

## PEACEMAKERS AND PERSECUTION

It is not by accident that Jesus put peacemakers and persecution together in the beatitudes. (See Matt. 5:9, 10) The making of peace is diametrically opposed to what the devil wants to accomplish. For this reason he immediately does everything withing his power to persecute the peacemakers.

This dichotomy dates back to Eden. Everything God made was "good". The devil, however, tempted Adam and Eve with "evil". The Hebrew word for evil is "ra" and comes from the root "ra a" which literally means "to spoil by breaking to pieces". God created wholeness and unity, and the devil attacked that unity with fragmentation and division. Peacemakers are the sons of God and that is why they are persecuted.

It is the eternal plan of God to call men out of a confused and divided world and unite them with Jesus Christ. This unity not only involves all of the fragmented elements of earth, but also in heaven. This is specifically stated in Eph. 1:10. As Jesus set about to bring unity He was constantly criticized for fraternizing with the wrong kind of people. His ultimate goal, as we have seen, was far greater than His critics dared to imagine. He was not just reconciling publicans and sinners, but everyone and everything. Ultimately, that which is not united in Christ will be destroyed

Thus the battle lines are drawn. The devil fights with physical force, but the weapons of our warfare are not carnal (2 Cor. 10:4). We wrestle against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12). Our victory will come through spiritual realities, such as the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and because we are not afraid to die (Rev. 12:11). We are like sheep in the midst of wolves but we still not to be afraid.

On the night before Calvary Jesus warned His disciples that they would be hated by the world. He said "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also (John 15:20). When we become like Jesus we reach out to all people, and those who consider themselves superior persecute us for it. Paul, for example, was telling the story of his life to a Jewish audience. They listened respectfully until he dared to mention that Christ sent him to the gentiles. At this point they stopped listening and started persecuting (Acts 22:22).

It has been said that Jesus has never been a Head without a Body, a King without subjects, or a Shepherd without sheep. This means that the same battle lines, have been and will be, encountered by each new generation. The late W. Carl Ketcherside had a Damascus Road experience in Belfast, North Ireland in 1951. It dawned on him that the invitation to open our hearts to Jesus was not given to alien sinners but to lukewarm Christians. On his knees he invited Christ anew into his life and arose with a burning desire to become an apostle of peace and unity. He came to realize that his fiery lessons and vigorous debates made him a "piecemaker" instead of a "peacemaker". When he broke the news to his wife Nell, she was ironing. Tears welled in her eyes and dripped down on the clothes she was pressing. "Carl", she said, "You are going to lose every friend you have got on earth". "That may be true", he responded, "but I will always have a friend from heaven who will never leave me or forsake me".

If you would like to joint the ranks of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, then dare to be a peacemaker. Reach out beyond the walls of your sect or denomination and start building bridges to those who are different. The persecution Jesus received was not initiated by secular leaders like Herod and Pilot. It came from men with a warped view of religion. So also with the persecution endured by Paul. He reminded Timothy of the persecution he endured from religious men at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and promised that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus would also be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:10 - 12). A similar persecution awaits you when you dare to be a peacemaker.

Before concluding his inspired message to Timothy, Paul wrote that at his first defence no one came to his support but everyone deserted him. This sad reality, however, paled into insignificance by the fact that the Lord stood by his side and gave him strength. This same Lord will also stand by you and bring you safely into His heavenly kingdom - if you dare to be a peacemaker (2 Tim. 4:16 - 18).