

Finding the Peace Which Surpasses Understanding

Bill Burton

At an early age, my brother and I used to play in the living room with toys that put out a little more noise than older people could endure. We also knew that our parents complained about the noise on occasions, but this time our mother shouted saying, "Hey, enough is enough! You kids stop all that loud noise; put those toys away and go to bed so that we can have some peace and quiet." Now that I am much older, I understand that to have just a little peace and quiet is appreciated and should never be taken for granted.

WHAT IS PEACE?

Webster defines peace as "a state of quietness; freedom from oppressive thoughts or emotions; an agreement to end hostilities, such as in war; a harmony in personal relations" (620). The definition of peace and its use as a noun in the Greek New Testament is defined by W.E. Vine as:

1. Harmonious relationships between men (Matt. 10:34; Rom. 14:19);
2. Between nations (Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20);
3. Friendliness (Acts 15:33; 1 Cor. 16:11; Heb. 11:31);
4. Freedom from molestation (Luke 11:21; 19:42; Acts 9:31);

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5. Order, in the State (Acts 24:2), and in the churches (1 Cor. 14:33);
6. The harmonized relationships between God and man, accomplished through the gospel (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17);
7. The sense of rest and contentment consequent thereon (Matt 10:13; Mark 5:34; John 14:27; Rom. 3:17). (Vine 454)

WHERE IS PEACE?

For years man has desired peace (1 Pet. 3:11), but he has not been able to come upon a peace that satisfies his will to live and one that guards his heart and mind. Man has resolved to seek out peace in the wrong places, namely, in drugs, tobacco and alcohol. The end result is securing a peace that only man can give. According to Tommy South, peace is a gift from God (Num. 6:24-26), but man's sins have created a divider or barrier between man and God and alienated him from God (Isa. 59:1-2), having no peace (South 13). Paul goes so far as to say that because of sin we are enemies of God (Rom. 5:10). I believe that when our minds are focused on God, we will always strive to live for the Master. We must trust Him and be confident that God will keep us in perfect peace (Isa. 26:3). In this I am reminded of the spiritual song with the phrase, "I woke up this morning with my mind, mind, mind stayed on Jesus, Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu—jah." In addition, when we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

There is no greater pleasure and satisfaction than being in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:3; 2 Cor. 5:17) and knowing that we have peace with God; especially that inner peace, and the joy within which creates in our heart an assurance that all is well between us now and for eternity (South 14).

Let's never forget that when we live sinfully we are sure to threaten our peaceful relationship with God, and then there will be no peace with God (Rom. 8:6).

PHILIPPIANS 4:6

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. [All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.]

We should enjoy the peace of God once we have it. Many times we focus on our failures and weaknesses. In verse six, where the King James Version has, "Be careful for nothing," the American Standard Version has, "In nothing be anxious [*merimnao*]." The Greek *merimnao* is "anxious, distracting care," according to Spence and Exell in *Pulpit Commentary* (156).

What Is Anxiety?

The word anxious means "an unduly concern or worrying," according to Tim Sheerer (860). The apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Philippi not to worry, but instead to cast all of their cares (anxiety) upon God because He cared for them (cf. 1 Pet. 5:7). Worrying has been classified as a sin because it shows a lack of faith in God (cf. Matt. 6:25-34). Paul did not want the Christians to be careless or worrying, but to be free from anxiety about worldly things which might distract their thoughts from the service of God and hinder their growth in holiness (1 John 2:16-17). The nearness that we have toward the Lord should keep us free from worldly anxieties. In John 14:27, Jesus said, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." I applaud Dr. Charles Mayo who once said, "Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the

whole nervous system and profoundly affects the health." In addition, worry, like a rocking chair, will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere.

What Is the Cure?

Prayer is the cure for worry. In every thing pray (the Greek *erotao* means "to ask") (Vine 480). In respect to afflictions, trials and embarrassment, in each emergency, small or great, cultivate the habit of referring all things to God in prayer (1 Tim. 1:8; 1 Thess. 5:17). Prayer is one of those spiritual blessings which is only in Christ Jesus, a privilege that has been extended to those added to His church (Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 3:12). Therefore, when we are at peace with God, we know that a loving, caring, benevolent Father will hear and answer our pleas according to His good pleasure (Phil. 3:12). We must never forget that prayer must be in earnest and from the heart. Also, our service to God must be more earnest and devoted, according to David Lipscomb and J. W. Shepherd (223).

The two words, "prayer and supplication," occur together in Ephesians 6:18, 1 Timothy 2:1 and Acts 1:14. The first one, "prayer," has been defined by Chrysostom and others as "prayer to obtain a good"; the second one, "supplication," meaning "to avoid an evil." In modern commentaries, both prayer and supplication cover the idea of prayer continued in strong and incessant pleadings until the evils are averted and the good communicated. This was especially needful while the Philippian Christians endured persecution for the sake of Jesus Christ (Spence and Exell 157).

Thanksgiving is a cure for worry. Vine defines thanksgiving (*charizomai*) as "gratitude, giving of thanks or to give freely (1 Cor. 14:16)" (625). Any request that we have to the Father relating to our spiritual condition must

be done in connection with thanksgiving for all the blessings received. It is the necessary accompaniment of prayer; it should never be absent from our devotions, because it springs out of that holy joy that the apostle Paul so constantly sets before us in this epistle and in others (Spence and Exell 156). Let us never forget that God loves His children and desires the best for them. He knows what is best and is able to do what is best for His children. Also, God will answer His children's prayers according to what is best for them spiritually (Sheerer 61).

PHILIPPIANS 4:7

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

In Isaiah 9:6, Israel's coming Messiah was called, "Prince of Peace." The people believed that He would bring them victory over their enemies and give them the prosperity for which they longed. Actually, Jesus came to give us victory over sin and death and to bestow on us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1-11).

The Peace of God

It is that peace that follows after we experience the peace with God. It is when we fully trust the Lord that a peace comes that is beyond the understanding of those who have never experienced it. This is the peace that surpasses all understanding. According to Webster, "surpass" is defined as "to become better, greater, or stronger" (885). Vine defines "surpass" as "to go beyond or to be over and above" (213-214). The peace which God gives has a calm blessedness that rises above the reach of

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human thought (Eph. 3:20; 1 Cor. 9:8) (Spence and Exell 157). It comes when a Christian obeys God, motivated by love. It is the serenity of spirit and contentment in a Christian's life which results in joy and happiness. The peace of God comes by worshiping and keeping His commandments (Ecc. 12:13; Matt. 4:10) (Scheerer 861).

Shall Keep Your Hearts and Minds Through Christ Jesus

The American Standard Version has, "...shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus." The peace of God abiding in the heart is a sure and trusting garrison, guarding it so that the evil spirit, once cast out, cannot return. The thoughts issue from the heart, for the heart is regarded as the determining part of man (Prov. 4:23; Matt. 12:35) and the seat of the intellect, not of feeling only (Acts 2:37; Matt. 9:3; Heb. 4:12) (Spence and Exell 157). Let's remember that the secret of learning to control one's thoughts comes when a Christian is filled with joy, forbearance and prayer (Sheerer 861). God gives all who trust Him that peace of mind which no one from a human standpoint can understand. Romans 8:28 states, "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good" (ASV), which brings peace to those who truly love the Lord. It is only in Christ that the mind can be preserved in peace. True believers abiding in Christ realize His promise of peace that He gives; thus, we should not let our hearts be troubled or fearful (John 14:27).

PHILIPPIANS 4:9

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

A better wording comes from the New American Standard Version, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you."

Paul is using his life as an example to translate all of the spiritual lessons taught into practical Christian living. The lessons taught are the "these things." His teaching and example were set forth as a model to follow, so long as he was following Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17). Most importantly, the lessons received must be translated into action (Sheerer 862).

Learned and Received

The verbs "learned," "received," "heard," and "seen" are all past tense. In the Greek, they are in the aorist tense and refer to the time when he was among them. The difference between "learned" and "received" is that the first points to the lesson or principle being taught and the second points more to the application of the truth in practical living. The church at Philippi had both from Paul.

Heard and Seen

Many of Paul's lessons were heard, even during his absence. When he was present, they still had the opportunity to not only hear but to see one who practiced what he preached (Lipscomb and Shepherd 226-227).

It is good when both teaching and life go together. Paul is certainly a pattern of the Christian life.

Practice These Things

Paul urged the people to think of and do things set forth in his own life, meditate upon them and practice them as they had heard them presented in his teaching or seen them exemplified in his manner of life (Phil. 3:17).

And the God of Peace Shall Be with You

In Philippians 4:9, the God of Peace is a title used from the Hebrew term “shalom,” which signified wholeness (Josh. 8:31), a general state of well being and helping to make life easier and more comfortable for the other individual (Vine 464).

CONCLUSION

When Christians live righteous lives and think righteous thoughts, they have the peace which passeth all understanding. Also, when people follow Christ as Paul followed, the God of peace who brings peace will be with them. Paul knew that his own pursuit of the high standards which he set for other Christians had brought peace. And his constant feeling of joy in the Lord, even in his chains, was a telling evidence that the God of peace was with him (Lipscomb and Shepherd 227).

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