

**PEACE**



**Shalom**

by:

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# PEACE

One of the many titles ascribed to our Lord is "**Prince of Peace.**" Upon his birth in Bethlehem a heavenly host declared,

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" (Luke 2:14) NRSV.*

Throughout the earthly ministry of Christ he proclaimed the message of peace. This peace was a **peace of wholeness**: peace of mind, peace of heart and life, peace *with* God and the peace *of* God. **See – John 14:27; Philippians 4:7; Romans 5:1; Colossians 3:15.**

Preachers often focus on the concept of peace: personal peace, peace in our relationships, in our families, in our churches, in our nation and peace in our world . . . ***but is peace possible?***

In his **Sermon on the Mount** our Lord issued this exhortation:

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)*

- ***But what happened?***
- ***Why is there so little peace in our homes, within our own hearts and minds, in our churches, in our nation and throughout the world?***

The Church has been around for two-thousand years, yet **this biblical concept** of peace appears to be beyond our reach.

*What can we do as followers of Christ to help make peace happen in our own lives, in our churches and in our world?*

## Two Major Views in the Church

History reveals that in the earliest days of Christianity Christians were **pacifists**. This

caused them considerable difficulty living in the Roman Empire. **Refusing** to serve the Emperor caused Christians to suffer persecution which led many to their death. As followers of Christ **they refused** to declare Caesar their '**lord**' and refused to serve in the military. To these Christians there was but **one Lord** and his name was **Jesus**. Throughout the Empire Christians boldly declared: "**Jesus alone and only is Lord!**" **See – Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 8:6; Eph. 4:5; Phil. 2:11; Rev. 17:14.**

As increasing numbers of people professed Christianity many brought baggage from their pagan backgrounds with them. Sadly this compromised **the simplicity** of the New Testament faith. Hierarchy developed.

**Augustine**, a North African, who had come from a pagan background became a Christian. He forsook his paganism, became a presbyter, and rapidly rose within the ranks of church leadership. He was extremely influential through his preaching, teaching and writings. By this time the majority of **Christians no longer took a pacifist position**. Christians were now serving in the military. It was this **Augustine** who took the position that it was not contrary to Christian belief to defend one's country in times of warfare. His theology, which is now accepted by the overwhelming majority of Christians, is what is referred to as "**the just war**" theory but the problem is:

- ***What is a 'just' war?***
- ***Are the wars that our nation engages in "just wars or have we become the aggressors?"***

Unfortunately the institutional Church has often deviated from the position held by Augustine and has engaged in wars that have been **anything but just**. Often Christian is pitted against Christian, killing and being killed, and that in senseless and unwarranted warfare. The **infamous crusades** are a prime example of senseless and godless action taken by **the institutional Church hierarchy**. The crusades promised God's blessing upon sincere

but misguided Christians seeking to do God's will. Somewhat similar to the present day **militant Muslims** as they seek to do what they believe to be the will of **Allah [God]**.

At the time of the **Protestant Reformation** there were groups of Christians who once again took **the New Testament position** as basic to their belief and faith in Christ. These Christians, known as **Anabaptists**, gave rise to some of the pacifist Christian groups we have today: the Mennonites, various Brethren groups, the Friends (Quakers), and others. Many early Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists were also pacifists.

Because of the fact that **the Reformers** held the same position as was held by the Roman Church **both** groups **persecuted the Anabaptists**. Many of these non-violent Christians were **martyred** for their belief.

At this point you may be wondering if I am a pacifist? The answer is '**Not exactly**'. I believe that Christians have **an obligation** to their nation to protect it even if it means taking up arms during a war forced upon it. **However** as a Christian, I am opposed to **wars of aggression**. At this point I am going to step-out-on-a-limb by stating that I am convinced that **the war** that the United States has directed at **the sovereign nation of Iraq is a war of aggression**. I have no doubt that the leaders of Iraq were misguided and evil men. However, **I am not convinced** that our government acted appropriately by provoking and then invading Iraq. There have been **needless deaths and maiming** to **both** ordinary **people of Iraq** as well as to members of **our own armed forces** while **the politicians**, some of whom are professed Christians, sit in their comfortable offices, making decisions that I believe are contrary to **Christ's call** for his followers to be **peacemakers**.

Even if you do not agree with my position I do ask that you not falsely accuse me of being unpatriotic. **I love my country**. I am convinced that God has and continues to bless

this nation of ours. Yet, I believe that **I am obligated to raise my voice in protest** as to what I see our nation doing in the world today. I am not convinced that **God has called America to police the world**. Christians are **called to be peacemakers** (Matthew 5:9) and **to live in peace** (2 Corinthians 13:11). Being a **Christian peacemaker** takes considerable work on the part of the Christian often subjecting the individual to abuse and misunderstanding by fellow Christians. The apostle Paul in writing to Timothy exhorted him to **“pursue peace.”** See – 2 Timothy 2:22. Pursuing peace takes time and effort but it must be done if we are to be fulfilling our mission as Christ’s disciples. Of all people on earth it is the followers of Jesus Christ who *should be known* worldwide as **the people of peace under the “Prince of peace”**. The peace that we have is the peace that comes **from God** (Philippians 4:7), **from Christ** (John 14:17) and is a **fruit of the Spirit** in the life of the believer (Gal. 5:22).

As a Christian believer I like the way the apostle Peter put it as to how we Christians are to live **allowing peace to rule** in our lives and in our churches,

*“Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing. For ‘Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who*

*demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.” (1 Peter 3:8-17) NRSV.*

## What Can We Do as Christians?

Christ calls Christians to be **“lights in this world”** and to be **“salt”**. I am convinced that this exhortation is to be taken seriously by his followers. **The call to be peacemakers must not** be ignored. In obedience to this call:



- **First and foremost we should ‘pray’ for peace** with a special emphasis of *“praying for the peace of Jerusalem!”* See – Psalm 122.
- **Actively work for peace** through whatever means that does not compromise our faith in Christ.
- **Speak-up for social justice issues** whether or not they are acceptable and/or popular with the majority of other Christians.
- **Defend the basic human rights** of all people: whoever and wherever they may be, whether or not we agree or disagree with them.

We invite your inquiry. We are:

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