

what
the
Bible
says
about
PEACE

3rd Edition

TWO PEACE PRAYERS

Lord, make me an instrument of your 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.

*(A Franciscan prayer, attributed to
Saint Francis of Assisi)*

Lead me from death to life,
from falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to hope,
from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love,
from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart,
our world, our universe.
Peace, peace, peace

*(An international prayer for peace, used by
people of all faiths each day at noon -
reprinted by permission of Prayer for Peace,
Senior's Farmhouse, Semley, Shaftesbury,
Dorset.)*

PAPER 1

THE VISION OF PEACE

Shalom

The beautiful Hebrew word "*shalom*" comes from a verb meaning "*to bring completeness*" or "*to make whole*." It speaks of a totally integrated life, with full health of body, mind and spirit. In peace, a person is perfectly attuned to nature, open to other people, and living a life of joy with God. People's relationships are those of sharing, mutual concern and love. These express themselves in justice, freedom and inter-dependence. All of this is included in the Biblical concept of "*peace*" as expressed in the word "*shalom*." (See, for instance, Psalm 4: 8; Psalm 147: 12-14; Isaiah 26: 1-12; Isaiah 32: 1-18; Zechariah 8: 14-17.)

God's Purpose

The creation story of Genesis shows God's will as being peace and harmony, shalom, for the whole created order. (See Psalm 104.) The essential goodness of God's creation comes first; sin follows later and is a corruption of the essential nature of human beings and the created order. (See Psalm 85; Isaiah 48: 17-22, Isaiah 59: 1-2,8.)

In the New Testament the same emphasis is clear. God's purpose in Jesus is peace "*God was well pleased through Him to reconcile all things to Himself having made peace through the blood of the Cross*" (Colossians 1: 20). This peace of Jesus is not some new purpose but the one intended "*before the foundation of the world*" (See also Jeremiah 28: 8-9.)

Peace for all

Shalom is not just for the individual, but for all creation. This is well illustrated in Psalm 122, where "*peace*" and "*Jerusalem*" belong together. Shalom is only possible where it is seen to be all embracing, both individual and corporate (See Isaiah 2: 204; Isaiah 11: 1-9.) In revelation the "*New Jerusalem*" is an all-embracing concept and cannot be reduced to purely inner spiritual values (Revelation 21: 1-5). Only the total well-being of all can express God's will and purpose of Shalom.

For Group Work

(a) Ask each person to write down what they mean by "*peace*". Share together your ideas.

(b) Discuss various dictionary definitions of *'peace'*.

(C) Using a concordance, find a variety of Biblical references to *"peace"*. In what different ways is the work used?

(d) Study Psalm 122; Colossians 1: 19-23; Revelation 21: 105. What picture do these give of God's *will* for His creation?

For **Discussion**

(a) What signs of God's original shalom do we see in our community and in the world today?

(b) How much is our abuse of the environment a move away from shalom? Consider Genesis 1: 27-31 and Psalm 8.

(c) Is a life of more money and luxuries for us and ours a denial of shalom? Can we find real peace for ourselves and our families if we forget the problems of society? (Amos 8: 4-8.)

For **Individual Reflection**

(a) What things in my life are a denial of shalom?

(b) What changes should I make in my personal life as a move towards shalom?

(c) Are there changes in society to which I should be committing myself as a move towards shalom? If so, what changes?

PAPER 2

PEACE IS SHATTERED

"The essential goodness of God's creation comes first; sin follows later and is a corruption of the essential nature of human beings and the created order." (Sec Paper 1.) The root cause of sin in the Genesis story is rebellion against God's order and the lust for power (Genesis 3: 1-7). Very quickly the story moves from the scene of harmony and health to that of strife, murder, war and refugees (Genesis 4). Shalom had been shattered. (See Isaiah 48: 18-19; Malachi 2: 4-9.)

The Vision Remains

The vision of shalom, however, is never quite lost. It is a recurrent theme throughout the Bible - the promised land *'flowing with milk and honey'*, ° the Messianic kingdom, the Messiah being the Prince of Peace, and shalom being one of the blessings of the kingdom (Isaiah 11: 1-9; Isaiah 65: 17-25; Zechariah 9: 910); the covenant of shalom (Ezekiel 34: 25-31); the *"new Jerusalem"* (Revelation 21: 1-5). Shalom is still seen as the ultimate purpose of God for His creation, a purpose thwarted by humanity's sin.

For Group Work

- (a) From the following list, together with any others you may wish to add, attempt to agree a list of the five main causes of unrest in the world today: greed for power, tribalism, nationalism, poverty, power in the hand of the few, loss of religious faith, over-population, ignorance of one another, unemployment, differing ideologies (communism, capitalism, etc), racism, class division, sexual discrimination
- (b) Study Isaiah 9: 6 & 7. If the vision of the Prophet is a Kingdom ruled by the *"Prince of Peace"*, "what does this mean for His followers?"

For Discussion

What can we do to reverse the move away from shalom in our own country and in the world at large? As Christians, have we any hope of peace in Ireland and the wider world?

For Individual Reflection

Peace is not so much a state to be attained in the future, but a way of living here and now.

- (a) Is my life as a Christian reflecting the peace of God within me?
- (b) What about my relationships at home, church, work, in the community?

PAPER 3

PEACE WITH JUSTICE

"Peace with Justice" is not a phrase invented by the Provisional IRA in the 1970s. It is a thoroughly Biblical concept, which some claim has too often been ignored by Christians. Of course, the expression is used by the Biblical writers in a very different way from that of the paramilitaries.

In the Old Testament, God is seen as a God of justice. This God of justice is not like the stern figure over our courts of law with a sword in one hand and balancing scales in the other. Justice, in Biblical terms, means that God is faithful to the promises He has made to humankind, even despite the unfaithfulness of human beings. In turn, God expects just conduct from His people, faithfulness to Him and His way. (See Deuteronomy 10: 10-22 and Psalm 72: 1-7.)

The close association of justice and peace is clearly seen in the prophets. In a situation of oppression and injustice the people say "*peace, peace, when there is no peace*" (Jeremiah 6: 9-16 and Micah 3: 1-12). Isaiah points out that justice and peace belong together, and true worship is not possible where the weak and powerless are exploited (Isaiah 58). Amos urged in the strongest terms that the way of injustice leads only to darkness and sorrow (Amos 5: 1-27).

In proclaiming God's way of justice, the prophets exposed false peace. True shalom can only be a reality when we face up to all that is contrary to God's will in our lives and community as a whole. (See also Proverbs 16: 7-8.)

For Group Work

(a) Study Jeremiah 6: 9-16 in small groups. A useful method to make clear the present day application of this passage would be as follows:
Give each group a copy of a current newspaper and ask them to find anything in the newspaper on which the Biblical passage throws light.

(b) Use a simulation game. This enables the group to move beyond mere discussion of oppression and injustice to experience the feelings of the oppressed. A range of games and activities related to justice is available in the publication *It's Not Fair* - See 'Other Useful Resources' at the back of this booklet for full details.)

For Discussion

(a) Can there be peace in a world where two thirds of the population gets poorer and millions die in poverty, while one third, including many Christians, get richer to excess?

(b) What injustices are apparent in society in your part of Ireland, or wherever you live? Can there be true peace while they exist?

(c) The *Violence in Ireland* report states: "*Christians must be actively involved in the pursuit of a just society. In this context we must not shun the call to a prophetic denunciation of injustice nor to demonstrate our solidarity with the poor and deprived.*" Are we as Christians sharing solidarity with the '*poor and deprived,*' or with the affluent and privileged?

For Individual Reflection

(a) Have we learnt to "*rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep?*"

(b) How far is my concern for justice able to lead me in action, for the sake of others, even if it is costly?

(c) Am I prepared to step on someone else on the way up the ladder of success?

PAPER 4

BARRIERS BROKEN

The classical Greek word "*eerie*" is translated as "*peace*," and its root meaning is the breaking-down of barriers. In the New Testament the heart of shalom and *eerie* come together and "*peace*" takes on a meaning which combines an end to strife, a state of harmony and the breaking-down of barriers.

Jesus both proclaimed and demonstrated the peace of the Kingdom of God. As he preached, healed, exposed injustice and oppression, as he gave in loving and sacrificial service, He revealed and lived out the peace of God's reign. These things were signs of that Kingdom - "*the Kingdom of God is come upon you*" (Luke 11: 20; see also Luke 1: 76-79; Luke 2: 14; Acts 10: 36-38; Effusions 6: 19-23).

In offering himself on the Cross as the sacrifice for human beings and all creation, he broke the barriers between humanity and God, and the barriers between people (Effusions 2: 11-22; Colossians 1: 19-23).

St. Paul stressed that within the body of Christ the barriers are removed (Colossians 3: 11 & 15). In the Johannine letters we read that the barriers between human beings and God cannot be removed without the same happening between human beings (I John 4: 20) - reconciliation of people to God must be accompanied by reconciliation between people.

For Group Work

(a) Show the video 'Neighbours' followed by discussion about the cause of barriers. It is a powerful film which begins with laughter as two men argue about a flower growing in the boundary between their gardens. Tension develops from the simple incident, leading to horror and death. Available from Veritas outlets and possibly from other sources - see under 'Other Useful Resource' at back of this booklet. (b) List the main barriers that exist between people in your community. Are there any of these on which you could take action?

(c) In your group try to recall the negative and positive attitudes, stereotypes or prejudices you have heard expressed or inferred about Catholics/Protestants. You might recall what you heard up to the age of 11 and from 11 until the present. Try to think of what you have heard at home, from friends, relatives, school friends, at church, in the Scouts, the Boys' Brigade, etc.

Try to recall the feelings around these attitudes. Was there envy, resentment, fear? Have you ever disagreed with what you have heard? Have you had an opportunity to explore its validity?

(d) Study current newspapers and magazines for examples of stereotyping e.g. of Blacks, Muslims, travellers, asylum seekers, etc. Invite a member of some minority, e.g. an ethnic minority, to come and speak to you.

(e) The New Testament advocates diversity within the Church, but not disunity, division and barriers. Consider Ephesians 2; 1 Peter 2; John 15; Romans 1 I; 1 Corinthians 12.

For Discussion

(a) If John 4: 20 is taken seriously, can the Christian have any place for politics which exploit the divisions in our society?

(b) Are divided Churches a denial of the reality of peace?

(c) Is *eirene* really possible in an age when politicians tell us that nuclear weapons have "*kept the peace for 50 years?*"

For Individual Reflection

(a) Am I living by a pick and choose cafeteria-type Christianity? When it comes to barriers between myself and others, am I assuming that what the Bible says applies to everyone else except me.

(b) Am I so convinced that in most things my position is the only right and proper one, that I am not open to other people and new ideas?

PAPER 5

THE CHRISTIAN AND PEACE

Peace is a Gift

In the New Testament, peace is not a thing to be struggled for, or a state for which we strive. Peace is a gift of God. Consider the implications of II Thessalonians 3: 16 and similar benedictions in the Epistles. Jesus says that he gives to the disciples his peace (John 14: 27). This peace comes as a natural gift from a way of life submitted to God.

Peace in Strife

The Christian has no guarantee of a life removed from conflict and strife. Indeed he may find that discipleship of necessity involves struggle and opposition (Matthew 5: 10). Yet the peace of the Christian continues, even in the midst of strife, a peace *"not as the world gives."* In the world the Christian finds God and His peace even in trouble (John 16: 32-33; Romans 8: 35-39; Philippians 4: 4-7).

Peace is not an Option

St. Paul makes it clear that peace is an essential mark of the Christian. It is not in the same category as the variety of ministries or gifts (I Corinthians 12: 28-30) where he makes clear that not all Christians have the gifts of teaching, healing, speaking with tongues, etc.. Peace is set firmly in the category of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22). These are the essential marks of the Christian. (See also Romans 12: 9-2; Romans 14: 15-19; II Corinthians 13: 11; Ephesians 4: 1-3.)

For Group Work

(a) Despite the centrality of peace for the Christian church, history is littered with wars. Sometimes Christian divisions have actually caused wars and no one can claim that the current Irish situation is unrelated to Protestant-Roman Catholic rivalries. Islam and Judaism too have often been involved in wars. Buddhism, by contrast, has never caused a war. Attempt some analysis of why this is so. (b) Share experiences of peace in times of trouble.

For Discussion

(a) Which comes first, individual peace, or peace in society? How interdependent are they?

(b) *"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword"* (Matthew 10: 34-39). In the light of many other aspects of Jesus' teaching (e.g. *"turn the other cheek,"* forgiveness, the incident in Gethsemane when Peter was told to put his sword away, etc.) how can we understand this apparently very unpeaceful saying?

(c) Is it consistent to foster separation among Christians, encouraging fear and suspicion, and at the same time to claim to be Christians?

(d) If peace is not an option, have Christians been active enough in Ireland in making ventures of fellowship across religious divides and in generally working for peace? What ventures of fellowship could you take in your locality?

For Individual Reflection

(a) The unpeaceful person cannot work for peace. How consistent is my life at all levels?

(b) How would the peace I experience as a Christian endure in a time of suffering and deprivation?

(c) Am I willing to make ventures of fellowship, even when it is costly to do so?

PAPER 6

IS PEACE POSSIBLE?

The history of mankind is not very encouraging for anyone who expects easily to attain a utopian state of peace. Yet perhaps this is the biggest barrier to a peaceful world, for if people do not believe it is possible, then it will not happen.

Peace Impossible?

We cannot avoid the apocalyptic statements as in Matthew 24: 6-9 or in Revelation 6: 4. Such passages seem to point to the inevitability of violence and war as part of the scheme of history. Yet we must balance against these passages those which point to peace being attainable as promised in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 21: 1-4).

Passages like these, together with the Christian doctrine of the nature of humanity, while preserving us from a naive rationalist optimism, should paradoxically help us to see that peace is possible. God in Christ has inaugurated a Kingdom of peace. In the Cross and Resurrection he has released a power of love into the world whose fullest expression is peace.

Christian "hope" is not a vague wish for better times that may appear. It is the belief that the power of love will succeed and that ultimately God will bring "all things in heaven and earth into unity" the shalom of God will reign (Psalm 72: 1-7; Micah 4; 1-4).

Peace Here and Now

Yet for the Christian, peace is not just a state to be aimed for in the future, but a set of relationships here and now. The Christian must live in this tension of being at peace in a world of conflict. This is the price of the peacemaker (Romans 5: 1-5; Romans 12: 14-21).

Action

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5: 9). This is the only beatitude that speaks of action. The call is to be active in making peace. There is no place here for escaping or separating from the world's conflicts. Peace is made in the midst of suspicion, conflict and violence. Into this situation the Christian peacemaker is called to bring healing and wholeness, the fullness of shalom. (See Psalm 34: 11-14; II Timothy 2: 22; Hebrews 12:14; James 3: 17-18.)

For Group Work

(a) Share ideas about one step each person can take now towards being the people of shalom in personal life, family, work, community, national life or international life.

(b) Look at the *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5: 38-48). Is what suggested there totally impractical? Try to act out w39-42. Form small groups of 2 to 3 people and think up a situation to which these verses might apply. Try to see how you would react if you were slapped. What do you feel? What would you do, and what does the other person feel when you do the 'unexpected'? Are 'going another mile', 'turning the other cheek' etc. examples of surprising unexpected actions which seek to break the action-reaction pattern of conflict? Can members of the group remember moments in their lives when they acted in ways which did not return violence for violence? (See Andre Lascaris' book *Doing the Unexpected* - further details in 'Useful Reading' at the back of this booklet.)

For Discussion

(a) It is often said, "Individuals want peace, politicians make war." Is this really so? How can individuals go about changing the things in society that make for conflict and violence?

(b) How can Christians show in tangible form the peace of the Kingdom?

(c) In a society with little open physical violence, what is the role of the peacemaker? **For**

Individual Reflection

(a) "Sit down Oh men of God, You cannot do a thing." Does this in anyway describe my attitude to peacemaking?

(b) The Christian is not called to be popular, but to be true to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even when it means suffering (Matthew 5: 10). Am I so concerned with popularity that I am unable to pay the price of peace?

This adult study guide is produced as part of the Churches' Peace Education Programme of The Irish Council of Churches and The Irish Commission for Justice and Peace.

Also available is *What the Bible says about Violence, What the Bible says about Justice, What the Bible says about Poverty, What the Bible says about Reconciliation, What the Bible says about Justice, What the Bible says about the Environment and What the Bible says about Sectarianism.*

A Catalogue of publications and full information on the Programme are available from either of these organisations. (See back cover for contact addresses.)

Useful Reading:

To do the Unexpected: Reading Scripture in Northern Ireland by Andre Lascaris
Corrymeela Press.
The Politics of Peace by Brian Frost, Darton, Longman and Todd.

Building the Peace: Good Practice in Community Relations Work in Northern Ireland
by John Lampen, N.I. Community Relations Council. (Information Centre, 21 College Square East, Belfast BT1 6DE. Tel. Belfast 311881.)

Shalom: Biblical Perspectives on Creation, Justice and Peace by Ulrich Duchrow and Gerhard Liedke, World Council of Churches.

Evangelical Contribution on Northern Ireland (ECONI) various publications including its action pack series (there is one on peace) and *A Future With Hope: Biblical Frameworks for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland.* (12 Wellington Place, Belfast BT1 6GE, Tel. Belfast 325258.)

Faith and Politics Group, *Breaking Down the Enmity* and subsequent pamphlets, (Available from the PERC.)

Pax Christi, *Peacemaking Day by Day.* (Available from Pax Christi, 562 Lower Rathmines Road, Dublin 6. Tel. Dublin 4965293.)

Engaging the Powers by Walter Wink, Fortress Press.

New Testament Basis of Peacemaking by Richard McSorley, Centre for Peace Studies, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.

Sign of Hope: The Osijek Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights by Sister Mary Evelyn Jegen, Life and Peace Institute, Uppsala, Sweden.

Presbyterian Church in Ireland, *The Church's Peace Vocation.*

Other Useful Resources:

It's Not Fair: A handbook on world development issues - peace, justice, human rights etc, for schools and youth groups (original edition published by Christian Aid; Irish Edition published by Christian Aid and Trocaire).

Videos - Available from Veritas, 7-8 Lower Abbey Street, Dublin. Tel. Dublin 8788177 and other Veritas outlets.

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