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Conditions for Peace

My wife and I recently attended a Commencement Exercise at UCLA because our daughter in law had recently graduated from UCLA Law School. I have been to a number of these graduations over the years. I heard what is probably the best commencement address that I think I have ever heard. Lee Hamilton, who served in the U.S. Congress for 34 years, gave the address. He is currently director of the Woodrow Wilson Think Tank in Washington. He was a lawyer by profession before becoming a politician.

He was addressing 300 brand new lawyers and he was telling them, in essence, to be honest lawyers! He said: "I want you to go out there, and I want you to focus on conflict resolution. You have been given some unique skills, and I would like to see you go out there and give to the community."

It was a very interesting address - all about a give way of life. He was telling them to go out and help this world by helping resolve the conflicts that exist out there. He told them they had unique tools to be able to do that. He was essentially saying: "Use principles of law as a means to peace." Try explaining that to the Muslim extremists in the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, or any number of people - using points of law as a means to peace!

Having the opportunity to travel around a little bit, I have been able to make certain observations. I have learned a little bit about history. I would suppose that we would consider Filipinos to be people of peace. They are peaceful people by nature and we probably consider that the Philippines, as a nation, have peace. But they don't - and they haven't had peace for some time.

They thought that they were going to have peace a number of years ago when America promised them release from under the domination of the Spanish. America did release them from domination of the Spanish - only to renege on their promises and to dominate them themselves! That is not one of the better periods of U.S. foreign policy.

When I was in the Philippines a few weeks ago, the press was declaring that the Philippines is a nation at war. Initially I would have thought that that meant the guerrilla war in the southern part of the Philippines, or maybe the economic war, but they meant that they are at war with themselves. That is true. They are not a nation at peace.

Hong Kong has been one of the wealthiest small nations on the face of the earth. Over the years, it has certainly enjoyed a very high standard of living, and a high degree of freedom. We probably think of Hong Kong as a place of peace, but the people who live there don't. They had peaceful conditions for ninety nine years, except for a little road bump called the second world war with some Japanese occupation. But in the main they have had peaceful conditions.

But once Hong Kong was handed back to mainland China everything changed. It was handed back with the concept of "one nation - two systems." That was banded around greatly at the time. In other words, Hong Kong was taken back into the fold of China, but they would allow Hong Kong to operate their own western style system. The leadership in China had no intention of ever allowing "one nation - two systems." Hong Kong is becoming one nation, one system. And our people in Hong Kong have a degree of anxiety as to where the future lies for those people. The noose is tightening. I can see it every time I visit. It's a little more Chinese each time that I visit. Any number of people in Hong Kong are becoming concerned what their future will be.

It's not difficult to observe that the concept of peace means different things to different people. This is certainly true, I believe, in the matter of how peace is achieved. I don't know if you are aware of a recent book entitled: "Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in a New World Order," by Robert Kagan. it's a very interesting book. Robert Kagan is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He worked in the State Department from 1984 to 1988.

On the inside cover of this book it says:

"European leaders, increasingly disturbed by U.S. policy and actions abroad, feel they are headed for what the New York Times describes as a moment of truth.

Since this was written, one moment of truth has occurred (the war against Iraq). All that has transpired in the relations

between Europe and America only confirms the accuracy of what this man was writing about.

"After years of mutual resentment and tension there is a sudden recognition that the real interests of America and its allies are diverging sharply, and that trans-Atlantic relationship has changed, possibly irreversibly. Europe sees the United States as high handed, unilateralist and unnecessarily belligerent. The United States sees Europe as spent, unserious and weak. The anger and mistrust on both sides are hardening into incomprehension.

As I look at the world scene from the particular vantage point that I have, the words of Jeremiah resonate very, very clearly. We have read these words many times, and I believe their implication is becoming more intense as time passes:

Jeremiah 6:14 They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace.

The issue here is not that the leaders were against the idea of peace. Everybody WANTS peace. Any leader over a people wants some time of peaceful condition for the people because that's advantageous to the leadership, so this is not that there is a con job going on here. They are wanting peace, and they are proclaiming peace. The problem that Jeremiah is dealing with here is that they are proclaiming peace when the conditions for peace are not present. It's an empty statement. The conditions do not exist. Verse 10 makes it very clear:

10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, And they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach to them; They have no delight in it.

This concept of "no delight" is a lot stronger than we read it in the English. It is a rejection, a hatred, a distaste for God's law, for God's way and for anything of God. So when they come down to talk about peace, God is not in the picture. The true elements for peace are not in the picture. So the leadership are proclaiming an empty promise. They are condemned for that.

I think this applies to our secular world today. The leaders in the western world truly seek peace. I believe that of the President of the United States, as much as I believe it of the Prime Minister of Australia. In their heart, they genuinely want the nations that they lead, to have peace. But they don't understand the conditions upon which real peace is based.

As you might expect, my concern is not so much for our secular nations as it is for the body of Christ. My comments are directed towards the church. The church needs to project true peace into a world that doesn't understand what peace is, a world that is at war with itself.

***Psalm 34:11 Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.
12 Who is the man who desires life,
And loves many days, that he may see good?***

That's a good question ...

***13 Keep your tongue from evil,
And your lips from speaking deceit.
14 Depart from evil and do good;***

Seek peace and pursue it.

We are to SEEK peace and pursue it. Peace doesn't come out of a clear blue sky, or with a click of the fingers. There is a way that TRUE peace is established. By the term "true peace" I hope you understand that I am differentiating between the world's concept of peace and God's concept of peace. This particular statement here is repeated for emphasis, with a little more context. The author borrows the statement from Psalm 34 ...

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind ...

Do we, in God's Church desire peace? Yes, we do. Do we all desire to be of one mind? Yes. These are noble sentiments.

**8 ... having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;
9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.
10 For "He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking deceit.
11 Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.**

This is clearly talking to the church.

**12 For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."**

So it gives us a little bit of a context to realise that actions are required to seeking peace. Like anybody in the world, we in the church, desire peace. We have been through times of great turmoil, times of division. We have experienced bitterness. On the personal level, if not on the general level, we may have experienced hatred against us for the actions that we have precipitated, for the decisions that we have made. And we are hungry for peace. It's a natural inclination. We are hungry for peace. We talk about it. As I said, conditions in the Philippines and in Australia are peaceful. That's a very positive statement. That's what we want to hear. That's the way we want things to be.

But in saying that, I am also going to say that it places the church in a dangerous position. I have already said clearly that there are conditions for peace. One of the indictments against the leaders of the world is that they declare peace when the true conditions are not present. So we in the church, should be very careful about the peace that we want, and the peace that we seek, and pursue.

I think we all have some degree of realistic appreciation of this statement ...

**Psalm 120:6 My soul has dwelt too long
With one who hates peace.
7 I am for peace;
But when I speak, they are for war.**

In order to establish the grounds for true peace, I would like to take a view, and add some familiar concepts of peace as the world views it, because I feel this is very, very important for us to be aware of. Whether it be President Bush or anybody else, the world desires peace.

Psalm 120 makes it very clear that peace to one person is not necessarily peace to another. We can say, "peace." The other person might respond with the word, "peace," but in their heart they might mean war.

Appeasement

So the first concept I want to look at is a familiar one to those who may be a little older, although we are now seeing a repeat of it in the same theatre of political activity, in Europe. Those of you who well remember World War Two will remember that appeasement was a major factor that led up to at least Britain's involvement in that war.

The word "appeasement" means, "to make calm or quiet." That's what we all want. We all want calm and quiet. But **is** calm or quiet obtained by making concessions to a potential aggressor. That's the specific meaning of appeasement: by making concessions to a potential aggressor.

I would like to refer to this book again, because there are some areas in here that are very interesting:

"To understand Britain's desire to appease Hitler when they did, you need to understand where Britain was at the time. They had come out of a horrendous war where the majority of their young manhood were buried in graves in the fields of Europe. The people of Britain didn't want another war.

"But most of all, the war destroyed the will and spirit of Great Britain and France, at least until the British rallied under Churchill in 1939. Britain reeled from the senseless slaughter of a whole generation of young men."

The attitude was set by the experience that they didn't want to repeat that.

"When confronted by the rising power of a rearming revisionist Germany in the 1930s, collective security ...

... that is, collective amongst a number of nations, the pacts and agreements that they had between themselves ...

"... collective security melted away and was replaced by the policy of appeasement. At its core, the appeasement of Nazi Germany was a strategy based on weakness, which derived less from genuine inability to contain Germany power, than from the understandable fear of another great European war."

"We don't want another war. We'll do anything to prevent another war."

"The purpose of appeasement was to buy time, and hope that Hitler could be satisfied, but the strategy proved disastrous for Britain and France."

As God's people, we have many potential aggressors. I am not identifying specific individuals, but under the heading of Satan and Satan's world, we have many potential aggressors. How often do we seek peace by appeasing our own human nature? We want calm and quiet lives, so we make concessions to a potential aggressor. Human nature is an aggressor that can be activated very easy and very well by Satan. For us to have to deal with our human nature is hard, difficult, tiring and wearing. We would like to do anything else BUT deal with it - just as Britain didn't want to deal with the power that was emerging in Germany. It wanted it to go away - so they decided to give it Czechoslovakia, hoping the power would go away. But it didn't - and human nature doesn't!

How often do we try and make concessions regarding God's law in its application in our lives because sometimes it is difficult? A lot of times it is difficult! It's difficult as far as human nature is concerned, but it's difficult maybe in terms of Sabbath employment issues, and so on.

How many members in the past twenty years have chosen the path of appeasement in dealing with apostasy - because the apostasy was hard to deal with. It was locked into the organisation in such a way that you and I couldn't deal with it. It was hard. How many members appeased that apostasy, and are no longer with the church today because they made concessions?

I have found it interesting working in an area of the world that is culturally very different from either Australia or the United States. When I was in Hong Kong on the last trip, six months ago, Ming Tak Ma, a member there, asked me a question. He said, "Why do you think that there are not many men in the church in Asia?" Apart from two in Hong Kong that is it in the church today, yet we had a flourishing church throughout Asia and Malaysia at one time!

He said, "Why aren't there any men in the church?" I hadn't really isolated that question in my mind. He proceeded to tell me why. It boils down to the very strong influence of families and the need to please, not only your extended family, but your employer as well. The Sabbath issue in Asia has always been a major issue, because culturally things are not set up to recognise the Sabbath. The Philippines is more so, which is probably why we have more people in the Philippines. But in other areas of Asia, observing the Sabbath was always a major pressure upon our members. If you lose your job in Asia over the Sabbath, then you've got a hard road in front of you. He explained to me that just as SOON as the church relaxed the law of the Sabbath, saying that it was no longer necessary to keep the Sabbath in a strict observance of not working on the Sabbath, there was INSTANT appeasement throughout Asia.

Be thankful that you don't live in a culture like that, that puts that kind of pressure on you. You truly do live in the freest of all societies on the face of this earth, for which you need to be daily thankful.

I found it interesting - the willingness to appease because we want calm, we want quiet in our lives, we don't want pressure, we don't want stress. We might fight things for a little while, but there's always that pressure to make concessions.

Compromise

Closely related to appeasement is the very clear political reality (clear because it's the basis of U.S. foreign policy) of compromise. If you have read anything of Henry Kissinger, he is a great believer in the diplomatic art of compromise. I would have to say that there is a time for compromise, because compromise seeks to settle differences by mutual concession. We compromise to reach agreement. I give a little. You give a little, and we'll meet somewhere in between our two original positions.

As I say, in the secular world, there is probably a place where that would fit. Maybe in our world there's a place where that would fit in terms of loving our neighbour as ourselves. There are times when we do need to compromise on our personality, or our opinion, and move more towards the opinion or the personality of another. So I am not saying that it's all wrong, but the trick is knowing when to compromise, and when not to compromise.

God's way of life is based on absolute truth. There is no mutual concession that can be made on absolute truth! It is absolute! It cannot be moved one way or the other. By definition, compromise combines the qualities of two things. In a marriage, we would experience a certain amount of compromise. We combine the qualities of two people into one, becoming one flesh, one life.

But when we begin to address godly living I think you can see that we are in dangerous territory with the combination of the qualities of two things. If we try to combine the qualities of Satan's world with the quality of God's way of life, we can see the problems. Human nature hates God's law and will ALWAYS seek concession.

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

The same battle has continued throughout the church from that time. It's still an aspect of being a member of God's church: to contend for the faith once delivered.

4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There's always this pressure for us to make concession. And as I read these verses, this is not the world putting pressure on us. This is people from INSIDE the organisation, from inside the church, who want to make concession regarding God's law and God's way of life. There are a number of ways that that is expressed. It's not my point to get into that today. But living godly in this world is hard, and it's difficult, and often does not lead to calm or quiet conditions!

But we hunger and thirst for calm and quiet conditions, so the pressure is always there for us to compromise, to have a little peace in our life.

People often seek peace by finding a group that will accommodate their personal concessions; concessions that they have already made. They want to find somebody who will allow them to hold onto them, that won't put any particular pressure on them. So they shop around for a group that fits. This is all a part of compromise!

2 John 8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.

9 Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God ...

It's as simple as that!

9 ... He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him;

11 for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.

That's a fairly serious warning about compromise. We have heard a great deal in recent months about ecumenism. Ecumenism is the art of compromise: the ultimate expression of compromise, if you will.

Tolerance

Another peace device that is employed today is tolerance. Perhaps we hear more about tolerance than we do about compromise. Tolerance is the capacity to adapt to unfavourable factors. Can we see the subtlety in this as far as we are concerned? As Christians we often have to adapt to unfavourable factors. We call them trials, difficulties in our life. We have to live in a society that is "unfavourable," full stop.

Tolerance is something that we have to learn to express towards each other - but there is a dangerous side to tolerance. Today our western society has adopted a relativistic philosophy. It is the underpinning philosophy of the world today.

We need to be careful not to allow virtues to become values. Think that one through. We are so used to hearing the word "values." But if we allow virtues to become values, then we leave ourselves wide open to what is called "social conditioning."

Values today are determined by social conditioning. Values are not set by an absolute standard. They are relative to each particular society. For example, the values you live by would be different to the values in the Philippines. But both are totally acceptable because they have been conditioned by the local, cultural social conditions.

I mentioned earlier that we were at the UCLA Law School graduation last Sunday. There were a number of speakers. One of the speakers made a presentation - a special recognition of one of the professors who was involved in the law school. He had died a month or so previously, and they wanted to recognise him. They talked about him in glowing terms and they had had a plaque made. They said: "We would like to present this plaque to Professor X's partner" (also male). It was done without a blink of the eye! It was totally acceptable.

Probably nobody within that group other than my wife, my son and I, would have had a problem with this. But it is only a reflection of the values of our society where a homosexual relationship now is on an equal footing with a heterosexual marriage relationship, and it is accepted to be so.

In Australia it is now normal on all news media, when they are talking about a male or a female, to use the word "partner." The term "husband and wife" is not used any longer! Even if it is a normal marriage relationship, the husband is the "partner" of the wife, and the wife is the "partner" of the husband.

If you use the term "husband and wife" you are putting a stamp of approval on marriage, and you may make the majority of the population that is living in anything BUT a marriage relationship (whether it be heterosexual or homosexual), FEEL BAD!

So we don't do that. This is called social conditioning. If you tell me that the social conditioning of the area in which you live has absolutely no impact on you, I will not believe you! You may be serious. You may mean it, but we are all here with some degree of social conditioning. It's impossible to resist it completely. Yet do we even make any effort? We express tolerance. We know we have to be tolerant in some ways, but when we let it get out of the proper bounds and spread out so that it changes virtues and makes them values, then we are on very dangerous ground!

**1 John 3:4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.
5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.
6 Whoever abides in Him does not sin ...**

I am having trouble reading this and saying this is a definition of tolerance! It seems black and white to me!

**6 ... Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.
7 Little children, let no one deceive you ...**

We are wide open to deception all the time because that's the nature of Satan, and it's the nature of the world that we live in - to deceive God's people.

7 ... He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

... not, "he who wants to be righteous, he who wishes he was righteous ... "

7 ... He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.

**8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.
9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin ...**

That doesn't mean that you never ACTUALLY sin, but with the Spirit of God within you, you have the desire NOT to sin. You have a desire NOT to tolerate something that is wrong, or evil. It's an attitude. It's a frame of mind, deep within us.

9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.

... close enough to God that the Spirit of God is leading the mind away from tolerance to evil and tolerance to wrong. But it's a fine line because we live in this world. We have to get along with people who are unconverted, people who are a part of the secular world.

But when it comes to our relationship with God, tolerance is checked in at the door. We come very firm on the principles.

Satan really would like us to BELIEVE that we are the peacemakers that are mentioned in Matthew 5, but without the true conditions for peace.

The Church is hungry for peace. I believe I could find very clear expressions of all of these ways of peace within the Church, but as I am trying to make it clear, they lack true conditions for peace. They will give you peace temporarily, but it won't be lasting peace, and it won't be the peace that passes all understanding. It won't be the peace that will see you through the trials and difficulties that still lie ahead of us, between here and the return of Jesus Christ.

I am trying to say that our desire for peace could be our undoing if we are not very alert and very careful.

What are some of the realities for God's people in the midst of all of this?

One reality that we all need to accept is simply that mankind CANNOT establish peace. To put it another way, peace is not natural to the human realm. I don't have any specifics in mind when I make this statement, but I will tell you that victory in the war in Iraq is not going to bring peace to that region. It won't bring peace. There may be temporary lulls and quiet, but overall there won't be peace in that area of the world.

There will not be true peace on this earth until Jesus Christ establishes on the earth, and even then, that's only the beginning of the way to peace. It's not true peace in itself as we will see.

Jesus Christ's first coming did not establish peace on the earth. Jesus Christ's second coming does not establish peace on the earth INITIALLY. At His return, it is anything BUT peace. This was what Christ said of His first coming:

Matthew 10:34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.

I hope we are clear enough in our minds to understand why that's the way it is.

**35 "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law';
36 "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'**

It is tempting to lift this verse out of the context that we are reading it here. If anybody gives you grief, if any other family member doesn't fall in line with you, then you say, "My enemies are of my own household." That is not what it is talking about!

This is talking about when somebody lives God's way of life, and strives to be godly, it's going to put them at odds with human nature - and if there are other family members that have that human nature, somewhere, at some time, there are going to be problems and difficulties, but it's not based on personality. And this Scripture is not something you can use to defend YOUR POSITION.

This is only admissible when you are doing the right thing. This is not talking about your opinion, or expressing your personality, but the fact that you are living a godly life. That is going to produce the conflict.

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

I can't even begin to express the incredible pressure that is brought upon our members in Asia by their families. I have known one young man for a long time. He is not yet baptised, but he has been associated with the church for many, many years. Why has he not committed to the church? Because of intense pressure from his family.

This is what these Scriptures are talking about; where some of this lack of peace is going to come from.

38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

39 "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Christ did not come to establish peace. To live a godly way of life is not necessarily going to produce conditions of peace around you. I have to set it that way so that you understand as we move on. We are to express peace. I am not offering an apology for lack of peace, but I am trying to get it in its correct context.

The reality for us is that living godly in a godless world will not be peaceful. If we seek peaceful conditions from the surrounding environment, we are going to be disappointed. And we often do, in our hunger for peace.

Psalm 37:7 Rest in the LORD ...

As you read this, ask yourself why? Why are you being told to rest in the Lord ...

7... and wait patiently for Him ...

Obviously there's going to be a NEED to rest and to wait patiently.

**7... Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.**

There are a lot of people right now who are seeming to prosper, who used to be of our fellowship, who are no longer.

**8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
Do not fret - it only causes harm.**

"Fret" and "stress" could be interchanged. We are more familiar with the word "stress" today. We all have to deal with it.

**9 For evildoers shall be cut off;
But those who wait on the LORD,
They shall inherit the earth.
10 For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more ...**

It doesn't say the wicked will be no more when they are wicked. They are going to be wicked and they are going to prosper.

And you are going to be good, and you are going to lack peace!

**10 ... Indeed, you will look carefully for his place,
But it shall be no more.
11 But the meek shall inherit the earth ...**

... tomorrow? No! ... next month? No!

11 ... And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

That's future looking! That's not today. Peace for the world is yet ahead of us and we are told not to fret, not to become anxious because we want peace now, and that peace may not be available; whether it's a peace in our marriage, our family relationships, or our working environment.

Christ's first coming only set out the CONDITIONS of peace. Then He offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice so that those conditions could be attained. When Christ returns the second time, He actually manages to bring all of man's concepts of peace to a head. Have you ever thought of it that way?

When Christ returns, He is going to be bring all of the nations' concepts of peace out into the open. They will proven to be false.

I do not have the picture in my mind, at least from Scripture, that when Christ returns, the world acknowledges: "Oh, here comes Christ. Here He comes to establish the Kingdom and peace. Let's go and make war."

They are absolutely convinced that THEY are the peacemakers, and He is the troublemaker, the antichrist. So they are bringing all their peaceful means to bear against what they see to be the problem, to eliminate Him, so there can be peace on the earth!

***Revelation 16:12 Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.
13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.
14 For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.***

That is an extremely deceptive activity. They have gone out to stir up the kings, to protect the earth, to protect the nations, the peace, the prosperity of the nations.

There's just a little warning slipped in here for you and I ...

***15 "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."
16 And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.***

... the last final battle. At that point in time, God's people had better have certain garments on. They need to be very careful that they don't get deceived into taking off those garments. It's going to be an incredibly deceptive time as these miracles are performed. They are performing signs to deceive the kings of the earth.

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and ...

What does He do? He ...

***11 ... makes war.
12 His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself.
13 He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.
14 And the armies in heaven ...***

Armies! Armies battle! Armies fight!

***14 ... clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.
15 Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.
16 And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.***

Peace is a condition that is imposed upon the world. I would say at this point in time that it is a condition that we could call

peace, RELATIVELY SPEAKING. If you look at the wars that have taken place, when Christ subdues them with a rod of iron, and there is no more fighting, no more war, you could say that there is a condition of peace, but it is not the ULTIMATE TRUE PEACE. It is just now setting the GROUNDWORK for peace to be introduced.

Peace Is A Process

The point that I would like to make at this juncture is that peace is a PROCESS. Peace is not an instant state that is obtained.

You may think that if the person alongside you is annoying you, and that if he or she is forcibly removed from your presence, you will have instant peace. That is not what we are talking about. That is not true peace.

Peace is something that is obtained over a period of time. It is the result of deliberate and particular actions. It's something to be sought. "Seek peace. Pursue it!" There's something that we have to DO in order for true peace to be achieved. We can be very thankful that Christ sets the groundwork so that this can now be pursued. He has given His life as the ultimate sacrifice. Now all mankind can come into that relationship!

The Peace Process Has Already Begun

But the Church is already in that relationship - which leads us into the second reality. The second reality is that the peace process has already begun. It has already begun - in the church!

***Ephesians 2:11 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh -- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands --
12 that at that time you 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.***

... no peace; war hungry people, giving true expression of the human nature.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

... a very particular and special relationship which we celebrate annually. We now have a closeness and an access through the blood of Jesus Christ and God ...

14 For He Himself is our peace ...

That is a profound statement in terms of the subject that we are dealing with. He Himself is our peace ...

14 ... who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

We've talked about aliens. "You who were without Christ, being aliens ..." but now something has happened whereby we are no longer aliens.

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

To make a long story short, true peace emanates from those through whom Christ is actively living His life.

I hope that's not too theological a sounding statement, that the reality is not assumed here.

When Christ lives His life within a human being there must be an expression of peace, the peace that comes from Jesus Christ, the peace that comes from having been made into one with God.

These statements about peace are made just directly ahead of Paul's continuing comments about the church. He goes on in the next few verses to address the church.

Peace is not just something that is "nice" to have. Peace is a REQUIREMENT in the Church of God! It's not just something that is nice to have. We have said that to ourselves after we have been through certain things in the past. Finally we came together into this configuration, and we said, "Isn't it nice to have peace!" That was fine and true as far as it went, but all that was, was the same as Christ subduing the nations of the earth, setting the conditions, in which true peace could then be pursued. That's where we are.

We are in the position now where we should be ACTIVELY SEEKING true peace. What we saw recently in Iraq will barely scratch the surface of what we will see before things are all over in this earth in terms of war and the power that man can unleash upon fellow man.

In the midst of this world of conflict, there has got to be this light that represents a people at peace - not just getting along in a social condition with our neighbour, but a true condition of peace, because it is that peace that is going to keep you glued to the trunk of the tree.

As I have already intimated, it's not going to be a road of peace for the church from hereon until Christ returns. There's going to be more difficulty. You can bet on it! Satan is not going to give you a road of peace between here and the return of Christ, or here and the resurrection. Satan doesn't want you to be at peace. He wants you to be agitated, fretting, and anxious so that you will take actions that are not consolable with godliness and the mind of God; that you will separate yourself from God out of fretting and anxiety.

When we are at peace within ourselves, the type of peace that comes through Jesus Christ, the things that go on in our surrounding environment don't upset us, and they don't upset our relationship with God. We might wish they didn't happen, but they don't throw our spiritual life through a loop. You wash straight through them. You are still there on the other side of them. It might be a trial that was hard and difficult, but you are still there, and just as close to God, even more so perhaps than you were before.

Jesus Christ prior to His crucifixion, spoke to His disciples. He said:

John 14:27 "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Is that the peace that we have in the church? To some extent, the answer to that is "yes," and to some extent, the answer is "no." We are working on it. We see it in certain instances, but we sometimes also see the lack of peace in certain areas and under certain circumstances.

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The true peace process has begun because Christ's sacrifice has been applied to us. It hasn't begun for the world because the sacrifice has not been applied to the world yet. But for everybody who took the bread and the wine at Passover, the peace process has begun. We are not just looking forward to the Kingdom as a time of peace. This church must represent the Kingdom, and in that way, represent peace.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

One of the major things my wife and I see is church members in numerous areas having to deal with is discouragement, leading to the more serious state of depression. For some reason, we are seeing more and more of that within the church. As I analyse it, it would seem to me that that is what Satan wants. That is what Satan's world engenders because there is nothing in the physical domain that satisfies. As man strives for peace, as he signs peace accords, and proclaims peace, there is no peace, so people are incredibly discouraged, and they lack hope.

One of the things we try to do for our young people at the summer camps, whether it be the Philippines or elsewhere, is to try and encourage them that there is a life ahead of them. From a secular, physical point of view, there's not a whole lot out there. There may be more so in some places than others, but in the Philippines we try and encourage our young ones to view life a

little more positively; that they can be successful, they can do something with their lives.

The nature of the world is that it is wanting to get us into such a frame of mind that we don't have peace - with ourselves, or within ourselves. That is a terrible situation, when we can't be at peace - with our knowledge of God's way of life, God's law, our knowledge of the plan of salvation, our knowledge of the Holy Days.

There has got to be a spark of life that that gives to us. We don't have peace in the environment around us, but there's got to be peace in our minds, in our relationship with God.

Paul, in discussing marriage, says:

1 Corinthians 7:15 But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases ...

The underlying approach to all this is ...

15 ... But God has called us to peace.

If we can't make our environment peaceful, at least we have to be peaceful in our mind. It is the peace that comes from our mind living as though Christ were living within us. It's a closeness to God, and as we have this peace of mind it flows out to those around us. People can at least observe that peacefulness of God's people, particularly in a congregational sense. If somebody should walk in here they should be able to find a peace that they don't find anywhere else.

Religious organisations in this world are as politically driven as any other type of organisation. Politics, strife and division should not be HERE. We should be of one mind, coming from a frame of mind. It is not simply being tolerant, compromising or appeasing. That is fine in a limited sense, but if that's the kind of peace this organisation has WE WILL BLOW APART at some point in the future - because that peace is not the glue that holds us to God.

The peace that keeps us close to God is the peace that comes from a converted mind. The peace process is the process of conversion. Hopefully we are all moving in this direction. Seek peace! Pursue it! Conversion has to be sought. Conversion has to be worked at.

Yes, you can say that in an instant you are converted in the sense that you receive God's Spirit, but that's just the beginning. A new life has to be built by that process.

As we build that new life individually we have individual peace, then collectively we have the true peace of God. We will hang together. We will be an organisation that God can use as a light to this world; an organisation that God can hold up in adverse conditions. Believe me, when we are magnified to this world, it will come against us. There will be adversarial conditions coming against us at that time - but it will be the peace of God that will be holding us together, and allowing us to be that demonstration of light to the world. It won't be our personalities. It won't be because we are NICE people or that we like each other, or that we put our feet under each other's dining table on a regular basis. It will be because Christ is living His life in us.

***Ephesians 4:17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind,
18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;
19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.
20 But you have not so learned Christ,
21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus:
22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,
23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,***

That's where it comes from. Satan will be constantly appealing to that part of us that is still human nature, to want to go back.

The problems Jude wrote about came from within. They did not come from without. There will always be pressure on us to substitute the world's concepts of peace for true peace.

24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

This is the ONLY true peace process.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts (in your minds), to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

If everybody had this mind, they would all be here in this room. When there's division in the church, it is because the true conditions for peace are not present. The church splits and divides when there is more human nature than there is of the mind of Jesus Christ. That's the bottom line for all of the divisions that we have seen in the church.

But we are here, and it is our responsibility to develop this kind of peace so that the church will have incredible cohesiveness for the future. Remember those words of Jeremiah, because he condemned the leadership of his day because they were saying, "Peace." They wanted peace. The people wanted peace - but they were not prepared to address THE RIGHT CONDITIONS for peace.

They rejected God's law. They had no pleasure in it. They wanted nothing to do with God's law as a way of life, yet they wanted peace. We will never have peace that way. True peace comes as we develop the mind of Christ on a daily basis - becoming more deeply converted day by day.

*...Brian Orchard
17 May 03*

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