

Peace in our time, part 1

God brokers the peace

Romans 3

¹⁰ As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Righteousness through Faith

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

I want to start with this question, Is God a peace maker?

Because many people don't think so and they have reasonable arguments why.

Exhibit A: in Matthew 10:34 Jesus says,

³⁴ "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Some people think God is an angry, war like, dictator. That, in fact, he is the very opposite of a peace maker, that because of him there is less peace in the world.

In his famous book *The God Delusion*, anti-theist Richard Dawkins says,

"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."

Christopher Hitchens, another atheist writer, comes at it from a different angle. He doesn't think God is the problem so much as religion, the thing God promotes.

In "God is not Great" he says:

"Religion is not unlike racism.... Religion has been an enormous multiplier of tribal suspicion, and hatred, with members of each group talking of the other in the precise tones of the bigot."

One says God himself is violent and hungry for war, the other that His followers, because of his teaching, are violent bigots.

Do they have a point? Is God about drawing lines in the sand, "I'm this and you're that" so therefore we are enemies. And we all know religious people are often the worst at creating division.

Just a couple of decades years ago, if you were a catholic, you were the enemy. Even within the wider church, the followers of God would cause division.

The God of the Old Testament, lead Israel into many wars, rises up nations against Israel, in Romans 3 even requires the blood of his own son. Not very peace-like behaviour.

So what do we make of all this? Let's have a look at the passage.

As I have mentioned before, the first 3 chapters of Romans is building one big argument. Which basically is, that Humanity and God are in conflict with each other. We have turned from God, from following his ways and because of that we have turned God anger onto ourselves. There is no peace between us and God and we have created this rift ourselves.

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¹¹ *there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.*

¹² *All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* Romans 3:10-12

When I was at school my friends were terrible to their neighbours. It was the 90's and there was this new thing called the internet and you could go on the internet and download the Terrorist's Handbook. It told you how to make bombs out of household chemicals which was very exciting to 17 year old boys.

They started small with coke cans, moved to letter boxes then onto bins. And one stage, every bin night one street in Hornsby Heights looked like Iraq. Bits of bins and rubbish everywhere.

Last year there was a story in News about two neighbours that had been feuding for 47 years in a suburb in Melbourne. They had argued over everything from clothes pinched from the line to poisoned roses, to fences being replaced. There had been restraining orders, court appearances. The two men aged 90 and 83, finally decided to fight it out on the footpath where one got knocked over, hit his head and died, age 83. 47 years of feuding, ends in this tragic and stupid way.

The Bible paints this picture of an even longer feud between a creator God, and his creations, his children. This feud has been going on since we first walked on the earth. But the difference here is that we are the only ones causing trouble. We are the ones throwing our dog poo over the fence, leaving the rubbish on their front lawn, poisoning the trees to close to our backyard. The feud is our doing, and we keep making it worse.

But God is the active one that tries to restore peace, he is the one who makes the sacrifices, does that hard work so that the relationship can be restored. We are just sitting there watching ... as we put a bungler in his letterbox. While he is doing everything he can to make peace.

And yet God still seek to make peace between us and him:

²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God... ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith

God is doing all the peacemaking, all the reconciling, all the hard work he puts on his shoulders, all he asks of us is to respond, to accept his peace, to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord. God is so keen to bring peace that he Gives his only son, to die on a cross so that the price might be paid and peace can be formed.

A minister once told this story about a car accident he was once in:

He stopped at the light and this car just ran up the back of him. He got out very young looking bloke got out. "Licence, insurance detail?" "I don't have a licence... I'm only 15, this is my dad's car." "Well, call you parents then, they will need to pay." Please don't tell, my dad will go crazy!" He was in a real pickle, it was a hard decision to make. There was damage that has been done and a price that needs to be paid. They couldn't drive their cars around smashed up, or just leave them there. For the problem to be fixed they someone needed to pay the price.

As Paul sees it in Romans, the problem is that between God and humanity, there is hostility. Like feuding neighbours, there is not peace. And for there to be peace, someone needed to pay the price, solve the problem. Someone needs to do what needs to be done. God gives all he has, his very son that their might be peace between us and him.

God ultimate plans for creation is that there will be peace but in a different way than the world expects.

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. John 14:27

The peace Jesus wants for us is something outside of this world because in the Kingdom of God, this is where peace will reign. God's goal is to bring about peace once and for all between us and him, between us and each other.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. Revelations 21:4

This is what the Peace of Christ will look like.

In the Roman Empire, at the height of its reign, the whole empire experienced a peace like never before. There was no fighting, you didn't need to fear the Persians,

or Egyptians because the Romans were such a dominant power. And because of this trade flourished, travel was safer and easier than ever. They called it the “Pax Romana” – the Roman Peace.

Under the might of the Roman Kingdom, there was a new kind of peace never before seen – a peace that was different, you could travel 1000 miles and trade in Roman coins, with people on the other side of the empire. You could buy property, settle in new cities.

Before the Roman Empire, this area was all small tribes and nations constantly fighting each other for land or resources. This was something new.

In Christ there will be a new peace, a peace never before experienced. A peace that has no bounds, no time, race, creed, age, gender generation. There will be a peace and a unity between ancient people and modern – between black white, male female ... a true peace.

This peace stems from Christ... And we taste this peace when we become follower of him.

Lin Yutang was born in China to Christian parents, educated in Christian schools. In his early adulthood, he became a devoted Confusionist which focuses on how a person can find personal peace and humanity can find wider peace.

But the more he looked into it the more he became disillusioned. Humanity was getting better but worsemore materialistic, individualistic, less interested in helping others. The more he thought about it the more impossible it was for mankind to evolve. One day his wife dragged him to a church service in NYC. The preacher spoke about eternal life, that it's not just living forever but it's being brought into the Kingdom of God where we will be healed, changed, perfected, have our selfishness stripped away, we will find spiritual peace.

This opened his eyes, he went back and read the Scripture and He read them like it was for the first time – something he had heard 100 times before. Bible stories he had read 100 times before, now felt like the first time he had ever seen them. As he read he realised that the Bible was not a book filled with historical events but an authentic revelation of God that through Christ ... bringing God within reach. And he finally found the peace he had been searching for all his life because peace with God is the basis of all peace in this world.

How can we find peace with each other, with ourselves, if we are in conflict with our creator?

So to think of God as a tribal violent war like God that wants the blood of his own son ignores the fact that God goes to extra ordinary lengths to create peace in this world.

A peace that stretches out beyond this world into eternity. He is the one giving all he can, all that he has that there might be peace in this world and the next.