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Matthew 5:9 - 7th Beatitude



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In Matthew 5:9, Jesus says that blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. The implication is that only those who practice peace-making will be called sons of God. A peacemaker is the opposite of someone who sows discord among brethren, and as ambassadors of Christ, we are called to be peacemakers. This involves more than simply reconciling with God, but also involves restoring relationships among people, resembling God's own peacemaking character.

Transcript

The 7th Beatitude, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5, is found in Matthew 5, verse 9, where Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Now, when it says they shall be called the sons of God, there is a strong implication that they and they alone will be called the sons of God. But just as it says, for example, in verse 7, Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, it's very clearly taught elsewhere in Jesus' teaching that only they shall obtain mercy, those who are merciful.

So also, it is probable that he means that only those who are peacemakers will be called the sons of God. We'll talk today about peacemaking and about what it means here when it says they shall be called the sons of God. First of all, it should be understood that being called the sons of God is going to happen because we resemble God.

Many times a child will bear a striking resemblance to his father. And even people who have never met the child before but who know the father often will recognize the image of the father, and someone will say, you must be so-and-so's son, because there is such a striking similarity. It is in this sense, I believe, that Jesus means that those who are peacemakers will be recognized as the children of God, recognized by God and recognized by others as those who are God's children.

Why? Because God is a peacemaker, and those who are peacemakers in character bear a resemblance to him. That is like the resemblance a child bears to his father. Now, to be a peacemaker is more than just practicing certain things.

It has to do with the nature. It has to do with the disposition. There are some people who like peace and who love peace, and there are others who don't love peace.

There are some people who love to fight. They love to get into conflicts. They love to cause divisions.

Causing divisions among brethren is something that God hates. It actually says this in Proverbs 6, verses 6-9. It says there are six things that God hates.

Seven are an abomination to him, and then it lists them. And the seventh thing it lists is he that sows discord among brethren. If somebody causes strife and discord between brethren, that's the opposite of being a peacemaker.

That's being a strife maker. And it says in Proverbs that God hates those who do that. So there are some things that God has very strong antipathy toward, and which, of course, if we do them, we will hardly be called the sons of God because we will not be resembling him at all.

The fact is that God is one who is deeply committed to peacefulness in relationships. Now, we see this in a couple of ways, and if we're going to resemble him, if we're going to be the children of God, as it says, then we need to be peacemakers in the same way that God is. Let me read you a passage in 2 Corinthians 5 that speaks of God and his activity as a peacemaker.

It says this in 2 Corinthians 5, beginning with verse 18. Paul says, Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore you, on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. Okay, now this word reconcile that appears so many times here in this passage is a word that means to make peace.

To reconcile two parties means that they have been alienated and they are now restored to peaceful relationship to each other. The relationship is restored to what it once was before there was disruption and discord in it. Now, that is being a peacemaker.

Now, there's two things about being a peacemaker that we learn about God here. First of all, that God is a peacemaker in that he is willing to make peace between himself and others whom he is at war with. Now, you are at war with God if you are a rebel against his authority.

God is the king of the universe. He has laid out laws. You are his subject.

You owe it to him to follow his laws. He made you. You don't own yourself.

He owns you. And therefore, if you have lived for yourself and not lived for God, if you have violated his commands in your life, then you have made yourself his enemy. The Bible uses the term enemy of God in a number of ways.

James says that if we are friends of the world, then we are enemies of God. And Paul says in Romans chapter 5 that when we were yet enemies of God, yet he sent his son to die for us. That's showing how great a peacemaker God is.

First, in making people who are at odds with him, people who are his enemies, entering into a relationship of peace with them. Everyone who has repented of his sins and put his faith in Jesus Christ and has committed himself to become a follower of Christ, has been granted the grace of forgiveness from all rebellion against God. God has put it all behind him, and he promises us a relationship of peace with himself.

As Paul put it in Romans 5.1, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now here in 2 Corinthians, which I read a moment ago, Paul says that this is how God made peace. He reconciled the world to himself, not imputing their transgressions to them, not imputing their sins to them.

That is, he treated the world as if it had not sinned against him. This is a peacemaking policy. If we would be like God in this respect, then we must look at those who have done wrong to us.

And if they have done wrong to us, there is a sense in which we need to approach them or relate to them in some senses as if they had done no wrong to us. We have to be willing to suffer the wrong for the sake of peace. We need to absorb injuries rather than re-inflict them.

It is not our place to retaliate. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, If a man strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. This is a peacemaking gesture.

Now, let me make this very clear. Peacemaking does not just mean rolling over and letting people walk on you. There may be times when that is indeed what you should do.

Jesus did that. There were many Christians in the early days of the Church who simply allowed themselves to be persecuted and did not resist. In James chapter 5, we read a rebuke to the rich who were oppressing and persecuting Christians.

It says to them in verse 6, You have condemned and killed the righteous, and he does not resist you. That means that the righteous man who was being persecuted was not resisting his persecutors. He was a peacemaker.

He was not going to escalate the conflict by fighting back. This is the way Jesus taught to make peace. At the same time, there is such a thing as a responsible peace.

And we need to be aware that the teaching of Jesus is not simply black and white in some cases. There are nuances to it. There are times when we should just turn the other cheek.

In fact, we should always be prepared to do that because he said to do so. But he also said elsewhere in Matthew chapter 18, He said if your brother sins against you, go to him privately and talk to him about it and try to restore him. In another passage in Luke chapter 17, in the early verses of that chapter, Jesus said if your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

And if he repents, forgive him. So there is such a thing as confronting somebody who has sinned against you and eliciting their apology or their repentance. Now the reason for that is not because you are refusing to be a peacemaker, but because you want to be a peacemaker.

Because you want there to be peace between you and that other person. You see, there are two things that are required in order for there to be peace between two parties. One is that you have to be willing to forgive them.

The other is that they need to want to have that relationship restored too. You cannot have a good relationship with somebody who refuses to be involved in a relationship with you. Now if somebody has wronged you, then your first reaction as a Christian, like that of Christ, is to, as it were, turn the other cheek.

You don't fight back. You're not there to cause trouble. You're not going to escalate the thing.

You're not there to get your pound of flesh or to see to it that they suffer as much as you've suffered. That's not the attitude of a peacemaker. You forgive them.

But there's got to be something else happen before the relationship is really restored, and that is they have to want to come back into the relationship too. And that's where the confrontation comes in. You want them in the relationship, so you confront them and say, listen, this is something that you did to me, which is not something that can continue to happen in a relationship.

I'm therefore asking you to repent so that a relationship can continue. And if the person repents, then the relationship does continue. Now if they don't repent, you can still forgive them in your heart, but you can't have a relationship with them, so there's really no restoration of the peace.

So as I say, it's more nuanced than simply to say, well, I just forgive everybody. Well, you can forgive everybody unilaterally, but that doesn't necessarily mean there's peace in the relationship. It doesn't mean the relationship has been restored.

Likewise, God was not imputing the world's sins against them when he sent Jesus. He put the sins of the world on Jesus. It says in Isaiah 53, 6, all we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way, and God laid on him, that is on Christ, the iniquity of us all. That is everyone who has sinned, everyone who's gone astray like a sheep. Christ bore our sins and died for them, says the scripture.

Now that he did before any of us had any interest in God. So God made the first move. He did not impute the world's sins against them.

He instead laid our iniquities on himself and paid the penalty for them so that we could be restored. But that doesn't automatically mean that we're in a peaceful relationship with God because if we have not repented of our sins, we're still walking in a direction contrary to him. And therefore, what we're doing prevents us from having that relationship with God.

So it's necessary for us to repent of our sins. God is willing to forgive, but there can be no restoration of relationship unless we're willing to accept forgiveness and come back to him and to break off the kind of behavior that he had to forgive us of in the first place. That's called repenting.

So this is the kind of peacemaker that God is. God is seeking peace with us. He is at war with us if we are rebels, or at least we're at war with him.

But he wants there to be reconciliation. So he forgave and he expects us to repent and to stop doing those things that are at war with him. This is what peacemaking is.

To be like him, to resemble him in such a way as to be known as the sons of God, we need to be peacemakers in the same way. Namely, that when people have wronged us, we are prepared to forgive them, but also to confront them and seek their repentance. If they repent, then the relationship is restored.

That's the first way that peacemaking is done. It has to do with returning to a condition of peace with somebody from whom you have personally been alienated. God has done this, and as we do the same thing, we do that which resembles him.

And that's what we're supposed to be doing. We're supposed to be children of God. As it says in Ephesians 5, verse 1, be imitators of God as dear children.

If you want to be called a son of God, you need to resemble him. You need to imitate him. And that's why Jesus said that the peacemakers are those who will be recognized as the children of God, because that is what God is.

He's a peacemaker, and as we imitate him, we look like him. We bear his resemblance. The family resemblance is there.

Now, there's another aspect to peacemaking besides what I've mentioned. Peacemaking, so far as we've looked at it at this point, has only had to do with when people have violated their relationship with you and how you restore your relationship with them. There's another sense in which God is a peacemaker that goes beyond simply reconciling the world to himself.

This is found in Ephesians chapter 2. And beginning at verse 11, Paul writes, Therefore remember that you who were once Gentiles in the flesh, this is the readers of the Ephesian epistle, they were not Jewish, they were Gentiles, who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands. Now, what he's saying is that the Jews who called themselves the circumcision referred to the Gentiles contemptuously as the uncircumcised or the uncircumcision. Well, he says that at that time, you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

So here, as Gentiles, we were alienated from the Jews. We were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. But then he says in verse 13, But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off, that is, Gentiles were far off from the Jews in terms of relationship, have been made near by the blood of Christ.

For he himself is our peace, who has made both one and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace. Now, what Paul is talking about here is the former alienated attitude of Jews and Gentiles from each other. And that alienation still exists outside of Christ.

But in Christ, it disappears. When a Jew becomes a believer in Christ and a Gentile becomes a believer in Christ, that middle wall of partition between them being Jew and Gentile is eliminated in Christ. And they are now one new man.

That is, they are one person. They are joined and united in Christ. And therefore, the alienation they once knew is eliminated.

And they are now at one with each other. Now, notice what this tells us about God as a peacemaker. God not only has reconciled the world to himself in Christ, but he's reconciled the different alienated parties to each other.

Gentiles and Jews in Christ are no longer alienated, but they are one. He is our peace. He has made peace, it says, in this way, by breaking down the middle wall of partition.

Now, this means that being a peacemaker in the sense that God is, means more than what we talked about earlier, where we simply establish or reestablish a peaceful relationship with those who are at odds with us. It means that when we look out and see

among other people division and contention and alienation, and it may be that neither party is necessarily at odds with us, but we see two parties that are at odds with each other. If we are like God, in this sense, peacemakers, then we are interested and compelled to get involved in trying to make a restoration of that relationship.

This happens, for example, when people get involved in counseling, at least in some cases it can, or marriage counseling, for example. Here's a husband and a wife who are so much at odds with each other, they can't even imagine living with each other much longer unless something changes. But things can change, and a third party, a pastor, a Christian friend, a counselor of some kind, gets involved and tries to help iron out the differences and help them to forgive each other and love each other so that that relationship can be reconciled.

That is third party reconciliation, and God is that kind of a peacemaker too. He saw the Jews and Gentiles alienated from each other, and in Christ he made them both one. He got involved as a third party, as it were, and got the two parties together in him, so that a peacemaker not only knows how to relate with those who are his enemies in such a way as to promote a peaceful reconciliation, but he also knows how, or at least is motivated to, get involved with other cases where there is a problem in relationships and try to bring reconciliation there.

And we are told to do those kinds of things. God does them, and insofar as we do what he does and do it in his way, then we are like him and we resemble him and are known to be his children. You know, in Romans chapter 3, Paul describes, using several quotes from the Old Testament, mostly from the Psalms, the state of the wicked.

And among other things, he quotes a line out of Isaiah 59, and this is in, let's see, what verse do we want here? Let me read the whole thing. It starts at verse 10 of Romans 3. There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who understands.

There is none that seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way. They have all together become unprofitable.

There is none that does good, no, not one. Then it goes on a little bit further, and then it quotes, in verse 17, the way of peace they have not known. And there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now, these people that he's described, the sinful world, says the way of peace they have not known. They don't know the way of peace. Have you ever noticed that? Have you ever noticed that nations can't seem to live harmoniously with each other without erupting into war somewhere along the line? I mean, it's true that there are nations that are allies and are at peace with each other, but how is it that there's really no period of history that's more than a few years long where there hasn't been two or more nations fighting against each other? And over what? Not always over necessary things.

It's not always a struggle for survival. Often it's just some kind of an insult that's been taken, or it may just be greed and the desire to oppress. But the point is very clear.

The world outside of Christ does not know the way of peace. And we see similarly in so many cases on an individual level, people who simply cannot live at peace with other people. Now, I'm not going to say that Christians have always shown themselves eminent in this where others have been deficient.

I would say the Christian church is a good example of failure in this to a large extent. We have churches that split over petty things. We have Christians who won't speak to each other over petty insults and petty differences.

Now, I would say of such people, the way of peace they don't know. They don't know how to be peacemakers. But Jesus wanted his disciples to be schooled in the way of peace.

That's what he was teaching them. And when he taught them, for example, in the same sermon, if someone strikes you on one cheek, turn the other to him. If somebody wants to sue you and take away your garment, give him your other garment as well.

If somebody forces you to go one mile, go two miles with him. This is teaching the way of peace. Jesus said, love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you, bless those who curse you.

This is the way of peace. Very few people other than Christians know it. And even not very many Christians seem to know it well enough to practice it.

But then, no wonder Christians too often are not known to be the children of God. The world may look on and say, those people, the children of God? Hardly. Yeah, that's too bad because Christians often don't give very good reasons to believe that they really are the children of God because they don't imitate God.

They don't imitate their Father, as sons do. And therefore, Jesus commands us to be peacemakers. He commands us to seek peace and follow it.

In Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 14, it says, Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. And so peace with all men is what we're supposed to be seeking. Now, I should make this very clear.

Paul said in Romans chapter 12, As if possible, as much as lies in you, be at peace with every man. And what he's saying, of course, is that you may do all that you can toward peace, and there may still be somebody who refuses to be at peace with you. That's not your fault.

There are still people who are not at peace with God, though he has done all he can do.

He said in Isaiah chapter 5, What more could I have done than I have already done? And God has done all that he can, I believe, to win some people over to him who have not come. And the same is true with you.

You may be the greatest of peacemakers, but there will still be some who will not be at peace with you. That's not your responsibility. That's not your problem.

Paul said, If it is possible, as much as lies with you, be at peace with everyone. And there will be times when it's not possible, because there's part of that relationship that does not lie with you. It lies with them.

It has to do with their decision. And it may be that they do not know the way of peace, and will not have it. However, that does not mean that you have any excuse to not be peacemaker.

You won't be successful all the time, but you must try all the time, if you would be like God. And we need to be like God, at least enough like him, that we resemble him as children resemble a father, so that the world can see that God does have children, and the time will come when we're manifested as sons.