

PEACE ON EARTH

One Person At A Time

By

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The angels' message, "Peace on earth," has a hollow ring for many people today. How can one find peace in a world torn by violence, hate and persecution?

This has been the century of bloodshed and persecution of Christians. The world systems may be in their last violent struggle for survival so that even God Himself is fiercely challenged at every level. So, whatever happened to "peace on earth?"

Jesus said, "I came not to bring peace, but a sword," explaining that to take up His cause would create serious opposition. He warned the disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). Clearly the promise of peace was not intended to mean peace between good and evil, right and wrong, or the kind of peace that is sought at the "peace conferences" between heads of states, as there has been no such peace in the past 2,000 years.

Still, Jesus promised us peace. "My peace I give you, not as the world gives give I unto you" (John 14:27). He said, "In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). By overcoming the world he did not silence his foes nor defeat them in physical combat, nor did He come to peaceful terms with them. We know the outcome of that conflict, but Jesus went through the thick of the battle with perfect peace, peace with God, His Father, and peace in His own mind and heart. The same peace He has promised you and me.

OBSTACLES TO PEACE. One will not find peace by striving for it and searching for it. It will not come by setting conditions for it: "When I get these bills paid, then I can be at peace." "When the children are all through college...When this surgery is behind me..." Problems will never vanish as long as we live in this sin-filled world. Jesus was at peace in the midst of the tumult and in the face of hostile enemies. He promises to give us that peace under similar circumstances.

A great hindrance to peace is our thinking that it is up to us to secure a peaceful future for the world. It may be pride in our self-importance that makes many think that God will fail it they don't straighten things out! Millions of people go through life under a great cloud of anxiety about what the future holds for the world and for the nation. There are plenty of profiteering prophets who are stoking these anxieties with their doomsday books. How many letters do you receive each week warning of the collapse of Social Security or Medicare, or of some other calamity, unless you send a generous donation?

This is not to cast doubt on worthy benevolent organizations which are helping people in need. If they are doing a good work, they will not use the pressure of fear to raise funds, and one may find peace and joy in supporting them. As for the evil that is always a threat to each generation, we are to listen to David: "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, Neither be envious against them that work unrighteousness. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in Jehovah and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on his faithfulness. Delight thyself also in Jehovah; and

he will give thee the desires of thy heart” (Psalms 37:1–4). *Let it go*. God will bring evil to judgment and reward the righteous. Believe it, and quit worrying.

Another hindrance to peace is the recent politically correct doctrine that we must see that everyone treats us fairly. If you insist on always being treated fairly you will never be at peace. Bitterness begins to grow when we dwell on the fact that we have been cheated, or that what has happened is not fair.

Rather than suggesting that we expect fair treatment, Jesus said to turn the other cheek, and if the adversary goes to court and “take away thy coat, let him have they cloak also” (Matt. 5:39–40). That’s not fair, but it’s the way of peace as practiced by Jesus. How other treat us in not a responsibility that rests on us; our responsibility is to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. If they do not act accordingly, let them bear their own responsibility for their actions. To deny self is to make up my mind once and for all that how people treat me has nothing to do with how I trust and obey God. Thus an obstacle to peace is removed.

The greatest obstacle to peace is an ambivalent purpose. One who lives for pleasure, wealth and recognition by the world will find no peace with God, for “the friendship of the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). True peace is enmity against the world: one cannot serve both God and mammon, and unless one’s purpose is fixed on doing the will of God, there will be no peace.

THE PEACE CHRIST GIVES. Jesus, who has been given all authority in heaven and earth, has the power to control humanity to make conflict impossible, but in doing so He would defeat God’s purpose to have man in His own image. On the other hand, there are plenty of world rulers who are eager to exercise such control, and establish a world government (under the United Nations) and an iron-clad “peace on earth,” even if it requires world war to do it. While such plans are now in progress, they can only result in frustration and rebellion, rather than peace. Man will never find genuine peace by the use of force.

The peace Jesus gives does not depend on one’s power to bend things to his own control, but is one’s possession in spite of outer conflicts. It is not earned or gained by power, but is *given*.

It is peace with God, because Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by His death on the cross “having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col. 1:20). Therefore, “we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:10, 11). There can be no personal peace and no peace between nations until man is reconciled to God through Christ.

It is peace on earth, not peace with the enemies of God in the world, but peace with the created order of things. One who lives in violation of the natural order, as God created it, will find conflict, but when he lives in humble submission to God’s law, he will find peace.

It is peace with all God’s servants. Paul tells us to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). We are not brethren because we all think alike and agree on all things, but because we are children of God. When we have surrendered all to Him, we have no personal agenda nor party to defend and can be at peace with our brethren.

It is peace concerning the future. Jesus taught that this life is temporal, as are all earthly things, but that He will raise us from death and give us immortality and glory in

the last day. Whatever the tribulations we face in the world, God's purpose will ultimately be fulfilled, giving us everlasting joy and peace.

Anxious fears, which rob us of peace, are not signs of cowardice or failure, but the normal reactions to things which threaten. The way to overcome such anxiety is to set your mind on God and His will, to get your mind off of yourself and upon God. *His holiness, His mercy, His love, His grace, His power, His purpose, and His presence.* He is able to see you through all the days of uncertainty or illness or hardship, and He is able to "fill you with joy and peace in believing" (Rom. 15:13).

Peace will never come to the God-forsaking world. The angel's message as given in the King James Bible, "On earth peace, good will toward men," is a mistranslation. The original Greek reads: "one earth peace among men of good will." People of good will are those who believe, repent, and submit to Christ the Savior in humble obedience. It is then that one can claim the promise as stated by Paul in Philippians 4:7:

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

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