

# Beginning Recovery of the Biblical Meaning of Peacemaking

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The problem is that the biblical meaning of peacemaking has been misplaced or lost just at the time when we need it desperately. This is a time when we need peacemaking. Both superpowers are planning a next generation of nuclear weapons that are much harder to control, much quicker to be triggered, lethal to many more millions of people when used, and much more likely to be used. And even if they are not used, their high cost is contributing to world-wide inflation and draining resources from people who need those resources to start feeding themselves; the purchase of weapons by the two superpowers, by right-wing authoritarian governments in nations populated with the poor, and by communist governments in nations that lack many freedoms, is one of the few real growth industries. Increased expenditures for weapons and petroleum are causing a world-wide inflation that is destabilizing the world. And recent progress in the world-wide push for human needs and human rights is now eroding in many places and needs our outspoken support. Injustice, the violation of human rights, causes war. This is a time when we need peacemaking desperately.

Yet, when the biblical call to peacemaking is mentioned, there arises a fog of ideological polarization: pacifism versus just war theory, unilateral disarmament versus military spending, even sexual permissiveness versus reactionary authoritarianism, and those who say we should not kill versus those who say we should post the Ten Commandments and pray in schools. Can we do better? We need to, more desperately than we know.

In the brief time I have, I cannot solve the whole problem and answer all the questions. I can offer some leads or clues which should be helpful for study in student groups. If you have the opportunity to follow up these leads, the resulting more extensive study by students will be where the problem will be solved and the questions will be answered. I hope this

will lead to more questions, questions that lead in turn to further study. Let me know how it goes.

### **War Is Caused by Greed and Injustice**

The prophets speak about wars in ways many students may not have noticed. One thing they say is that war and its destruction are caused by **greed and injustice**. Our injustice and greed are bringing our destruction by war—that is a recurring message throughout the prophets. And they were right. Therefore, what I am saying today ties in with what was said yesterday about world hunger and combating the poverty and injustice of world hunger. Poverty and injustice and world hunger cause war. And war causes more hunger. The two cause each other. I want to recommend for use in study groups the May, 1980 issue of **SEEDS** (222 E. Lake Drive, Decatur, Ga., 30030), which focuses on the connection between hunger and injustice and war and peacemaking.

I would also recommend Sider, **Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger**; McGinnis, **Bread and Justice**; Nelson, **Hunger for Justice**; Lappe, **Food First**; Dunn, **Endangered Species**.

### **Idolatrous Trust in Weapons Causes War**

The prophets also speak of another cause of war, a cause which has profound truth for us, but whose insightfulness and profundity we have underestimated because we have misplaced its meaning. A major cause of war, and of the nuclear arms race, **is idolatry**. But we have misplaced the meaning of idolatry; we think of the worship of statues and quickly conclude that we, of course, don't do that; idolatry has little relevance for us.

The biblical concept of idolatry means much more than making statues. It means forsaking Yahweh and trusting in something else in His place. I was disappointed when I went to a Bible dictionary and looked up idolatry; all it tells is the craftsmanship of how to make idols in the ancient Near East. But it doesn't tell the **meaning** of idolatry. We need to recover a clear understanding of that meaning in order to understand what is going on in our midst.

One of the most famous passages on idolatry is Jeremiah 2. "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns

for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” And what are these broken cisterns that Jeremiah is talking about? If you just read a little farther along in this chapter, it is very clear. Jeremiah is talking about making military alliances with Egypt and Assyria and about trusting in weapons for security. These are the broken cisterns that can hold no water. The nation has forsaken Yahweh to rely on military weapons and military alliances.

The other prophets speak of this false loyalty, this broken-cistern forsakenness of Yahweh, this trusting in military weapons also. The prophets are not pacifists; they don't say we should have no military weapons. But the problem is that we put exaggerated trust in military weapons and are driven by our idolatry into believing they can do things for us that they can't. For example, Isaiah 30 and 31 makes it clear: “The Egyptians are men and not God, and their horses are flesh, and not spirit. . . . Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord. And yet He is wise and brings disaster, he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity.”

The prophets go on to describe the destruction that happens because we place trust in what won't bear that trust (Jer. 2:15, 19; Hosea 7:11-13; Amos).

In an exaggerated trust we become defensive, and we close our ears and our eyes to what is really happening, because we are clutching so tightly to what won't bear that trust. We won't hear the Word of God that calls us to repentance for our injustice. So the consequence of this idolatry is that we become more unjust. We are so defensive, so closed against hearing God's Word about justice to the poor, widows and orphans, the hungry, the strangers in our land. And we become hard like rocks. We can't be touched and we can't be moved. Therefore the injustice that causes war grows worse, and we lose our chance for repentance of self-correction.

Then we become foolish and lose our proper sense of caution. We do foolish things (Hosea 7:11; Isaiah 10:15ff.; 14:3ff.) We are not rational anymore. We are clutching to a particular source of hope and security which can't bear all that trust. Therefore we venture into wars that we have no business getting into because we exaggerate our ability to rely on our weapons, and we close ourselves to the warnings we are given. Therefore, we blunder into destruction, and are unable to understand why.

There is not time to say more, but I do want to mention that I spelled some of this out and indicated its relation to the nuclear arms race in the packet that **Sojourners Magazine** puts out, "The Nuclear Challenge to Christian Conscience"; it has about 26 different articles by different authors all the way up to the Pope and all the way down to me. The students in my course on social ethics answered and rated this packet the best of readings in the course. It should be of interest to your students in your study groups.

At the time of the Cuban missile crisis, we were scared because of what nuclear war might do to us. Back then, the Soviet Union had 75 intercontinental ballistic missiles that could reach the United States. We had 294. Seventy-five can do a lot of damage. It can ruin the 75 largest cities in the country. So there was reason to be scared. Now the Russians have 5,000 nuclear warheads and bombs that can reach the U.S. and we have 11,000 that can reach the Soviet Union. If the arms race is not controlled by treaty, and the two sides continue building at the present rates, before the 1980's are out the 6,000 that the Soviet Union now has will become 32,000 or 33,000 and the 11,000 we have now will also become 32,000 or 33,000. What that means is that if there is somebody you love they are a lot surer to be killed in a nuclear war. It means a phenomenal amount of destructiveness.

If you take a one megaton nuclear bomb, which is about an average size Soviet bomb, and you drop it over the city of Louisville, where I live, it would cause a blast that would knock down brick ranch-style homes all the way out to the expressway on the east and the west, an eight mile diameter.

Then there would be fire storms. The explosion is so hot that it causes asphalt to burn like kindling. The fire storms would go out twice the distance of the eight mile diameter. Many people who didn't get killed by the knocking down of homes, by all the bricks flying around, etc. would be burned by the heat. And then thirdly, if it were a surface burst, which produces more radiation than with an air burst, the radiation would be powerful enough to kill most of the people 100 miles downwind. That is one bomb. The Russians now have 6,000. And the 6,000 become 32,000 by the end of the decade if they are not controlled. Furthermore, the kind that they and we are building are making them more likely to be used; many experts are now saying they expect nuclear war to happen before the next two decades are out. That means my children and your children, our mothers, brothers and fathers, aunts and uncles and those we love are likely to be victims of nuclear war.

We don't know much about the destruction of war because we haven't had war on our territory since, I guess, the Civil War. These weapons are intercontinental weapons. They are not just aimed somewhere else. They are aimed at us and ours are aimed at Russia. So the danger in this kind of nuclear war is beyond imagination. The **Sojourners** packet has a map in it. It is from the Pentagon. The pink areas are the places where the bombs are most likely to land. And because most of us are in the South where we have more than our share of military installations, most of us either live in the middle of one of those pink targets or near one, or downwind. We are not talking about something theoretical or abstract. We're talking about the real thing.

The trend in the nuclear arms race is not to stay where we are, but for this monster to increase in size and to become unstable. And therefore it is more likely to happen. We are not getting to a safer kind of world, but to a much less safe world.

If you were a Martian and you visited us and saw us and the Russians building such mutual suicide, what would you think? It is not in the rational interest of the Russians or the Americans. To explain that sort of thing you would have to

go to some kind of concept like idolatry, becoming foolish and irrational because our trust is in something that can't bear that trust. We have replaced what would be a rational way of thinking with an exaggerated trust in these weapons so that when we worry that the Russians are building more we don't support a treaty to stop them from building more, but we just build more ourselves. Then of course it causes them to build more. This irrationality is obvious in "The SALT Syndrome," an organization which has named itself the American Security Council so that people will confuse it with the National Security Council. The basic logic of the film is that the Russians are building more and more and more weapons and we've got to be worried about that. Therefore, we should oppose treaties which put limits on what the Russians build. The illogic is obvious. Why are they so illogical? Their trust is in building more weapons. They say we should build this and this and this. And the result of building this and this in the nuclear arms race is that the Soviet Union builds the same things. We build ICBM's so they build ICBM's. We build multiple warheads so they build multiple warheads. We build cruise missiles so they build cruise missiles. It goes on and on. You can't achieve a treaty that says the U.S. can build them, but Russia can't.

### **Peacemaking and the Sermon on the Mount**

In Matthew 5 Jesus gives us a set of suggestive clues about how to be peacemakers. Unfortunately, many miss the clues, however, because they read Jesus' teachings as merely a negative prohibition—nonviolence, nonvengeance, or non-resistance. I want to suggest that that is a misinterpretation. If you read the various teachings in Matthew 5 and ask what the common thread is, you notice that it is not a negative "don't do something," but a positive "do do something." Howard Rees was my campus minister in Washington, D.C. He got fed up with our emphasis on regulations that say don't do this and don't do that. He once asked, "What I want to know is what **are** you doing while you are not doing what you don't do?" I think that is what Jesus is asking in the Sermon on the Mount. For example, Jesus says if you are in a worship service and you remember your brother has something against you, drop your hymbook immediately

and run up the aisle and out the door and go get reconciled with your brother and only after that come back to worship. Now that wasn't a question of merely **not** doing violence against my brother. That was a command to take surprising initiative: run out of the worship service and go get reconciled and only then come back.

Or again, Jesus says, if someone poor asks aid, I should give to him. That is not a situation in which I am going to hit somebody and I shouldn't. That's the injustice and greed getting in the way of making peace. I should fight against poverty and hunger. I should take surprising initiative. Not only my coat, but my shirt too.

I should pray for my enemies. It's not that I'm going to clobber my enemies, and Jesus merely says "don't." He is saying surprising initiative is to pray for your enemies. The Zealot says to pray that our (Roman) enemies will be destroyed and to take up the sword against them. The Roman soldier has authority to require me to carry his pack for a mile. Jesus says to carry it for a second mile. Jesus here opposes the zealot strategy of violence and instead advocates the politics of surprising initiative and carrying it a second mile. Jesus came to Jerusalem, confronting the authorities, identifying with people in need, and dying to bring peace and reconciliation. It's not an ethic of not doing something, sitting on our can and saying we are for peace. It's an ethic of taking a surprising initiative to go to your brother and get reconciled. The reason John Walsh is not here is because he believes that. He believes in taking an initiative and going to Iran where our brother has something against us, and visa versa where we've got some things to be reconciled, and trying to find a solution. That's an example of the kind of surprising initiative, peacemaking, that Jesus taught and lived and died undertaking.

So what that means about this idolatrous arms race is that we need to think about taking surprising initiative. I would suggest that you might consider having your students study either John Howard Yoder's book, **The Politics of Jesus**, or the new book by Ferguson **The Politics of Love**, or Ron Sider's **Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger** or his **Christ and Violence**.

**Paul's Theme: Grace and Peace**

Let me offer a few suggestions about Paul. Did you know that every one of Paul's letters begins by praying for grace **and peace**? And all end by praying for grace and peace except Philemon, which omits peace, and II Thessalonians, which prays for peace but doesn't mention grace?

Paul is deeply concerned about peace at least four levels. His understanding of God's secret purpose for the ages which is now revealed in Christ is his purpose to bring all together in one to make all of us become one people. His great vision, God's purpose revealed in Christ, is to bring all of us together in peace (Colossians 1:15-23; cf. Eph. 1-3).

Second, it's Paul's understanding that grace is not just a doctrine, but that grace changes my relationship with my fellow human beings, I am a member of the family not because of anything I deserve, but purely because of the grace of God. That means that I have no way that I can say somebody else can't be a member of the family because of not being good enough. Grace means you can belong here, you were invited in as strangers, and so therefore you have got to invite everybody in too. Grace and peace belong together. I have no way to boast that I am better than somebody else. Boasting, self righteousness and pride are among the biggest obstacles to making peace with others, and grace undercuts all boasting.

Third, there were great problems between the Jews and the Gentiles—racial, national, religious, and just plain old despising one another. Again and again Paul works for Jews and Gentiles to become one and come together to make peace.

Fourth, the church itself is to be the embodiment of God's purpose of peace and so Paul again and again in his letters works for peace in churches. The church is going to be God's instrument in his purpose and it can't be an institution at war with itself. It has got to be itself the embodiment of God's peace. Somehow I think it is appropriate that you have invited me to come speak of peace at this particular Southern Baptist Convention. One of my students heard that I was coming and he said, "Oh, you're going to speak on peacemaking at the pastor's conference?"



Fifth, Paul speaks about the way of peace in relating to the government. There is interesting new material about the background behind Romans 13. In Romans 12 Paul summarizes the sermon on the Mount about living in peace with others and then in Romans 13 he talks about the Roman government. There had already been one insurrection against the Roman government in which apparently some Christians participated, and the Jews and Christians, including Priscilla and Aquilla, got kicked out of Rome. And now another insurrection over taxes was beginning to occur; it would probably lead to war, and so Paul writes to the Roman Christians and says, "Pay all the authorities their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due (Romans 13:7)." There was a just tax, and an unjust revenue which was causing the insurrection. Paul wanted Christians in Rome to pay both taxes, and to make peace not war. You can read about that in an article by Marcus Borg in **New Testament Studies** and in the last chapter of Victor Furnish's new book, **The Moral Teachings of Paul**. Paul was very concerned that Christians make peace with the Roman government.

With these five levels of Paul's concern about peacemaking, read Romans through. Notice also that the virtues and vices Paul lists are mostly peacemaking virtues and enmity-producing vices. And notice how Paul decided to risk his life and his hoped-for missionary journey to Spain for the sake of bringing the collection from Gentile churches to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem—how important it was for him to try to make peace between Jews and Gentiles, even more important than his hope to go to Spain (compare Acts 20 and 21). Romans is not just a letter about a doctrine of grace, written so we can construct theological doctrines and argue about them. It emphasizes peace as much as grace, and calls us to a new peacemaking lifestyle. Reading Romans (and Paul's other letters) with this in mind, you see it from an exciting and relevant perspective that has been too long obscured by doctrinal debate.

#### **A Specific Application: The GLCM and SS-20 Missile Buildup**

I hope these brief clues can open up some new perspectives on crucial biblical themes for you and for those you

minister to. I hope they can help all of us see some guideposts that have been hidden too long by an ideological fog.

We are in danger of blundering into destruction because we have replaced proper trust in God by exaggerated trust in weapons. We are called to repent, to be open to the Spirit, to return to Yahweh and his compassionate justice. We are called to take surprising initiatives to make peace. The very heart of the gospel message is grace and peace. We are called to make peace across racial, religious, economic, national and governmental barriers.

These clues, these guideposts, relate directly to the nuclear arms race and a dangerous new weapons development that I want to mention. The particular weapons that I have in mind are the ground-launched and sea-launched cruise missiles that are now being prepared for deployment in late 1983. These weapons are particularly dangerous to the future of those we love, and are not in the long-term interest of the United States, our allies, or the Soviet Union. And they can be stopped, if we encourage our government to push for serious negotiations about stopping them.

The ground-launched and sea-launched cruise missiles are different from the air-launched cruise missile, and different from all previous long-range nuclear weapons, in one all-important respect: they are too small to be counted by spy satellites. And their launchers are too small to be verified by spy satellites. This means that once these cruise missiles are put in place, we will have a next-to-impossible task to know how many of them the Soviet Union has, and they will have an equally difficult task trying to know how many the United States has. Or how many our allies have.

Present arms control agreements depend on our ability to watch what the other side does, and to count their bombers, missile-carrying submarines, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with our own technological devices. We each know exactly how many of these nuclear weapons launchers the other side has. Therefore, we can reach agreements limiting the number each side will build, and have confidence about each others' performance. In the midst of all the acrimony of the SALT debate, conservative Senator

Barry Goldwater, who is on the Armed Services Committee and the Intelligence Committee, said verification of SALT II is no problem. We monitor what the other side does by spy satellite, infrared photography, microwave and radio interception, radar, and personal spies. We know the exact number of the other side's missile launchers.

But now for the first time, a long-range nuclear weapon is being built that is small, and mobile, and does not need a large launcher. The ground-launched cruise missile is only twenty feet long; it could be hidden in a living-room, a barn, under a haystack. The sea-launched cruise missile could be hidden in a fishing trawler, a yacht, or any kind of ship that wanders along our Atlantic or Pacific shores. If we build ground-launched cruise missiles and place them on the ground surrounding Russia, we cannot negotiate a treaty saying they cannot surround the U.S. with long-range sea-launched cruise missiles. They will be able to do this in unlimited numbers. Although the missiles are small, their warheads have about 15 times the explosive power of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. Because these missiles are relatively cheap, we can be surrounded by very large numbers of them in a short while. They can turn the U.S. into a very large Hiroshima.

Our NATO allies do not like these weapons and want us to begin negotiations quickly to get them stopped. One reason is the arms race chaos they will bring. Another reason is that they will be stationed on the ground in Western Europe, and that will make millions of Europeans more likely targets in nuclear war. And another reason is the Soviet SS-20 missile.

The Soviet Union is building a powerful new missile, the SS-20, and aiming it at Europe. They are building 75 per year—which is fast as missiles go. The Europeans want this stopped. And we agree. The way to get them stopped is to push the Soviet Union to agree to stop, and to agree that neither we nor they will build any long-range ground-launched or sea-launched cruise missiles. We will then match the SS-20s that have been built with more controllable weapons, submarine-launched missiles or Pershing-II ballistic missiles.

Under these conditions, an agreement can be verified. Although we can't count how many cruise missiles are put in place **once they are in place**, we can verify whether **some or none** have been put in place. We can reach an agreement saying none will be deployed, and be confident of compliance. To put them in place would require extensive transportation, surrounding equipment, training and practice, guards, etc., and experts are confident we could detect that some are being put in place, but not how many. So the point where they must be stopped is at zero. The time we must work on that agreement is in 1981, so that the weapons systems do not gain too much momentum to be stopped, and so that the Soviet Union does not continue deploying more and more SS-20s by the time agreement is reached.

Christians who take the Biblical call to be peacemakers seriously have a strategy which has been given to us, and which is highly relevant. First, we are called to repent of idolatry. We must beware of so much trust in weapons that we are blinded to any solution except trusting in our building not only submarine-launched missiles and Pershing-II missiles, but also ground-launched cruise missiles, while the Soviet Union builds SS-20s and sea-launched cruise missiles and Backfire bombers in an uncontrolled way. That way leads to very thorough destruction of those we love. We are called to disclose the foolishness of idolatrous trust and its consequences. And to repent for that idolatry in ourselves.

Second, we are called to take initiative, to go talk with our brother where there is alienation, to see if there is a way that we can reach some agreement. Our NATO allies want us to take this initiative. The Soviet Union wants negotiations on this issue. It is in our interest as a people who don't want to be surrounded by sea-launched cruise missiles in uncontrolled numbers, and who don't want a quantum leap in the likelihood of nuclear war starting by accident or by decentralized action within some field command in Europe or in Russia, and who want a controlled nuclear balance rather than a chaotic nuclear arms race.

Third, Paul's emphasis on grace and peace guides us in our strategy. He points out that all have sinned, both Jews and Gentiles. No one has a basis for self-righteousness. We

all live only by forgiveness and grace. This is true of all persons, and it is true of both sides of the nuclear arms race. Russians tend to assume that the nuclear arms race is caused by the United States. Americans assume that we are righteous and that the Russian government is to blame. This self-righteousness causes complacency on both sides about our own need to take initiatives, and our own need to examine actions we take which also contribute to the process that is moving toward our mutual destruction.

It is true that the Soviet Union has long been engaging in a steady military buildup, and that they have made decisions which have caused us to miss opportunities for getting the nuclear arms race under control. But the same is true of the United States. Every major offensive nuclear weapons system was first developed by the United States, because of its technological lead, and then copied by the Soviet Union. Several times in the past twenty-five years, the two sides came close to agreements on inspectable mutual nuclear weapons limits, only to have the agreements called off, or undermined by early deployment of the weapons, or fail to be ratified. Many of those times, the destructive action was ours; many times it was theirs. No side is righteous, not one. A realistic awareness that self-righteousness can lead to our destruction, and that it is based on a nationalistic and unchristian pride, can help us to move in directions that lead to peace rather than war. The alternative, war, is, in a nuclear age, not only massive suicide, not only the killing of ourselves, but the likely killing of those we love.

Paul calls us to live peaceably with all. And he suggests, and himself undertakes, imaginative ways to make peace. He says this is God's purpose for all of us. He sets his face toward Jerusalem, following his Lord in an effort to make peace between Jews and Gentiles. His vision is our vision. His Lord is our Lord. We are called to take initiatives to live peaceably in a community threatened by a growing number of nuclear weapons. Let us repent, and call one another to repent, and follow our Lord.