

The Peace-Making of Abraham

Gen. 13.1-13.

There were no disputes between Abraham and Lot as they journeyed from Ur to Haran to Canaan to Egypt and back to Canaan. During difficult times, constant transitions, repeatedly uprooting their families to move on, there was no disagreement. But, when they arrived in Canaan for the last time, and gained wealth, they then experienced family disagreement. Increased possessions brought increased trouble! Prosperity brought strife!

13.8. Let there be no strife amongst us, for we are brothers. Many, when facing conflict, cling to their personal rights and personal financial priorities. Many families and churches are torn apart by self-seeking, standing on our own rights, and refusing to consider the needs of others. In so doing, the cause of Christ is shamed. Who wants to join a congregation of bitter, feuding and vengeful saints? “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Rom. 12.10). “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Phil. 2.4).

Abraham was Lot’s superior in wealth, age, social status and family seniority. He recognized this strife, and he didn’t ignore the problem, he took the initiative to propose a peaceful way forward. Although it was his right to insist that he have the first choice of the land, he graciously gave this option to Lot.

Lot, perhaps stunned by Abraham’s generosity and self-sacrifice, immediately chose the seemingly “best land” around Sodom. Lot greedily chose what he thought was his best option. He took his chance while he could. He pitched his tent “toward Sodom” (v. 12), and in standing selfishly for his own position, he opened his life and family to bitter consequences...from Sodom. God however revealed Himself again to Abraham, affirms His promises to him, and the chapter concludes with Abraham still worshipping at an altar to the LORD. Lot is absent. His selfish behavior had unforeseen and tragic consequences, both spiritually and for his marriage and for their family. Abraham’s peace-making though personifies the Beatitude, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5.9).

This is the only place in the entire Bible where we find the word ‘Peacemaker.’ Semitic languages are obliged to break this word into two, and Jesus is commending neither the peaceful nor the pacifists in this Beatitude.

Peace is often limited to the absence of war or the cessation of hostilities. Ceasefires and surrenders are important preludes to peace, but they do not constitute biblical peace. Peace in the Bible is a positive concept, including the finest of loving relationships between individuals, within families, communities and nations. Peace also includes good health. The peace that Jesus is discussing is the peace of God, a force for good, mutual trust and inner security which, ‘Passeth all understanding’ (Phil. 4.7).

Jesus lived during the time of the *Pax Romana*, the ‘Peace of Rome.’ The *Pax Romana* arose from the Romans’ self-belief that they had a superior system of governance, and it was their mission to impose their laws and way of life on the rest of the world. In practice, the arrival of Rome in an unconquered territory was accompanied by rape, slavery, mass killings, the complete destruction of towns and homes, and the mass deportation of the survivors. The arrival of the Roman emperor into newly-conquered territory was announced by public heralds as the ‘*euaggelion*’ or the ‘Good News.’ Whilst the *Pax Romana* was good news to the Romans themselves, it was terrifying news to the newly conquered.

Peace amongst disciples does not happen easily. Yet, to be Christ-like means to be a peacemaker. To maintain the peace of God, Jesus commanded His disciples to remove causes for stumbling amongst one another. ‘If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea! Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes’ (Matt. 18.6-7). A stumbling block is a *skandalon*. Followers of Jesus are to be aware of

causes for stumbling, and to voluntarily hold back from that which would cause younger disciples a crisis of faith.

And peace is to be actively worked for. Jesus gave clear instructions to His disciples on how to maintain peace. Matthew 18.15-20 clearly indicates that if there is a cause of controversy, the offended party is to seek out the offending party and work for reconciliation. This may involve an appeal to conscience or praying for the Holy Spirit to soften the heart of the offending party. If this does not work, the matter is to be brought to the matter of 2-3 witnesses, and if that does not work, the matter is to be brought before the church family. Appeals to individual conscience, inter-personal relationships, and community harmony are to be made. And in bringing the matter before the entire church family, both sides are agreeing to live with and honor the decision of the entire church family.

What are the implications of this Beatitude?

Firstly, Jesus is the 'Prince of Peace' (Isa. 9.6). In the time of the disciples, Jesus made it plain that those homes or communities which rejected Him would also reject the peace of God (Matt. 10.12-15). And in rejecting the peace of God, they would by default be subject to whatever form of peace the dominant political forces would impose on them. All forms of human peace, e.g. the *Pax Romana* or *Pax Britannica*, are ultimately based on injustice, exploitation and oppression. At a broad level, we may understand the conflicts in the Middle East between Israelis and Arabs as happening because both sides have broadly rejected Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace. In our families, as we reject the rule of the Prince of Peace, we will strive for *shalom* but never experience *shalom*. The same is true for our own hearts!

Secondly, an African proverb says, 'When elephants fight, the grass is trampled.' When spiritual leaders and fathers choose not to work and sacrifice for peace, but prefer to fight and form factions and gossip and criticize and point out the problems in others, it is those young in the faith who are discouraged and fall away. And upon such leaders Jesus pronounces eternal destruction unless they repent! Pushing for what is right must always be measured against the potentially eternal cost to disillusioned young Christians.

Thirdly, peace-making may involve self-sacrifice and unjust treatment for the peacemaker. Paul wrote about Jesus Christ bringing peace between Jews and Gentiles, 'For He is our peace; in His flesh He has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Eph. 2.14). Our peace with God came through the self-sacrifice of Jesus. Yet our striving for peace generally involves someone else sacrificing or apologizing or losing face in public whilst we stand on a foundation of truth and seek to come out of the process with social esteem and honor. But, to follow Jesus in peace-making involves a willingness to be personally hurt or humbled in order that the community as a whole might experience peace. If everyone is seeking for their way to be followed, there will never be peace. If everyone is seeking to make peace, regardless of the personal cost or sacrifice, the peace of God will flourish.

And so we conclude with questions for personal reflection.

1. What are the personal characteristics of someone who is at peace with himself or herself?
2. Describe what the presence of the peace of God would mean in your home and church family
3. Reflect on the causes of stumbling from others that have caused difficulty for you in your own Christian experience. How did these causes for stumbling impact your walk with God? In what ways am I a cause for stumbling to Christians around me?
4. What personal effort and sacrifice am I willing to make to be a peace-maker? How may I better reflect Jesus as the Prince of Peace in my own life?