



Keeping the peace: follow the “Umpire Principle”



People tell me that I have to know what’s going on in the world. I say, “Show me the verse.” It’s fascinating, but no one has yet shown me the verse. If there were such a verse, I am convinced I would have been shown it by now. I have not taken a newspaper, ever. People have said to me, “Why don’t you get the paper, Zender?” My stock answer is, “Because I might find out what’s happening in the world.” I don’t understand how people can read newspapers and live to tell about it. Well, they generally don’t live. They get cancer and die. It takes a little time to die of worry, but it happens eventually.

Reading newspapers is the very definition of minding things of the Earth. It’s like going to a restaurant and saying, “Give me your War Special and a side order of Worry. For dessert, I would like a large Train Derailment and a Communist Coup.” Good God. What do you expect? How can you expect peace when you order

an entrée of War? I am not even mentioning the 11:00 news, but don’t get me started. Oh, it’s too late. “Honey. Turn on the news. Let’s watch colorful, hi-definition accounts of kidnappings, rapes, racial discord, house fires, and tsunamis in faraway places. Then we’ll go nite-nite.”

THE UMPIRE PRINCIPLE

How far does one bury one’s nose in the dirt of the world, the dirt of politics, the dirt of Yahoo! News, the dirt of The New York Times, the dirt of CNN, and the dirt of the latest gossip at parlors of beauty? Is there a helpful rule of thumb? There is. I call it “The Umpire Princpal.” It’s as simple as Colossians 3:15. Well, it is Colossians 3:15—

“Let the peace of Christ be arbitrating in your hearts...”

The word translated “arbitrating” here is the Greek word, *brabeuo*. According to page 17 of the Keyword Concordance in the *Concordant Literal New Testament* (the most accurate translation in existence), the Greek word *brabeuo* literally means UMPIRE. Isn’t that colorful? In other words, let the peace of Christ be umpiring in your hearts. What does this mean?

Let’s do a baseball analogy, folks. Picture yourself as a batter standing at home plate in the classic batter’s stance. The pitcher has to throw you a baseball that is approximately waist high on the vertical plane and horizontally over the plate. If he delivers you such an accurately aimed ball, you swing your bat at it and hope to hit it.

The pitcher is human, however, and does not always put the ball where he wants it. Sometimes a pitch is above your chest, below your knees, or to the left or right of the target. In these cases, all the baseball experts tell you not to swing. Because not only will you probably miss the ball, you will look silly doing it.

It is not always easy to tell whether or not a baseball is coming into the strike zone. The big-league ball generally heads your way at approximately ninety miles per



hour. Who decides whether or not a pitch has been accurately placed? We can't ask the pitcher; he's prejudiced. The batter is similarly partisan. Each of these players is obviously more lenient toward his own perspective than, say, an objective bystander would be. Ah, the objective bystander—known in baseball as the umpire.

The umpire is a referee who stands directly behind the plate with his eyes settled between the batter's chest and knees. He is the only one in the stadium in the perfect position to judge the location of the pitched baseball. Now to our analogy.

According to Paul, the umpire in our hearts is the peace of Christ. You standing at the plate with your bat at the ready is your heart, set to be influenced either toward peace or conflict. The strike zone—between knees and chest and directly over the plate—is that place in your life where you are most content, most happy, and most peaceful; let's call it your sweet spot. The pitcher is the world, and the baseballs zipping toward you are all the varied circumstances that the world throws your way.

The peace of Christ is the most perfectly situated judge of what the world dishes you. It stands directly behind your heart, analyzing every pitch. The beautiful thing about this spiritual Umpire is that It calls the trajectory and location of the ball while the ball is yet en route to the plate. That's an advantage that real batters don't have.

Let's say that the world winds up and delivers a nasty curve ball. As the ball gets closer and closer to you, you feel great unease. This is the peace of Christ—the Umpire—telling you: "This pitch is going off-target; don't swing." The translation in real-life terms would be: "This situation may look like it's coming in fine, but it's putting a pit in your stomach even now; stay away from it." Sure enough, the pitch goes wide. Thank God you didn't swing.



Here comes the next pitch, and it looks like a beauty. It is. As it's coming in, the Umpire says, "Swing at this one. It's pure. It makes you feel fine. Put yourself into it." So away you swing. You may miss, but at least you'll go down swinging at that which brings you contentment. Keep swinging at good pitches and eventually you will hit more than you miss.

The peace of Christ—thank God—stands and watches over our hearts. Let it be umpiring your heart. As the circumstances of life whiz in at appalling speeds, listen to the Umpire. The peace of Christ will tell you what you can handle and what you cannot. It accomplishes this, not by some miraculous audible voice, but by the standard of a settled heart. Are you feeling the peace? That's the Umpire. *Swing.* Feeling ill at ease? Step out of the batter's box and wait for another pitch. God won't blame you. After all, you're heeding your Designated Arbitrator. —MZ