

PEACE

Peace is a topical issue. The debate has become more heated than ever. The reason is that never before has the world been in a position where it can destroy itself. The nuclear build-up is described as a race (the arms race). However, in this race there can be no winner, only horrific defeat for those in the “race” but also for those who are helpless “spectators”. The real race must be to put an end to this madness. The question is how?

The first thing we must make sure of is that we be informed; we should know the facts. Sometimes figures can be misleading, for example, how much does it cost to provide food, water, education, health and housing for the WHOLE WORLD. The answer is about £12 billion a year – a huge sum of money ... about as much as the world spends on arms every two weeks. Only by knowing facts such as that can we fully understand how evil the arms escalation is. It is not a question of who might die in the future; most of the world is already being threatened with death because some countries are spending money on weapons that should be spent on their food and health. The irony is that after all the money we have spent we feel less secure than we ever did. We must pray. But it’s not enough just to spend time in prayer. Masses of money has been spent on arms; as Christians we must demand that time, energy and money be spent on Peace. That still leaves the question, how? That answer lies with the experts but we can no longer condone more spending on weapons. After all, how many times do we have to be able to destroy the world to feel safe?

“All the nuclear weapons in the world
don’t offer the security of a
single embrace”.

JUSTICE AND PEACE

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In his teaching, Jesus often talks about the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is central to his teaching. What does it mean? Well, it is not the same as an earthly Kingdom with limited territory and rulers who may be good or bad. The Kingdom of God speaks of the reign of God in people's hearts. When people allow God to rule their lives it will mean; "Good news to the poor, liberty to captives, to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free" (See Luke 4).

In the "Our Father" we pray for the coming of that Kingdom. Of course it is not something that is going to happen overnight. For the Kingdom to come fully, God must reign in the hearts of every man and woman. Until he does, there will always be some injustice. We can always pray for unjust rulers, the poor and the blind, but we cannot ensure that they are part of the Kingdom; they have to decide for themselves. I can only extend God's Kingdom by becoming a part of it myself. On the inside, it means having a deep relationship with Christ. On the outside, it shows itself through a concern for justice and peace.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY JUSTICE?

At some stage in our lives, all of us have to deal with other people where we will be in a position of power. We may have authority at work or over children. We may be involved in distributing resources (food to the poor, money to those in need etc). This is when we need a sense of justice. We could say a lot of things about fairness and equality, but this would not teach us how to be just. We might be handing out sweets to children and for some particular reason give one child more or less than the others (for reasons of health, reward, punishment ...). Being just means knowing people's needs and then acting in a loving way towards them.

What about criminals? A criminal will find it much harder to become reformed in a society that despises him. We will only become effective in dealing with law-breakers when we act out of love for them. This does not mean letting them go free; people may need protection. We must act

out of love for the individual and their community. Laws are necessary, but they can offer limited protection only and it's usually the rich and powerful who can make best use of it. Most of the world is powerless, hungry and poor. Where can they turn for justice? Jesus says that they should be able to turn to us!"

WHAT CAN WE DO?

It would be sad if we were concerned with injustice in Russia whilst acting unjustly ourselves at home or at work. The first thing I must do as a Christian is to be just to my family, friends and neighbours. I must also be concerned that there is justice in the society in which I live. Those who suffer are usually the most vulnerable; the elderly, the unborn, the lowly paid, the sick, ethnic minorities, women and so on. By helping these we are helping to establish the Kingdom of God. In his Kingdom, God is our Father and the needy our brothers and sisters.

THE WORLD

How far must our concern stretch? There is always a limit to what we can do; there must never be a limit to our concern. If someone is imprisoned in Siberia or starving in Chad we may be able to do little but the very fact that we are concerned is a prayer in itself. That is how our concern must first express itself, in prayer. But then there are usually things we can do. We can join a group involved with prisoners of conscience; become a member of some political organisation; or join a Third World group or maybe you could do something locally. But remember, the first thing we must do is to look at ourselves and our own lifestyle to see if we are causes of injustice ourselves. We might find the odd plank lying around!!!