

Walls of Salvation

***"In that day shall
this song be sung;
... We have a strong
city; salvation will
God appoint for
walls and
bulwarks. Open ye
the gates, that the
righteous nation
which keepeth the
truth may enter in.
Thou wilt keep him
in perfect peace,
whose mind is
stayed on thee:
because he trusteth
in thee."***

—Isaiah 26:1-3

THE LACK OF PEACE AND

security in the world today is not just among nations. There are various conflicts between individuals, businesses, special interest groups, political parties, religions, and ideologies of many kinds. The ultimate discord which exists in the world, however, is between God and man. This disharmony between man and his Creator must be reconciled before any of the conflicts among mankind can have a satisfactory and lasting res-

olution. Besides all the struggles among nations and people, there are many battles within our own minds. These also must be conquered before we can obtain true peace of mind and heart. Such peace is based upon the assurance that our Heavenly Father approves of our thoughts and actions, is caring for us, and overruling all our experiences for our highest good.

The Gospel of Christ is a message of peace and goodwill, as it was announced by angels to the shepherds over two thousand years ago at the time of Jesus' birth. (Luke 2:10,14) However, there are many shades of meaning contained in the word peace. Naturally, our first thought, no doubt, is that of the cessation of armed conflict between nations and peoples. Peace also means tranquility of mind, rest and security, unity and accord. First and foremost, peace means reconciliation with God, which can only come through being "at one" with him.

Nearly all people desire to have peace of heart and mind, but few know how it can be properly attained. Many have sought to attain wealth, power, or fame, thinking that through these they could find peace, only to discover that it mostly has eluded them. Whether man realizes it or not, unrest and a troubled spirit are essentially due to a lack of fellowship with God. No one can have true peace of mind and heart without close communion with his Creator.

Thankfully, the Scriptures teach that in God's due time peace will come to this world. Wars and conflicts of every kind among men will cease. Let us remember, however, that God's long-promised peace on earth can come, in the fullest sense, only by reconciling mankind to himself. Indeed, this will be done through Jesus Christ our Lord. He is the true "Prince of Peace."—Isa. 9:6,7; Luke 1:79

BORN UNDER SIN

At birth, we were "shapen in iniquity" and conceived "in sin." (Ps. 51:5) We required reconciliation

to God, and needed a Savior. (Rom. 5:10) Only through accepting Jesus' ransoming sacrifice as the means of our salvation can we find our way back to God. Additionally, only through developing into Christ's character likeness of kindness, mercy, and love, will any be able to attain a full and lasting relationship of peace with God.—Phil. 2:1-5; Rom. 15:1,2,5,6; Eph. 5:1,2

Real peace is out of our reach as long as we are alienated from God. It can be found only in fellowship with him. It necessitates being released from the condemnation of sin, and partaking of the blessed benefits of salvation. Through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ our Lord, we must first be made right with God. Thereby we can have communion with him, and its resulting peace, security and true happiness. Only by such reconciliation can the peace which man lost in Eden be restored. As the prophet declares, "There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked [those guilty of sin]."—Isa. 48:22

WALL OF PARTITION BROKEN

Throughout history, mankind has built literal walls for the purpose of providing peace and security to citizens of cities, nations, and large empires. Even today, much discussion is taking place in this country about the building of a wall between the United States and Mexico. The stated purpose of such a monumental project is to protect our country's citizens by keeping undesirable, criminal elements from entering our borders from the south. If past history is any indication, however, such efforts, in the long-term, will prove futile.

Nearly every literal wall that has ever been built in man's history has either been eventually destroyed, or significantly breached, to such an extent that it either lays in ruin, or has disappeared altogether.

God, we believe, has put into motion an entirely different arrangement. The Apostle Paul wrote, "In Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition; . . . Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, . . . to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you."—Eph. 2:13-17

The words "wall of partition" which Paul speaks of in this passage has a twofold significance. First, it speaks to the "wall" which separated Jews and Gentiles for a long period of time. God had dealt exclusively with Israel for many centuries, bestowing upon them his favors and blessings. During this period, Gentiles were considered "aliens" from God's special care. Paul, however, says that by the "blood of Christ," both Jews and Gentiles can be reconciled to God. "In Christ Jesus," the "wall of partition" was now "broken down," which separated these two groups.

In a larger sense, a "wall of partition" has existed between God and all mankind since the fall of our first parents into sin. This wall has separated God from both Jews and Gentiles alike—that is, from all mankind, regardless of nationality, religion, or any other differences. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) This wall,

too, has been broken down through the blood of Christ, and will provide mankind the opportunity to be reconciled back to God in his coming kingdom on earth, concerning which Jesus taught us to pray. (Matt. 6:10) In this way, Paul concludes, Jesus “came and preached peace.”

WALLS OF SALVATION

In contrast to the “wall of partition” between God and man which Christ has broken down, our opening text uses this metaphor quite differently. Here the Prophet Isaiah says that “salvation” has been set in place by God “for walls and bulwarks.” This is not a wall of separation, but rather a wall of strength and protection. Salvation is a wall built by God, impenetrable by Satan and his devious methods and deceptions. God’s walls of salvation are not for the purpose of keeping any nation or people out, for the prophet says, “Open ye the gates.”

Just as Jesus was God’s chosen instrument to break down the wall of partition between himself and mankind, he is also the one who has brought about the opportunity for man’s salvation, building it as a “wall,” so to speak, for man’s eternal blessing. In God’s coming kingdom of righteousness, mankind will not only receive the immediate benefits of salvation—release from Adamic condemnation—but also will be taught and learn of God’s laws and loving character. All who, in their actions as well as in their heart, come into conformity with righteousness will, as the prophet says, “enter in” to the “strong city” of God, and be kept in “perfect peace” eternally.

Thus we see that while mankind continues their attempts to build walls of separation, literally and figuratively, between themselves and their fellow-man, in order to maintain some sense of temporary peace and security, God's method is different. He has broken down forever, through Jesus, the walls of partition between peoples as well as the wall which has separated all mankind from him because of sin. At the same time, God is building the walls of salvation, strong and eternal, through which all will have the opportunity to enter, through the operation of his kingdom, under the administration of Christ. Only by this will true and lasting peace, goodwill, and security be achieved.

THE PEACE OF GOD

Another important aspect of peace is the personal, inward peace, which all desire to have, but which is so elusive and seemingly unattainable in our present chaotic and uncertain world. Some take sleeping pills so they can have rest at night, and tranquilizers that they can have rest by day. Others take stronger drugs, to which many become addicted, just to survive from one day to the next. Indeed, in today's world there is unrest, nervousness, tension, frustration, and confusion. However, our focus is not the peace which may momentarily come from pills, tranquilizers, or drugs. True and lasting peace of mind cannot come from these.

Some seek inner peace in worldly substitutes, such as self-sufficiency, business involvement, or in various meditation exercises. One by one, though, these learn that lasting peace is not gained by such substitutes. The peace of God comes from knowing

and trusting our Heavenly Father. A good physician knows that a peaceful attitude of mind may be better than all his pills. A peaceful attitude is good for physical health and also for spiritual health. We may properly ask, then: How can we attain personal, inward peace—the peace of God—in the confusing and fear-filled world we live in today?

We have already considered that all mankind, under the righteous reign of Christ in God's kingdom, will have the opportunity to attain full and lasting peace and security under those arrangements. At the present time, however, the inward "peace of God" is limited to those who, by faith, have committed their lives in full consecration to do the will of the Heavenly Father. God shows his acceptance of these by begetting them with the power and influence of his Holy Spirit. One of the evidences of this begetting is the inward "fruitage" of peace. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."—Gal. 5:22

As we allow God's Holy Spirit to rule in our lives, we grow in an abundance of peace. This peace of God does not depend on feelings and circumstances. Its foundation is in knowing the eternal purpose of God as revealed in his Word. Through our understanding of God's plan, we know of his love and goodness. Through faith in his absolute dependability, we can lay claim to the promise that we can cast all of our cares upon him, because he cares for us.—I Kings 8:56; I Pet. 5:7

NOT DEPENDENT ON GOOD FORTUNE

The peace of God does not depend upon the smile of good fortune, nor is it dependent upon physical health, or the friendship of others. We do not wish

to belittle these material good things—they are precious, valuable, and helpful. However, the peace of God does not depend upon them. We know this because we have seen the peace of God abide in poverty, ill health, when friends forsake, and even as some “walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”—Ps. 23:4

The consecrated child of God should have a sense of security. The peace of God provides this. Just as a child feels secure in his parents’ ability to care for and protect him, so we also have the security of knowing: “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. . . . If God be for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:28,31

Paul exhorts, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 4:4-7

Here the apostle identifies several things as connected with the peace of God. First, he says “rejoice.” Only such a disposition prepares us to be at peace inwardly. Have “moderation,” he continues. The word translated “moderation” has the thought of gentleness and mildness. By displaying this kind of attitude toward others, we will gain inward peace. “Be careful,” or anxious, about nothing, the apostle adds, but use prayer to present your concerns to God. What peace of mind it should give us to lay our burdens before our all-wise and loving Heavenly Father!

PROMISED BY JESUS

Paul makes it clear that this peace of God passes all human understanding, all human reasoning, in its power on our behalf. Jesus promised us this same peace. It is the peace that sustained him in his hours of need. He 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. . . . These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 14:27; 16:33

This is the peace of God which surpasses human ability to understand. God is always at peace—undisturbed, unperplexed. We could not imagine his being otherwise. He has promised this same peace and rest to us, provided we cease from our own works and submit to his will for us. Let us accept it, in faith. It is the peace of God because only he can give it, through Jesus Christ our Lord and by the power and influence of his Holy Spirit.

WHERE IS OUR TRUST?

Oftentimes in this age of materialism, men put their trust in things of a transitory nature. Others put their trust in people, which is sometimes better, but it is not enough. We must put our trust in God. Through faith, we must be able to say, as Jesus did, "Not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42) No doubt, on the mount of transfiguration, when the Master heard the Father say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," he felt secure. (Matt. 17:1-5) These words must have given him strength in the later days of severe trial. Peter, James

and John also felt very close to God on the mount. They were filled with joy. They felt very secure, and had great peace. There are times when we also feel close to the Father. Let each day be a special time like this for us, for if we live close to him, as the words of the hymn express, “No storm can shake our inmost calm.”

We know that it is possible to enjoy this calm. We have heard the testimony of those who have suffered the loss of their health, or the death of a family member, or gone through some other severe trial of faith, and yet have kept the peace of God in their hearts throughout these experiences. They have learned the secret of peace. They live close to God, and God is near to them. His infinite power, beyond human comprehension, gives them peace in the realization that he knows, loves, and cares. In those who have this assurance, pain and peace can live together.

The “walls of salvation” will be for man’s eternal benefit, and bring eternal peace to all the willing and obedient in God’s kingdom. For the consecrated children of God at the present time, let us have the peace of God as our wall and bulwark at all times. May we also always keep in mind that the source of our peace, and that of the world in the kingdom, is the redeeming blood of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus. “Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, . . . hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprieveable in his sight.”—Col. 1:20-22 ■