

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	135		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE PEACE OF GOD

You will often hear people quote the Bible to support their particular position on some civil or political issue. Christianity has suffered a great deal from this type of abuse; and perhaps on no subject more than the subject of “peace.” The common understanding of this term centers around two points: one, men desire peace in a world full of hostility, that is, people want to see war and bloodshed abolished; and two, men want peace of mind, a subjective disposition of calm and well-being. The trouble (very literally) is that sinful man can never possess peace, either outwardly or inwardly. He may convince himself in one way or another that he is at peace and has peace of mind, but apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ it is a Satanic delusion. Our understanding of peace is basically Greek. The Greek understanding of peace (*eirēnē*) was primarily negative, the mere absence of turbulence or conflict. The Hebraic sense is rooted in the word *shalom*. When the Jewish writers used the word *eirēnē*, they impregnated it with *shalom*, which understood peace more in a positive sense; not merely the absence of strife, but the additional element of well-being, harmony and totality. The Pauline sense is even more emphatic. Peace is the result of a restored relationship where the wrath of God has been dealt with in Christ (cf. Rom. 5:1ff). *Eirēnē* is found over ninety times in the NT, almost half (forty-three times) of these in the letters of Paul. It is therefore an important concept in Paul’s thinking, as our text will go on to show. Paul is still seeking to communicate the “incomparably great power for us who believe” (1:19). The knowledge of that power is made known only by the Holy Spirit (1:17). It is illustrated by the resurrection of Christ and demonstrated in the lives of those who were dead in sin (2:1). It is solely by grace (2:8). It is extended to those who at one time were completely cut off from God’s covenant dealings (2:11-13). God has done something in Christ. His purposes center on the Church, composed of Jew and Gentile. However, the Apostle is not content to let the matter rest there; he must unfold how God accomplished this fact. He has done something entirely new.

H. K. Moulton helpfully points out that: “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 Co. 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. *Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the sons of God*. (Mt. 5:9). They will follow in the footsteps of what their Father has done in Christ, who came *that He might create in Himself of the two one new man, so making peace* (Eph. 2:15). That is always the Christian’s God-given task: to make two people or parties into one, by the peace of Christ who died that all might be one. Only so can the world become what it was intended to be: *the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace* (James 3:18; RSV). The Christmas message of peace to those in whom God can take pleasure because they accept His peace is therefore threefold: (1) that we should be utterly willing to be at peace with Him, with no rebellion against Him left in our hearts; (2) that with His peace in our hearts we should be eager to go out far beyond our own mere rights to be at peace with one another for Christ’s sake; and (3) that we should never stop short of being *peacemakers*, sharing the creative activity of God, in our home, our church, our country, and the world.”¹

- I. **THE SOURCE OF PEACE: THE PEACE-MAKER (v. 14a).** “For he himself is our peace.” The Greek text puts the pronoun *He* in the emphatic position. The conjunction connects the verse with what has just preceded it (v. 13). *Peace* has the article (*ē eirēnē*). The article used with the predicate noun presents the predicate as something well-known, or as that which alone merits the designation; i.e., the only thing to be considered. Christ is *the Peace*. He is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). He promises *His peace* to His own (Jn. 14:27; 16:33). Angels sang at His birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace* among men with whom he is pleased” (Lk. 2:14). Our peace with God comes at His expense (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:1ff). Because of Jesus Christ, God is “The God of Peace” (Rom. 15:33, 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; 1 Th. 5:23; 2 Th. 3:16; Heb. 13:20, 21).

- II. **THE WORK OF THE PEACE-MAKER (14b-16).** There was an obstacle to peace. First and foremost, it was man’s enmity and hostility to God and God’s judicial wrath against sinners. This had to be dealt with first. Also, the purpose of God entailed uniting Jew and Gentile as one in the Body of Christ, the Church; this necessitated removing another obstacle.
 - A. **The Dividing Wall of Hostility.** What is meant by this? Some commentators have suggested that it refers to the barrier which separated the inner courts of the Jerusalem temple from the court of the Gentiles (cf. Acts 21:27ff). Other restrictions were placed upon Jewish women and laymen right up to the High Priest, who alone could enter the holy of holies on the day of atonement. This picture may be in the background, but surely the foremost thought is that personal hatred and hostility which existed between the groups. The bond of unity between the two is Christ. He is what they have in common. How is this accomplished? How was this peace made? Paul tells us first negatively and then positively:
 1. *Negatively – Christ Abolished (Gk. katargēsas, to make null and or void) The Law (Note: Ton Nomom) With Its Commandments and Regulations.* The law is a unit. Paul is not speaking simply of the ceremonial law. Men are not justified by the law (Gal. 3:19-4:5). But, on the other hand, the holy law of God is *not* abrogated by the law of faith (Rom. 3:31, 7:22, 13:8-10). To what, then, is Paul referring? The context has direct references to Jew and Gentile. The law created a division between the two (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:53; Deut. 33:3-4). Christ made void the divisive function of the law. The law was not given to Israel as a means of either justification or sanctification. It served to make a distinction between the Jew and Gentile and was identified with the external “ordinances.” The abolishing took place *in his flesh*; that is, by the agency of the Messiah’s death.
 2. *Positively – Christ Created in Himself One New Man Out of The Two.* The word for *new* is *kainos*. There are two words in Greek for “new;” *neos*, which means new in reference to time, and *kainos*, which means “new in quality, new in character, unfamiliar, fresh, introducing something which has not been there before and which could not even have been there before.”² The point is that Christ “creates” a new man. Hughes writes, “Jesus didn’t Christianize the Jews or Judaize the Gentiles. He didn’t create a half-breed. He made an entirely new man. *For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus . . .* (2:10). We are God’s masterwork, a new race, in Christ Jesus! This must not be watered down. This is the answer to alienation, to racism, to prejudice, to hatred, to estrangement.

*In Christ there is no East or West,
 In Him no South or North,
 But one great fellowship of love
 Throughout the whole wide earth.”³
 (John Oxenham)*

B. ***The Means By Which Christ Wrought Peace.*** *Through the Cross* (Gk. *Dia tou staurou*, lit., by means of the cross). The cross reconciles man to God and man to man. Christ has *put to death* (Gk. *apokteinas*, aorist participle, used to express means) *their hostility*. This is done by the death of Christ in His physical body, and He unites Jew and Gentile in *one body*, which is the Church. The price of peace, both with God and between man, was the blood of Christ.

III. ***THE PROCLAMATION OF THE PEACE-MAKER (v. 17).*** This does not primarily refer to the preaching of Christ during His earthly life, but to His cross-work. When the work of reconciliation was accomplished, then the “good news” was proclaimed. The message of peace is preached because of the death of the peace-maker, who made peace by means of His death and in His death slew the enmity of Jew and Gentile. The expression *to you who were far away* is directed to Gentiles and *to those who were near* is addressed to Jews (cf. Isa. 57:19). It is only by the cross and after the cross that such a message can be preached.

IV. ***THE RESULT OF PEACE (v. 18).*** Through Christ Jesus men have peace with God and peace with each other. But specifically, Jew and Gentile in Christ have *access* (Gk. *prosagōgēn*, approach, lit. an introduction, cf. Rom. 5:2). We have the freedom to approach God (cf. Heb. 4:16, 10:22). In light of the preceding verses (1:2ff) this is astounding. It is by Christ *in one Spirit unto the Father*. Note again the Trinitarian emphasis (comp. Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13).

CONCLUSION: How are men ever to know peace? Apart from Jesus Christ there is no peace, nor will this world ever know peace outside of the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah wrote, “There is no peace, says the LORD, for the wicked” (48:22 and 57:21). The peace that Christ brings is not by His example or teachings, but by His atoning death. The reconciliation that He effects is by means of His shed blood. Unless men have been stained with His blood and washed whiter than snow, they will continue to stain themselves with the blood of other men. All the efforts of the world to bring about peace outside of Christ are doomed to complete failure. All seeking after peace apart from Christ is an illusion. He is our peace. Thomas Goodwin, one of the great Puritan theologians, wrote extensively on the subject of a *false* peace which the natural man pursues. Citing the text in Isaiah, he declared, “And therefore though the depraved conscience may calm, and lay asleep the disquiets and tumults of the mind, yet this peace of natural conscience is rather a not being troubled than true peace, ease rather than peace. Thus a man in debt thinks all is well if he hears of no suit entered against him, no sergeant to attack him, no writ out for him; but all this is only quietness from being troubled, not peace with his adversary. But a godly man’s conscience is not only at peace, but it hath peace with God through faith: Rom. v. 1, *Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*. A godly man’s conscience receives an acquittance (which it hath to shew) from Christ’s satisfaction, and God’s receiving the atonement; Rom. v. 1, 11, compared, *By faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And not only so, but we also joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement*. But an unregenerate conscience never received this, nor can the ungodly produce such an acquittance, and indeed they never seek after it.”⁴

ENDNOTES

¹ H. K. Moulton, *The Challenge of The Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied in Depth* (Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1977), p. 67.

² W. Barclay, *The Letter to the Galatians and Ephesians* (St. Andrew Press, 1958), p. 128.

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of The Body of Christ* (Crossway, 1990), p. 93.

⁴ *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* X (rpt. Tanski Publications, 1996), p. 263.