

Peace and War

By Benjamin Phillips

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Romans 12:9–16. These verses expand on Christ’s “new commandment” (John 13:34) that we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Often, the most difficult people to love are the ones you know the best (and who know you best!). Why do you think this is true? Apply this to churches: If Christians don’t love one another, how will they be able to love their enemies? Which gives a better picture of the peacemaking effect of the gospel, a church where everyone is the same or a church where different cultures, levels of wealth, races and tastes are represented? Prepare to share your answers to these questions.

Assignment Two

Read Romans 12:14–13:4; then read the comments related to Romans 13:1–4 in the section **It’s in the Book**. This passage suggests a difference in the responsibility of Christians in their personal life (12:14–21) and their responsibility as a police officer, soldier or government leader (13:1–4). Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How do you think being a Christian should affect how a person carries out these public roles?

Assignment Three

Read Galatians 5:13–16 and 19–26. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: If we do what we are capable of in our own strength (“the flesh”), what will the results be (vv. 15, 20–21)? Peace comes when we love one another (v. 14), but if we can’t love in our own strength, where will we get help (vv. 22–26)? How does someone “walk by the Spirit”?

Scripture to Memorize

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:18

Session Goal

Consistent with God’s Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will see the gospel as the answer to the causes of aggression in themselves and others.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Sam Harris, a popular atheist author, wrote in his book *The End of Faith* that faith and religion are “the most prolific source of violence in our history.” An early twentieth-century skeptic, John Remsburg, claimed that “the name of Christ has caused more persecutions, wars and miseries than any other name has caused.” If a person close to you made this kind of claim, how would you respond?

Read Romans 12:14–21 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 14. Bless those who persecute you. Persecution in Paul’s time was often the result of citizens bringing charges against Christians before Roman officials (see Acts 13:50; 16:16–24). Later, this developed into official government-led persecutions, such as the one under Emperor Nero in which Paul died. **do not curse.** This phrase is a warning against calling down divine judgment on someone in anger, wishing for evil to harm or destroy them.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: Why are the most difficult people to love often the ones you know best? If Christ followers don’t love one another, how will they be able to love their enemies? Which gives a better picture of the peacemaking effect of the gospel, a church where everyone is the same or a church where different cultures, levels of wealth, races and tastes are represented?

Studying the Passage

Verse 15. Rejoice. Paul encouraged Christians to stand with one another in all circumstances and to reject the kind of pride that leads to a pattern of taking offense. This kind of unity is essential to obeying the commands in verse 14 and verses 17–21.

Verse 17. Repay no one. Justice is rarely achieved by seeking revenge. Usually the result is an escalating exchange of evil.

Verse 18. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Paul acknowledged that living at peace with everyone is not always possible. Christians should never be the cause of breaking the peace. We should always be the leading cause of restoring and maintaining peace.

Verse 19. leave it to the wrath of God. The Bible does not deny that people do evil things that cause harm. Ultimately, God will judge all evil at the final judgment.

Verse 20. if your enemy is hungry. Here Paul quoted from Proverbs 25:21–22. (For an excellent example of this in action, see 2 Kings 6:15–23.) As individual disciples, we are to mirror the merciful offer of peace made by Christ through the cross.

Discussion Question

Why is revenge so tempting? How is the idea that peace can be gained through destruction of enemies an illusion?

On Your Own

Romans 12:15–16 suggests that the place to begin living out the peacemaking reality of the gospel is in your own church. Look beyond the polite greetings. In the space below, write answers to the following questions: Where are there divisions in your church? How can you help bring healing and peace to those relationships?

Read Romans 13:1–4 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. there is no authority except from God. Paul pointed out that government is established by God and that He has granted government authority. He does not claim that everything governments do is good and right or that governments never misuse their authority. In other places, the Bible does instruct Christians in what to do when governments do evil, but that is not Paul's concern here.

Verse 4. does not bear the sword for nothing. Government has the right to use force in defense of what is right and to restrain evil, but only when force alone will accomplish this goal. **is the servant of God, an avenger.** While Romans 12:19 requires individual Christians to leave vengeance to God, Romans 13:4 states that God uses governments to execute judgment. **the wrongdoer.** Government usually deals with evildoers inside the nation. Sometimes, however, evildoers are *outside* the nation, and sometimes evildoers *are* other nations. In these cases, government can use the sword to defend against evil.

Discussion Questions

How does government praise and minister to those who do good—both to citizens and to foreign nations? How does government judge wrongdoers? How can being a Christian help a government official do these things better?

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: How do you think being a Christian should affect how a person carries out public roles such as being a police officer, soldier or government leader?

Read James 4:1–4 out loud.

Studying the Passage, vv. 1–4

Verse 1. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you. James focused primarily on conflict among individuals and in small communities, particularly the church. However, his points also speak to conflict among larger communities, such as nations. **your passions.** This phrase is a general reference to things we find pleasant and/or desirable.

Verse 2. You desire. James included sexual desire, but did not limit his point to that. The reference here is to any strong, driving desire. **you murder.** This does happen literally, and at the national level it takes the form of unjust, aggressive war, yet murder also happens spiritually when people lose their temper with others (see Matthew 5:21–26).

Verse 3. You ask and do not receive. James insisted that God is not a “genie in the bottle”

who exists to fulfil our desires, no matter the state of the heart making the request.

Verse 4. an enemy of God. James warned that selfishness that leads to conflict with others also declares war against the ultimate foe, God. To take up such a fight is to commit to a suicide mission!

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: If we do what we are capable of in our own strength, what will the results be? If we can't love in our own strength, where will we get help? How does someone "walk by the Spirit"?

Discussion Questions

How did God respond to us while we were His enemies in sin? How can Christians and churches mirror that response in our treatment of those who wrong us and our nation?

On Your Own

In the space below, think about different organizations and movements that work to bring peace to communities and among nations. How do they address the spiritual source of conflict? If they don't, then how successful do you think they will ultimately be? In the space below, write how God might be calling you to help bring peace at home and in other parts of the world.

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Prayer

7 minutes

At Home: Nail It Down

Peace and war are difficult issues that demand more from disciples than bumper-sticker responses. “Give Peace a Chance” and “Nuke ‘Em All! (And Let God Sort Them Out)” don’t do justice to the Bible’s teaching on these subjects. Disciples are called to work for peace, but also to respect the role of government as God’s agent in dealing with wrongdoers, both domestic and foreign.

War and peace seem far removed from the lives of most disciples. These decisions are made by presidents, generals, and admirals, usually in far-off capitals. Sometimes decisions about war are even forced upon nations by other nations. Apathy—the sense that “I can’t do anything so why worry about it”—is a constant temptation. Disciples can forget that peace and conflict are personal and community-level issues as well.

In this lesson, we see that the Bible calls disciples to:

- Give up the pride and selfishness that prompts us to seek revenge on those who wrong us (Romans 12:14–18).
- Instead we are to trust God to inflict righteous judgment (Romans 12:19–21).
- Respect government as God’s agent to bring earthly judgment on wrongdoers (Romans 13:1–4).
- Recognize that the same cause of war among nations is at work causing conflicts among us (James 4:1–4).
- Cooperate with the Spirit, who is at work in disciples to eliminate the causes of conflicts, making churches examples of the peace among different people that the gospel brings together (Galatians 5:13–16, 19–26).

Disciples must deal with the sources of conflict in their own lives and become peacemakers, as far as is possible for them, in all their relationships (family, school, work, church, clubs, teams, friendships). As disciples become agents of God’s peace in their nearest spheres of influence, God will grant them wider spheres of influence.

Follow up Question

Can you share an example of a way you have taken the initiative to bring peace to a situation or relationship?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.