

they be not desperately wicked, they will see cause to bless God for this: well, blessed be God that sent such a man to me to prevent me, for I see I should

have done that I should have repented of. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’

SERMON XXXIX.

OR,

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MAKE PEACE BETWEEN MAN AND MAN.

‘Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.’—MAT. V. 9.

IT is a blessed thing to be an instrument of peace between man and man. I find the story of Moses, in Exod. ii. 30, wherein he doth engage himself in a quarrelsome business, but to the end that he might make peace, to be recorded by the Holy Ghost afterwards in the New Testament as a high and great commendation of Moses. ‘And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together; and he said unto him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? Why, now Moses he might have lived at the court, and had all the delights that possibly might be, why would he meddle with the Hebrews that were striving together? In Acts vii., we find them among the great commendations of Moses, this set forth; ver. 26. ‘And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?’ He would have set them at one again. The Holy Ghost forgets not this, that Moses would not content himself to live at the court, and have all kind of pleasure and delight there, but he would interest himself in the fallings-out of his brethren, so as if possibly he could to set them at one again. The Holy Ghost remembers this in after ages. Then somewhat is to be said about this of making and keeping peace between men and men. It is not, blessed are those that are at peace with sin, or seek to make peace with men’s sins and corruptions, but peacemakers that make peace between brethren and brethren, neighbour and neighbour: for though we should labour to be at peace with all men as much as possibly we can, yet we must not so much as endeavour nor desire to be at peace with any sin. Though God were infinitely willing and desirous to reconcile the world to himself, yet he would never reconcile sin; God and sin can never be reconciled—God and the least sin cannot. All the angels in heaven and men upon earth can never reconcile God and sin;

yea, whatever Christ did, as it was not intended by him, so it could never reconcile God and sin together; but God would remain to be an eternal enemy to sin, and that is the glory of God. So when we are endeavouring to make peace, we must not think to make peace with men’s corruptions, with men’s sins; we must not so love peace as to swallow it wrapt up with the dirt of guiltiness and of sin, not so as to soothe and humour men’s corruptions. Certainly there is no blessedness here, but a curse. But yet thus far, though we ought never to be at peace with men’s sins, yet we may forbear men though sinful—we may forbear sinners; yea, and when we come to oppose their sins, we must oppose them only with those weapons that God hath appointed. The magistrate in his place, and the church in its place, must oppose sin. There may be a great deal of turbulence of spirit, more than God allows in men, in opposing men’s distempers and corruptions: but that that we are now speaking of is peace between man and man. I shall therefore first labour to propound some general rules of peace between man and man. Secondly, Some more special rules in reference unto family peace. Thirdly, Some rules in reference unto neighbourly peace. And I confess I had some thoughts of rules about church peace, and commonwealth peace; but I shall tell you after why we shall not speak to that now.

First, then, Some rules in general for peace between man and man.

That is the first: That we should never use any violence to any man, but where there is a necessity. If what we would do may be done by any means but by violence, we should rather try it. When we see such and such walk disorderly, otherwise than we would, they do wrong. First, We should study whether there may be any means to recall them before any violence be used; use that always as the last help. It is quite otherwise with most men and women. When any

thing displeases them in another, they fly upon their faces present, and the first way which they take for help to reduce men, it is in a violent way. Now this is not to be the child of God. ‘Blessed are the peacemakers: they shall be called the children of God;’ that is, as I shall shew afterwards, they shall be like God. Now the Lord himself doth not love to ‘grieve the children of men.’ So the Scripture saith, ‘He delights not in the death of a sinner; he doth not willingly punish.’ Why, we should be like our Father. If there can be any means that can be used besides violence, let that be first tried; let us first engage ourselves there.

Secondly, If violence must needs be used, let there not be an extent of this violence any further than needs must. By the extent of it, I mean either in regard of the subject against whom, or in regard of the violence itself. Let it not be extended to a further degree than needs, but mix it what possibly you can with gentleness and love, if there be any hope of good that way; and extend it not further than needs must in respect of the subject that you do oppose. By that I mean this, that when any do displease you, and you must act in opposition to them; fly not out against all others that have any kind of likeness to them in anything else. Indeed, you may oppose all others that do that very unjust thing that such a one doth; but this is the frowardness and the turbulence of men’s spirits, that if any one do displease them, they do not satisfy themselves in opposing the person that doth it, or the thing that is unjust, but they will fly out against all men that have but any kind of correspondence with such that are of the way that they are of, and will not only oppose them that do displease them in the thing wherein they are displeased, but in all things else. Oh, this is an unpeaceable spirit! As we read of Haman, when Mordecai had displeased him, he did not think it enough to proceed against Mordecai’s person, but against all the people of the Jews; his heart was against them all. And thus it is with many; if they be but angered with any one that is in such a way different from others, they will presently fall upon all that are of that way. It was just the prelatical way in former times; if any that were called a Puritan did but anger them, they would fall upon all that went on in that way, and cry out of them all; and if they were displeased in one thing, they would seek to revenge themselves all the ways they could, in opposing of them in all other things. Now this is a way of turbulence, and not the way of peace. That is the second rule: When violence is to be used, yet let it extend no further (either in regard of the measure or the subject) than needs must. Such a one hath done amiss; why, I will deal with him in his person, and deal with him about that particular thing wherein he hath done amiss. It is a

very usual thing in neighbours, if one be but angry with one in a family, they are presently angry with all in the family; and this causes a great deal of division. So likewise in a town, a church, or commonwealth. But these rules are in general.

Thirdly, If you would have peace in the world, you must resolve beforehand to be willing that it should cost you something. Every man would fain have peace. When we speak of peace, saith Austin, in his Comment upon the Psalms, all mankind desires it presently. When you speak of peace, with one mouth—Oh I desire it, I would wish it, I would have it, I love it. Every one would fain have peace; but men and women are loath that it should cost them anything. What is the meaning of that? Oh they would fain have peace, but they would fain have everybody to be all of their mind; they would fain that they might do everything whatsoever they pleased, and nobody speak against it. But now, when the heart is set upon peace, and is used by Christ to be a peacemaker, such a one is set upon peace, so as to be willing to purchase it at a dear rate, yea, to purchase it at any rate but sin. The truth is, peace is never bought too dear but by sin. And as we say, we may buy gold too dear; so we may buy peace too dear, if we betray our consciences for peace sake, or the truth for peace sake. But let us be willing to sacrifice what is our own and not God’s, especially when it is public peace. If every man or woman had this resolution strongly set—Well, I am resolved so long as I live, wheresoever God casts me, I will make it my endeavour that there may be peace where I live, and I will be at any cost that so I may procure it. Yea, whatsoever shall be proposed as a way of peace besides sin, I am resolved that that way I will take where I see that God may have glory, and the public good may go on. Yea, where I see the good of my brother’s soul doth depend upon it—for where there are jars and contentions, I have heard that there is abundance of sin, and I find it so by experience. Now, where I may prevent sin, and do good, I am resolved, though it cost me dear, I will not be wanting for the furtherance of this. This resolution must be in every man, to be willing that it must cost him dear; for peace is a precious commodity, and it comes not by wishing. Oh I would have peace! and it comes not by crying out one upon another, but by willing that it should cost me something. You that cry out so much for peace, I appeal to you, what doth it cost you?

And then the fourth rule for the furtherance of peace is, That every man or woman should account it the most honourable thing to yield first. That cursed principle that there is in men’s hearts, that it is a disgrace to begin to yield, it is that that makes disturbance in the world, in all societies. But if men were principled in this, that where there are any

breaches, that man or woman begins first to yield is the most honourable, this would be a mighty furtherance to peace. Believe it, it is so. It is a great part of the honour of God to begin to be reconciled to us; so saith the Scripture: ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.’ He was in Christ—yea, he was from all eternity in Christ. Alas! if God had not begun with us, we should have stood out with him to all eternity. Mankind would have been an enemy to God eternally, if God had not begun with him to be reconciled first. Now, is it the honour of God to begin with us poor creatures, and is it not the honour of his creature to begin with his fellow-creature? Thou sayest, Let him come to me and yield to me—I am his better; or, he hath done me the wrong, and the inferior ought to yield. If God had stood out with you upon these terms, and had said, Let the creature yield which is the inferior, and any creature that hath been unjust and done me wrong; and what would become of you? Well, would you be called the child of God? then be such a peacemaker as God is—begin the work of reconciliation first. If another doth begin, you have lost the honour of it, and lost a great part of the reward of it. It is no thanks, when another begins to be at peace, that then you come in; any base spirit can be brought to that. But if you for peace sake can yield to an inferior, and seek it first, oh, this is honourable in the eyes of God and in the eyes of man! That is a fourth rule.

Fifthly, Look to breaches betimes. When there is any breach between you and another—it is a general rule that concerns states, churches, neighbours, families—where there is any breach, begin to stop the breach betimes; let it not go far before you come in with help against it. Contention and strife is compared in Scripture to the breach of waters; and where there is a breach of waters, it is not to stand and look upon it, and say, Hereafter I will stop it; but it concerns thee to stop it presently; you know not what the end of it may be. Very great breaches do come often with very little beginnings, and a little at the first would be a means to help very great evils that afterwards great means will not help: that is a further rule of peace.

Sixthly, If you find peace be hard to make, pursue it. Pursue peace, and try one means after another; let it not be sufficient for you to say, Well, God knows, I would fain be at peace, and I have used means to be at peace; I have made fair offers. Well, but hath not that done the work that you desire? Fall to it again and again; try more conclusions. Whatsoever the heart of a man is in, and set upon, he will try all the conclusions that he can for the effecting of it. If your hearts be set upon peace, though you have a repulse the first and second time, you will on again. The Scripture bids us ‘pursue

peace, and follow peace;’ and mark my text, ‘Blessed are the peacemakers;’ he doth not say, Blessed are the peace-wishers. Some men have good affections, and say, I would there were peace; and it may be they use some slight endeavours: As for my part I have done something for peace. Ay, but is the thing effected, hast thou made peace? Thou shouldest never be at rest till thou hast made it. If there be any means in the world untried, try what that means will do.

Seventhly, Further, if after all the means used that you can, you do not find it come, but still men will be of contentious spirits, then observe this rule. However, for thine own part, resolve to walk before such in a convincing way. They are of troublesome spirits, and wrest every word you speak. You cannot meddle but you foul your fingers; yet, for all this, break off with this resolution, I say: I will do what I can to convince them in a constant way of good, of holiness, and justice, and righteousness; if it may be, I will heap ‘coals of fire upon their head,’ and melt their hearts that way. I am resolved, whatsoever evil they do to me, I will do good to them. As Calvin said concerning Luther—Luther was of a violent, hot spirit. Well, saith Calvin, let Luther call me a devil, let him call me what he will, I will acknowledge Luther to be a precious servant of God, whom God doth use as an instrument of great good. Here is a peaceable spirit. This is the way to make peace. When the means have been tried, and yet it cannot be done, men’s spirits will not be quieted, yet walk convincingly before them; and a convincing conversation, in a few months it may be—but what if it be years?—will prevail with their hearts more than all other means that you did use to make peace between you and them. And truly now, in these days, the people of God are put to as much trial in this as in any age. I would to God he would but fasten this one thing I am speaking of upon their hearts! Such clamours and outeries and reports there are among us, that one would wonder how so much dust should come to be raised. How men that heretofore seemed to be godly and religious, their spirits are so embittered, and even mad again, one would wonder at it. But the best way is this, wait on the Lord and keep his way; walk strictly, inoffensively, commit thy cause to God, and in time all these clamours and stirrs will wash away, will come to nothing, and thy light will break forth as the noon-day, and God will incline the hearts of others to thee, and they shall be convinced, and say, Verily, here is a son of God, observe his way and course: there is nothing but the Spirit of God appears in him. This is our way, to walk in a convincing conversation, in a constant way; when we cannot quiet men other ways, this will do it.

Eighthly, And then, in the last place, use much

prayer. ‘Pray for the peace of Jerusalem,’ pray for the peace of kingdoms, cities, churches, neighbours, towns, families; be much in prayer for it. This is a good spiritual help. I might shew you Scripture for everything; but the point is so large, and I have spoken heretofore about it, so that I shall but only name the very heads of things. There is many of you cry out of the troubles of the times, and of the contentions that there are among men, and bitterness of men’s spirits; you cry out of this, but I appeal this day, in the name of God, to your consciences, what time have you spent in secret to make your moan to God, to complain to God in secret between God and your souls? Perhaps some men, in prayer with others, will speak of the contentions, and it is with a spirit of contention; but when you have been in secret, have you poured out your hearts with earnest prayer that God would find out means of reconciliation? O Lord, we cannot see how men can be reconciled, men’s hearts are at such a distance; but, Lord, thou that knowest how to reconcile heaven and earth together, thou knowest how to reconcile men and men! Pray much for this, and know that thy prayers at last shall return into thine own bosom. This now in the general.

Now for the particulars. For peace in families observe these rules:—

First, thus, Observe men’s tempers in your family. The husband observe the temper of the wife, and consider then what she is to be indulged in in regard of her temper; so the wife the temper of her husband, the parent of the child, the master of the servant, and servants to their masters; every one observe the tempers one of another, one fellow-servant observe the temper of the other, and it will help much to peace in the family.

Secondly, Observe the fittest times and seasons to debate things in a family. You have the opportunity of any time. Be not rash in contesting one with another. The husband is not to fall a-debating things when he sees the wife in a distemper, and so the wife. No, rather forbear. A wife would live at peace. She complains of such and such evil carriage in her husband; but I appeal to you, what do you do when there is any evil miscarriage in a husband? Why, you presently fly out in words against him, and then you will debate the business when he is in a passion; whereas you should observe the fittest time, when you see him to be in the most loving disposition, then in a loving way debate what hath been unjust and amiss in him, then set it before him, and then tell him of it when he is in the fittest condition to hear; and so the husband should do accordingly to the wife. Something, I observe, hath been done amiss; watch now for the time when it may be most like an admonition will take, and this would much conduce to peace.

Thirdly, If any be angry with one another for some one thing, let them take heed that they be not angry with them for all things because there is one thing amiss. That now you find ordinarily, if there be anything amiss in a family, there is nothing will please a contentious spirit, but they are angry with everything in the family. Now wisdom would teach you thus: there is such a thing displeases me; ay, but because that displeases me, what doth the other displease me? The other is as well done as it was done when I was most pleased. I am now displeased with this one thing. Let me keep the expression of my displeasure within bounds to the thing that hath displeased me; let not me have my gall to run over. That is a great disease that physicians observe in the body, when the gall runs over, and doth not keep in its proper place. So when anything displeases me, for me to have a heart angry and bitter against all things, this is a great make-bate in a family.

Fourthly, Let superiors desire obedience out of love rather than out of fear; and let inferiors obey rather from love than from fear, or from necessity. What is the cause of the disturbance in families but this, the servants they will never care for obedience, nor children, but merely out of fear, when they naught needs, or out of necessity they must do it, and therefore they do it; and governors they carry themselves towards their children and servants as if they did not regard their love at all, but they regard to have their will. Let my servant do my work and will, and there is all that I care for. Now, if you will be carried by such principles as these are in a family, certainly there will be a great deal of disturbance there; but now when in a family the master or mistress would have them obey, and their care is, oh that I might have obedience from love, that what they do they may do for me out of love; and so the husband not only care to have his wife to be under him, but to do all she doth out of love, and not out of necessity. Now it is not a little will breed disturbance in that family, but there is abundance of peace there, where the superiors do desire and endeavour obedience out of love rather than fear, and where the inferiors do obey and serve rather from love to their superiors than from necessity that they must do it.

Fifthly, Observe that when at any time there is most cause to oppose others in the family for any evil, be sure to labour at that time to shew most love; then, above all times, manifest your greatest love unto them, that they may be persuaded that you do intend their good. Let a man love me and beat me, as the proverb is. If you have occasion to manifest displeasure in your family, then your care should be to manifest love, that those that you manifest displeasure against may be convinced that even at that

time you love them. Certainly this will mightily allay the bitterness of spirit; for otherwise, if you oppose them out of bitterness, though the cause be just why they should be opposed, yet if it be out of bitterness, bitterness will raise bitterness. And so, though the other be the guilty person, yet instead of subduing his corruption, you will but only stir up his corruption; but now, if you shall so oppose him in his way as to reprove him, or if there be cause punish him, yet so as to carry yourselves towards him so as he cannot but be convinced you intend good, and no hurt to him, this will mightily overcome his spirit, and so will be much peace in the family. It is the promise made to Jerusalem, in the prophecy of Isaiah, 'That it shall be a quiet habitation.' Oh, it is a great blessing upon a family if it may be said, this is a quiet habitation! Come from morning to night, from the beginning of the week to the end, yea, from the beginning of the year to the end, you shall see nothing but quietness here. It is the blessing upon Jerusalem, and so upon your families. Oh these are the children of God! Here is nothing but peace and quiet here. Every one knows how to do his duty—the governors theirs, children and servants theirs; and so it is a quiet habitation.

Now then for neighbours. Whosoever will meddle in that had need be much self-denying, and very wise, and very loving, and very meek in dealing with them. And these rules are to be observed for peace between neighbour and neighbour:—

First, Entertain nothing against a neighbour merely upon hearsay. Take heed of that. A great deal of fire is kindled, and stir there is between one neighbour and another. Why, what is the matter? When it comes to be examined, it is nothing at all; it was a mere fancy—as sometimes soldiers have a false alarm—and there is no truth in anything; but as soon as they come to confer one with another, they shake hands and are friends together. Oh, take heed of entertaining anything merely by hearsay. Consider this peace between me and my neighbour: it is precious, and I am loath to lose the benefit, the sweetnes^s of it, for nothing. Therefore I will inquire whether it be true or no, and if need be I will rather go to him himself to know it, than I will entertain grudges, and that that may breed contention between us. That is the first rule.

Secondly, Take heed of being peremptory in thy judgment in thine own cause, but be willing to hear those that are not interested in the cause; and, above all times, take heed of your judgment in time of passion. Though men are never so resolute as they are in time of passion, yet the truth is, men are never so unable to judge as they are when they are angry. Of all times, do not believe your own judgment, if anger be once got up. When once the thing

is got into the affections, the judgment then vanishes;¹ men have the weakest judgments in their passion, and yet they will be the most peremptory in their judgments then. That is the second rule: If you would have peace among neighbours, be not too peremptory in your judgments in your own cause, and especially believe not your judgments in your time of passion, but rather go and think of it—pray over it.

Thirdly, (that may be a distinct one,) Do not fall out with any neighbour till you have been before at prayer, that God would direct you in this business. Oh, here is a business falls out that is like to bring a great deal of disturbance. Lord direct me; Lord help me. Guide me in this, that I may do nothing dishonourable to thy great name—nothing disagreeable to thy will. I appeal to your consciences in this, you that have had to deal with neighbours, I appeal but to your consciences in this thing; can you say thus: There was never any falling out between me and any neighbour, but I went first to God to direct me in the business, and to teach me how I should behave myself about it, with a resolution to walk according to what directions God should grant to me by his word and by his Spirit? Certainly your contentious men, and unpeaceable men, they seldom pray—they seldom commend the cause to God; and therefore God leaves them to themselves, to bring such a deal of trouble, both to themselves and unto others.

Fourthly, Let nothing be brought into public view before private means have been used. Whosoever offence there is between one neighbour and another, yet observe this rule—it is a rule that Christ tells us—if thy brother offend thee, tell him his fault between him and thee alone; and if yet he continues in his evil, then take two or three privately. Afterwards bring it to the church. So that this concerns Christians, that whatsoever offences fall out, first private means is to be used, and we are not to make any infirmities, any faults of any of our brethren known in public, until we have tried private means. Indeed, if the fault be public, then there may be public means used without any more ado; but if the thing that is done be private, do not you bring it into public before you have used private means to help.

A fifth means of peace is this: Oh, labour to engage one another in duties of love; make account that it is a great benefit to you, if God offers you an opportunity to engage a neighbour to yourself. We should study peace. When men or women are engaged one to another, then they will not easily break peace. But when they live as strangers one towards another, then every little thing makes them break the peace.

¹ Perit omne iudicium cum res transit in affectum.

Sixthly, Another rule is this: If my good crosses my neighbour's commodity or conveniency, if anything that I would have do cross the mind of my brother, let me account it an affliction to me. Though, it is true, I may lawfully desire my right; yet if I find I cannot have my right without contention with my brother, I should make account of it as a great affliction to myself. Indeed, God doth not deny men to seek their right; but if they see they cannot have it without their brother's affliction, they should account it an affliction to themselves.

Seventhly, Farther, delight thou in doing good thyself, and rejoice to see others do good; that is the way of peace. If once a spirit of envy doth prevail in the hearts of men, there is nothing will keep them at peace. One man envies at another; he sees such a man gets more than he. Such a man gets the credit and honour of such a thing more than I. Now when a spirit of envy prevails, there will come a spirit of contention. But when men labour to do what good they can in the places that God hath set them, and they can rejoice in what good they see God makes others to be an instrument of, they can appeal to God: Lord, thou knowest what a joy it is to my heart to hear or see that thou makest others to be an instrument of good as well as I. This is acceptable to God.

Eighthly, And then the last thing that I would propound is this, That there should be often neighbourly meetings for the keeping of peace, and the making peace where there is any breach of it, and specially those that are of the chief in places and towns. And these meetings should be in their own houses; it is most honourable, and safe, and comely, and like to be most profitable, for men in parishes and towns to meet together at their own houses, and not to make the place of their meetings to be in taverns. For though, it is true, it is not simply unlawful in itself for friends to meet there; but though it be not in itself simply unlawful, yet certainly it is more honourable for those that are chief in towns that they can meet together in their own habitations. And there is more love in meeting together at their own houses than at the tavern; and there is not so much danger there; though they intend no hurt when they go, yet there is a greater temptation there; although sometimes it is but little that is either eat or drunk, yet at some other times there may be excess. And so the business of peace and love may run into the business of excess in eating and drinking, and pleasing the flesh, and so no good at all done, but rather before they part one from another, fall out one with another, when they have taken somewhat too liberal of the use of the creature. And therefore, though the thing be not in its own nature evil, yet you know what the rule of the

apostle is, Phil. iv. 8, 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.' Certainly, those that shall be instruments of this are instruments of great good; they are blessings to the places where they live, and many will bless God for them. What abundance of good may but half-a-dozen chief men in a parish or town do this way, if they would set themselves about it, and not say, Well, I have business of my own, and what have I to do with them? This, I had almost said, is the language of Cain, when as God inquired about his brother Abel, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' saith he. Let no man say, Am I my brother's keeper? I must look to business of mine own. Know it is thy business, if thou wilt approve thyself to be a child of God. As God hath made it to be the greatest work that ever took up his heart to reconcile the world to himself, so you that are eminent in places should account it your own work to reconcile differences in parishes, and not let things break out to bitterness, and violence, and rage. What good is there done then? Many times when you have meetings, perhaps you are in a fair way of composing things, and carrying all things with a joint consent for the furtherance of the gospel, and the good of the place that God hath set you in. Why, one froward word puts them all into a fire presently, and there is the less of an opportunity of abundance of glory that might have come to God. What! dost thou regard more thy passion and humour, and to stand upon thy terms and honour—dost thou regard this more than public service for God, or church, or commonwealth? Thou art not one of God's. A child of God would regard the cause of God more than his private cause. And therefore blessed are the peacemakers, either in families or parishes. Oh then blessed are the peacemakers in church and commonwealth. I confess many things I had in my thoughts to have spoken concerning these two; but times are so for the present, and the spirits of men are in such a fit, that I could not satisfy my conscience in this, to think it a seasonable time to meddle with anything. For I could not meddle with making peace, but I must shew you something about our differences, and what one side would have and the other. Now, were men's spirits in any quiet frame, fitting to hear it, it would be an acceptable work; but for the present, seeing men's spirits are in such a fit, I am verily persuaded that whatsoever is said would be as stubble to an oven. And therefore I rather desire to forbear, and commit the cause to God, desiring him to make peace among us.