

Digging Deeper : Pacifism

According to the doctrine of the Church of England (Article 37)
It is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the Magistrate, to wear weapons, and serve in the wars.

Do you think this is compatible with Jesus teaching, for example in Matthew chapter 4 verses 39 and 44?

Read 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 13-14. What do these verses teach about the God-given purpose of civil authority? Is there a proper place for civil authorities using force to restrain or punish, for example, internal acts of terrorism, or external acts of war?

If this is the role of the state should a Christian serve a judge, MP, policeman or soldier? How would you understand Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 4 if you were to occupy such a role?

It is worth noting that Paul on trial before Felix and Jesus on trial before Pilate accepted the authority of the state over them as given by God, even though this could lead to imprisonment or death.

The early Christians did have problems serving in the armies of Rome but this was not because they were pacifists. George, for example, is said to have been born into a Christian family and his father had been a high ranking soldier. George himself became an Imperial Guard for the Emperor Diocletian. However, in 302AD the Emperor issued an edict requiring Christian soldiers to be arrested and every soldier to make sacrifices to the gods of Rome. George refused to renounce his faith and denounced the edict personally before the Emperor. The Emperor tried persuasion, then promise of gifts and then torture as a result of which George died. He was not the only such martyr but is perhaps the best known with a country named after him (Georgia) and 16 others, including England, officially acknowledging his courage and faith.

David Phillips, April 2012

The Fruit of the Spirit is ... peace ...

Bible Study 3 on Gal 5.22-23



The Greek word for peace is *eirene* from which we get words like irenic and the name Irene. But the idea of peace is richer in Semitic culture than in Greek. The Hebrew word is *shalom* which appears in the name Jerusalem (city of peace) whilst the Arabic word is *salaam*, and both are used as greetings.

1. 'Peace be with you'

'Peace' is part of a greeting and parting blessing in many places in the New Testament. (Eg. Luke 10.5-6, Rom 1.7 & Rom 15.33). Most of us probably use words of greeting and parting like 'hi' and 'bye'. Do you think we have lost something in this?

In the 1970s and 80s many churches introduced 'sharing the peace' during their services. Some people seemed to have loved this whilst others loathed it. Is it something you have experienced and if so what do you think of it? What do you think visitors make of it?

Many churches have also introduced tea and coffee after services to allow time for 'fellowship' as we do at St. James. Do you see this as an important part of our meeting together and if so why?

2. Peace with God

The message we are given to proclaim is described as *the gospel of peace* (Rom 10.15 & Eph 6.15).

Read Romans 4.25-5.2 & 5.9-11

If we have 'peace with God through Christ' what does this suggest about life without Christ? How is this described in verses 9 to 11?

What words are used in these verses to describe what Christ does for us? Would you be able to explain to someone who asked you what each of these words mean?

According to ch 5 v 1 how is it that we can have peace with God? How, according to verse ch 4 v 25 does this come about?

Would you say that you have a sense of peace with God? Or is this more something you accept because it is taught in the Bible?

Some people do have a sense of the fear of God before coming to faith. This seems to have been especially so during some of the great revivals. Do you think it appropriate to speak about the wrath of God in order to drive people to find peace in Christ?

Read John ch 16 vv 32-33.

In what way is what Jesus says in these verses about peace similar to what we saw in the previous study regarding joy?

If you go through a time of persecution how easy is it to have a sense of peace?

If you are particularly struggling with anxiety and lack of peace at the moment then the following two passages may help to see how we can find peace:

John ch 14 v 27 & Philippians ch 4 vv 6-7.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.
(Matthew ch 5 v 9)

3. Making peace with all :

Read Rom ch 12 v 16-21

The instruction to be peacemakers comes in the middle of these verses. In what practical ways do these verses suggest we do this and what does that mean in our own circumstances today?

Do you think people sometimes see this sort of peacemaking as a weakness? What would you say in response to such an assertion?

What in verse 18 suggests that peace is not always possible and what should our response be?

4. Making peace in a troubled fellowship :

Read Rom ch 14 v 17-19

Paul has been speaking about a dispute that had arisen in the church regarding practice - in particular about what believers should or should not eat. How can such disputes damage Christian fellowship?

What is Paul's advice here and in particular what do you think verse 19 means in practice?

If an argument is brewing how easy do you find it to step in and make peace?

Are you the sort of person for whom the red mist rises quickly when you are annoyed and if so have you found ways of coping with this?

(Paul gives some more practical advice on keeping unity in Ephesians 4.1-3.)

(Paul's response to the troubles in Galatia were very different, because in that case people were insisting on obedience to the law in order to be saved. Paul was anything but peaceful in his approach to such dangerous error.)

5. No peace with the world

Read Luke 12.49-53

Why does the gospel bring division?

What does the response to Jesus' own ministry from some who heard him show us? Should we expect to find anything different? (cf Jn 15.20 & Mtt 10.22).

Why do you think some people respond the gospel of peace with animosity and even violence?

Do you think that there is a danger that churches or individuals try to blunt the offence of the gospel for the sake of peace with the world? (See also Ezekiel 13.15-16)

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. (2 Thess 3.16)