



# SEEDS OF PEACE

SERIES: THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Catalog No. 1085  
Matthew 5:9  
Seventh Message  
Gary Vanderet  
September 29, 1996

Will and Ariel Durant in their famous book *The Lessons of History*, begin the chapter on "History and War" with these words: "War is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3,421 years of recorded history, only 268 have seen no war." That is a chilling statement. Today, anyone old enough to understand what is being said on television knows that multiple wars are being fought at this very moment.

The charter of the United Nations establishes the purpose for that organization's existence as "the discovery and eradication of the root causes of warfare." There have been numerous conferences held and organizations formed having similar objectives, yet, as one man aptly put it, "We are no closer to a solution than we were the day Cain slew Abel."

On an individual level, a solution is no closer. Homes and families are disintegrating at an alarming rate, indicating that the same turmoil exists between husbands and wives, parents and children.

What is the answer to all of this? Some say that we must come to an understanding that war is unprofitable, and stop fighting. Remember the old bumper sticker, "What if they had a war and nobody came?" But Christians know that the answer to war will never be a matter of bootstrap ethics. Peace is impossible for the human race without a radical change in human nature.

That is the theme of the seventh beatitude of Jesus:

**"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."** (Matt 5:9, NASB)

Every Christian, according to Jesus, is to be a peacemaker—in his home, in his community, and in the church.

First, we should note what Jesus is not saying. He is not saying: "Blessed are those who avoid all conflicts and confrontations." Nor is he saying, "Blessed are those who are easygoing and relaxed." His words do not mean, "Blessed are the passive, those who compromise their convictions when surrounded by others who disagree."

No, this is this same Jesus who would say later: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his

own household" (Matt 10:34-36). In other words, conflict, even among families, would be the inevitable result of his coming. We must love Jesus best and put him first, above even our nearest and dearest relatives. So passivity is not what Jesus is talking about.

The clear teaching of the Scriptures is that we should never seek conflict or be responsible for it. On the contrary, we are to seek peace. Here is what Peter says:

**Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it."** (1 Pet 3:8-11, NIV)

The apostle Paul said:

**Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.** (Rom 12:17-19, NIV)

And the words of James:

**Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.** (Jas 3:13-18, NASB)

In the New Testament, the word "peace" comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, which bears the idea of wholeness and overall well being. When a Jew greeted someone with *shalom*, he was wishing not just the absence of trouble, but for all that made for a complete, whole life. God's peace is not narrowly defined. It is much more than the absence of strife: it encompasses all of the person. It is positive. So a peacemaker is not one who is passive, but one who actively pursues peace in its fullness.

Peacemaking is a divine work, for peace means reconciliation—and God is the author of peace and reconciliation. Indeed, the same verb which is used in this beatitude of Christians is applied by Paul to what God has done through Christ. Through Christ, says the apostle, the Father was pleased “to reconcile to himself all things...*making peace* by the blood of his cross.” And Christ’s purpose was to create one new man in place of the two, Jew and Gentile, “*so making peace.*”

It is hardly surprising therefore that, according to this beatitude, the particular blessing which attaches to peacemakers is that “they shall be called sons of God.” Such people are seeking to do what their Father has done, which is loving people with his love, as Jesus will go on to explain in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. It is the devil who is the troublemaker. God loves reconciliation. Through his children, as formerly through his only begotten Son, he is bent on making peace.

Apparently that quality above all others is what designates Christians as true sons of God—because that is what God does: He makes peace. He reconciles people. Some go through life leaving turmoil in their wake. Everywhere they go they cause distress and upset because they are demanding, they want everything to center on themselves. But the characteristic of a son of God is that he serves, reconciles and makes peace wherever he goes. He doesn’t make situations difficult. To the extent that he can, he tries to bring about peace and reconciliation.

My wife startled me once when she said to me, “You love conflict! You thrive on it!” As I pondered this, it became clear to me that she was right. I am a survivor. I grew up in a chaotic home and I have learned to survive by fighting. When someone gets in my way, I take care of myself. But this kind of behavior is the antithesis of what Jesus is talking about in this beatitude.

Jesus is the model of how a peacemaker goes about his work. Paul writes in Phil. 2:

**Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Phil 2:3-8, NIV)**

Here the apostle puts his finger on the one issue which divides and disintegrates the body. The thing that destroys harmony is a self seeking spirit—the desire to insist upon our own rights, to have our own way. Self assertiveness is the very essence of worldliness. Pride is the virus that causes the most damage to the health of our families and the body of Christ. If there is

continual conflict in our homes, if there is wrangling with business associates, somewhere at the root of it is pride.

C.S. Lewis points out that pride is the essential vice, the utmost evil. He writes: “Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that are mere fleabites by comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of man.” And because pride is at the center of our resistance to God, God himself resists it. James says: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” When we chose to be great, we forfeit God’s grace.

On the other hand, humility releases God’s greatness. If pride leads to every other vice, humility leads to every other virtue. Humility is the basis of our life with God and our usefulness in the world. Here is how Thomas à Kempis put this: “The more humble a man is in himself, and the more submissive to God, so much more prudent shall he be in all his affairs, and enjoy greater peace and quiet of heart.”

That is why the order of these beatitudes is so important. Everything begins with brokenness. We can never be peacemakers without first being broken. Peacemakers are humble men and women who understand their spiritual poverty. Not only do they understand it, they feel it, and they mourn because of it. Poverty of spirit is what makes them gentle with others, especially those who hurt them. The meek do not take offense; the peaceful do not give offense unnecessarily. So the first step, and perhaps the one we need to remind ourselves of, is to realize how proud we are.

Pride shows itself in subtle ways. See if you can relate to some of these examples: insisting on recognition (our titles); wanting to be noticed, to be prominent and eminent; smarting when we’re not consulted or advised on a matter; dominating social situations; always telling our tales rather listening to others; resisting authority; getting angry and defensive when challenged; harboring a grudge; nursing a grievance; wallowing in self-pity; choosing our own kind rather than loving the lowly; wanting to be in the center rather than serving on the edge.

Proverbs says: “Through pride comes nothing but strife.” The source of our conflicts is our self assertive spirit which seeks to meet our own desires without regard for God or for others. Only by foregoing our rights and in humility regarding others as more important than ourselves will we become peacemakers and learn to live in harmony.

We need to deal with our stubborn tendency to get our own way and to do our own thing. You may say, “Don’t I have any rights? Things like the right to privacy, the right to acceptance, the right to recognition?” The answer is, yes! But if insisting on those rights in a particular situation could cause distress and create disharmony, then we must be willing to forego them in the interest of others.

That is the wisdom of God that James writes about. He actually describes two types of wisdom, the wisdom that is from above and the wisdom that is from below. Thus, there are two ways to influence others—through the humility that seeks to serve, and the arrogance that seeks to gain. Those are the two motivating energies, the two mindsets in the world. One is the seed of the woman; the other, the seed of the serpent. The former takes all one's energies, talents and gifts and uses them to benefit self; the latter takes all of these things and uses them for the benefit of others.

In this regard, one man I greatly respect and admire is Dr. Bruce Waltke. Chuck Swindoll shares the following incident which occurred when he accompanied Dr. Waltke on a visit to the mother church of the First Church of Christ Scientist, in downtown Boston. Dr. Swindoll writes:

When we got to the multiple-manual pipe organ, she [the hostess] began to talk about their doctrine and especially their belief about no judgment in the life beyond. Dr. Waltke waited for just the right moment and very casually asked:

"But, Ma'am, doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible, 'It is appointed unto man once to die and after that, the judgment'?"

He could have quoted Hebrews 9:27 in Greek! But he was so gracious, so tactful with the little lady. I must confess, I stood back, thinking, "Go for it, Bruce. Now we've got her where we want her!"

The lady, without a pause, said simply, "Would you like to see the second floor?"

You know what Dr. Waltke said? "We surely would, thank you."

She smiled, somewhat relieved, and started to lead us up a flight of stairs.

I couldn't believe it! All I could think was, "No, don't let her get away. Make her answer your question!" As I was wrestling within, I pulled on the scholar's arm and said in a low voice, "Hey, why didn't you nail the lady?" Why didn't you press the point and not let her get away until she answered?"

Quietly and calmly he put his hand on my shoulder and whispered, "But, Chuck, that wouldn't have been fair. That wouldn't have been very loving—now would it?"

Wham! The quiet rebuke left me reeling. I shall *never* forget that moment. And to complete the story, you'll be interested to know that in less than twenty minutes he was sitting with the woman alone, tenderly and carefully speaking with her about the Lord Jesus Christ. She sat in rapt attention. He, the gracious peacemaker, had won a hearing. And I, the scalp-snatcher, had learned an unforgettable lesson.

How good are you at sowing seeds of peace? You may not be called on to ward off international conflict, but you will have opportunities to do something far more vital: bringing inner peace to troubled hearts.

This is what Jesus modeled. In the gospels, we don't

find him settling disputes or negotiating contracts. But we do see him cultivating inward harmony through acts of love: washing the feet of men he knew would betray and forsake him; having lunch with a corrupt tax official; honoring a sinful woman whom society had scorned. Jesus built bridges by healing hurts. He prevented conflict by touching the interior. He cultivated harmony by sowing seeds of peace in fertile hearts.

Think for a moment about the people who make up your world. Picture their faces: your spouse, your children, your parents, your golf buddies, your neighbor, the receptionist at work. May I tell you something you know or may have forgotten? Someone in your world is hurting and needs a word of peace. The daily push and shove of the world has a way of leaving us worked over and worn out.

James says that "peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." Do you want to see a miracle? Then plant a word of love deep in someone's life. Nurture it with a smile and a prayer, and watch what happens. Sowing seeds of peace is like sowing beans. We don't know why it works; we just know it does. Seeds are planted and the topsoils of hurt are shoved away. So never underestimate the power of a seed.

In May, we attended a pastors conference in Canada. While we were there, Dr. Larry Crabb shared a story with me that I shall never forget about seeds that were sown in his life many years ago, seeds that had produced a harvest of righteousness.

Larry Crabb stuttered when he was young. He had particular difficulty with the letters "l" and "p." This was especially hard, because his name was Larry, and he went to Plymouth-Whitemarsh junior high school, in Pennsylvania. He has already published this story in one of his books, and I will quote his own words:

In the ninth grade, I was elected president of our junior high student body. During an assembly of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades—several hundred students—I was beckoned by the principal to join him on stage for an induction ceremony. Standing nervously in front of the squirming, bored crowd, I was told to repeat after the principal the words, "I, Larry Crabb, of Plymouth-Whitemarsh Junior High School, do hereby promise..." That's how the principal said it. My version was a bit different: "I, L-L-L-L-Larry Crabb, of P-P-P-P-Plymouth Whitemarsh Junior High School, do hereby p-p-p-promise..." The principle was sympathetically perplexed, my favorite English teacher wanted to cry, a few students laughed out loud, most were awkwardly amused, some felt bad for me—and I died a thousand deaths. I decided right then that public speaking was not for me.

A short time later, our church celebrated the Lord's Supper in a Sunday morning worship service. It was customary in our congregation to encourage young men to enter into the privilege of worship by standing and praying aloud. That particular Sunday I sensed the pressure of the saints (not, I fear, the leading of the Spirit),

and I responded by unsteadily leaving my chair, for the first time, with the intention of praying.

Filled less with worship than with nervousness, I found my theology becoming confused to the point of heresy. I remember thanking the Father for hanging on the cross and praising Christ for triumphantly bringing the Spirit from the grave. Stuttering throughout, I finally thought of the word *Amen* (perhaps the first evidence of the Spirit's leading), said it, and sat down. I recall staring at the floor, too embarrassed to look around, and solemnly vowing *never again* to pray or speak aloud in front of a group. Two strikes were enough.

When the service was over, I darted toward the door, not wishing to encounter an elder who might feel obliged to correct my twisted theology. But I was not quick enough. An older Christian man named Jim Dunbar intercepted me, put his arm on my shoulder, and cleared his throat to speak. I remember thinking to myself, "Here it comes. Oh well, just endure it and get to the car." I listened carefully to this godly gentleman speak words that I can repeat verbatim today, more than twenty years later.

"Larry," he said, "there's one thing I want you to know. Whatever you do for the Lord, I'm behind you one thousand percent." Then he walked away.

Even as I write these words, my eyes fill with tears. I have yet to tell that story to an audience without at least mildly choking. Those words were life words. They had power. They reached deep into my being. My resolve never again to speak publicly weakened instantly.

Since the day those words were spoken, God has led me into a ministry in which I regularly address and pray before crowds of all sizes. I do it without stuttering. I love it. Not only death, but also life lies in the power of the tongue.

God intends that we be people who use words to encourage one another. A well-timed word has the power to urge a runner to finish the race, to rekindle hope when despair has set in, to spark a bit of warmth in an otherwise cold life, to trigger healthful self-evaluation in someone who doesn't think much about his shortcomings, to renew confidence when problems have the upper hand.

Never underestimate the power of a seed. My prayer is that we would begin, even today, to sow seeds of peace wherever we go. St. Francis of Assisi expressed the same desire when he prayed:

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.*

*Where there is hatred, let me sow love,*

*Where there is injury, pardon,*

*Where there is doubt, faith,*

*Where there is despair, hope,*

*Where there is darkness, light,*

*Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be  
consoled as to console,*

*To be understood, as to understand,*

*To be loved, as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,*

*It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,*

*And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

© 1996 Peninsula Bible Church/Cupertino