

Real World PEACE

Q: *Is Christianity a force for peace or a cause of conflict in the world?*

A Christmas question! **Second Sunday of ADVENT: PEACE!** *"Peace on earth, good will toward men"*

ONE SIMPLE TRUTH AND TWO PROBLEMS ABOUT PEACE

Point 1. ONE SIMPLE TRUTH ABOUT PEACE: The peace that Christ brings into the world is peace with God.

Luke 2:13-14 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

The glory is the glory of God. The peace is the peace of God, given as a gift to the people "with whom He is pleased!"
Peace with God!

Ephesians 2:14-18 For he himself is our peace ... making peace, and reconciling us both to God ... And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here's what some people say: *Too bad. I thought maybe it was about something practical and significant.*

"Peace with God" ~ a nice experience: but much bigger problems to worry about. World peace/hunger/poverty.

On a personal level: family problems/marriage difficulties/financial challenges /health issues.



"Peace with God? That's it? How can we be OK with only that? Can't we do better than that?"

But that's to assume that a person's problem with God is a small thing.

And a person's problem with other people or with health or with other material things is a much greater problem.

Here is a typical 17th century gentlemen living in London, England.

We ask him how he is. And he says,

"I doeth well but since I live in London, I have two problems. The one a great problem and the other small. The small problem is very small!" 1. I suffereth flea bites for the city is overrun with rats.

The other problem is a major problem. 2. The Plague has broken out in the city.

"And what will you do?" "Prioritize! First the big problem. The Great Plague. So I am following my doctor's orders.

The Great Plague (1665-1666) --- Bubonic Plague, a terrible disease. A terrible death.

Deaths in London reached 7000 persons per week by September 1665. 75,000 to 100,000 people died, a fifth of London.

Doctor's recommend "Keep a fire going to cleanse the air. Burn peppers and other spices. And smoke tobacco."

In this case, the small problem was the actual cause of the big problem.

In fact, your single greatest personal problem is your relationship with God ... and only through Jesus Christ can this problem be resolved! And all other problems are small in comparison, for your problem with God will last past your life on earth!

All the problems requiring peace are resolved in/through/by Christ: the Prince of Peace!

Peace with God → peace with yourself → peace with others!

Point 2. ONE PROBLEM ABOUT PEACE: Being at peace with God imperfectly

General principle:

Proverbs 16:7 When a man's ways please the Lord, he makes **even his enemies to be at peace with him.**

Here's how it works:

James 3:17-18 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then **peaceable**, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in **peace** by those who make **peace**.

Sometimes it's a lot of work!

Hebrews 12:14 **Strive for peace with everyone**... And so sometimes, we fail to make it work at all!

And so here fits the whole sad story of Christianity, with some spectacular and well known examples of atrocious things done in the name of Christianity. In the name of Jesus. The Crusades. The Inquisition. The persecution of Protestants

by Catholics and vica-versa and the persecution of Anabaptists by both... Terrible terrible stuff! Perhaps we can all agree...

- Religion (Christianity) has many times been used by evil people to further their evil plans. So has every good thing!
And that in those cases, it seems to show no evidence of improving the motives or morals or behavior of the villain.
- BUT while hundreds of wicked people are using religion to do evil, thousands and millions of people have found in following Christ a powerful support and strength and direction and reform ...
- AND it is unfair and misleading to judge any leader of anything [e.g. Jesus] by his craziest and most outrageous fans, and any movement [e.g. Christianity] by its weirdest and most dastardly proponents! (Our worst examples compared to your best examples?)
- We must do our best to represent our faith well. **Matthew 5:16! 1 Peter 2:12**
- *When all else fails, use humility!* Humble yourself. Admit your blame. *"Confess your sin."*
Say *"If I were a better Christian, you might not have such a problem with Christianity!"*
Let this be our motto! **If we can't manage excellence in any other way, let us be excellent apologizers!**

But on the other hand... maybe doing a better job of obeying Christ would make you **more of a problem** to others!



Point 3.

THE OTHER PROBLEM ABOUT PEACE: Being at peace with God in an imperfect world

Sir Elton John: "From my point of view, I would ban religion completely. Organized religion doesn't seem to work. It turns people into really hateful lemmings and it's not really compassionate."



There has always been this question...

Saint Augustine, Bishop in North Africa ~ 400 A.D.

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

We must be emptied of that wherewith we are full, that we may be filled with that whereof we are empty.

God has promised forgiveness to our repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to our procrastination.

"The City of God" following the sack of Rome in 410. *"Why did this happen?"*

It's what the world is all about: it's the city of man at war with the city of God!

General principle:

John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours."

Painful reality:

Matthew 10:34-36 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come 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 person's enemies will be those of his own household."

Romans 12:18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Here's how it works:

James 3:17-18 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.



Not that you can't say anything to the point!

Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be gracious, **seasoned with salt**, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Dwight L. Moody being criticized on his evangelism methods:

"I prefer my way of doing evangelism to your way of not doing evangelism."

"Compared to what?" Which other religion/world view shall we compare Christianity to?

Russia during the Stalin years? China during the Mao years?
On what foundation will you establish a code of law and a system of government and a way of life if not on biblical values and law?

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

2 Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

Narrator: Hold up! “The cause of more wars and racial conflict and crimes against humanity and the oppression of women’s rights than any other sociological phenomenon known to humankind”? Really? Well, at the very least, this is the sort of thing that’s REALLY being said about religion these days. That’s being said AGAINST religion! Is this true? Is religion one of the big problems in the world today? More to the point right here, is Christianity a problem? Is following Christ a problem? **[Takes his place on the bench beside Ryan]** Or is the problem that so many people who are trying to follow Christ do it so imperfectly? And if that IS the problem, or maybe we should say, to the degree that it IS the problem, the next question is, what do we do about it? **[To Ryan]** And what are we going to do about you? You kept your faith a secret --- you “hid your light under a bushel” --- just so that she wouldn’t think poorly of you --- and now she has even more reason to think poorly of you --- AND of your faith. So everything is a big old mess! **[To the audience]** He’s can’t actually hear me so there’s nothing I can do just now. I’m existing in a totally different matrix. But I can have some faithful friend of his show up, a faithful friend who will talk to him about the mess he’s made. I can make that happen just like this **[Snaps fingers]**

Josh: **[Enters and approaches Ryan]** Well? How did it go? I mean, how can you ever be at peace with that? **[They exit, talking]**

Narrator: Right! **How** can we be at peace with ourselves if we know that we are compromising our beliefs? **And** how can we be at peace with the people around us if we DON’T compromise our beliefs? **And** what do we say to people who believe that we SHOULD compromise our beliefs, in the interests of keeping the peace?