

Christian Responsibility to Pursue Shalom in a Violent and War-Torn World

A close devotional reading of Scripture has often nurtured in Christians a responsibility to actively seek peace and offer grace even when retaliation is justified, equivocated, and logical. The seeking of peace and offering of grace arise in lives of those who have accepted forgiveness, reconciliation, grace, and peace from God. This is the life of shalom; which is often translated “peace,” but is more fully understood as wholeness, harmony, and the flourishing of all God’s creation. Following the example and words of Jesus, we no longer recognize the logic of retribution and doing evil for evil (Deuteronomy 19:21), rather, because of the unmerited grace and love of God in Jesus Christ, we proclaim and strive to embody the unjustified, often illogical, and rarely equivocal nature of grace and peace (Matthew 5:38-42). We seek peace by following Jesus’ command to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44), and Paul’s challenge to be ambassadors of Christ with a ministry of reconciliation because we are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Finally, in the Lord’s Prayer, we give and receive grace through confessing our sins and forgiving other’s sins against us (Matthew 6:7-15 & Luke 11:1-4).

Yet the truth of the gospel’s good news is always met with the objection of our reality. We lament our war-torn world and the loss of shalom. Our Scripture, tradition, and experience are not devoid of the knowledge of war, violence, revenge, and hate. Scripturally, we know from Jesus that there will always be wars and rumors of wars, and Ecclesiastes claims that there is a time for war and a time for peace (Matthew 24:6 and Ecclesiastes 3:8). In our own Covenant tradition, we remember the wisdom of Lutheran Pietist August Hermann Francke who, when asked by King Friedrich I his position on war, replied that Christians are called to preach ‘blessed are the peacemakers.’ The Evangelical Covenant Church has also resolved to speak about previous wars. Experientially, none of us are exempt from memories of wars, the confrontation of hate, and the aftershock of violence. We find ourselves today in the United States of America in the midst of a post-war rebuilding in Iraq and Afghanistan, and throughout the world there are currently over thirty wars being waged. As Christians, who believe in a God who offers shalom, it is our personal and communal responsibility to actively work, pray, and hope for peace, while proclaiming and offering grace.

During times in and surrounding wars there are confessions to be made, forgiveness to be offered, and reconciliation to be sought. We recognize that the courageous pattern of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation is our primary active Christian practice toward shalom. We acknowledge that sometimes war can be justified, and that there is such a thing as a war that can be deemed just. However, when it comes to being followers of the bringer of peace, Jesus Christ (Luke 1:79), we, as the Evangelical Covenant Church, affirm that war and violence are not God’s desire and that life in the midst of war is not the way God intended it to be – rather, it is a corruption of shalom. We further acknowledge that while shalom and our active working toward it will be fulfilled only in the return of Christ, we do not labor in vain. Rather, we labor with the audacious hope that even in the midst of death we may find life, in the midst of war - peace, and in the midst of sin - grace. It is in these labors that our actions bear witness to the good news of the gospel.

As Christians we understand that war does not arise in a vacuum, rather there are conditions that often breed hatred and violence and so there are injustices for which atonement must be made (eg. the Holocaust in Germany; the violence in Darfur, Sudan; the Apartheid government in South Africa). We also understand that shalom does not arise instantaneously, but rather through sustained Christian practices. The future prevention of war and the cessation of current wars will not simply be the signing of peace treaties and cease-fires, but will include economic and

environmental development, equal access to necessities of life (food, water, shelter, health care), dismantling of ideologies of oppression—racism, sexism, classism, and a grace-filled spiritual renewal that proclaims love to hardened hearts. The Christian practices of shalom include prayer, worship, confession, forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, advocacy, hospitality, and humility.

Therefore:

- We resolve to mourn and remember the loss of all forms of life in the current wars and previous wars - innocent, civilian, insurgent, and military, ecological and spiritual.
- We resolve to affirm the worth of those who have died in wartime by upholding them in prayer and ministering to their families and congregations.
- We resolve to courageously face violence in the world, by breaking the perpetual cycle of violence with the grace and peace of the gospel of Jesus Christ who invites us to be ambassadors of reconciliation and proclaimers of shalom.
- We resolve to do all we can to prevent and end war in thought, word, and deed.
- We resolve to do all we can to live into shalom in thought, word, and deed.

These resolves may be carried out through the following actions:

- That we each practice forgiveness of others and seek out reconciliation.
- That we each pray for peace.
- That we each mourn with those who are grieving loss of loved ones because of war.
- That we each cultivate our own courageous practice of peacemaking.
- That we each support with our time, talent, treasure, and testimony organizations that are working to end war and the conditions that lead to war.
- That we each offer the grace and peace of God to our neighbors, so that we may together live into shalom.
- That we all communally engage in Christian liturgical practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- That we all communally support organizations that are working to end the conditions that lead to war, such as Covenant World Relief, the Paul Carlson Partnership, and Bread for the World.
- That we all communally affirm our Christian Responsibility to pursue shalom in all times through education, formation, fellowship, and public proclamations.
- That we all communally support our pastoral and administrative leaders as they encourage our denomination and local churches in peacemaking practices and in the proclamation of God's grace.

Finally, we ask for creative work together toward a world of shalom. May we have the courage to ask ourselves: what have we done and what have we left undone in our Christian responsibilities to seek peace, offer grace, and live into shalom?

Scripture References (NRSV)

Deuteronomy 19:21--Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Matthew 5:38-42--‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”
39But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; 40and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; 41and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. 42Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

Matthew 5:43-44--‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” 44But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you

2 Corinthians 5:14-21--For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Matthew 24:6-- And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet.

Ecclesiastes 3:8-- a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace

Luke 1:79--to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.