

THE PEACE OF GOD

By

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“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Each year this theme is the basis for everything from sermons and pageants to TV advertising and political hype. Significant of our secular society, there seldom is mention of glory to God, but an ever increasing emphasis on good will toward men.

The early repetition of this theme raises some questions. Why, after almost 2,000 years, has the message of Christ failed to establish peace in the world? Why do we not see more good will toward men, rather than hatred and violence? Can we believe that at long last, through the United Nations or the New World Order, we finally are going to see peace on earth?

The famed British Christian author, G. K. Chesterton, who died in 1936, once warned, “Beware of men and of movements that speak the language of Babel...beware of the New World Order, beware of their Peace in our Time...It is merely part and parcel of that same Tower of Babel impulse which God cursed so long ago. It is merely a new sprig from the primordial root of humanism; man seizing his own destiny and making a name for himself in the annals of history.”

Unquestionably, the scripture promises peace through Christ, but it is *not* peace for the world nor good will “toward” all men. This phrase, from Luke 2:14, is a mistranslation of the original Greek, which should read: “on earth peace among men of good will.” There is no promise here that all the earth will be blessed with peace and good will but that Christ will give peace to a certain group, those of truly good will.

NOT PEACE, BUT A SWORD. Rather than suggesting that His work would result in peace among all people, Jesus said that His disciples would encounter hostility, rejection and persecution.¹ “Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.”² He warned that they would be “hated of all men” for His name’s sake.³

According to the record there has been only one time when all the world was at peace, and that was in the Garden of Eden before man turned from God to have his own way. All creation was in harmony and at peace under God’s sovereignty. That peace was broken when man’s heart was alienated from God, leading to rebellion. Since then the record is one of restlessness, stress, war and violence. “The way of peace they have not known,” wrote Isaiah.⁴

God’s purpose is so contrary to the unholy desires of natural man that men grow to despise it and work together to defeat it.⁵ While the words, “In God We Trust”, appear on our coins and we include “under God” in the pledge of allegiance, there is a widespread effort to eliminate God from an part of life in America. To follow Christ and uphold the righteousness of God is to incite the world’s hostility, making the Christian the target of all those in the world who reject Christ and resist the purpose of God. Jesus warned, “In the world you have tribulation....”⁶

THE PROMISED PEACE. The advocates of a New World Order promise world peace, meaning an end to war between nations. Such peace would be forced by military power, such as that which destroyed Iraq and established peace between Iraq and Kuwait, although this absence of war has brought no real peace to the people of either nation. The Soviet Union had this kind of peace for over 70 years, but in all that time few people under communist rule could be said to be at peace.

As much as we desire peace between nations, we must recognize that such peace is never permanent nor universal. When Jesus promised peace He was careful to note that it was not the kind of peace the world gives.⁷

What Jesus offers is personal peace in the midst of outer conflicts, and we have His own example of what this means. He lived in a nation occupied by a foreign power; He was slandered and falsely accused and was constantly confronted by evil men who wanted to destroy Him. Yet He went about calmly obeying the Heavenly Father, ministering to the people and bringing peace to their minds. The peace Jesus gives is a private matter which one may enjoy in spite of the world's upheaval.

CONDITIONS FOR PEACE. This peace can be ours in any and all circumstances. People have found peace with God in the midst of battle, in prison, during illness and physical suffering, in times of financial disaster and when all things around and near them were in turmoil and chaos. But there are certain conditions for peace.

1. The first of these is faith in the gospel of Christ, that we may be "reconciled to God through the death of His Son."⁸ Because of sin man is at enmity with God and burdened with guilt under the threat of judgment — "the wages of sin is death."⁹ Only through Christ's death for our sin can we "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."¹⁰

2. God's purpose must become our purpose. Many who are confident that they are reconciled to God, as far as sin is concerned, still have no genuine peace. They are provoked by every daily obstacle, frustrated by failure to gain worldly approval, and anxious about material things.

It is a tragic fact that many churches, in the effort to gain membership, use the lure of excitement, entertainment, and the promise of prosperity and recognition. Such programs actually encourage people to seek fulfillment in the way of the world rather than in the purpose of God. The church which builds with the world's tools (entertainment, psychology, prestige, etc.) can give only the world's empty promises. The Bible warns: "If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."¹¹ It is no wonder that there are so many church members who are stressed out and filled with anxiety. God's purpose has not become their purpose. One cannot serve two masters.¹²

Many Christians suffer from stress because, while they are trying to serve God, they also are seeking to fit into the world and enjoy its fellowship. These are opposites, and one who follows both will be torn between them. There can be no peace for one so divided in purpose, for while he desires the peace God gives, he pursues a way that is contrary to God and to peace. Such a person is "double minded" and can receive nothing from God.¹³

Jesus taught us to beware of the world and not to seek its praise, its wealth or its power.¹⁴ Paul writes, "be not conformed to this world..."¹⁵ Rather, we are told, "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth."¹⁶

God's express purpose is to bring us to love Him and to be like Him.¹⁷ If we make that our purpose, then we cannot be thwarted and defeated by external obstacles and

opposition. One who desires only the will of God will find peace in every circumstance, in spite of external conditions and whether or not he has the world approval.

3. Peace is also conditioned upon our trusting God. "You (God) will keep imperfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."¹⁸ This is not as simple as it may sound. We have all had our trust betrayed at different times by different people. Scripture advises against putting our trust in man.¹⁹ Even the very best among us is still but a frail and fallible mortal being. This leaves us with a vast future of uncertainty which feeds and nourishes anxiety and worry.

That is, unless we trust God. Not only is the future known to Him, but He will make all things work together for our good. Jesus teaches us to "be not anxious" for God will supply what we need.²⁰ If we trust God, we will be content with what He supplies and will not be shaken by the turn of events in the world. It, too, is under His power.

We trust God for our redemption from sin and death, and we trust Him to give us life and all things in the new creation. Peace is ours when we trust our lives to Him for today and for all our tomorrows.

Paul writes that as much as possible we are to be at peace with all men.²¹ A Christian cannot be at peace with that portion of the world which is in the grip of Satanic lawlessness, but we can be at peace with God in the midst of the conflict.

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."²²

REFERENCES

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