

THE PEACE OF GOD

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." – Phil. 4:7.

PEACE is defined to be a state of quiet, or tranquility, freedom from disturbance or agitation – calmness, repose. Such a state of mind our text affirms of God. His is a mind tranquil, calm, undisturbed, never agitated, nor even wearied nor perplexed by any of the cares of His vast dominion. Yet this perfect peace of God, the Scriptures show, is due neither to the fact that there are no disorders in His vast domain, nor yet to any stoical indifference to pain or pleasure, but rather to that perfect poise of His glorious attributes which makes Him Master of His situation as Sovereign of the whole universe.

Have we admired the coolness and calm self-possession of a great general, such as Grant or Napoleon, in the midst of the confusion and smoke of battle? or of a great statesman, such as Gladstone or Bismarck, in the midst of national perplexities and perils? or of skilled physicians or others in critical times and places? These are only faint illustrations of the peace of self-possession and self-confidence which rules in the mind of God. He is never confused, bewildered, perplexed, anxious or care-worn, nor in the least fearful that His plans will miscarry or His purposes fail, because all power and wisdom inhere in Him.

The scope of His mighty intellect reaches to the *utmost bounds of possibility*, comprehends all *causes* and discerns with precision all *effects*; consequently, He knows the end from the beginning, and that, not only from philosophical principles, but also by *intuition*. As the Creator of all things and the originator of all law, He is thoroughly acquainted with all the intricate subtleties of physical, moral and intellectual law, so that no problem could arise the results

of which are not manifest to His mind. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." – I John 1:5.

God, the Creator of all things, is also the competent Sustainer of all things. In silent grandeur, from Age to Age, the whole physical universe fulfils His will, without a suspicion of disorder or mishap; and the same Power is pledged for its sustenance throughout the eternal future.

Thus from His own vast, inherent resources of Power and Wisdom, springs the peace of God. But not from this source alone is the Divine peace; for peace is the certain concomitant of inherent goodness. God is the impersonation of every virtue and every grace; and consequently He has the blessed satisfaction and peace of conscious moral perfection as well as inherent Wisdom and Power.

GOD'S EMOTIONAL NATURE

Yet we find this peace of God coexisting with much of disorder and trouble. As a Father He shows us that He bears a father's love to all His intelligent creatures – "*the whole family [of God] in Heaven and in earth*" – and that for His "pleasure they are and were created." (Eph. 3:15; Rev. 4:11.) He created them in His own likeness – with the same mental and moral attributes, so that He might have communion and fellowship with them as sons, and they with Him as a Father, that thus, in mutual fellowship and communion, the Creator and the creature might find pleasure, happiness and delight.

This likeness of God includes in all not only the same mental faculties, but also the free exercise of the same in the formation of character. A creature incapable of thus forming character would not be in God's likeness. And for the purpose of developing character, the alternative of good and evil must be placed before him. The right and the wrong principles of action must be discerned and the individual left free to his own choice in the matter, that the pleasure

of God may be realized in the virtuous character resultant from the free choice of righteousness.

Since the love of God for His newly created and innocent creatures is akin to, but much stronger than, the love of an earthly parent for an innocent infant; and since that loving interest and solicitude does not grow cold as the creature advances in years, but earnestly watches for the development of the principles and fruits of righteousness, it is manifest that, like an earthly parent, God experiences the sense of either pleasure or pain, according as His free, intelligent creatures choose the right course or the wrong. Of this we are fully assured, not only by thus reasoning from the fact of His Fatherhood, but also by all of those Scriptures which speak of some things as abominable, displeasing, hateful and despicable to Him and as giving Him no pleasure; which say that His anger burns against them, and that His indignation and wrath wax hot, even to their destruction. Other Scriptures speak of His pleasure, love, joy and delight in pleasing things – in the principles of righteousness and those who obey them – the appreciation of pleasurable emotions of an opposite character, for pain [R5284 : page 228] and pleasure may properly be considered the ebb and flow of the same emotion.

These exhibitions of the mind of God indicate clearly an emotional nature in the Divine Being, of which fact we might also judge from the realization of our own emotional nature, since man was created in God's image. No, dear friends, God is not a God of stoical indifference, insensible to the emotions of pleasure and of pain; but the perfect poise of His attributes preserves the equilibrium of peace under all circumstances, whether of pain or pleasure.

GOD'S PEACE UNBROKEN BY EXTERNAL DISCORD

With this thought, then, let us consider the circumstances under which the marvelous Peace of God has been perpetually maintained. The deep-laid Plan of God in all His creative works required long *aions* [ages] for its accomplishment. Across the vista of ages

He saw in His purpose the glory of an intelligent creation in His own likeness, established in righteousness and worthy of His gift of eternal life. He therein saw the mutual pleasure of the Creator and the creature, and with a peaceful patience He resolved to wait for the glorious consummation.

As the Plan developed and time rolled on, the free moral agency of His creatures, misused by some, was enabling them to develop evil characters. By this means discord was introduced into His family – "the family [of God] in Heaven and in earth" – all His creatures, angels and men; and the family was divided, some holding to righteousness and some choosing to do evil. But such a contingency was one of the foreseen necessities of the far reaching Plan, the glorious outcome of which, was, in the Divine judgment, worth the cost of all the trouble and loss which He foresaw.

What a dreadful thing is family discord! How a prodigal son or a wayward daughter often brings the gray hairs of the human parent down with sorrow to the grave! Ah, the Heavenly Father knows something of such sorrow; for He saw Satan, one of His sons (Isa. 14:12), an angel of light, fall as lightning from Heaven. (Luke 10:18.) For six thousand years, at least, that son has been in open, defiant rebellion against God, and most actively and viciously engaged in inciting further rebellion and wickedness. He saw many of the angels leave their first estate (Jude 6) and become the allies of Satan, and then He saw also the whole human race fall into sin. Did ever any human parent find such a conspiracy – so virulent and hateful – spring up in his family? Surely not!

Then God found it necessary to perform the unpleasant duties of discipline. In His Justice He must disown the disloyal sons and deal with them as enemies. Though all the while His Fatherly Love was preparing to bless the deceived and fallen ones when the purposes of redemption should restore the repentant to His favor, Love must be veiled, while only stern, relentless Justice could be

manifested. This has been no happifying duty, nor has the attitude of the sinner been pleasing to Him.

Consider the Love against which these recreants sinned. Though from God cometh every good and perfect gift, His favors have been despised, His love spurned, His righteous authority conspired against and defied, His character maligned, misrepresented, made to appear odious, hateful, unrighteous and even despicable. Yet, through it all the peace of God continues, and for six thousand years He has endured this contradiction of sinners against Himself. And still, O wondrous grace! His Love abounds; and it is written that He so loved the world, even while they were yet sinners, that He gave His Only-Begotten Son to die for them; and that through Him judgment (trial) is also to be extended to those angels that fell, with the exception of Satan, the leader and instigator of the whole conspiracy – the father of lies. – John 3:16; I Cor. 6:3; Jude 6; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 20:10,14.

GOD'S PEACE COMPATIBLE WITH SORROW

This gift of Divine Love was another indication of the cost to our Heavenly Father of His great and marvelous Plan. Not only did He behold the fall into sin of a large proportion of His family, but their recovery cost the sacrifice of the dearest treasure of His heart, and the subjection of this beloved One to the most abject humiliation, ignominy, suffering and death. Again the illustration of a parent's love assists us in comprehending the cost of this manifestation of Jehovah's Love. With what tender and yearning emotions of Love must He have made this sacrifice of His beloved Son, in whom He was well pleased! In addition to all the graces of character manifested since the very dawn of the being of the Logos, was now added the further grace of full submission to the Divine will, even when the pathway pointed out was one of humiliation and pain.

Ah, did the Father let Him go on that errand of mercy without the slightest sensation of sorrowful emotion? Had He no appreciation of the pangs of a father's love when the arrows of death pierced the heart of His beloved Son? When our dear Lord said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and again, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt," did it touch no sympathetic chord in the heart of the Eternal? Yea, verily; the unfeigned love of the Father sympathetically shared the Lord's sorrow. – Matt. 26:38,39.

The principle taught in the Divine Word, that true love weeps with those that weep and rejoices with those who rejoice, is one which is also exemplified in the Divine character. The immortal Jehovah could not Himself die for us, His Divine nature being proof against death. And even if He could have died, there would have been no higher power to raise Him out of death. Thus all creation would have been left forever without a Governor, and only disaster and ruin could have ensued. But God could and did sacrifice at great cost to His loving, fatherly nature, the dearest treasure of His heart; and thus He manifested (I John 4:9) the great Love wherewith He loved His deceived and fallen creatures. If this sacrifice cost Him nothing, if it were impossible for His mind to realize any painful emotion even under such a circumstance, then the gift of His Son would be no manifestation of His Love; for that which *costs* nothing, *manifests* nothing.

Our Lord Jesus also manifested His great sympathy for the Father in the misrepresentation of His character which He has so patiently endured for ages. It was the one effort of His life to glorify the Father and to rectify among men the false impressions of His glorious character – to show to men His goodness, benevolence, love and grace, and to lead them to love the merciful God who so loved them, even while they were yet sinners, as to seek them out and to plan for their eternal salvation.

GOD'S PEACE SELF-CENTERED

Yes, there has been great commotion in the disrupted family of God – commotion in which the Lord declares He has had no pleasure (Psa. 5:4); but, nevertheless, *the Peace of God* has never been disturbed. In the full consciousness of His own moral perfection, His unerring [R5284 : page 229] Wisdom, His mighty Power, and with the fullest appreciation of Justice and the keenest and most ardent love of the beauty of holiness, patiently and peacefully, and even joyfully in the midst of tribulation, He has endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself for six thousand years.

But during the seventh millennium, according to the Divine purpose, it will be the joyful privilege of our Lord Jesus fully to manifest to all creatures in Heaven and in earth the Father's glorious character. Then will the Father rejoice in the grandeur of His finished work and in the everlasting peace and happiness of His family in Heaven and on earth, "reunited under one Head." – Eph. 1:10. – *Diaglott*.

This blessed consummation will not be realized, however, until the incorrigible fallen sons of God, disowned and disinherited because they loved unrighteousness and would not be reclaimed, shall have been cut off. This will be the last unpleasant duty of the Creator and Father of all, who positively declares that it is a sad duty, yet nevertheless one which He will have the fortitude to perform in the interests of universal righteousness and peace. Hear Him: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why *will ye* die?" – Ezek. 33:11.

Thus we see that the Peace of God is compatible with great commotion and with sorrow and pain of any kind; for it is not dependent upon outward circumstances, but upon the proper balancing of the mind and the conditions of a perfect heart. Such peace – the Peace of God – was enjoyed also by our Lord Jesus in

the midst of all the turmoil and confusion of His eventful earthly life. And this brings us to the consideration of our Lord's legacy to His disciples, when He was about to leave the world, as expressed in His own words:

"Peace I leave with you, *My* peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth [in stinted measure or in perishable quality], give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." – John 14:27.

OUR LORD'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

Thus with abounding compassion and tenderness, did our Lord, on the last night of His earthly life, bestow upon His beloved disciples His parting blessing, His legacy of *Peace*. It was the richest legacy He had to bequeath, and was one of priceless value. It was the promise of that tranquility of soul, that rest and ease of mind, which He Himself possessed – the *Peace of God*. It was the same peace which the Father has Himself always enjoyed, even in the midst of all the commotion which the permission of evil has brought about; but it was *not derived* from the *same source*. In Jehovah this peace was *self-centered*; He realized in *Himself* the omnipotence of Power and Wisdom; while the *peace of Christ* was centered, *not* in Himself, but in *God*, by faith in His Wisdom, Power and Grace. So also if we would have the *Peace of God*, the peace of *Christ* – "My peace" – it must, like His, be centered in God by faith.

Yes, the peace of Christ was a priceless legacy. Yet how quickly the stormcloud of trouble, which was even then growing very dark, burst in its fury upon the heads of those very disciples to whom the words were directly addressed. It followed almost immediately the gracious bequest, and struck consternation, bewilderment, confusion, to their hearts and shook their faith from center to circumference. Then, where was the peace? While the Lord was speaking the words, the foul betrayer, Judas, was out on his murderous errand. Then followed the agony in Gethsemane, and the

terror and consternation among the disciples as they began to realize the fate of their beloved Lord. Soon their almost breathless suspense deepened into more fearful forebodings as He stood alone before His merciless accusers and persecutors in the Hall of Pilate and the Court of Herod, while they were powerless to shield Him. Then came the tragic end – the horrors of the crucifixion.

WHAT HAD BECOME OF THE PEACE?

Where was the promised *peace* under such circumstances – when, overcome with fear and dread, they all forsook Him and fled; and when St. Peter, although anxious to defend Him, was so filled with fear that *three times* he denied his Lord and with cursing declared that he never knew Him? The explanation is, that the *peace* had not yet *come*; for as the Apostle Paul tells us, "Where a *testament* is, there must also of necessity be the *death* of the *testator*. For a testament [a bequest] is of force *after men are dead*; otherwise it is of *no strength at all* while the testator *liveth*." (Heb. 9:16,17.) But as soon as the tragic scene was over and the cry, "It is finished," fell upon their eager ears, strange as it may seem, there is evidence that *peace* began to steal into their grieving hearts. The darkened heavens, the quaking earth, the rending rocks, the torn veil of the Temple – all spoke to them a message of comfort which the world could not receive.

To the world (Jews and Gentiles, both participating in the crime) the language of these events was that of Divine wrath and indignation against them. And as fear fell upon the people, and the clamor and excitement of that awful day died away, they smote upon their breasts and returned to their homes. The Roman centurion and they that were with him, fearing greatly, said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

But to the disciples of the Lord these events spoke a very different language. The cause of their blessed Master was *their* cause and it was *God's* cause. To them these supernatural

demonstrations were evidences that God was not regarding this matter with indifference; and though through the veil of darkness they could not read His bright designs, in these events there was to them a whisper of *hope*.

Three days later hope was revived by the news of our Lord's resurrection, confirmed to them by His appearance in their midst. Again forty days later hope was strengthened by His ascension after His parting counsel and blessing and promised return, and the instructions to tarry in Jerusalem until they received the promise of the Father, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit of adoption, not many days thence – at Pentecost. Then the peace of Christ, the Lord's rich legacy, began to be realized, and the tarrying days of prayer and expectancy were days of abiding peace – peace which flowed as a river. But when on the day of Pentecost the promised Comforter came, the river of their peace found a deeper bed; and their joy knew no bounds!

"Like a river glorious is *God's perfect peace*,
Over all victorious in its glad increase.
Perfect; yet it floweth *fuller* every day;
Perfect; yet it groweth *deeper* all the way."

OUR RICH LEGACY OF PEACE

But not alone to the early Church was this legacy of peace bequeathed. It is the blessed inheritance of the entire Church, even to the end of the Age. The Lord showed His thought for us all on that very day, when in His prayer He said, "Neither pray I for these alone, **[R5284 : page 230]** but for all those who shall believe on Me through their word." – John 17:20.

The peace promised, observe, is not the short-lived peace of the world, which is sometimes enjoyed for a little season – while fortune smiles and friends abound and health endures, but which quickly

vanishes when poverty comes in and friends go out, when health fails and death steals away the treasures of the heart. "My peace," the peace of God which Christ Himself by faith enjoyed, who, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor, who lost friend after friend, and in His last hour was forsaken by all of the few that remained – His peace endured through loss, persecution, scorn and contempt, and even amidst the agonies of the cross. This peace is something which none of the vicissitudes of the present life can destroy, and which no enemy can wrest from us.

What richer legacy could the Lord have left His beloved people? Suppose He had bent His energies during His earthly life to the accumulation of money; and that in so doing He had amassed an immense fortune to leave in the hands of His disciples wherewith to push forward the great work of the Age when He should be taken from them; money to pay the traveling expenses of the Apostles and to defray the numerous expenses incidental to the starting of the work in various places, such as the renting of lecture rooms, the payment of salaries to traveling brethren, etc., etc. How soon would it all have vanished, and how poor would be our inheritance today! "The Man of Sin" would surely have gotten hold of it in some way, and not a vestige of the legacy would have reached this end of the Age. But, blessed be God, His rich legacy of peace still *abounds* to His people!

The peace promised is not such as the world can always recognize and appreciate; for the possessor of it, like the Lord Himself, and like the Heavenly Father as well, may have a stormy pathway. Indeed, that it must be so to all the faithful until the purposes of God in the permission of evil are accomplished, we are distinctly forewarned, but with the assurance that through all the storms this peace shall abide – "In the *world* ye shall have tribulation, but *in Me* ye shall have peace."

FAITH THE BASIS OF PEACE

If we would know the foundation and security of this abiding peace which is able to survive the heaviest storms of life, we have only to look to the teaching and example of the Lord and the Apostles. What was it that held them so firmly and gave them such rest of mind while they suffered? It was *their faith* – their faith in the Love, Power and Wisdom of God. They *believed* that what God had *promised*, He was able also to *perform*, and that His righteous and benevolent Plan could know no failure. By the mouth of His Prophets He had declared, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure....Yea, I have *spoken* it and I will *bring it to pass*; I have *purposed* it, I will also *do it*." "The Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it?" (Isa. 46:9-11; 14:27.) On the assurances of God they rested. In Him their faith was anchored; and it mattered not how fiercely the storms raged or how they were tossed by the tempests of life while their anchor still held fast to the Throne of God.

The language of our Lord's faith was, "O righteous Father, the *world* hath not known Thee; but *I* have known Thee." He had been with the Father from the beginning, had realized His Love and His goodness, and had seen His Power, and had marked His righteousness and His loving kindness and Fatherly providence over all His works. And so it is written, "By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities." (Isa. 53:11.) The knowledge which He had of the Father gave to Him a firm footing for faith in all God's purposes concerning the future. Hence He could and did walk by faith. And that faith enabled Him to overcome all obstacles and to secure the victory even over death.

So also it is written for our instruction – "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our *faith*" – that faith in God built, in our case, upon our Lord's testimony of the Father; and again it is written that, "Without faith it is impossible to please God." It is only

through steady, unwavering faith that the peace of God – the peace of Christ – will abide with His people. While the Lord was with His disciples, and they saw in Him the manifestation of the Father, their faith was strong and they had peace *in Him*, as He said, "While I was in the world I kept them." But not until after He had left them was their faith anchored *in God*. After Pentecost they experienced the same peace that Christ had enjoyed – the blessed peace that came from a knowledge of the fact that God acknowledged them as sons and heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ, if they would continue faithfully to follow in the steps of the Redeemer.

CULTIVATION OF UNWAVERING FAITH

Herein is also the basis of our peace. No matter how fiercely the storms of life may assail us, we must never let go our anchor and allow ourselves to drift, but always remember that "the foundation of God standeth sure"; that "His Truth is our shield and buckler"; that "what He has promised He is able also to perform," notwithstanding our human imperfections and frailties; that covering these we have the imputed righteousness of Christ, our Surety and Advocate; and that "the Father Himself loveth" us, "He considereth our frame and remembereth that we are dust," and so has compassion for the sons of His Love and is very pitiful and of tender mercy. Indeed, "What more can He say than to us He hath said," to assure our faith and to steady and strengthen our hearts to patient endurance in the midst of the trials and conflicts of the narrow way of sacrifice.

There is nothing which puts the Christian at greater disadvantage in the presence of his foes than for him to let go, even temporarily, his grip upon the anchor of faith. Let him do so for a moment, and of necessity darkness begins to gather round him. He cannot see the brightness of his Father's face; for "without faith it is impossible to please God"; and while he grapples again for the anchor, the powers of darkness fiercely assail him with doubts and

fears. These attacks are generally based upon his human imperfections, which he should ever bear in mind are covered by the Robe of Christ's righteousness.

If we would have the peace of God reign in our hearts, we must never let go our anchor, "nor suffer Satan's deadliest strife to beat our courage down." The language of our hearts should always be, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." With this faith the peace of God, the peace which the Master bequeathed to us, ever abides. Thus "the peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"; for it is written again, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

In the midst of the Christian warfare let our hearts be cheered and our minds be stayed, not only with such assurances that all the Divine purposes shall be accomplished, but also with such promises of personal favor as these:

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord [R5284 : page 231] pitieth them that fear Him; for He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust." "Can a woman forget her sucking child?...Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have engraven thee upon the palms of My hands." "The Father Himself loveth you," and "It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." "Such as are upright in their way are His delight." "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart" – the peace of God, even in the midst of storm and tempest.

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