
THE VOICE

Official Newsletter of Evangelical Anabaptist Fellowship (EAF)

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Peace is more than not going to war

Mennonite Anabaptists have always been noted for their peace theology; their commitment to non-violent love. Historically they have taken a strong stand on non-participation in the military. Because of the great evil of war, they have sometimes been inclined to make the war issue the primary application of their peace theology.

It is of interest to note, however, that the New Testament never, to the best of my knowledge, applies the peace teachings to the war issue. It is always applied to personal relationships, the home, the church (genuine worship requires restored relationships with brothers and sisters (Matthew 5:23-24) and society. And the ethic of non-violent love is given in a society where the military is highly visible.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to follow his example and live in obedience to his teaching. Jesus lived and taught the ethic of non-violent love and so should his disciples. God is love and this love is powered into the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). It is by loving that Christians show family identity. Love is the primary mark of discipleship. Jesus said that people would identify his disciples by their love for one another. John writes that we cannot know God without love, for God is love (1 John 4:5). We cannot claim to be disciples of Jesus and not live in love with our brothers and sisters. Love is always relational. It is to live our lives for others.

Living by the love ethic can be costly. We are living in a world filled with violence, evil, and abuse, and we are bound to get hurt. How

do Jesus' disciples respond to persecution and abuse? The New Testament gives clear instructions on this matter. The disciples' response to abuse is shaped by the love ethic. This does not allow for the option of retaliation. Jesus' disciples do not meet evil on its terms. Their weapons of warfare are not of this world (2 Corinthians 10:3-4). Jesus instructed his disciples to love and pray for their enemies and Paul writes that Christians are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:20). The disciples' response to abuse and persecution is to love. The only debt they owe other people is love. And "love does no wrong to a neighbour" (Romans 13:10).

Yes, the peace theology applies to the war issue but the ethic of love is a relational ethic - it is a lifestyle. If Christians today will diligently strive to have their personal relationships shaped by love, it will prepare them to respond to the war issue. This may involve us in unjust suffering but then suffering is part of our identity as children of God (Romans 8:17-18). Disciples are called to be peacemakers and this identifies them as sons and daughters of God (Matthew 5:9).

Edwin Plett

But peacemaking just won't work in this situation!

Unfortunately, many believers and their churches have not yet developed the commitment and ability to respond to conflict in a gospel-centered and biblically faithful manner. This is often because they have succumbed to the relentless pressure our secular culture exerts on us to forsake the

timeless truths of Scripture and adopt the relativism of our postmodern age. Although many Christians and their churches believe they have held on to God's Word as their standard for life, their responses to conflict, among other things, show that they have in fact surrendered much ground to the world. Instead of resolving differences in a distinctively biblical fashion, they often react to conflict with the same avoidance, manipulation, and control that characterize the world. In effect, both individually and congregationally, they have given in to the world's postmodern standard, which is "What feels good, sounds true, and seems beneficial to me?"

Taken from The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Conflict by Ken Sande. Updated Edition p. 15-16.

Food for Thought - Biblical peacemaking should never be understood as a better way for you to win arguments where you're "right". It shouldn't even be understood as a more likely way to get to the truth. One or both of those things may happen, but neither gets to the heart of why we engage in biblical peacemaking. Biblical peacemaking is at its core a recognition *that even in the midst of an argument where we have a lot to lose and where our opponent may be entrenched in sin, the most important thing we can do is to bring glory to God through our conduct.* It is an act of faith that out of this peacemaking witness, God can do things far beyond upholding the truth or vindicating us, though he will also do both these things eventually. The "thing far beyond" that peacemaking makes possible is redemption -- especially of those trapped in sin.

Next time you find yourself tempted to say, "But peacemaking won't work in this situation or with this person" remember that what God and you are attempting to "work" may be two entirely different things.

Taken from Peacemeal August 13, 2014, Peacemaker Ministries.

Following the Heartbeat of Jesus

His face broke into a big smile as he leaned across the table and said, "God finds you fascinating." We were sitting across from each other at a small table in Starbucks. It's a public place and this conversation almost felt awkward. Beaming ear to ear he went on, "God is intrigued with you. His eye is on you ... in a good way." He is watching to see what you will do next because He is fascinated with you. He is doting on you because of His great love for you." Wow – what do you say in response? I sat there and tried to take it all in.

The start of Jesus' public ministry began with clarity about His love connection with the Father. At His baptism, Jesus heard these words, "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased*" (Mark 1:9-10). Jesus knew He was loved. When challenging situations arose, He was unshaken. He was grounded in the certainty that the sovereign God loved Him. He had heard the Father speak into His own heart and continued to receive daily reminders of God's love through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The heart of Jesus was in sync with the heartbeat of the Father; and the rhythm was defined by love.

In my reading of the gospels, I am reminded of how often Jesus spent time alone with the Father. Daily He returned to hear the Father say "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" These times of intimacy with the Father were a constant reminder of the love that surrounded Him. It was this love connection which set the course for His life and ministry.

Jesus loved others out of this place of intimacy with the Father. In fact, love was the core curriculum of His little discipleship school. Each disciple was enrolled in a DTS program where being loved and learning to love was the heart of the program. He loved His disciples, and in doing so, He taught them that they too, were loved by God. Their hearts began to follow the heartbeat of Jesus.

Knowing God's love was essential to

following Jesus. Being with Jesus, His disciples were learning how to “fall in love with the God Jesus knows.” (See James Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God*.) What He was teaching them was central to His own life, not just a theory. He wanted God’s love to be central to theirs.

Learning to know the Father’s love led to the next lesson, “How to love others.” Being loved, they learned to accept themselves within the circle of His love, setting them free to love others. By His example, Jesus showed them how to love in every situation they faced together. What do you do when people are demanding, difficult to love, seeking attention, obnoxious, or devious and deceptive? In every day-to-day encounter, the disciples saw first-hand what God’s love looked like through His example. What sets the rhythms of your heart? Are you “falling in love with the God Jesus knows?” Learning to love and be loved is central to following Jesus in discipleship. A love connection with the Father will set you free and allow you to love others in extravagant ways.

True discipleship is about knowing the Father’s great love for us. As our heartbeat begins to match that of the Father our capacity to love others grows. We become loving people, both in our passions and in our actions. Imagine what the Church would be like today if every believer was a disciple who came to know the love of the Father, setting them free to love others in the way of Jesus. It’s a simple idea, something God could use to turn the world upside down.

An article on discipleship by Paul Kroeker for CW, Fall 2013.

Book Review - Taste the New Wine

Bernie Loepky has written a very readable and usable study on the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. The format of the lessons is written for an interactive study.

The author writes an important prologue to the book in which he focuses key undergirding principles for his study, such as how to read the Bible, progressive revelation, importance of the context of a text, and the

significance of the literary style of the text. He emphasizes the necessity of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our study of Scripture as well as the importance of having a discerning spirit as we read and study the Bible.

He warns about some temptations we may have as we study the sermon. These include depending on extra biblical authorities rather than discerning the text ourselves; being too dependent on human reason, important as that is; basing our interpretation on personal experience and finally, allowing the possible consequences of acting on Scripture guide the interpretation.

The book has 33 lessons or chapters. Lesson 1 is an introduction to the material to be studied. The other 32 chapters deal with the biblical text. Each chapter examines a theme of the text being studied in the lesson. Each lesson is developed under a threefold outline: Introduction, Text, and Discussion.

The *Introduction* introduces the idea found in the Scripture text being studied.

The *Text* section examines the text, giving various interpretations of the passage and then suggests what the writer thinks is the most appropriate teaching of the text. Finally, the *Discussion* section is set up with various statements re issues of the text and then a question on the issue mentioned in the statement for discussion by the class. The questions are well thought through and will help classes do an interactive study of the material.

I would suggest that one issue of interpretation could have been stated more clearly. That is the issue when the biblical text deals with a specific problem at a specific place in terms of the culture of that day. There is the temptation when it is said that the text speaks to the culture of that day that it then has nothing to say to us today. Responses to specific issues of a particular time and culture are however responded to with underlying biblical principles. Our task is to find that principle and find a current application. I believe the writer does imply this but my suggestion is it could have been more helpful if it had been spelled out a little more clearly.

I highly recommend this book to any Sunday school or Bible study group. As you use these lessons, you will be led into a deeper understanding of the Sermon on the

Mount and hopefully greater obedience. His list of references lists additional sources you may wish to consult.

Review by Harvey Plett

Taste the New Wine - It will change your life!



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