

“In Pursuit of Peace”

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

1. Discuss our cultural understandings of peace.
 - a. When people speak of peace, what do they usually have in mind? How do they think we will achieve it?
 - b. What do Christians usually have in mind when they speak of peace?
 - c. How do Christians sometimes use the concept of “peace” to determine God’s will?
2. Discuss the Old Testament meaning of peace.
 - a. *Shalom* is the Hebrew word commonly translated “peace”. Here are the primary words used as definitions from a key Hebrew dictionary: completeness, soundness, welfare, peace.
 - b. How are wholeness (completeness) or soundness related to what we might think of as “peace”? What is the result if something is missing important parts?
3. Discuss the following definition: “Peace is the condition of things when all is as it should be.”
4. Read Isaiah 32.
 - a. What are the conditions being described in verses 1-5? How do these conditions connect with the above definition? Why will these conditions exist (cf. v 1)?
 - b. What is the heart attitude of those described in verses 9-14? What are the circumstances they will face? How do these things compare to the above definition?
 - c. Compare the circumstances in the two sections above. In what ways is *shalom* either present or absent?
5. Read especially Isaiah 32:16-18 (note that the word translated “peace” is the Hebrew word *shalom*).
 - i. What do you think verse 16 means? How might this look in practical terms?
[Note that sometimes opposites are used in Hebrew to refer to everything in between, e.g. from the wilderness to the fertile field.]
 - ii. According to verse 17, what brings about the condition of peace? Why would this be so?
 - iii. What are the words or concepts used to describe this peace in verse 18?
 - iv. How does the idea of wholeness connect to these verses?

6. Read James 3:13-18.
 - a. What behaviors and attitudes does James say are necessary for healthy relationships?
 - b. According to verses 13, 15, and 17, what is the source of these behaviors or attitudes?
 - c. How does verse 18 connect with Matthew 5:9? How does this verse connect with Isaiah 32:17?
7. From the following passages, discuss the ways in which Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker:
 - a. Romans 5:1 and 10.
 - i. What do these verses say about your condition before Jesus?
 - ii. What do these verses say Jesus did?
 - iii. What are the results?
 - b. Ephesians 2:11-19
 - i. What do these verses say about your condition before Jesus?
 - ii. List the things that these verses say Jesus did?
 - iii. What are the results?
8. Discuss ways that we can be peacemakers like Jesus.
 - a. How might Romans 5:1 and 10 connect with 2 Corinthians 5:20? How is sharing the gospel with the lost peacemaking?
 - b. What does Matthew 5:23-24 say about peacemaking? How is the importance of this work highlighted (what is put on hold to seek for peace)?
 - c. What does Matthew 18:15 say about peacemaking? Why is this hard to do?
 - d. What does Romans 12:18 say about peacemaking? With whom are we commanded to pursue peace? Why is this hard?
 - e. What sacrifices did Jesus make to achieve peace for you? How might this encourage you in your pursuit of peace with others?
9. Read and meditate upon 1 Thessalonians 5:13b-14.
 - a. "Live in peace" is an imperative (a command) in the Greek. Our translations might make this sound a bit passive, something we let happen, but the command is active and requires work. It might be translated, "Cultivate peace!" How does this change the sense?
 - b. What are the three types of people Paul describes in verse 14? It will be helpful to consult differing translations since these words have a range of meaning.
 - c. How will each of these "conditions" lead to broken lives or disordered emotions?

- d. How does the work of peacemaking differ for each of these types of people?
 - e. Why is it important that we think about each person's situation or heart attitude before we try to help restore wholeness?
 - f. What is the one character quality that is to be demonstrated to everyone? In what way does this display the character of Jesus?
10. The Scriptures referenced above all present peace NOT primarily as a feeling but as a state of affairs that affects the way we feel. Read Isaiah 32:16-17 again.
- a. In what ways do these verses confirm that peace is viewed more as a condition of "rightness" than as a way of feeling?
 - b. What does verse 17 say about the potential feelings that result from the condition of peace?
 - c. How does this compare to the way you have thought about peace?
11. How has your understanding of "peace" changed as a result of this study?
12. How has your understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker changed?
13. What are the biggest challenges or fears you might struggle with when seeking to be a peacemaker?