus to focus on both dimensions of peace?



How might somebody who is the victim of violence find solace in the story of Jesus Christ?

What are the sources of division in your congregations or communities?

What Does Peace Have to Do with the Gospel?

The ideal of peace displayed in the Garden of Eden and foreshadowed in the Old Testament has been restored by Jesus Christ. However, it will not yet be fully realized until the coming kingdom. In the meantime, then, what do we do? We, the Church, live out the values of heaven here on earth.

In his book *Practice Resurrection*, Eugene Peterson describes the church as “a colony of heaven in the country of death.” As followers of Jesus Christ, we are not to passively wait for God to bring us home, but rather, we are to be Christ’s ambassadors during our time on earth, seeking to fulfill God’s incredible vision of a people living in a covenant of peace with him and with one another.

Therefore, throughout the epistles, we are encouraged to be peacemakers. We are instructed to “pursue what makes for peace,” to “live in peace,” and to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” We keep this peace within our ranks, but we are also called to share with those around us. The biblical authors write much about “preaching peace” to all; everyone who has been reconciled to God has now been given the ministry of reconciliation. Emphatically, we are to “strive for peace with everyone.” After all, as James writes, “a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

A heart of peacemaking is not just a practical strategy to communicate the gospel – peacemaking is a central part of the gospel. The Church and followers of Jesus Christ are uniquely distinguished by our God-given ability to make peace. As Jesus declared in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

Through the Matthew 5:9 Fellowship, we seek to equip Christian leaders to be peacemakers in their communities. In today’s toxically polarized context, may we live out the peacemaking character of God, faithfully representing the Prince of Peace.

Self-Reflection Questions

What specific steps can you take in your congregations or communities to be a peacemaker?

Additional Reference Bible Verses:

Paragraph 1: Romans 15:33; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Philippians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:16; Hebrews 13:20

Paragraph 2: Numbers 25:12; Isaiah 54:10; Ezekiel 34:25; Ezekiel 37:26

Paragraph 4: Job 5:24, 1 Kings 9:25

Paragraph 7: Zechariah 8:12; Micah 4:3-4, Isaiah 9:6-7

Paragraph 8: Luke 2:14

Paragraph 9: Colossians 1:19-20

Paragraph 10: Romans 5:1, Isaiah 53:5

Paragraph 11: Ephesians 2:14-15

Paragraph 14: Romans 14:19, 2 Corinthians 13:11, Ephesians 4:3, Acts 10:36; Ephesians. 2:17, 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, Hebrews 12:14, James 3:18

Advanced Reading:

Peterson, E. H. (2010). *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation on Growing up in Christ*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Plantinga, C. (1999). *Not the way it's supposed to be: A breviary of sin*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.