

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at the subject of peace.

I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter. The primary criteria for inclusion are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

Also, if you have any Gospel subjects that you would like me to cover in the Newsletter, please let me know.

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John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

Matthew 5:11 And blessed are all the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.

In contrast to the prophecies concerning the latter days when there should be “wars and rumors of wars” there is the promise of something greater: peace. For the greater part of our history, both as a nation and globally over the last several thousand years there have been very few years of what might be considered to be “peaceful” times. War and violence have left their mark on both us and the world around us. The times of peace have also left their mark, leaving us wanting more of it.

What is peace? Is it simply defined as a lack of war or fighting? It would be tragic if we could only define this word because of its antonym – a word having an opposite meaning. If peace were just the lack of war or fighting, it would suggest we desire something that is just not something else.

Peace, if defined as simply a lack of active fighting, would mean that much of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1950's-1990's was “officially” peaceful even if there were ongoing proxy wars between the two. But that seems hardly adequate to describe what most of us consider to be “peaceful.” It is sometimes called a

“hot peace” because there was a lot of anger and animosity between the two. That is, after all, the reason it was called a “cold war.” But peace must be more than this, much more.

What Jesus told the disciples is about a different kind of peace, where there is neither animosity nor anger, and yet it is even more than that.

One can perhaps be in a state where he is not angry with his neighbor, but still not be at peace with him either. That is a state of agreement without benevolence. To be at peace with your neighbor, or with another country, means not only being agreeable to one another, but to be understanding and good-willed towards them also.

Jesus encouraged – and encourages – his followers to be peaceful not just to one another, but to our enemies.

Matthew 5:46 But I say unto you, **Love your enemies; bless them** that curse you; **do good to them** that hate you; and **pray for them** which despitefully use you and persecute you;

Matthew 5:27 **Agree** with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him, lest at any time thine adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

When you think about it, it is really hard to have animosity towards someone that keeps blessing you and doing good things for you and speaking kindly to you. The idea is that it provokes you to emulation, even if it is out of a sense of shame. In the world of animal training you might think of it as rewarding good behavior, but for humans it should be more than just operational conditioning – we are, after all, supposed to be more intellectually and spiritually capable than animals.

You might be tempted to think that peace means having a mutual respect for one another, but I’m not sure that definition really applies to our relationship with God. While certainly we should respect God, but does God need to respect us? We are his creation; we have nothing to be considered an advantage in this relationship. He has nothing he needs to respect us for since all we have is what he has given to us.

The one thing we can receive respect for is our decisions. For this we go way back to the beginning.

Genesis 5 (Inspired Version); Genesis 4:3-5 (King James Version, partial)

6 And Cain loved Satan more than God. And Satan commanded him, saying, Make an offering unto the Lord. And in process of time, it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

7 And Abel, he also brought, of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof; **and the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering**; but **unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect**.

In this case we see that God had respect to Abel but not to Cain, and it was not on account of something Abel had that Cain did not, but because Abel wanted to please the Lord and Cain did not.

Abel's relationship with God involved mutual respect, but that is perhaps a conditional use of the term "mutual." The term "respect" in this passage might equally be replaced by the corresponding phrase "God accepted Abel" because of Abel's willingness keep this kind of peaceful relationship with God. He "went out of his way" to do what God wanted him to because of his love for God.

The reward of having peace with our neighbor, or with other nations, etc., is not just motivated by a desire to accept the lifestyles, cultures, or practices of them and make them our own. If it were so we would quickly lose our own identity and uniqueness. It would mean that the things we love – the people we love – are less important than the things that our enemies might love. So mutual acceptance cannot be the answer to what makes peace work. It must be based on a standard of peace and not just the contractual and mutually beneficial agreements that we can have with one another.

If we think about being at peace with God, it would be unthinkable to believe that it is only possible because he adopts our beliefs or cultures or practices. He is our creator; there is nothing we have that would benefit him in any material or spiritual way except his joy in having a creation that faithfully worships him.

Instead, we can be at peace with God only because he has set the terms for that peace and we agree to them and faithfully abide by them. (i.e., we have nothing to bargain with.) But what a peace that is!

I often think of how Mormon and Moroni, the last prophets and writers in the Book of Mormon, must have lived their lives. On the one hand they wrote some of the most beautiful literature and commentary on the spiritual elements of life, but they lived in a nation which, during their lifetime, suffered the most devastating civil war they had ever endured up to that time. Their own people committing atrocities that were worse than those of their enemies. These two men retained a peaceful relationship with God while they were in the midst of horrendous warfare as a nation.

That should say something about the kind of peace that Christ can give us. A peace that is given and not merely mutually agreed upon. That brings us back to our opening verse of scripture, "my peace ***I give unto you***; not as the world giveth give I unto you." Peace with

God is not something we can give to him, but what he gives to us. It is a spiritual gift that he can impart to us.

The idea that peacemakers will be called the children of God is not particularly new to the New Testament. We find this admonition in that old, war-filled Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 20

10 When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, then **proclaim peace unto it**.

11 And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace and open unto thee, then it shall be that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee.

12 And if it will make no peace with thee but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it.

This passage might seem rather inconsiderate to the people of these other cities or lands, but one must ask what kind of **peace** they were to “**proclaim unto it**” that would make them want to become “**tributaries unto thee**” and to want to “**serve thee**”?

This seems like a rather hostile form of peace – “Make peace with us or we’ll destroy you and take everything you own!”

There is actually a point to what some might call “this madness” – and it serves a bigger picture than just the relationship between Israel and its neighbors. Who were these “cities” that they should “proclaim peace unto it”? It’s explained a few verses later –

Deuteronomy 20

15 Thus shalt thou do unto all the cities which are very far off from thee, which are not of the cities of these nations.

16 But of the cities of these people, which the Lord, thy God, doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth;

17 But thou shalt utterly destroy them: namely, **the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites** as the Lord, thy God, hath commanded thee,

18 **That they teach you not to do after all their abominations, which they have done unto their gods**; so should ye sin against the Lord, your God.

19 When thou shalt besiege a city a long time in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them; for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege;

20 Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy and cut them down; and thou shalt build bulwarks against the city that maketh war with thee until it be subdued.

When you think about who these groups of people were, you have to realize that this was not just a matter of national peace between two governments, but the larger picture of salvation. God used Israel to perform judgments against the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. All of these worshipped other gods and had abominable practices, which were things God found unacceptable.

The peace Israel declared to these nations was not just a desire for those nations to not fight against them, but that those nations might repent of their sins against God and adopt the doctrines of the true and living God. There could be no other kind of peace between Israel and their neighbors because their beliefs were in complete and mutual contradiction to one another. Israel was to declare a peace which involved the commandments of God and of repentance for their false beliefs. In this way peace is established by willingly vanquishing the differences of belief into a single true belief.

But, some might say, is that not the same problem facing the world today by Islamic leaders? They publish the idea that the world would be more peaceful if everyone were just Islamic instead of Christian or Jewish. There is a very qualitative difference though. If you discount that Islam worships a different god which they call Allah (named after a moon god), and discount the particular doctrinal “things” that people like to quote from the Quran, there is the underlying problem that the most strictly Islamic nations on earth have the most brutal forms of punishment, lack of civil rights, and controlling fascist dictatorships that you can find today. The highest percentage Islamic countries in the world are the source of the largest groups of terrorist organizations today, and they tend towards violence against their own groups of believers.

“By far the vast majority of victims of terrorist attacks over the past 15 years has been Muslims killed by Muslims. In the latest instance, an Islamic State suicide bomber struck a Kurdish wedding in southeastern Turkey on Saturday, killing more than 50 people.” – Voice of America News – (<https://www.voanews.com/a/most-terrorism-victims-are-in-muslim-majority-countries/3478905.html>)

Those who pay attention will realize that “Christianity” has faced similar problems in modern times as well as in the past, but is that really an accurate view of things? Even this passage in Deuteronomy which we have covered tends to suggest a similar thing...to a certain group of people. The war in Bosnia/Hercegovina/Croatia involved a genocide which was perpetuated by those calling themselves “Christians,” but by virtue of the crimes they committed they could not be considered Christians in any practical sense. Muslims claim the same for their beliefs as well.

The apostle James seemingly adds fuel to the fire with what at the first glance, is a contradiction to all that has been discussed about peace:

James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Is James suggesting that we should not have peace with other nations or with one another? God forbid – rather, he seems quite adamant that the saints should not become partakers of the sins of the world. Let it not be forgotten that the same Jesus who called the peacemakers “children of God” also sent out the apostles to preach:

Mark 16

14 And he said unto them, **Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.**

15 **He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.**

16 And these signs shall follow them that believe:

17 In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them;

19 They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

This is what he instructed his apostles to do: go, preach, baptize. It says nothing about bringing condemnation upon anyone, nor that they should curse anyone, nor that they should bring any evil upon anyone. Any condemnation would be handled by God.

This “enmity” of which James wrote is about friendship with the world, versus friendship with God. “Friendship with the world” in this context is not about being at peace, but about being a participant in the beliefs and doctrines of those who have refused the Gospel of Christ. The “world” he refers to are unbelievers.

John 15

14 **Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.**

15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

16 Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.

17 These things I command you, that ye love one another.

18 **If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.**

19 **If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hateth you.**

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake because they know not him that sent me.

Jesus clearly differentiates how this friendship with God is contrasted with friendship with the world. This shows us that the world it refers to are those who are unbelievers. And yet, despite this, he clearly commanded early on, “**Love your enemies; bless them** that curse you; **do good to them** that hate you; and **pray for them** which despitefully use you and persecute you.”

Paul expounds on this as well:

Romans 12

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 **If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.**

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

We note here that Paul did not say it would always be possible to live peaceably with all men, but that “**if** it be possible...” that we should “live peaceably with all men.” His point here is that we should leave no excuses that could be levied against us for not doing our best. This is not what happened in Bosnia, and it is certainly not what happened in Rwanda or other places where genocides took place. There were seemingly no efforts made to live peaceably.

In these passages we find that it is perhaps the goal of these things to make our enemies a friend of God, and then we will also be friends with them. This is a lasting kind of peace, one that enables us to face challenges in the future. If the only thing we do is to attempt to be at peace with our enemies, we would find that it would do them no service to God. We should – as those with the greater responsibility – seek for their peace with God. Isn’t that what the four sons of Mosiah did when they went to the Lamanites?

Mosiah 12

1 Now it came to pass that after the sons of Mosiah had done all these things, they took a small number with them, and returned to their father, the king, and desired of him that he would grant unto them that they might, with those whom they had selected, go up to the land of Nephi,

2 That they might preach the things which they had heard, and that they might impart the word of God to their brethren, the Lamanites, **that perhaps they might bring them to the knowledge of the Lord, their God, and convince them of the iniquity of their fathers;**

3 And that perhaps they might cure them of their hatred towards the Nephites, that they might also be brought to rejoice in the Lord, their God,

4 That they might become friendly to one another, and that there should be no more contentions in all the land which the Lord, their God, had given them.

5 Now they were desirous that salvation should be declared to every creature, for they could not bear that any human soul should perish;

6 Yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment did cause them to quake and tremble.

7 And thus did the Spirit of the Lord work upon them, for they were the very vilest of sinners.

By the work they did, which was based upon the most pure of intentions for the work of the Lord among the Lamanites, the Lord prospered them and they accomplished what they set out to do. This is the work of the Gospel of Christ: it brought them to peace with God, and then it brought them to peace with the Nephites. Had it been a peace that worked the other way – peace towards men and then peace towards God, it might very well have failed. In doing things this way the Lamanites who were converted became friends with God, which is the far more important task.

But perhaps the idea of peace is a little more than just being amicable with one another. Jesus **gave** peace to his disciples, as found in John 14:27 at the beginning of this article. It was a gift, a spiritual gift, but what is the nature of that gift?

Thus far I've discussed things like establishing peace and having peace but haven't really discussed the nature of it. We often think about peaceful times as being times when we were content with life and the conditions of life, and perhaps that is not far from what the peace is that Christ gave his disciples. Perhaps you conjure in your mind the image of sitting on a pier overlooking a lake with a fishing pole in your hand on a lazy summer day. Is that peace?

Jesus apparently had something very contented in mind when he spoke words of kindness to people, sharing how the Lord loved them and would bring them the Comforter, which would teach them the peaceable things of the kingdom:

Doctrine and Covenants 39 (RLDS)

2a And verily, verily, I say unto thee, He that receiveth my gospel receiveth me; and he that receiveth not my gospel receiveth not me.

2b And this is my gospel: repentance and baptism by water; and then cometh the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost, even **the Comforter**, which showeth all things **and teacheth the peaceable things of the kingdom.**

Doctrine and Covenants 42 (RLDS)

17a If thou shalt ask, thou shalt receive revelation upon revelation, knowledge upon knowledge, that thou mayest know the mysteries and **peaceable things-that which bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.**

Here we seem to find the definition that “***peaceable things***” are those things that “***bringeth joy, that which bringeth life eternal.***”

This seems to be more than just getting along with people and not being at war. It is elementary to having both joy and life eternal. That is a very much more spiritual form of peace than what we experience in today’s world, and I have to believe that this is what Jesus meant when told his followers that he “***gave***” them his peace. ***His*** peace.

It is this peace with God that gives men the ability to endure in hope and with faith through the struggles they might face in this world. It is a peace which is not drawn on a map or confined to national boundaries. It is a peace that must endure forever if we carefully maintain it. It is that peace which Joseph Smith, Jr., had when he surrendered himself to the authorities for an unjust accusation, saying simply,

“I am going like a lamb to the slaughter,” he told them, “**but I am calm as a summer’s morning.** I have a conscience void of offense towards God and towards all men.”

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/saints-v1/44-a-lamb-to-the-slaughter?lang=eng>

This is not all that different from what we find in the life of Stephen:

Acts 7

55 But he, **being full of the Holy Ghost**, looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus, standing on the right hand of God,

56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,

58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

59 And they stoned Stephen; **and he, calling upon God, said, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.**

60 And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, **Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.** And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

This is the action of the Comforter – the Holy Ghost, and it demonstrates for us that they had this peace in their heart and spirit given to them, enabling them to endure all things

even to the end. This function of the Holy Ghost is the ultimate expression of trust and love that lets us begin to see just what it might be like in eternity. To have the Comforter with us in all things is indeed a worthy kind of peace to seek after for both us and our enemies, and it may just be that they will find it along with us if we do the things Jesus commanded us to do.