

## Peace Beyond Reason

***“Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep [garrison] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 4:6,7).

To say that these are troubled times is to say nothing that has not been said since the world began. As a matter of fact, the world has not stood at such an international cessation of hostilities, if not to say harmony, since the turn of the century. On the other hand, the level of turmoil in private sectors has hardly ceased since the world began. If we think, for example, that things are getting so bad that we are close to the end times, one has only to consider the era of ancient Rome, when much of the Mediterranean world was under its oppression and the lot of individuals especially outside of Rome was often miserable, indeed. Of course Rome itself was immersed in moral depravity. And the leaders of State were also leaders in debauchery. It is of course a moot point whether or not the world is worse than it has ever been. One thing important to understand in the issue is that the coming of Christ is on the basis of His own timetable and not on the basis of world conditions. Where world conditions are primary in the time clock is in the case of God’s dealings with Israel. But it is a reasonable assumption, based on Scripture (or what Scripture seems to say), that the Church will be taken out of the world before these events take place that are relative to Israel and the Middle East. Remember, in dealing with Scripture we must be very careful about absolutes. This is the way the author sees it as he investigates the matter.

Of course the issue we are concerned about here is not the analysis of world affairs, but rather the matter of personal stability in the midst of chaos, not only at the world level, but in the area of personal faith. How can we have peace in the midst of world-shaking events and in the midst of our own personal afflictions—by understanding the difference between the flesh and the spirit. One can have peace in the spirit in the midst of turmoil in the flesh and the disruption of our circumstances. According to Galatians 5:22, Peace is a fruit of the Spirit. That is to say, that when we have Christ in our spirits, we have His peace. He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). When we have His Spirit within us, we have the very peace of God resident within us. We don’t have to conjure up feelings of peace in our fleshly minds—the peace of Christ is there as Christ is there.

*But if His peace is within us, why don’t I always feel at peace?*

The answer is really the crux of this article. Jesus said, *“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled [in turmoil], neither let it be afraid”* (John 14:27). The peace that Christ brings to our spirits is not the worldly kind of cessation from trouble or hostilities, but rather a peace in our spirits which is not subject to the fleshly circumstances. Thus, one may have concern about the circumstances of one’s life, but in the realm of our identity with Christ, all is well. Sometimes the fact that we don’t feel that all is well may be due to factors which have no bearing on the presence of Christ within our spirits. It is like the warrior who

has borne the heat of the battle, but comes home to a peaceful hearth. In the natural sense, it is easier to cope with the problems of life when there is harmony in the home.

*But what about guilt feelings? Don't they rob us of our peace in the spirit?*

They shouldn't, if we have asked forgiveness for our human failures. God does not add up our misdeeds and hold them over our heads, like the "Sword of Damocles." Remember well that to ask forgiveness is an evidence of the working of the Spirit in us, and therefore a guarantee of receiving it. But what if we are still caught up in things that brought us guilt in the first place? The fact that you are troubled about these misdeeds is, again, the indicator that Christ is still with you. If His Spirit had left you, you would not be concerned. The standard which Jesus set forth was that forgiveness should be extended to one who has offended us, "*seventy times seven in a day, if one repents*" (Matthew 18:22; Luke 17:3,4). The guarantee of the presence of the Spirit of Christ within us is the continual effort on our part to interact with Christ and deal with Him in the matter of our failures.

So peace is our portion in our spirits, no matter what the human feeling may be in our fleshly minds. One does not have to feel "victorious" in the midst of affliction, because that, again, depends a good deal on the circumstances and on one's emotional makeup. The so-called "overcomer" is often depending too much on fleshly feelings. It is Christ within us who is the Victor over Satan and not our human mental power. Paul admitted to emotional stress in his second Epistle to the Corinthians—"Without were *fightings*; within were *fears* . . ." (7:5). But that did not keep him from recognizing his victory in the spirit. Also in the same Epistle he said he said, "*Now thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ* . . ." (2:14). In his flesh, Paul felt the heat of the battle; the propensity toward human failure; the frustration of Satan's hindrances; the stinging barbs of his fellow believers. But, in all of these things he was strong in his spirit. The reason for this, as he pointed out in II Corinthians 12:7-9, was the all-sufficient grace and strength of Christ in the midst of his own weakness. Even Jesus found that the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak (Matthew 26:41).

**Be careful [anxious] for nothing** . . . The word, often translated "careful," is *μεριμνάω* (*merimnao*) which literally means to "to be pulled apart" or "to go to pieces." In spite of the familiar motto—"it is a sin to worry"—there is no substance to that thought in the Bible. The Lord would like to deliver us from our worries and fears, but certainly recognizes human weakness. You can't really argue your brain into not worrying, when the circumstances are overwhelming. David said, "*When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I*" (Psalm 61:2). Jesus, on the cross, suffered the range of human feelings in the flesh even as the Son of God. Psalm 22 is regarded, generally, as a prophetic picture of His anguish. In times of deep distress, it is very difficult to convince the human emotions that they ought not to be upset or distraught. It is very important to understand that human emotional makeup varies considerably. Some people are, by nature, more calm than others. This may be a hereditary matter or, on the other hand, it may be a case of euphoria—a condition of elation that does not face reality. This can be simply an escape mechanism.

There are many reasons why people are anxious and it is well to recognize that these are matters of the human mind and not of the spirit. To call worry “a sin” is to ignore these fundamental facts. The hope for the worrier is that there is no need to feel guilty about it and that God is working in our circumstances in spite of our feelings. That is of course contrary to the teachings of some groups that would put the problem of worry as a deterrent to the Lord’s help. This is a tragic error and has caused great distress among believers. It would be well for one to read Psalm 107 where the Psalmist makes a special point of the fact that even when Israel was out of order and cried to the Lord, He delivered them. He repeats situations where Israel had, by her own failure, gotten into trouble and were delivered in spite of it. On each occasion He repeats the glorious refrain—*“O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!”* (107:8).

**But in everything by prayer and supplication . . .** The word “supplication” is merely “petition.” There is nothing special about the word which would indicate some particularly intensive prayer activity. Jesus said, *“Ask and you shall you receive.”* Much is made, in some circles, about the parable on perseverance (Luke 11:7). The story goes that one asks his neighbor for bread, and though the neighbor will not give him bread because of his generosity, yet he will do it if the neighbor “bangs” on his door enough. That is totally out of keeping with Christ, who is the Soul of graciousness and generosity. Actually the parable is applied to Israel as are most of the parables in the Gospels and has an altogether different application. In fact, Jesus chides the Pharisees who thought they would be heard for their “much speaking.” And the statement by James—*“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”* (5:16)—should rather be translated—*The prayer of the justified one is energized with much strength.* No amount of human fervency or perseverance or feelings of trust is adequate to prove to God that we are worthy to be heard. The simple request of the child will do. God already knows our hearts and does not need proof of fervency. With simple requests and gratitude, Christ can be enlisted on our behalf.

**The peace that surpasses understanding . . .** God gives peace when there is no peace. That is to say that when the circumstances are beyond us and there is no reason to be at peace, the spirit within is at peace, because the peace of Christ is there.

**Shall garrison your hearts and minds . . .** The word “mind” is the Greek word νοῦς (*nous*) which refers more to the inner spirit than to the fleshly brain as such. Paul tells the Corinthians that we have the *nous* of Christ—hardly a reference to His physical brain. But this inner spirit is garrisoned by Christ. There is a fortress between our spirits and Satan. He may batter the walls and cause much distress and affliction, but he will never prevail to enter the fortress of our faith.

However distressing the circumstances; however devastating the afflictions; however weak the flesh; however vacillating the emotions; Christ will prevail within us. He will not be deterred by our vacillating human emotions, however we may struggle with anxieties and fears. So cast off the yoke of guilt, and rest in the peace and grace and faith of Christ within you.

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