

A Theological Case for Interfaith Dialogue

Baptists have always been passionate about reflecting something of God and a lot of Jesus in the communities where we live and in the places where we work. Admittedly, sometimes we may act as if we were the light of the world and forgot that we "...were not that light but were sent to bear witness to that light..."

Nevertheless, in our enthusiasm for Jesus, we are driven to be a light to a world darkened by chaos and turmoil...to sound an alarm in a world duped by arrogance and greed...to be a symbol of God's tender mercy and loving grace for those struggling with life's cruelties.

While it may be that the world has not changed much since Jesus' day, today's rapid transportation, instant worldwide communication, and destructive weapons were never a part of Jesus' time. Yet, our day is stressful, people are tense, and the segments of the religious world are fighting each other for the control of our lives--just like things in Jesus' time!

As if a part of life, there will always be conflicts that separate people; disagreements that divide the community; fine causes that beg for support; and noble principles that need to be defended. It was in this kind of context where people and communities were torn by social, religious, and political conflicts that Jesus said in Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

Those who accept Jesus' words as a personal call to be more 'peacemakers' than warmongers are special people. Those who hear Jesus saying '...help others avoid those vicious conflicts that often end in war...work for peace among those who polarize others with their theological exclusiveness, philosophical wit and social labels' are indeed children of God, having a special kinship with God! Their witness is their call for reason in a world terrorized by radicalism and extremism.

When it comes to our Baptist witness to those of non-Christian traditions, the Interfaith Task Force of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of Georgia has found that our greatest witness is to be peacemakers among these whose traditions and persuasions differ from ours. With respect and appreciation of other people's spiritual perspective on life, we offer simple acts of kindness and small gestures of friendship and let the Holy Spirit use such a witness to His glory and for His benefit.

Because of that friendship, doors, long closed to Baptists, are being opened to us!

If those who broker peace and encourage warring parties to 'beat their swords into plowshares' are children of God, most assuredly, those who seek to bring understanding between Christians and non-Christian traditions...those who seek to bring respect and appreciation for those of different theological interpretations are also 'peacemakers' who rightly deserve to be called 'children of God!'

We invite you to join us in being 'peacemakers' in today's world which is torn as much by religious conflict than united by respect and appreciation.

Submitted by Wayne Martin, Chair of the Interfaith Taskforce and Member of Smoke Rise Baptist Church