

## Live in Peace with One Another

Isaiah 48:17–22, 1 Thessalonians 5:13b

Last week we preached on the topic “The Myth of the Sovereign Consumer” from 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13. We omitted the last sentence of verse 13, “*Be at peace among yourselves.*” We will focus on this phrase today.

The word “peace” is an important Bible word, occurring more than 400 times. You have probably heard the Old Testament word for peace: שָׁלוֹם (*shalōm*). If you have any Jewish friends, you can use it as a greeting—either “Hello” or “Goodbye.” Just say, “Shalom, friend.” They will know what you mean. The name Solomon (שְׁלֹמֹה) is derived from it; it means *peaceful*. The Lord Jesus Christ is the “Prince of *peace*” (שֵׁר-שָׁלוֹם). The prophet says, “Of the increase of His government and *peace* there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”<sup>1</sup> Amen!

When Jesus was here on earth he told his disciples, “*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).

A lot of people all around us are totally devoid of peace. Like the man with the unclean spirit in Gadara, who “always, night and day . . . was in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying, and cutting himself with stones,”<sup>2</sup> they live with constant mental torment. They medicate themselves with alcohol, tranquilizers, painkillers, and legal and illegal drugs, trying to escape reality.

What are the most common kinds of billboards that you see around town? Marijuana provisioning centers. When you walk through a neighborhood you cannot escape the smoke. A lot of people around us never experience peace of mind.

In its summary of the gospel Shorter Catechism Q. 36 asks, “What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification? The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, *peace of conscience*, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.”

The only way to have peace of conscience is through the Gospel. The Scripture proof for “peace of conscience” is Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ.” What a glorious phrase: “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”! Isn’t that what you want to experience? Do you experience it?

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. 9:6–7

<sup>2</sup> Mark 5:5

Our Old Testament text makes the sweeping claim, “‘There is *no peace*,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked’”—*no peace*! Turn with me to Isaiah 47:17ff. “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: ‘I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go. Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your *peace* would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Your descendants also would have been like the sand, and the offspring of your body like the grains of sand; His name would not have been cut off nor destroyed from before Me.’ Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, declare, proclaim this, utter it to the end of the earth; say, ‘The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!’ And they did not thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out. ‘There is *no peace*,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked.’”

The LORD is addressing the covenant people. He says, “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer.” “Your *Redeemer*” means that he has redeemed them from the hand of the enemy, Satan. “Redeemer” is a synonym for *Savior*. God declares himself to be Israel’s Savior. He says, “Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your *peace* would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.”

This is a promise for all time. If we heed God’s commandments, if we obey God, then we will experience peace. The wicked do not want to heed God’s commandments. They consider them a burden, an impediment to their happiness. They believe that God gave his commandments to torture people—that the essence of happiness is to throw off God’s commandments, to make happiness the main goal, to live life as one sees fit. But those who are born again by the Holy Spirit, who realize their sinfulness and their shame and their unworthiness, who know that they have fallen short of God’s standard of absolute perfection, whose eyes have been opened to the truth that the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ is the perfect Savior, the only one who measures up to the righteous demands of a holy God, look to Christ alone for salvation. By faith they believe that all their sins and iniquities have been laid on Christ, and that his perfect righteousness has been credited to them, as it was credited to Abraham. They become willing followers of Christ, and they begin to keep God’s commandments and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. Our Isaiah text teaches that the byproduct of keeping God’s commandments will be to experience his peace. “The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!” All these blessings have come upon him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. *But* “‘There is *no peace*,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked.’”

What a contrast! The Lord promises his people, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3). *But* “‘There is *no peace*,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked.’”

I have three points this morning: (1) Christians should practice peace. (2) Christ is our peace. (3) There is no true peace without Christ. First,

### **1. Christians should practice peace.**

Our text teaches: “Be at peace among yourselves” (εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς). This is an interesting sentence. It is just three words in the Greek. Paul took the noun *peace* (εἰρήνη) and turned it into a verb: *be at peace*, or *live in peace*. The verb is plural. This teaches us two things: (1) he is not just talking to pastors and elders—every member of necessity has a part in this; and furthermore, (2) any member can spoil it.

It is God’s will that we have a peaceful church. All of us have a part to play. Peace is a fragile commodity. Any of us can spoil it.

Will we—each of us—commit ourselves to keep the peace?

“Be at peace among yourselves.” The Geneva Bible note is helpful: “The maintenance of mutual harmony, is to be especially guarded.” Peace is mutual harmony. It is a recognition that within the body of Christ the goal is not just my own personal joy and satisfaction; loving one another requires that I care about my brothers and sisters in Christ.

The church is to be a peaceful place, a haven of rest from a frenetic world. Think of the contrast between a church and a bar. A bar has nonstop video and audio feeds, overpowering music, throbbing beats, loud voices. It can be hard to think. Some private homes, too, have clamoring voices, people out-shouting one another, seeking to get each another’s attention.

But church is a quiet place. “God says, “Be *still*, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). “The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth *keep silence* before him” (Hab. 2:20). Church is a place of quiet reflection.

Remember Elijah, after his dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal, how he was emotionally exhausted and traveled to Horeb, the mountain of God. The LORD told him, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD.” And the LORD passed by, and there was a great wind that tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a still, small voice. God was not in the clamor of the blasting wind, earthquake or fire; he spoke to the prophet in a quiet voice.

We need to cultivate a love for the still, small voice. We need to develop the art of meditation, learning to love to contemplate on God’s word, day and night. We need to develop a love for worship, for seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness. We need to learn to seek God’s glory—not our own. We need to experience peace in the midst of affliction and calamity—the “perfect peace” of a mind focused on Jehovah.

How do we live in peace? By minding our own business; by seeking peace and pursuing it; by cultivating a love for sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his teaching; by cultivating a love for purity of doctrine, pure worship, godly order, contentment with the means of grace, a love for hearing God's word read and expounded; for a Word-centered ministry; for contentment with Christ as King, for a zeal to see the lost converted and brought to faith, becoming our fellow-worshippers, for learning to look not only on our own advancement, but also on the advancement of others, to see them become fruit-bearing disciples of the Savior.

It is so easy to develop a critical spirit, to focus on all the ways we feel we have been shortchanged, the ways other people have hurt us. How we need to cultivate an attitude of thankfulness for all God's tender mercies which have been lavished on us through Jesus Christ his Son.

We need to think more of heaven, and the great things that await us there. We need to turn our eyes upon Jesus, and find that the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

James asks, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war." This is the opposite of peace, the opposite of contentment, the opposite of seeking the glory of God.

Our text teaches: "Be at peace among yourselves," or as the New American Standard Bible translates it, "Live in peace with one another." Let us learn to be peacemakers and peace-seekers. In the words of Psalm 34, "Depart from evil and do good; *seek peace* and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14). Christians should practice peace. Secondly,

## **2. Christ is our peace.**

In Ephesians 2 we read that we Gentiles at one time were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." But now in Christ Jesus we who once were far off were brought near by the blood of Christ. "For *He Himself is our peace*, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation between Jew and Gentile" (Eph. 2:11-14). Here is a beautiful description of Christ: "He himself is our peace."

The Bible teaches that those who are without Christ are enemies of God. You cannot be merely passive with respect to Christ. If you are not for him, you are against him. You are his enemy.

People may think that they are neither enemies nor friends of Christ. They don't think badly of him, but they haven't yet asked him to be their Savior. But the Bible doesn't view people that way. It calls those who haven't submitted to Christ enemies of God. Consider these Scriptures.

Romans 5:10, “For if, when we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son . . . .”

Romans 11:28 (concerning the Jews), “As concerning the gospel, they are *enemies* for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers’ sakes.”

1 Corinthians 15:25, “For he must reign, till he hath put all *enemies* under his feet.”

Philippians 3:18, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the *enemies* of the cross of Christ.”

Colossians 1:21, “And you, who once were alienated and *enemies* in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.

Hebrews 1:13, “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine *enemies* thy footstool?”

Hebrews 10:13, “From henceforth expecting till his *enemies* be made his footstool.”

We live in a dangerous world where heads of the major superpowers are actually talking of launching atomic bombs at each other—engulfing the whole world in nuclear war. The major powers of the world need to pursue peace! As the Psalmist put it, “Woe is me, that I dwell in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace. I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war” (Ps. 120:5–7).

It is one thing to have human enemies, but to be an enemy of God is even more serious. In the Bible God calls Abraham “my friend” (literally, “my beloved”): “But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the descendants of Abraham *My friend*” (Isa. 41:8). Abraham was born in sin, just as all of us. How did he become God’s friend? Through the gospel! Abraham “believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness” (Gen. 15:6). And we, who apart from Christ are enemies, become friends by faith in Jesus Christ. All of us by nature are sinners—enemies of God. “The wages of sin is death”—eternal separation from God, the source of life and happiness. “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,” and those who put their trust in him and look to him as Savior are given the gift of eternal life with God in heaven. This is not because of our own deserving but because of grace. Our sins are laid on him, and his perfect righteousness is credited to our account. Are you looking to Jesus Christ as your only Savior? Oh, the wonder of the gospel! We who had no hope and were without God in the world have been brought near by the blood of Christ. “For He Himself is our peace.” Praise the Lord!

(1) Christians should practice peace. (2) Christ is our peace. Thirdly,  
**3. There is no true peace without Christ.**

Scripture promises: “The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace” (Ps 29:11). Apart from him there is no peace. “‘There is no peace,’ says the LORD, ‘for the wicked.’”

We live in a world of continual war. The Bible speaks of “wars and rumors of wars” until the Second Coming of Christ.

We are told to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Ps. 122:6). Ultimately this means pray for the peace of God’s people, “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb. 12:22). God’s people live in a very dangerous world. Ultimately it is only the Lord who can keep us safe.

God’s people are to be peacemakers. “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9).

The Christian can choose the way of peace over the way of conflict and struggle and self-advancement because he knows that God is on the throne and will protect and vindicate him. Here are the words of Scripture:

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>3</sup>

For the nonbeliever, it is every man for himself. If I do not stand up for myself, then no one else will stand up for me. If I’m going to get ahead in this world I am going to have to do it on my own. Such an attitude often leads to conflict. With regard to the wicked the apostle writes, “The way of peace they have not known” (Rom. 3:17).

Think of that: “The way of peace they have not known.”

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<sup>3</sup> Rom. 8:28–39

But not for the Christian!

The prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi comes to mind: “Lord, make me an instrument of your *peace*: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

“O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”

Yes, Christians should practice peace. Christ is our peace. There is no true peace without Christ. He is our peace, who look to him in true faith. Amen.