

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory	Pastor/Teacher
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A GREAT BENEDICTION (Part I)

Our English word *benediction* comes directly from the Latin *benedictio*, lit. to speak well – to pronounce a blessing. In the Old Testament, Numbers 9:22-27, we find an example of how the Levitical priests were instructed to bless the people of Israel.

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons,
Saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

This priestly blessing is alluded to a number of times in the Psalms, i.e., Psalm 67:1, which reads: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. *Selah.*” The Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26 is the source¹ for this: “The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.” When we come to the New Testament, this priestly invocation appears frequently at the beginning of the Apostle Paul’s epistles: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1:7). In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul closes this epistle with a similar benediction: “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and. May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

I. **THE TITLE OF GOD: THE GOD OF PEACE.** “The title *God* is here especially to be applied unto the first person, in regard of that special relation which it hath to *Jesus Christ*, whom God the Father brought again from the dead. Yet this property of *peace* here applied to him, is not so proper to the first person, as it excludeth the other two; for the second person is the Prince of peace, Isa. 9:6, and the third person is the Spirit of peace. This, then, is the property of the divine nature, rather than of any one particular person exclusively. God is here and elsewhere thus styled, *The God of peace*, in that he is the primary fountain and author of all peace, and the worker and finisher thereof; and there is no true peace but of God, as is evident by this phrase, *the peace of God*, Phil. 4:7, Col. 3:15. And God’s ambassadors have *the ministry of reconciliation*, 2 Cor. 5:19, and their message, the *gospel of peace*, Rom. 10:15.”² The noted Greek scholar H. K. Moulton gives the following details on the New Testament use of the word peace.

The word (Greek, *eirēnē*) occurs no fewer than ninety-two times, twenty-five of the uses being in the Gospels and forty-three in the Pauline letters. Derivations from it occur another eight times, bringing

the total to just over a hundred. It is obviously a word to which the New Testament pays great attention. From this extensive use we shall take only samples, but six distinct senses of the word can be found:

A. There is the ordinary secular sense – absence of armed fighting. Jesus uses that sense in Lk. 14:32. It comes twice in Acts (12:20 and 24:2), and once in Revelation 6:4. That, I think, is all. The New Testament is not unaware of the secular sense, but it makes little use of it.

B. More frequently we find, especially in the Gospels, the ordinary Jewish use of the word as a salutation, corresponding to the Muslim *Salaam*: *Whatever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house* (Lk. 10:5; cp. Mt. 10:13). And this is the primary meaning of the only use of the word in Mark, when Jesus says to the woman whom He has healed: *Go in peace* (5:34). His words there are more than a merely conventional Good-bye. He bids the woman enter into a new state of peace, arising out of her contact with Him.

C. In fact there is a special peace which the New Testament describes as *the peace of Christ*. Jesus Himself speaks of *my peace* in Jn. 14:27, and in 16:33 He says that He has spoken *that in me you may have peace*. Paul picks up the thought in Col. 3:15 and elaborates it in Eph. 2:14-17: He *is* our peace, making Jew and Gentile into one new humanity, so making peace; and He comes and preaches peace to them that are afar off and them that are nigh.

D. Yet in the New Testament peace goes back fundamentally behind even Christ Himself to God the Father. It is essentially His gift to men. It is a remarkable fact that every Pauline epistle begins with the salutation, very slightly varied: *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. In the body of the epistles a still deeper phrase is used, when God is spoken of as *the God of peace*: *The God of peace be with you all* (Rom. 15:33); *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly* (Rom. 16:20); *God is not a God of confusion but of peace* (1 Cor. 14:33); *The God of peace and love shall be with you* (2 Cor. 13:11); *The God of peace shall be with you* (Phil. 4:9); *The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly* (1 Thess. 5:23); *The Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways* (2 Thess. 3:16); *The God of peace make you perfect in every good thing* (Heb. 13:20, 21). If we are to have that *peace on earth* of which the angels sang in Lk. 2:14, it comes as His gift, because it is part of His nature.”³

CONCLUSION: Christmas is referred to as the traditional season of Peace. The angels’ announcement to the shepherds: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). The ESV properly captures the true meaning here as opposed to the misleading rendering that we often find on Christmas cards that peace is a universal gift to everyone. It is not. “There is no peace,” declares the prophet Isaiah, “says the LORD, for the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22). Richard Phillips rightly notes, “The message of Christianity is not that we must do God’s will and then we can be at peace with God. We can never do his will until we first receive his peace. Paul puts it most eloquently in Romans 5:6-8, *While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. . . . God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*” You do not have to earn or negotiate peace with God, but only to receive it through his Son Jesus Christ. Out of his peace comes every good thing for doing his will, even the peaceable fruit of godliness and the joy that it brings.”⁴

ENDNOTES

¹Gordon Wenham points out that, “This Aaronic benediction is echoed in many of the Psalms, most clearly in Pss. 67 and 121. This is perfectly. Natural since both psalms and blessing were used in the temple. Many branches of the church have adopted this blessing for use at the close of Christian worship. And this is entirely appropriate, for not only are its petitions of abiding relevance, but in the threefold repetition of the divine name theologians have traditionally seen an adumbration of the Trinity. The New Testament affirms that Jesus is Lord, and that the Holy Spirit is Lord (Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 3:17). In Jesus the full meaning of peace is revealed: he gave peace, made peace, and is our peace (Jn. 14:27; Eph. 2:14f.). This new covenant dimension gives an added depth to a prayer that in its Old Testament setting is already extraordinarily meaningful.” *Numbers: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (IVP, 1981), p. 90.

²Wm. Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (rpt. Kregel, 1980), p. 1112.

³H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of The Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied in Depth* (Bagster & Sons, Ltd., 1977), p. 67.

⁴R. D. Phillips, *Hebrews: Reformed Expository Commentary* (P&R, 2006), p. 624.