

The Peace of God

*“The peace of God,
which passeth all
understanding,
shall keep your
hearts and minds
through Christ
Jesus.”*

—Philippians 4:7

THE WORD “PEACE”

occurs in every book of the New Testament with the sole exception of the First Epistle of John. To the Christian, peace is an important element of being “spiritually minded” and is listed as one of the

fruits of the spirit. (Rom. 8:6; Gal. 5:22) Thus we see that peace is a most vital subject, both in terms of comprehending its various components and then developing it in one’s character.

Our Heavenly Father is a “God of peace.” (Rom. 15:33; I Thess. 5:23) God’s mind is tranquil, calm, and undisturbed. He is never agitated, wearied, perplexed, anxious, nor exhausted by any of the cares in his vast dominion. The perfect peace which God has is not, however, because there is no disorder or trouble in his domain. He is always fully aware of such conditions. His mighty wisdom comprehends all causes and discerns with precision all effects, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.” (Isa. 46:10) As the Creator of all things and the originator of all laws, no problem can

arise which is unexpected or that he has not already forecasted.

Jehovah is the Father of “the whole family in heaven and earth,” and demonstrates a father’s perfect love toward his intelligent creatures. (Eph. 3:14,15) He created mankind “in his own image” or likeness, having similar mental and moral attributes, so that he might have communion and fellowship with them as his children. (Gen. 1:27; Ps. 103:13; II Cor. 6:18) Mankind’s created likeness to God includes not only similar reasoning faculties, but also the ability to exercise one’s own free will in the development of their character. In order for one to develop a character, the alternatives of good and evil must be placed before them. Right and wrong principles of thought and action must be evaluated, and all individuals are left free to make their own choice. God does not force anyone to think or act in a particular way. An additional dimension of likeness to our Heavenly Father includes man’s having a dominion, something the angelic hosts did not possess.—Gen. 1:26-28

THE LOVE OF GOD

The love of God for mankind is similar to, though much stronger than, the love which earthly parents have for their child. The Heavenly Father’s loving interest and solicitude does not grow cold as the years go by. Rather, he earnestly watches for the development of the principles and fruits of righteousness in his creation. Like an earthly parent, he experiences the sense of either joy or sorrow when his freewilled human creation chooses the right or the wrong course.

This we are fully assured of by scriptures which speak of God's pleasure in those who reverence him. (Ps. 147:11; Mal. 3:16,17) Our Heavenly Father has a love, joy, and delight in the principles of righteousness and for those who obey them. Our Lord Jesus admonished his disciples, telling them: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) On the other hand, many scriptures also speak of those things which displease God, and are even "an abomination" to him.—Prov. 6:16-19; 16:5; Num. 11:1

PEACE KEEPS OUR HEART AND MIND

In our opening verse the Apostle Paul speaks of the peace of God "which passeth all understanding." Here the phrase translated as "which passeth," in the original Greek, means "to hold oneself above." In other words, the peace of God allows one, as it were, to rise above all outward circumstances and conditions. This type of peace is rather exceptional.

Paul then explains that this peace "shall keep [Greek: be a watcher in advance] your hearts and minds." Here the apostle differentiates between "heart" and "mind." The heart represents our affections and feelings. Paul urges not only that we should have peaceful feelings, but also that our mind should be at rest. Such peace acts like a "watcher" for both our heart and mind—standing guard continually, ready to challenge every hostile or worrying thought or feeling which may enter our being. Thus, this peace guards not only the Christian's heart affections, but also the thoughts of the mind. Elsewhere, Paul admonishes that we

are to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Doing this contributes to our having and maintaining the peace of God.—II Cor. 10:5

“THROUGH CHRIST JESUS”

The peace of God is provided, and is only attainable, “through Christ Jesus,” as our text states. If after we have made a consecration of ourselves to the Lord, we should do something to violate our conscience in some respect, we would feel estranged from him. When this occurs, we should repent—that is, correct our thinking and reform our ways—drawing near to the Heavenly Father and endeavoring by prayer in the name of Christ Jesus to seek reconciliation and to return to divine favor.—II Pet. 3:9; Rev. 3:19; Phil. 4:6

The Apostle John elaborates concerning the provision which God has made for us when we sin. First, we should “confess our sins” in prayer to our Heavenly Father. Then, through the merit of Christ’s blood we can be forgiven and cleansed from all unrighteousness, for “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” who appears in the presence of God “to make intercession” for us. (I John 1:9; 2:1; Heb. 7:25) Thus, we can come to God through the arrangement which he has made and rejoice that we may obtain forgiveness and grace to help in time of need.

Having peace “through Christ Jesus” means that such mental serenity and calmness is compatible even in the midst of outward commotion, sorrow, or pain of any kind. It is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon the proper

balancing of the mind and the condition of heart. This kind of divine peace was enjoyed by our Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry even in the midst of turmoil, confusion and persecution.

OBTAINING THE PEACE OF GOD

Concerning the peace which God gives to his faithful followers, the Prophet Isaiah writes: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength." (Isa. 26:3,4) Here Isaiah states two requirements in order to obtain the peace which God is willing to give.

First, our mind must be continually "stayed on" [Hebrew: to lean upon or take hold of] our Heavenly Father, his principles and promises. This includes all of our thoughts concerning our hopes, desires and ambitions. All of these must be rooted and fixed upon our Heavenly Father and the many "exceeding great and precious promises" which he has given to us in the Scriptures.—II Pet. 1:4

Secondly, we must continually trust, or have full confidence, in our Heavenly Father at all times and in all circumstances, as we pass through the various experiences in life. Along the same line, the Apostle Peter states that the followers of Christ "are kept by the power of God through faith." —I Pet. 1:5

GOD KNOWS OUR THOUGHTS

There are many scriptures which point out the fact that our Heavenly Father knows all our thoughts. For example, when King David announced to all the princes of Israel that God had chosen his son

Solomon to succeed him, he admonished his son, saying: “Know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee.”—I Chron. 28:9

The psalmist similarly wrote, “O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off.” (Ps. 139:1,2) We are also told in the book of Hebrews, “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Heb. 4:12

PROPER THOUGHTS

Knowing the importance of our thoughts, how can we direct them in a manner which would be pleasing to our Heavenly Father and which will enable us to have the peace of God? Part of the answer to this question is found in the Book of Proverbs, where we are admonished, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.” (Prov. 16:3) Our “works” include not only outward deeds, but also our desires in life. The psalmist, expressing his one and only desire, writes: “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.” (Ps. 27:4) If our one and only desire is to be faithful

unto death, so that we may “dwell in the house of the LORD” forever, this will no doubt have a profound impact on our daily thoughts.

As our love for God and all his principles grows, we will think more and more upon his words and strive to keep all his instructions. Let our meditations be these: “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. ... for thy testimonies are my meditation. ... I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word.”—Ps. 119:97-101

God’s commandments and principles should not be viewed as grievous or painful to us. Instead, the sentiments of our heart should more and more be, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”—vss. 103-105

Elsewhere Paul invites us: “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service,” and then he adds, “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Thus are we to submit ourselves to the will of God by being transformed with the heavenly influences through his Word. Such a renewing of our mind implies a renovation of all our thoughts and way of thinking. This is a most important work in the Christian’s life. The apostle then concludes with the purpose of this renewing work: “That ye may prove [Greek: test] what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

ADVERSE EXPERIENCES FOR A WISE PURPOSE

When someone very dear and precious to us has died, we sorrow from the void which is left. At those times let us place all our trust, hope and comfort in the resurrection promises which our loving Heavenly Father has given.—John 11:24; I Cor. 15:21-23; Rev. 21:4,5

If we experience a joy or some slight prosperity in our life, may our thoughts humbly thank our Heavenly Father. At the same time, let us also remember that the things of this present life are, at best, only temporary, and that we must not place our hopes upon the things of this earth, but rather upon the things which are eternal.—II Cor. 4:18

At times we may be falsely or maliciously spoken of by coworkers, neighbors, relatives, or even by brethren. On such occasions, let us think how, throughout the past ages, God has permitted such experiences to come upon even his most faithful followers, because his wisdom saw that such adverse, and even unjust, experiences would allow his followers to develop and crystalize their character and thus prove them. Such experiences were permitted, for a wise purpose no doubt, to faithful ones such as Joseph, Moses, Paul, and many others. They were especially permitted to come upon the perfect man, our Lord Jesus, during his earthly ministry. Peter admonishes us: “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.”—I Pet. 2:21-23

If all our thoughts lean toward our Heavenly Father and his promises, and if we constantly place all our trust and confidence in him throughout all the various experiences of life, then we will be able to have “the peace of God.” The psalmist writes, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” (Ps. 18:2) To have this fulfilled in us, however, requires constant effort throughout each day, from arising each morning until retiring at night.

JESUS' FINAL LEGACY

As a part of the final legacy which he gave to his disciples after leaving the upper room and before arriving at Gethsemane, 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, neither let it be afraid.”—John 14:27

Jesus, with compassion and tenderness, on the last night of his earthly life bestowed upon his disciples this heritage of peace. It was the richest gift he could bequeath to them. It was of priceless value because it encompassed the promise of the tranquility of soul, and the rest and ease of mind which he himself possessed—the peace of God!

This is the same peace which the Father himself has always enjoyed, even in the midst of all the commotion which the permission of evil has brought about, but its focal point is somewhat different than the peace which Jesus had. In Jehovah, this peace is centered in his own omnipotent power and wisdom, not in a selfish way, but in knowing that

all his plans and purposes are being accomplished in exact accord with his will. (I Chron. 29:11-13) The peace which Jesus had was not centered in himself, but in God, and his faith in the Father's wisdom, power and grace. So too with us. To have the peace of God, we must be like Jesus, and rest upon God by faith.

While Jesus was uttering these words concerning peace to his disciples, the betrayer, Judas, was out on his murderous errand. Then came Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, and fear swept over the disciples as they realized the fate of their beloved Lord. "Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled." Those who arrested Jesus took him to the high priest, the scribes, and the elders, who were already assembled waiting to try him. Peter, anxious to defend Jesus, followed them, but he became so overwhelmed with fear that three times he denied even knowing Jesus. (Matt. 26:47-75) Finally came the end—Jesus' death on the cross. The peace which Jesus had so lovingly promised had not yet come to his disciples.

Three days later, hope was revived with the news of Jesus' resurrection, confirmed by his appearances, and again forty days later, with his parting command to wait in Jerusalem until they would obtain the promised Holy Spirit of adoption, which was shed upon them at Pentecost. Only then did the Lord's rich legacy of peace begin to be realized.

Jesus' gift of peace was bequeathed not just to his first disciples. It is the blessed inheritance of the entire "body of Christ," even to the end of the Gospel Age. (I Cor. 12:12,27) Jesus expressed this thought in his earlier prayer, saying, "Neither pray

I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”—John 17:20

ABIDING PEACE

The peace promised by our Lord is not the short-lived peace of the world which is most often enjoyed for a relatively brief duration—while fortune smiles, friends abound, and health endures. It quickly vanishes, however, when poverty comes, friends leave, health fails, and death steals away our dear ones, the treasures of our heart. The peace which Jesus promised, “my peace,” is something which none of the difficulties of the present life can destroy, and which no enemy can take from us. What richer legacy could the Lord have left to his beloved followers?

Consequently, the peace promised is not of the kind that the world can generally recognize or appreciate, because the possessor of it, like Jesus, may have a stormy pathway. Indeed, it must be so with all the faithful followers of the Master until the purposes of God in the permission of evil are accomplished. The Lord distinctly forewarned his followers that, “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” but through all the storms of life, the peace of God would abide if they would trust him, so that “in me ye might have peace.”—John 16:33

THE FOUNDATION OF PEACE

To find the foundation and security of this abiding peace, which can survive even in the heaviest storms of life, we have only to look to the teaching and example of Jesus and the Apostles. Thus we ask: What was it that held them so firmly and gave them such peace, even as they suffered?

It was their faith in the love, power, and wisdom of God. They believed that what God “had promised, he was able also to perform,” and that his promises could not, and would not, fail. (Rom. 4:21; II Cor. 1:20) By the mouth of his prophet Isaiah, God declared, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: ... Yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.” “The LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?” (Isa. 46:9-11; 14:27) Jesus and the apostles rested upon these and many other assurances of God.

FAITH AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

The Apostle John wrote, “This is the victory [Greek: the means of success] that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (I John 5:4) Faith in God is essential in achieving peace, because peace comes from God. “Without faith it is impossible to please him.” (Heb. 11:6) It is only by developing a constant, unwavering faith that the peace of God will abide with his people. It is the blessed peace which comes from the assurance that God acknowledges us as his children, “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Rom. 8:17) Along these lines James writes, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”—James 2:5

This is the basis of our peace. No matter how heavily the storms of life may assail us, we must never let go our anchor and allow ourselves to drift. Rather, we should always remember that “the foundation of God standeth sure” and that “his truth

shall be thy shield and buckler.” “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”—II Tim. 2:19; Ps. 91:4; 119:165

Although each of us has human imperfections and frailties, these can be covered by the imputed righteousness of Christ. (I John 1:7-9; 2:1,2) We are also assured that “the Father himself loveth” us, and that “he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust,” having compassion for the sons of his love.—John 16:27; Ps. 103:8-14

If we want the peace of God to reign in our heart and mind, we must never let go our faith. Based upon full faith and trust, the peace of God which the Master bequeathed to us will always abide. Throughout our Christian journey, let our hearts be cheered and our minds stayed, being assured that the promises of God will come to fruition.

Following our opening verse, Paul states, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, ... honest ... just ... pure, ... lovely, ... of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. 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.” (Phil. 4:8,9) May our requests at the throne of heavenly grace be for the increase of his peace and our faith. Let all of us be filled with the promised peace which “passeth all understanding,” and that will guard our heart and mind through Christ Jesus. ■