

## **WHAT IS THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN? PEOPLE WHO ARE PEACEMAKERS**

The world is full of problems. Some are small and some are huge. Christians today are faced with the War on Terror, catastrophe relief, pain and suffering, and mixed messages about their world. As we consider the problems facing the world today, we can say that there are five giants that fuel the rest - five pervasive problems that affect billions of people.

These are the ones that we are called to tackle. God gets the most glory when we attack the biggest giants. These problems are so huge that they can only be addressed with total dependence on God and with all of us - our congregation and the Christians all around the world -- working together to confront them.

Here are the giant problems (this list is by Rick Warren):

### **1. The first global giant is spiritual darkness.**

Here's a startling truth: Billions of people have never even heard the name of Jesus Christ. Three thousand distinct people groups around our world wouldn't even know the name of Jesus if they heard it. This fuels confusion about what us Christians are all excited about. They feel threatened by us, because they don't understand our talk of victory. This spiritual darkness leads people to kill themselves and others in the name of a false god. Terrorism, persecution, and hatred exist because of spiritual darkness.

When we say Jesus, "who is that?" they'd ask. "What's so significant about that name?"

These people know nothing about Jesus or about God. If you were one of those who had never heard the name of Jesus, wouldn't you want somebody to come tell you about our Savior, our Lord?

Romans 10:14 (NCV) – *Before people can ask the Lord for help, they must believe in him; and before they can believe in him, they must hear about him; and for them to hear about the Lord, someone must tell them.*

The greatest giant in our world today is the fact that billions of people do not know Jesus Christ.

### **2. The second global giant is the lack of servant leaders around the world.**

Around the world, there are plenty of people in leadership who abuse their power. Many refuse to use their power for the good of their people - instead they choose to use it for themselves. This has created chaos in the world.

Leaders must see others who will follow Jesus' style of leadership: serve others before yourself. Be last and you'll be first. Zechariah 10:2 (TEV) says, "People wander around like lost sheep. They are in trouble because they have no leader." The people need servant leaders.

### **3. The third giant is poverty.**

More than half of the world -- that's three billion people - live on less than two dollars a day. One-sixth of the world's population lives in slums. There are 10 million little girls who've been sold into prostitution in Southeast Asia. Their families exist in such grinding poverty they see no other way to feed their families than to sell their little girls into prostitution. Those are heart-breaking and horrible statistics.

*Proverbs 28:7 –The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.*

It's easy to live in a bubble and think the rest of the world lives like we do. When we go about our daily lives forgetting how most of the world lives, we tend to judge people for being poor rather than help.

### **4. The fourth giant that is destroying people is disease.**

Billions suffer the effects of famine and drought. They are homeless, hungry, and helpless. They're ill. We can do something about that.

This is not a Susan Summer's commercial. BUT, the fact is I have seen the effects of poverty when I've traveled to third world countries. Africa is being haunted by an AIDS epidemic and there is no hope for people with HIV or AIDS. The stigma is enormous. People are abandoned by their own families. Their bodies slowly waste away from opportunistic infections. As Christians we cannot ignore these people.

### **5. The fifth giant is ignorance.**

Over half the world is still illiterate. How can a country grow and be strong economically when its citizens can't read, can't write, and don't know the fundamentals of math and science that we take for granted? It's no wonder these countries aren't strong. Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge."

**IGNORANCE – POVERTY – DISEASE – LACK OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP – AND SPIRITUAL DARKNESS CAN ALL BE TOPPLED BY THE CHURCH!**

God has the power to do it. His children can make a difference. I believe that the church is the perfect tool for toppling giants.

This is why today I want you to really get a grasp on what it means to be part of the Church of the Brethren. One of the most controversial things about the Church of the

Brethren is that it is one of the historic peace churches. It is one of those churches that say that war is wrong and that real Christians should be peacemakers.

Last week we talked about Christ being our peace, so today I want you to really consider what it means to have Christ's peace in your lives. I want you to translate the peace that Christ gives you into how you treat others.

If you have peace from Christ, then it is peace that you will work for, live for, and die for. War can not solve the problems of this world. War will not topple ignorance (teacher's do that). War will not take down poverty (in fact, it is known to cause it). War will not teach people what servant leadership is about. It teaches dominance, rather than service. War will not lead people out of spiritual darkness. You can not lead people to Christ at the end of a gun.

Many Christians believe that "God is speaking again through a Bush" (as seen on a bumper sticker). Our President hopes that war can produce peace. President Bush hopes that a War on Terrorism can end terror campaigns while the terrorists believe that we are fighting a jihad, or holy war. How should Christians respond to all of this?

I know that for some people, joining the military is a great honor. In fact, we should honor those who have made this choice. Most of the Church at large today believes that participating in war is their duty. In the Church of the Brethren, you have the freedom to follow where the Holy Spirit leads you.

I want you to know, however, why the Church of the Brethren, as a denomination would say that there is a better way. The better way is to be a peacemaker.

There are three church denominations that are called the "historic peace churches": the Quakers, the Mennonite, and the Church of the Brethren. That means you sit in one of these "historic peace churches."

These churches believe that war is the result of sin. Our denomination would even say that "war is sin." War comes from lust, greed, unresolved hatred, and the evil that lurks in man's heart. Think about it: what would make a person want to kill someone else today? Sin.

Some in our denomination believe, however, that the military is necessary to keep that evil in check. In fact, many in our denomination believe that serving in the military is honorable. Within those historic peace churches, many members do not find it realistic to be a peacemaker. During WWII, fifty percent of the Mennonite boys who were drafted entered the United States military. Ninety percent of the Church of the Brethren young men chose military service as well.

I want you to understand something, though, the Church of the Brethren's call to be a peacemaker is from the Bible, not a secular liberal pacifist agenda. It is not a bunch of people who do not believe in God that think we should be peacemakers. Belief in God is the reason to be a peace-maker! In fact, there is a difference between pacifism and peace-making. You can look at the back of your sermon outline for further explanation.

The Church of the Brethren stands on the New Testament's call to follow Christ. If you follow Christ, then you have experienced His peace. If you have experienced His peace, then you should desire to be a peacemaker.

I believe that we need peacemakers and peace-builders more than we need pacifists. A pacifist's goal is political. A pacifist's goal is to change the government through non-violent action. A peacemaker's goal is for others to know Christ, the Prince of Peace. The peace-makers goal is for real peace to enter into everyone's life.

I want to explore with you today why being part of the Church of the Brethren means that you will take seriously peace-making. The Church of the Brethren believes that: **Every Christian should be a peacemaker. Why?**

### **1. Jesus brings peace.**

We must admit that living for Jesus is difficult, and requires us to carry our cross daily. Following Jesus, however, leads to peace with God, yourself, and the people around you. This gift of peace made available through Christ, places an ethical demand on the Christians.

This gift of peace in Christ means that we have the obligation to share it with others. It must be our one of our primary concerns! If Jesus brings peace, then being a peace-maker becomes important.

The gift of peace from Jesus does not mean the end of tension or the absence of warfare. In fact, Jesus said that He came to bring a sword that would divide families (Matthew 10:34)! It means that we should spend more effort in making peace. You can not deny that the results of war are devastating. God is a God of life and a God of peace, not chaos and destruction.

The Church of the Brethren, from its beginning, has called its people to reject war. In 1785, the Church of the Brethren elders said, "We see that Christ always, in all his sufferings, endured them, and that with great patience, and never resisted or defended himself...So...we can not see or find any liberty to use any (carnal) sword, but only the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

They took seriously that their war was spiritual, not physical. They took seriously Christ's example when He faced the cross and persecution. They took seriously peace-making. Though the bar has been set high, this example is relevant for us today.

The Bible is true as it was when it was written. When the Bible says something, we know it is from God and we must follow it as we follow Christ.

*2 Corinthians 10:3-5 – For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

This means that we are each called to take every stronghold down through the power of Christ! Our battle is spiritual. This means we should be praying for our troops and America's enemies.

This does not mean that we are to be doormats for our enemies and allow them to trample all over us. Jesus doesn't call us to that. Real love stands up for what is right and protects the innocent, even if it means losing life. If Christ is our peace, then we must be willing to put ourselves in harm's way for the weak and innocent. In 1777 and 1780, families who believed that Jesus' call to love your enemies meant to be non-resistant were massacred by Indians at Morrison's Cove, Pennsylvania. The Church of the Brethren hold these people up as heroes because they would not fight back, even when it meant watching their wife and children die. To be honest with you, I am not sure that these people are heroes. They allowed their kids to die, but I was not there. I do know that there is no story of any Indian being converted due to their action. Peace never came to the enemy, simply because Christians were pacifists.

Some of our heroes in the Bible were warriors. This does not give us an excuse to abandon peacemaking. If you have been impacted by the peace of Christ, then your life needs to reflect it.

Jesus still calls us to love our enemies. Peacemaking is still one of the most important things we can do, simply because Jesus brings peace.

We are called to be peacemakers, because Jesus brings peace, and...

## **2. There are TWO Kingdoms.**

The Bible makes it clear that there are Two Kingdoms. There is the kingdom of man, and the Kingdom of God! Guess which one we are called to follow?

In fact, Jesus uses the terms “Kingdom of God” or “Kingdom of Heaven” 125 times in His sermons. He wanted to make clear that when you follow Him, you do not follow what the world does. You put the Kingdom of God first!

In John 18:36, *Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*

Our allegiance should first and foremost be to Christ’s Kingdom, not our home country. We should put the Kingdom of Jesus ahead of America. We are citizen of Heaven!

If this is true, and it is, then we have to be cautious about involving ourselves in battles and wars and politics that cause division. Our enemies are not other people!

Ephesians 6:12 – *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

This means that our battle is for God’s way, God’s peace and God’s justice. We must realize that God’s weapons against these enemies promise results! God is big enough to handle any enemy that we face. If our God is BIG, then Christians should be willing to die for their country, but not necessarily kill for it.

In most American homes today, parents are willing to send their sons and daughters to die for America, but won’t send them to die for preaching the Gospel. You don’t make money being a missionary! According to a report in December 2004, approximately 300,000 American men and women have served at one time or another in Iraq. Imagine what would have happened if just half of that number were sent as missionaries into Iraq! These messengers of peace would have glorified Christ through their actions, and citizens of any nation would have the peace of Christ in their hearts! True peace could happen in the Middle East, if Christians took peace-making seriously!

We are called to peacemakers, because: Jesus brings peace, there are two Kingdoms, and...

### **3. Humans are created in the image of God.**

A human being, whether an American or an Iraqi, is created in the image of God.

Genesis 1:27 (NLT) – *So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them.*

This is clear to me: Christians should not be afraid to die (for to die is gain), but should be afraid to snuff out the image of God in another person.

A Peace-Maker opposes war because of its results: abuse, destruction, death, wounds, and pain against the Image of God. We need to recognize this when we think about being a peace-maker.

We also need to realize that it is God's prerogative to take life and it is God's prerogative to bring life into this world. It is not our prerogative!

Deuteronomy 32:39 (NLT) - *Look now; I myself am he! There is no god other than me! I am the one who kills and gives life; I am the one who wounds and heals; no one delivers from my power!*

1 Samuel 2:6 - *The Lord brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.*

In fact, the Bible tells us that God will take an accounting of all the blood that is spilt, and will even demand payment (Genesis 9:5). This means that we should not be so gung ho about war!

Christians should be more willing to have a bumper sticker that says, "I support my Church: I tithe," then a ribbon that says, "support your troops." Guess which one is more prominent in the Church parking lot on Sunday morning?

We are called to peacemakers, because: Jesus brings peace, there are two Kingdoms, Humans are created in the image of God, and...

#### **4. Hell is a reality.**

In the Bible, Jesus talked about hell more than anyone else. Hell is real. Hell is the place that people go to if they don't know Jesus.

A peace-maker is a person who believes that love is the ultimate way. Christians want people to be saved, because they love them. Our interest should be in the spiritual outcome of the souls of even our enemies.

Since hell is a reality, we should think twice about pulling a trigger. As followers of Christ, we can not allow Satan to use us to send someone to hell. That is why peace-making is a better way.

Since hell is a reality, we also need to know that any evil that is done to us will be taken care of by God. We can endure hardships, and persecution without having fight back. We know that evil will be taken care of.

We don't have to take our revenge, because God will do it for us.

Romans 12:17-21 – *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

If we believe that hell is real, then we should be people who do good, even to our enemies.

We are called to be peacemakers because Jesus brings peace, there are two kingdoms, humans are created in the image of God, and hell is a reality.

Peace-making might mean standing against military action. It is Christian to call people to peace and it is American to be a peace-maker. "If patriotism means wanting what is best for one's country, and if one firmly believes that waging a war will neither make America safer nor create a more just world, then advocating for peace is an act of patriotism." People should not think that those who love peace are anti-American! A world without war would be wonderful.

We should be doing more for peace. Being a peace-maker is not easy. GRACE IS REQUIRED. I believe that Christians will make mistakes. We have to remember the rewards that Christ promises to peacemakers:

- Jesus promises that Peacemakers will be called children of God. (Matthew 5:9)
- Jesus' brother tells us that Peacemakers will have a whole crop of righteousness in their lives. (James 3:17-18)
- The one who Jesus made the leader of the Church after He left tells us that Peacemakers are promised that God will watch over them and listen to their prayers (1 Peter 3:10-12)

Being a peacemaker means you are promised by Jesus Himself blessings! What more can you want?

The world is full of GIANTS. Ignorance holds people back. Poverty has its grip on thousands. Disease is killing millions. AND leaders aren't willing to serve the people.

To top it all off, spiritual darkness keeps millions blind and spiritually dead. They don't know Jesus and they don't know peace.

The answer is for the Church to take seriously its call to be peacemakers. Real peacemakers are followers of Christ and have powerful answers to the needs of the world. Each of these GIANTS are taken down:

- When a Peace-Maker bends down and teaches someone as Christ taught the masses;
- When a Peace-Maker shares the wealth of Christ with the poor;
- When a Peace-Maker brings healing to the diseases that plague our world, and
- The Giants tumble down when a Peace-Maker puts others first and shows them the way of Christ.

The BIGGEST GIANTS FALL when a peace-maker shares the source of their peace: Jesus Christ!

Jesus has the power to defeat anything that has declared war on you!

Make a decision for Christ TODAY:

*Bless'd Be the Tie That Binds - #421*