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Peaceful Coexistence: Sharing Christ’s Love in a World of Intolerance

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KEY VERSE
Luke 9:56: “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy the lives of people but to save them.”

READINGS
Daniel 6:1-17; Psalm 120; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 9:51-56

Dearly beloved in Christ, greetings to you in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We live in a world where people are increasingly divided by religion, caste, race, language, culture, political ideology, and social status. Differences that should enrich our communities sometimes become reasons for suspicion, hatred, discrimination, and violence. People who follow different faiths may regard one another as enemies rather than neighbours. Even within families, communities, and churches, intolerance can destroy relationships and weaken the bonds that unite us as human beings. In such a world, the theme “Peaceful Coexistence: Sharing Christ’s Love in a World of Intolerance” is especially relevant. As Christians, we are called not to withdraw from people who are different from us, nor to respond to hostility with hostility, but to demonstrate the love, compassion, and peace of Jesus Christ. Peaceful coexistence does not mean that we abandon our convictions or compromise our faith. It means that we respect the dignity of others, live together despite our differences, and seek the common good while remaining faithful to the Gospel. The Bible teaches us that God calls His people to be instruments of peace. Daniel remained faithful to God while serving in a society that did not share his faith. The psalmist cries out against deceit and hostility, longing for peace. Paul calls the Church to put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Jesus Himself refuses to respond with violence when He is rejected by a Samaritan village. Through these passages, let us reflect on three important lessons: peaceful coexistence requires faithfulness without hostility, Christlike character in our relationships, and a commitment to respond to rejection with love rather than retaliation.

1. Live Faithfully with Others Without Becoming Hostile

Daniel 6:1–17 presents the story of Daniel, a faithful servant of God living under the rule of a foreign king. Daniel distinguished himself through his integrity, wisdom, and excellent service. His conduct was so exemplary that the king considered appointing him over the entire kingdom. However, Daniel's success provoked jealousy among other officials. Unable to find grounds for accusing him in his public responsibilities, they targeted his religious faith. They persuaded King Darius to issue a decree forbidding anyone to pray to any god or human being except the king for thirty days. Daniel knew about the decree, yet he continued to pray to God as he had always done. His enemies used his faithfulness against him, and he was thrown into the lions' den. Daniel's story teaches us that peaceful coexistence does not require us to abandon our faith. He served faithfully in a kingdom that was different from his own cultural and religious background. He fulfilled his responsibilities with integrity and contributed to the welfare of the society in which he lived. He did not become hostile towards others simply because they did not share his faith. At the same time, Daniel did not allow pressure from those around him to separate him from God. He maintained his

spiritual convictions without using his faith as a reason to mistreat others. His life demonstrates that we can remain deeply committed to Christ while living respectfully with people of different beliefs. This is an important lesson for Christians today. We live among people who may have different religious traditions, political opinions, cultural practices, and moral perspectives. We should not assume that everyone who differs from us is our enemy. We can work with people of other faiths in education, healthcare, environmental protection, disaster relief, and community development. We can join hands to protect the poor, care for the vulnerable, and promote justice. Our faithfulness should be visible through honesty, fairness, compassion, and responsible service. When people see Christians working sincerely for the welfare of all, they encounter a witness that goes beyond words. Daniel's integrity earned him respect even in a difficult environment.

Psalm 120, however, reminds us that peaceful living is not always easy. The psalmist cries out to God because of lying lips and deceitful tongues. He longs for deliverance from people who hate peace. This is an experience many people share today. False accusations, rumours, prejudice, and hostile speech can create deep divisions in society. As Christians, we must refuse to contribute to such hostility. We should not spread unverified information, use religion to encourage hatred, or speak contemptuously about people from other communities. Instead, we must stand for truth and justice while treating others with dignity. Peaceful coexistence begins when we recognise that our neighbours are human beings created by God. We can disagree without demeaning one another, remain faithful without being arrogant, and defend our convictions without promoting hatred. Like Daniel, let us be faithful to God and serve our communities with integrity.

2. Put on Christlike Love in All Our Relationships

Our second lesson comes from Colossians 3:12–17. Paul writes to the Christian community and reminds believers that they are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. He calls them to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. He further instructs them to bear with one another and forgive one another, just as the Lord has forgiven them. Paul's language is practical. Just as we choose what clothes to wear each day, we must deliberately choose the attitudes that shape our relationships. Compassion must replace indifference, kindness must replace cruelty, humility must replace pride, and patience must replace anger. These qualities are not signs of weakness; they are evidence of a life being transformed by Christ. Paul then declares, “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Colossians 3:14). Love is the bond that holds the Christian community together. Without love, even our religious activities and theological knowledge can become empty expressions of faith. This teaching is essential for peaceful coexistence. Intolerance often begins when we believe that our own group is superior to others. We judge people before knowing them, interpret their actions negatively, and refuse to listen to their experiences. Once prejudice takes root, even minor disagreements can become serious conflicts.

Christ calls us to a different way of living. We must learn to listen before judging, understand before condemning, and forgive rather than seek revenge. We should recognise the dignity of every person, even when we disagree with their beliefs or decisions. Paul also writes, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Colossians 3:15). The peace of Christ should govern our inner lives and our relationships. This does not mean that we ignore injustice or remain silent when people are mistreated. Genuine peace cannot be built upon discrimination or the suffering of vulnerable people. Rather, Christian peace calls us to confront injustice truthfully, firmly, and compassionately, seeking restoration wherever possible. The Church has a particular responsibility to model this way of life.

Our congregations should be places where people experience acceptance, mutual respect, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Differences in age, social background, language, culture, or status should never become excuses for exclusion. Church leaders must encourage dialogue, address conflicts fairly, and demonstrate humility in their own conduct.

Moreover, peaceful coexistence must extend beyond the walls of our churches. We are called to show compassion to our neighbours, help families in need, support children and older people, and cooperate with others in serving the community. When Christians work together with people of different faiths for the welfare of society, they demonstrate the practical meaning of love. Paul concludes this passage by instructing believers to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Every conversation, decision, relationship, and act of service should reflect the character of Christ. Our faith should influence not only what we believe but also how we treat people. If we want a peaceful world, we must begin by cultivating peaceful hearts and relationships. We cannot preach reconciliation while nurturing bitterness, nor can we proclaim love while practising discrimination. Let us put on Christlike love every day and allow His peace to shape our lives.

3. Respond to Rejection with Peace, Not Retaliation

Our third lesson comes from Luke 9:51–56. As Jesus travelled towards Jerusalem, He sent messengers ahead to a Samaritan village to prepare for His arrival. However, the villagers did not welcome Him because He was heading towards Jerusalem. The rejection was connected to the longstanding hostility between Jews and Samaritans. These communities had deep religious and historical differences. Instead of receiving Jesus, the village refused Him hospitality. James and John, two of Jesus' disciples, were offended by this rejection. They asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” Their response reveals how easily wounded pride and religious hostility can lead to thoughts of punishment and destruction. Jesus, however, turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village. He refused to allow rejection to become an excuse for retaliation. His mission was not to destroy people but to bring salvation, healing, and reconciliation. Our key verse expresses this principle: “For the Son of Man did not come to destroy the lives of people but to save them” (Luke 9:56, as rendered in some translations). Jesus demonstrates that the power of God's kingdom is revealed not through revenge but through love and the pursuit of human restoration.

This passage speaks directly to our world today. Religious intolerance can lead people to believe that those who reject their beliefs deserve punishment or humiliation. Political and social conflicts can provoke anger, making people eager to retaliate against those who oppose them. Even Christians may sometimes respond to criticism with harsh words, public condemnation, or a desire to see their opponents defeated. Jesus calls us to another way. We must not confuse defending our faith with attacking people who disagree with us. We can explain our beliefs clearly, stand against injustice courageously, and challenge harmful behaviour without dehumanising those responsible. We can refuse to participate in hatred even when others attempt to provoke us. Peaceful coexistence does not mean accepting violence, remaining silent about oppression, or allowing vulnerable people to suffer. It requires us to protect those who are threatened, speak against injustice, and seek solutions that preserve human dignity. But our methods must reflect the values of the kingdom we proclaim.

Jesus did not force the Samaritan village to welcome Him. He continued His journey. This teaches us that there are times when we must accept rejection without responding with bitterness. We cannot

control every person's attitude towards us, but we can choose how we respond. Imagine the difference if Christians consistently responded to hostility with truth, courage, patience, and compassion. Our homes would become more peaceful, our churches more united, and our communities more harmonious. Instead of escalating conflicts, we could help people find ways to communicate, cooperate, and rebuild trust. The world does not need Christians who merely speak about peace. It needs Christians who practise peace. We must be peacemakers in our families, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and public life. We must teach children to respect differences, encourage young people to reject hatred, and demonstrate through our actions that love is stronger than intolerance. As followers of Jesus, let us refuse the temptation to call down fire upon those who reject us. Instead, let us carry the light of Christ into places of conflict and offer the hope of reconciliation.

Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, peaceful coexistence is not an optional extra in the Christian life. It is an essential expression of our faith in Jesus Christ. Daniel teaches us to remain faithful to God while serving others with integrity. Psalm 120 reminds us of the pain caused by deceit and hostility and our need to seek God's peace. Paul calls us to clothe ourselves with compassion, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love. Jesus teaches us not to respond to rejection with destruction but to continue our journey in the spirit of His saving mission. Today, let us make three commitments. First, let us respect the dignity of every person while remaining faithful to our Christian convictions. Second, let us cultivate Christlike love and peace in our relationships. Third, let us respond to intolerance with courage, wisdom, and compassion rather than hatred or revenge. May our churches become communities of reconciliation, our homes become places of peace, and our lives become instruments of God's love in a divided world. We may not be able to remove every difference in the world, but we can choose to love across those differences. We may not be able to silence every voice of intolerance, but we can ensure that our own voices proclaim truth, justice, mercy, and peace. Let us go into the world as ambassadors of Christ, sharing His love with all people and building bridges where others build walls. May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, the love of Christ guide our relationships, and the grace of Christ empower us to live together in peace. Amen.