

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

47 What Does the Bible Teach About Peace?

Scripture: John 14:27-31

Once again a new year has appeared on the horizon of history. What its days and moments hold for each one of us God alone knows. Knowledgeable people who speculate about the future wonder if it is the dawn of just another year or the dusk of human history as we know it. One columnist laments, "The 20th century will continue to be a time of turmoil and confrontation. Blood will flow, innocents will be slaughtered, old values will shift and insurrection will become commonplace. In the oft quoted phrase of Cyril Connolly, "It is closing time in the gardens of the West." And in the book, **The End of the American Era**, Professor Andrew Hacker of Cornell makes the observation that America's history as a nation has reached its end."

An equally grim note is sounded by Canada's most prominent liberal theologian, Dr. Ernest M. Howse. This churchman of national stature, warm social concern and outstanding scholarship, observes, "The world is dark with what seems like the sunset of civilization. Prophecies of global disaster, which before would have been dismissed as lunatic, are now seriously examined and everywhere stun the mind with terrifying dreams and incomprehensible dread." Another leader writes, "The tide of violence continues to rise and now involves schools, Churches and courts. Bombs explode, snipers shoot police and the streets are battlegrounds. Marriage and the family are under attack; sedition flourishes in the military; violence is preached from the pulpit; and pornography is sanctioned by the courts."

Enough said. It is not my intention to begin the new year with you by rehearsing the ills of the world in which we live nor to sound a grim note in our coming together. Rather, I want to turn your attention to a matter which understandably demands man's primary attention today throughout the world because of the conditions which have been described. It is a concern which is epidemic and on the lips of people wherever they gather. It is the matter of peace and happily, it is one of the important subjects of the Bible and the Christian faith. It is the Christian teaching that peace can be found. But it is a unique peace in that it does not depend upon peace as we normally think of it. Christianity poses the

penetrating question, "If your peace depends on peace, are you sure you have peace to begin with?" This is a most important question in an individual's quest for peace. Consider:

I. PEACE IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE TRIUNE GOD:

The God which the Bible describes is marked by a perfect confluence within Himself. There a movement without friction, and an absence of discord. All the dimensions of His being move in absolute harmony, and there is untroubled existence. One of the reasons for humankind's lack of peace is that there exists a state of alienation between such a divine being and ourselves. We may understand God the Father as the God of Peace. We read in Romans 15:33, "*Now the God of peace be with you all.*" In 16:20 we find the words, "*And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.*"

This same truth is taught in Philippians 4:9, "*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.*" In Hebrews 13:20 we read, "*Now the God of peace who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will.*" Peace, then, is an attribute of God. It inheres in His very nature and being. But it is not something, or a perfection which is abstract, or need be unintelligible to us. The person who came into this world to best reveal God to us, what God is like, was given the name "Prince of Peace." This designation is mentioned in Isaiah 9:6. "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.*" This same one is called by Paul in Ephesians 2:14, "our peace." As a further demonstration of the fact that peace has to do with our God, it is God the Holy Spirit who so moves in our lives to produce peace. We read about this in Galatians 5:22 and Romans 15:13.

I suppose one way for us to understand this perfection in the Godhead is for us to realize that in this respect we are not like God. The Apostle James talks about the cause of a peace less world. He writes, "*From whence come wars and fightings among you: come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*" (4:1) As long as individuals are proud, selfish, covetous and vengeful, there can be no peace, neither global or individual. But God is not like that. His nature is like ours in these respects. There is perfect harmony among the members of the Trinity. It is important for us to realize that peace inheres in the very nature of

God. To refer to God as “the God of peace” is to give basis to our quest for peace and experience of it.

II. THERE IS A PEACE WHICH DEPENDS ON PEACE AND IS A SOMETIME THING:

The first mention of peace in the Bible is found in Genesis 14:18-19. We read, *“And Melchizedek king of Salem (of peace) brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God. possessor of heaven and earth.”* Melchizedek was an ancient king and a priest of God. He was to become the symbolic head of the highest order of the Levitical priesthood. He stands as a type of Christ according to Hebrews 7. Melchizedek was the *“King of Peace”* in his time, Christ is the *“Prince of Peace”* for all time. As this Prince of Peace the Lord Jesus gives a most affectionate discourse on the evening of his betrayal with the full realization that he would be crucified the next day. The discourse begins with John 13:31 and concludes at the end of chapter. It was at this time that He conveyed the blessings of the new covenant to his disciples. These are represented as the Lord's last will and testament. We are able to note certain characteristics of such testaments. **They have children as beneficiaries.** People commonly give their estates to their children. We find in the Book of Hebrews (2:13) that believers are represented as Christ's children. *“Behold, I, and the children which God hath given me.”* **Such wills are made before death.** So Jesus did in a special way confirm to his disciples on the evening before the day of His crucifixion a particular legacy. **A will or testament becomes valid at the time of death.** This testament of The Lord's also is in force because He died. In Hebrews 9:17 we read, *“For where a testament is there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead. otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.”* So, Jesus in the New Covenant conveys to believers the inheritance which he meant for them to possess and enjoy. (Hebrews 9:14-15)

Now, what is this legacy which Jesus bequeathed to his followers? Is it silver and gold? No, he doesn't have that. Could it be property of some kind? No, He has not even a place to lay His head. Perhaps it is some other thing which is thought desirable, such as fame. He does not have it to give. Actually, His legacy is described in His own words in John 14:27. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you not as the world giveth, give I unto you.”* Jesus is saying that what I have to give you doesn't have to do with money, it doesn't have to do with

a temporary sense of security, it doesn't have to do with an easy life. It has to do with me personally. I give you my peace. And He wants them to understand that this legacy is not like the common and usual legacies given by men to their children. Earthly things which are not bread and upon which their lives are not satisfied. Jesus said, *"not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* He recognized that there is a peace which can be found outside of Himself, but it is a peace which I have come to say depends upon peace and is a thing sure to be lost. Let us try to understand and identify the peace which the world affords.

There is a peace of, sorts which seems to come over some people when they become insensitive to what is going on around them. Their feeling is that there isn't really anything worth being troubled about. It is an absence of feeling, a basic unconcern. In this manner they feel they have learned to cope with whatever life brings to them. There is no pain and no struggle. They fail to realize that peace is not apathy, it is not absence of disturbance. These people have capitulated, so they have a settled mind.

Another kind of worldly peace is that of compromise. How many times can a little peace be worked out when one is willing to become flexible, and not rock the boat. It is the kind of peace which can come when we are willing to live with a situation which we know is not right. This is the peace Jesus was confronted with in the wilderness. Satan told Him that He did not really have to go to the cross. All you have to do is fall down and worship me and I will give you the kingdoms of the world was the reasoning put forth. The temptation was to take the easy way. Turn these stones into bread so that everyone will know that you are the Messiah. Do a trick. Just compromise a little and let's be done with this conflict between us. This is a kind of peace that we hear about. You can have peace, just compromise a little.

Of course, there is a kind of peace which comes when there are peaceful circumstances. If the circumstances are reasonably pleasant a person can be at peace, there is an untroubled state of being. There is no hassle. Another kind of peace may have something to do with suppression, or the ability to cope. This peace may have more to do with the showing of a contrived placid exterior. Still another peace is spoken of by those who find some kind of diversion from whatever is bothering them. People speak of the peace of community where they come together in little groups or big groups and unwind. Others come to a drug induced insensibility to escape the storms of life. Some confuse peace with the

happy go lucky bravado of the person who will not allow anyone to get close to him with a serious thought. We may speak of peace as an untroubled state of being, these are some of ways we may understand the word's of Jesus, *"not as the world giveth, give I unto you."*

III. THE CHRISTIAN BEARS A DIVINE RESEMBLANCE IN THE PEACE HE HAS:

It was not without meaning that we first thought of the fact that peace is an attribute of God. This may seem uncomfortably theological, but that is exactly the point. Christianity does not view the problem of peace as being essentially political, organizational, cultural or economical. It is rather a theological and individual issue. The truth is that if the God of Peace is my Father, The Prince of Peace is my Savior, and The Holy Spirit of Peace is my indweller, I am one who bears a Divine resemblance in the world. That is why the words of Jesus are so very important. He said, *"My peace I give unto you."* This certainly was not a **circumstantial** peace. Peace did not accompany His birth, Herod declared a personal war because of Him. Peace did not follow his life. The members of His own family turned on Him. (13:54-58) Nor did peace characterize much of His teaching. He said *"Think not I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword."* (Matthew 10:34-39) It was not a peace of **compromise**. He conno one into following Him. His position was clear. *"You follow me,"* He said, *"and your life will be hard. You will experience contempt; you will know what it is to be hated. The world which did not accept me, will not accept you. If you do choose to follow me, you will pick up your own cross, you will deny yourself. It will get tougher. But I will give you something, I will give you my peace."* Neither did Jesus have peace because he became indifferent to the troubled world in which He was. So moved was He that He sweated blood according to the record, yet He had peace. He did not quit or cop out.

The peace Jesus gives to His followers is the peace He enjoyed while on earth in His state of humiliation. Although He was hated and persecuted and found no place of rest, yet He had peace. You see, peace was not for Him fundamentally an emotion, temperament, or disposition. It was a matter of His convictions which meant inward rest. Glorious certainties filled His mind and heart.

The Peace of Jesus is a reasonable peace. It had as its foundation knowledge and the right view of things. The peace of the world is founded in blindness and delusion. The peace of God's people results because they have had their eyes opened. They see things as they really are. The great problems of life have been

settled. There is the matter of God and one's relationship to Him. Jesus knew of His relationship with the Father. (John 14:10; 21, 15:9, 16:15) Another problem has to do with the future. Jesus spoke with confidence about the future. (14:3, 16, 29; 16:16) A third grief people feel has to do with what is happening to them in the present. Jesus had perfect assurance about that. (12:32, 13:3, 31-32, 14:6, 30, 16:32) I believe these are the reasons Jesus had peace in the time of crisis. This peace was His in spite of the fact that He groaned over Lazarus, and that He knew that disciples would leave Him (13:21) and thunder at the Pharisees. His assurance concerning God, the future and the present, points the way in which the Holy Spirit can minister peace to our lives.

The peace of Jesus is part of the saints beauty and dignity. The peace of the Christian is not only his comfort, but also where the image of God within them does partly reveal itself. The first time the word peace is used in the New Testament is in Matthew 5:9. Christians are owned as sons in this passage. Thus we proclaim peace after possessing it, and petition and preserve it. The greatest contribution to world peace is to lead a person to the Prince of Peace. (Ephesians 2:11-17; I Timothy 2:1-2; Romans 14:19)

Alan B. Christensen, Pastor, Hope Evangelical Free Church, Wilton, CT,
January 7, 1979