

THE FORMULA FOR PEACE

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on June 28, 1964 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

When one pauses to look at the world about him it is quite obvious that in creating man God intended for him to be happy. Provision is abundantly made for the satisfaction of man's every need. The means by which man can provide his food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life are abundant and close at hand. In addition, God has caused the world to be indescribably beautiful. Think of the colorful beauty of the myriad flowers, the restful green of trees and grass, the blue of the sky, and the brilliance of the sunset. In addition to the wide variety of color, there is the never-ending variety of form and shape in all kinds of vegetation and even in the living things of the earth. Surely, one cannot doubt that God intended for man to be happy.

Yet, it is equally obvious that mankind is often unhappy. One needs only to stand at some downtown intersection at the rush hour of the day and observe the facial expressions of those who pass by to realize that man is fraught with care and worry. As the people pass, their facial expressions indicate the tension under which they live. Even when observing people quietly sitting in a bus or train, one gets the impression that they are often far from happy and that their lives have many tensions and concerns.

Still another evidence of man's unhappiness is his desire to escape from reality. Psychologists tell us that this is one of the primary reasons why the movies have been so popular for several decades. For an hour or two, while completely engrossed in the story unfolding on the screen, a person forgets almost completely who he is and where he is. Maize, a dime store clerk, forgets the drab existence of her own life--her cheap and inadequate wardrobe, the unimpressive apartment to which she goes home at night, and the lack of challenge and excitement in her day-to-day activities--and for a little while through the principle of empathy imagines herself to be beautiful, surrounded by admirers, and living in a luxurious setting with an abundance of clothes and possessions of every kind. The fact that scores of millions of people watch the movies every week is at least some indication that they seek this limited kind of escape.

Still another evidence that many are dissatisfied with their own lives is the fact that more than ten billion dollars are spent each year in the United States alone on intoxicating liquors. While it might be too much to claim that all who drink do so in order to escape the frustrations and problems of their own lives, it is quite obvious to students of the problem that those who are heavy drinkers are almost universally seeking escape from the unpleasant reality of their own lives. These are people who would like to forget who they are and the circumstances in which they live. The same can be said with even greater emphasis of those who drown their sorrows in the use of dope.

Why Are People Unhappy?

There are many factors, of course, that contribute to the unhappiness of man, but one of the chief is the fact that man finds himself in a situation involving suspicion, conflict, struggle and rivalry with his fellow man. In the "battle of life" he does not trust his fellow man. Each suspects the other of trying to out-do him. In trying to "get ahead" all too often one person pushes others down as he endeavors to lift himself to better positions. It is a battle of the "haves" against the "have-nots." The rich are hated by the poor, The successful are envied by the less successful. It is capital against labor, the young against the old, the outs against the ins.

Some years ago, a vice-president of the Ford Motor Company in Dearborn, Michigan, provided a limousine and a special tour of the huge River Rouge plant for a small group of which I was a part. In this largest manufacturing plant in the world, which then employed some 90,000 men, we were taken to sections not ordinarily visited by the general public on the regular tours which regularly go through this great industrial complex. I recall that we were taken into the engine assembly building where in a series of pits men were working feverishly along conveyor lines in assembling automobile motors. Some were naked almost to the waist as they struggled to keep up with the production demands of the assembly line. Our guide, a young man of education and ambition, pointed out that he was wearing an oval badge, indicating management, whereas the men in the pits were wearing square badges, indicating labor. He warned as we entered the building that sometimes there was trouble. He said, "Occasionally, as we pass through on the catwalks above the men, a wrench will come flying through the air. Be on your guard." This was simply his way of telling us that there was resentment among the men who were toiling so rigorously against those whom they considered to have the white-collar jobs of ease and preferment.

The Goal

Although it may be over-simplification, the primary reason for this struggle among men is the goal for which they struggle. As long as man's central goals are centered in the material things of this life, the here and now, strife is inevitable. The hard facts are that there are simply not enough of the various kinds of choice possessions to go around. Not every one can drive a Cadillac; not every one can live in an air-conditioned luxury home; not every one can travel widely on vacation. Similarly, not every one can be head of the firm, foreman of a department, or have a white-collar job. Since there are not enough of the best things in life to go around, man feels an

urgent drive to push himself ahead, to push others aside, so that he may enjoy the rewards at the top. The only possible result is antagonism and conflict. Those who do not succeed in reaching the top rung of the ladder become discontented and unhappy.

It is a little like the experience that all of us have seen in some major-league baseball park. From the bat of one of the stars a foul carooms off into the second deck and a hundred people rise as one man, extending arms and scrambling to get the foul ball as a choice souvenir. After the scramble only one was able to secure it; only one can go home in triumph. Life is often like that, primarily because the goals of life are centered so solidly upon the material things of this world, of which there are not enough for everyone to have all of that he wants.

### The Christian Is Different

In Christianity, things are different. For those who really grasp Christ's way of life, there is an absence of the struggle and conflict which have blasted the happiness of countless millions of men. The reason is a very simple one. Instead of rivalry and conflict, there is partnership and fellowship. Listen to the apostle Paul as he writes to the church at Philippi, "I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, for your fellowship in the furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now." (Phil. 1:3-5). The key word in this passage is fellowship which means partnership. Paul had established the church at Philippi some years before, as we read in Acts 16, and the members to whom he is now writing had been partners with him in the growth of that church and in the spreading of the gospel elsewhere. A few moments later in the same opening chapter of his letter he says, "Ye are partakers with me of grace." (Phil. 1:7). Paul's emphasis clearly indicates that there was a wonderful feeling of warmth and cooperation among the Christians at Philippi.

In Philippians 2:1-4, this same mood is further reflected, "If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit; of any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others." Christians have no need to be rivals, hence, can be concerned about the things of others and can count others better than themselves.

This means that one congregation's success is actually a benefit and a blessing to other congregations nearby. This means that one preacher's success is a boon to other preachers of the gospel. This means that one Christian's good life actually makes it easier for others about him to live the faithful Christian life. To put it another way, heaven is big enough to accommodate all who genuinely wish to go there. There is no shortage of spiritual blessings, hence, no rivalry among those who seek them. In actual fact, it is much easier to live the Christian life when many others about one are doing so, much easier for a congregation to grow and make progress when other congregations are doing well nearby, much easier for one preacher to accomplish fine things in the Lord's service if he is surrounded by others who are successful.

### The Goal

This partnership or fellowship is possible because Christians have a goal in which cooperation and helpfulness are normal rather than competition and antagonism. In Phil. 3:14, the apostle Paul continues, "I press on toward the goal of the prize of the high calling (another translation says the upward pull) of God in Christ Jesus." A moment later he adds, "For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is perdition, whose God is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things." Having sounded this warning against those who are unmindful of Christ, he then concludes, "For our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:18-20). The Christian's goal is a spiritual one and this makes possible the elimination of the struggle and rivalry that results among those "who mind earthly things."

### Peace and Contentment

As a result of this spiritual goal, Christians find that their lives have the rare but universally desired quality of peace. Again Paul speaks, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice ... In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things. The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you." (Phil. 4:4, 6-9).

In addition to peace of mind, the Christian also finds that he has a contentment which is wonderful indeed. Listen again to Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me ... And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4:11-13, 19).

The apostle Paul wrote these words from a Roman prison, yet one finds in them a wonderfully radiant outlook on life. Even though things were not going very well with him here in this life, it did not seem to matter greatly, for his citizenship was not here on earth but in heaven. Even though he awaited an appearance before Nero and had a questionable future, he clearly had a peace of mind and a contentment that are rare among men.

### Conclusion

The Christian is happy. Because his life does not center in the material things of the world, but rather in the spiritual realities of eternity, he is able to rise above the basic problem of mankind--struggle, conflict, and rivalry. The solution to the problem of war, whether it be on a national level or an individual level, is for men to change their basic life goals. As long as the most important thing in life is the securing of material possessions, conflict is inevitable. When, on the other hand, man learns that the most important thing in existence is the spiritual, he then can use the material things of this world in their proper secondary place yet without allowing his life to be dominated and ruined by them.

The Christian does not go out of the world, but rather uses the world and its blessings to whatever extent they are available. He does not worship things, nor does he allow material things to dominate his existence, but he uses them for the greater purposes of the spiritual kingdom. This is the formula by which all men could live together in peace and happiness. More important yet, it is the formula by which all men could achieve peace in their relationships with God. This is the formula for peace and happiness, both in this world and in that which is to come.