

SHOULD CHRISTIANS PRAY FOR WORLD PEACE WHEN CHRIST PREDICTED INCREASING WARFARE?

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Mark 13:7 - **“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end.”**

I don't suppose there are very many issues in the news today that would divide Christian opinion more than the Christian response to war. You all have your own opinion, I'm sure. Who of us isn't moved by the bloodshed in Ukraine. The media keeps us all closer to the horrific scenes of war than any previous generation. Opinions vary in some degree, I'm sure, between those on the left and those on the right. It's a passionate issue, for sure.

I don't suppose the church will ever be fully and finally united on all the issues of when, or even if, war is ever a moral necessity. Yet I **do** feel Christians on both sides of the political spectrum would say they are passionate about the blessing of peace even though perhaps differing on how that goal is to be reached. I think **all** of us would be united in praying, ***“Lord, bring peace to this corrupt, violent, war-torn world! In Jesus Name, bring peace.”***

And that, in itself, raises an interesting problem. In what sense should Christians pray for peace when Jesus, in our text, said, referring to the increase of warfare in the earth, that these things ***“....must take place”***? What does that mean - ***must*** take place? And if wars ***must*** take place, then are we somehow going against God when we pray for peace?

Goodness knows, it's hard enough to really believe God when praying for anything as big as global peace. But now do I have to also confront the possibility that even **God** doesn't want such a peace to exist? How am I supposed to pray in faith with **that** possibility on my mind?

These are the kinds of times that raise bigger questions than we can answer with simplicity. People's hearts churn and their minds are stretched searching for a straight line to the truth. I certainly don't have all the answers. I have my **political** views, but I work quite hard to keep church and state separated in the pulpit ministry of our church. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords, not the political property of either the left or the right.

Yet I think there are some helps to guide us on our knees at these trying times. Let me try to give you some principles about how Christians should pray when Jesus said of these wars, "**....these things must take place.**"

1) **CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRAY FOR PEACE, WHILE UNDERSTANDING THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN GOD USES MORAL EVILS IN THIS WORLD TO ACCOMPLISH HIS DIVINE PURPOSES**

In other words, there is no final conflict between Jesus' words that wars **must** take place and the command from Paul that Christians should pray for our leaders that we would live in peace:

1 Timothy 2:1-4 - “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

“Well, how can this be, Pastor Don? How can we give honor to the words of Jesus and obey the injunction from the apostle Paul at the same time?”

I’m not sure I can fully explain that to you. But I know that it is right to do it. I know this because Jesus, our Lord, did the very same thing. Consider the circumstances surrounding His death on the Cross. The Bible is very clear that this unjust event was fully determined in the counsel of Father God:

First, you have Peter’s explanation of the Cross of Jesus: **Acts 2:23 - “...this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.”**

Also, notice how the early church expressed their understanding of the crucifixion in their prayers: **Acts 4:27-28** - “...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, [28] to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.”

And so we learn, very importantly, I think, that God sometimes uses very wicked, unjust events to accomplish His purposes in this world. But we also see something else. We see that Jesus, who understood the full purpose and depth of the Cross, prayed that the event be passed from Him:

Matthew 26:39 - “And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’”

I take this to mean that we are entitled, even encouraged, to pray against things that are unjust and immoral in this world, even though God may be using them to accomplish His greater good. The fact that there are some things that simply “***must take place***” doesn’t mean we can’t pray for unjust events to pass from us.

2) **OUR PRAYERS SHOULD BE GUIDED BY WHAT WE KNOW, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, TO BE RIGHTEOUS AND JUST FOR MANKIND HERE ON EARTH**

Matthew 6:10 - “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

This ties in with the last point. We pray from ***our*** view of things. We simply don't possess complete knowledge about the will of God in heaven, or the way angels perform it. We live here on earth. We must be guided in our prayers, as best we can, from the information in the Scriptures and the commandments of God directed toward ***us***, because that is the only information we have regarding God's will. We simply don't know all of God's sovereign way for all the nations of the earth.

In other words, all things being equal, we are to pray for our world in ways that are ***in keeping with the way God has commanded us to pray and live***, not by the way His will may unfold in His sovereign plan for this planet. What we ***do*** know is God has commanded ***us*** to keep from dishonesty, hatred, bitterness, violence and bloodshed in our own lives. So, all things being equal, this is the way we should pray for His will to unfold in this fallen world.

3) **WE SHOULD STILL ALWAYS PRAY FOR PEACE HUMBLY,
KNOWING THAT A SOVEREIGN GOD MAY LEAVE OPEN THE
POSSIBILITY OF WAR**

Romans 13:1-6 - “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. [2] Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. [3] For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, [4] for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. [5] Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. [6] For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing.”

There are at least a few basic ideas that are clear from this text. While you and I are not to take *personal* vengeance in our own hands, God has given to *governing authorities* the right and obligation, not only to make requests and negotiate deals, but to bear the sword. There are times when governing bodies are called to turn back injustice and oppression with the appropriate weight of physical force.

I know these are complex issues, but if I see an old lady being mugged across the street am I morally obligated to try to help her? If I witness this kind of violence and cruelty and do nothing to step in and help am I any better than the one beating that old woman? And if I **do** help the old lady do I know for certain that there aren't **other** thugs waiting in the shadows to jump into the fray? Might my involvement actually **escalate** the violence? And does that lack of absolute certainty justify my doing nothing at all to help?

Not easy questions, these. Other cases of violence are further removed my personal life. They involved other broken people in other lands. What is my responsibility then? In such cases our prayers should be for divine wisdom, relief from undue misery, and the expeditious return of more peaceful and just conditions.

- 4) **CHRISTIANS SHOULD PRAY FOR PEACE KNOWING THAT PEACE ITSELF IS NOT THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ALMIGHTY GOD, BUT SERVES AS THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS TO WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO GOD, THE SPREADING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGHOUT THIS WORLD**

1 Timothy 2:1-4 - "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, [2] for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. [3] This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, [4] **who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**"

For Christians to pray for peace and **not** commit their lives and resources to the missionary task at hand is short-sighted and hypocritical. ***The only reason the Scriptures give to pray for peace is the conversion of the lost to Jesus Christ, God the Son.*** I say that is the only **stated** reason. Paul makes an unmistakable link between three things in this important text: 1) ***Praying for national and international leaders.*** 2) ***Making our desire known to God for peaceful living conditions among peoples and nations.*** 3) ***Recognizing God's ultimate desire that "...all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth"*** (4).

We need to be so careful about this. It is dreadfully easy for the church to adopt the right **actions** for inadequate **reasons**. There are vast segments of the church today who are frantic in their scramble to promote peace, but who do so for purely **humanitarian** reasons. And certainly there is nothing **wrong** with expressing humanitarian concerns. We **should** care about these humanitarian issues. But, and this is the important point, we should also know why we, **as Christians**, express these humanitarian concerns. **Why** are we to care about the poor, the dying, the battered and persecuted, and the oppressed?

I think the Scriptures teach that the Christian Church has a **unique contribution** to make at this point. We alone have the ultimate **reason** to pray for peace. The reason isn't just the **absence of war**. The reason is the **reaching of the lost**. In other words, we don't just pray for peace because people are God's **creatures**. As true as that is, there is an even stronger New Testament foundation for praying for peace. We pray for peace because God wants to make His **creatures** His **children** through faith in Jesus Christ.

I know these are difficult issues. While I don't have all the answers, here are a few things I am certain of. Hold on to them and let them light the path of prayer when so many are at war.

- a) ***Pray for peace knowing God can and does use moral evil to accomplish His purpose in this fallen world.***
- b) ***Pray for peace using God's commands for how Christians should live as a guide.*** In other words, order your prayers around the commands God has **clearly revealed** rather than by trying to figure out what He has chosen to **keep to Himself**.
- c) ***Pray for peace recognizing fully that there are appropriate times for just war and the use of the sword.*** You and I will rarely be able to **discern** those times perfectly, but that is not as important for our purposes at prayer as recognizing that such times do exist. Leadership in this fallen world always bears its own heavy responsibility before God.

- d) ***Pray for peace knowing that God's ultimate goal is never merely the absence of war, but the spreading of the gospel.*** This is the most important point. I'll tell you how you can know if a church is serious about its cries to God for peace. ***What does it do with the gateway of peace when God provides it?***

Stay on your knees, church. Keep humble and non-contentious. Pray for our leaders and those of the rest of the world. Pray and wait for peace with your check-book out for world missions. And keep your feet clothed with the preparation of the gospel of peace - just for the time when God ***does*** bring seasons of peace!