

The Bible, the Book of Peace

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Introduction

The Hebrew word for “peace” is the familiar Jewish word of greeting, *shalom* (or *salom*). In all its various forms it appears well over four hundred times in the Old Testament text. It is a rich word, embracing a broad spectrum of ideas, including completeness, soundness, welfare, safety, security, health, prosperity, quiet, tranquility, contentment, friendship, and absence of war or strife (Brown). The Greek word, *eirene*, was chosen by the Septuagint translators (3rd–2nd century B.C.) to render *shalom* in their Greek version of the Old Testament, thus investing it with the same broad positive qualities. One should not be surprised therefore, that in the Greek New Testament, *eirene*, “has much the same meaning and usage as *shalom*” (Walker).

The Sacred Text employs *peace* in reference to Divine-human relationships. “And he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto Jehovah” (Exo. 24:5).¹ The peace-offerings (mentioned 87 times in the OT) were celebrations of the peaceful relationship between Israel and Jehovah. Israel’s peace with God was but typical of the full peace men can have with God only through the Christ: “Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 4:12; Rom. 5:1; 1 Tim. 2:3–6). *Peace* is also used in reference to human-human relationships, both between nations and individuals. “And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites” (1 Sam 7:14). Such peace is to be cultivated by God’s people: “If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

Peace is also used in reference to one’s surroundings or circumstances. This seems to be the point of Isaiah’s statement: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3). Luke describes such an atmosphere among the churches in Acts 9:31: “So the church throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria had peace.” One’s personal tranquility of spirit is also described in terms of *peace*. Thus, David wrote, “Great peace have they that love thy law; And they have no occasion of stumbling” (Psa. 119:165). The devout servant of Christ enjoys “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Phi. 4:7). Obviously, context is a major determinant of meaning for these words, but just as apparent, in every case they convey a positive and desirable state of being.

A Brief Overview

The opening scenes of the Bible depict an atmosphere of great peace. After God created the material universe and brought order out of the initial chaos, He then created the various forms of plant and animal life. He crowned His creative work by creating mankind and assessed it all as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God placed Adam and Eve in the paradise of Eden, which, apparently, He had especially prepared for them (2:8, 15). This was a place of peace in which God communed with them. He was at peace with His creation – there was perfect fellowship between God and man. So far as we know, there was also perfect peace between Adam and Eve at the first.

Then came the satanic serpentine Satan with his beguiling deception and temptation (3:1-5). Eve sinned, then Adam, and the perfect peace, that at first existed (and could have continued), was shattered so as never to be fully reclaimed on earth. The marvelous primitive peace and order were plunged into gross chaos of another sort. Adam and Eve not only forfeited their sweet fellowship with God but were driven from Eden and given heavy physical penalties as well (vv. 16-19). Sin not only sundered the peace between God and mankind; it also set men against each other. Blame and suspicion arose between Adam and Eve. Cain and Abel argued, and Cain murdered his brother. By only the tenth generation from Adam, mankind had become so wicked that God could no longer tolerate his rebellion (Gen. 6:5-12). Had it not been for righteous Noah mankind would have been completely exterminated by the flood. The world has been a jungle of hatred, malice, crime, spite, cruelty, and war ever since. There is no real peace on this earth – this is the historical record given us in the Inspired Volume over the four thousand years of history it covers.

Uninspired history of the past two thousand years continues the same story. World War I, near the beginning of this century, was declared to be the “War to end all Wars.” When ominous sounds and actions began coming out of Germany twenty years later, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, foolishly declared that he and others had conferred with Adolph Hitler, the Nazi Fuhrer, and had achieved “peace in our time.” All this merely set the stage for World War II, the most destructive and deadly conflict ever. The United Nations, formed on the heels of World War II, was supposed to provide the basis of lasting peace – at least for the prevention of war. Yet, during the several decades of its existence world peace has been shattered by numerous additional wars and skirmishes.

The enmity between God and men caused by sin is not unrelated to man’s inability to be at peace with his neighbors. In fact, these are twin problems. The farther men fall from the lofty plane for which God created them and to which He calls them through His perfect Will, the more they mistreat each other. If all men were at peace with God through obedience to His

Word, they would all be at peace with each other. Conversely, the more men desert and/or rebel against God, the less respect they have for the lives and property of others. The result of all of this is the destruction and prevention of peace.

The Bible is basically a book that tells us human beings the way the peace they once had and longs to have with God was destroyed and the way, through His grace, men can be at peace with Him once more. It also tells us how to live so as to be at peace with our fellowmen, insofar as we are able. The theme of the Bible therefore may be stated as one of two-fold peace – peace with God and peace with one's fellow human beings. Only when one achieves this two-fold peace can men be at peace with themselves.

The Primacy of Peace with God

Of the two aspects of peace pertaining to mankind, peace with God is of primary and foremost importance. Man's relationship with God is sometimes described as a "vertical" relationship due to God's downward reach to him and, in necessary and natural response, man's upward reach to God. God is ever above man, and man can never be on an equal plane with Him. God's desire to see man restored to a place of peace with Him is the story of redemption and reconciliation. The study of peace between God and man is the study of fellowship and friendship between them – the ultimate aim/theme of the Bible.

Foreseeing the plunge of man into sin as he exercised his free will, before Creation the Godhead formulated a plan whereby He could accept His rebellious creatures (Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9; et al.). Men did not have the ability to originate or execute such a plan. It all began in the gracious and merciful heart of God – He is the One who thought, sought, and bought the peace and the possibility of restored fellowship between Himself and man. It should therefore surprise no one that several times all three Persons of the Godhead are associated with the concept of peace and reconciliation. The Father is described as "the God of Peace" (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 1 Cor. 14:33; Phi. 4:9; et al.). The Christ was prophetically named, "the prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6). The Holy Spirit is likewise depicted as a producer of peace (Rom. 8:6; 14:17; Gal. 5:22; et al.).

As previously stated, in the beginning man was at perfect peace with His Creator. Adam and Eve were created as innocent and pure of sin as infants. God gave them a clearly-stated positive law which forbade the eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). The penalty for eating of the tree was death – separation from God. When the primal pair ate the fruit, they broke the marvelous peace and fellowship they had enjoyed with God, and thereby destroyed their innocence. Their act of rebellion, as well as every other

instance of disobedience to Divine mandate, is denominated “sin” by inspired writers (Rom. 4:15; 1 John 3:4; 5:17a). No mere human being, even the most noble and righteous of the race, has been able to live perfectly above and apart from sin since that time: “For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).² Thus in Adam, peace with God was shattered for all his posterity, and they all came under the same death sentence God laid upon him originally (Gen. 2:16–17; Rom. 6:23a).

Adam had hardly forfeited his blissful peace with God before the Divine plan for its restoration began to be announced. Even the earliest hints of God’s plan were grounded in the work of One Person. *Seed* is the Biblical word-thread which sews together the promises of God through which His fellowship with mankind might be restored. As God expelled Adam and Eve from Eden, He not only enumerated **their** grievous penalties. He also addressed **Satan** with words that would assure his eventual doom: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). For centuries, God’s statement to the serpent has been understood as the first Messianic prophecy. (Ironically, the hope of **peace** with God is rooted in a prophecy that promises **enmity** between the “seed of woman” and the serpent’s “seed.”) The prophecy foretells that the old devil, the serpent, Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2) would attempt to destroy the promised “seed” of woman, the Christ. He did so when the newborn **Seed** was a mere infant in Bethlehem (Mat. 2:13–16). He continued to do so in the terrible temptations in the wilderness (4:1–11), in the relentless opposition of the Jewish leaders, and finally in His crucifixion. But all of this was as but a “bruise” to the heavenly Seed’s “heel.” In His sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, He dealt Satan a mortal head wound from which he will never recover “...that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

The promises God made to Abraham figure prominently in the peace process between God and man. In the twentieth generation after Adam, Abram (whom God later, renamed “Abraham” [Gen. 17:5]) was born. God called him to leave his native city of Ur in Chaldea to follow where He would lead him (Gen. 12:1; Acts 7:2–4). At the time of this call God made several promises to him and to his descendants, which would be repeated and amplified on subsequent occasions (Gen. 12:2–3, 7; 13:15–16; 15:5, 13–18; 17:7–8; 18:18; 22:18). Some of the promises pertained to physical elements, including fathering a great nation, achieving earthly fame, and possessing the land of Caanan for his posterity. However, the last part of God’s initial

promise to Abram relates especially to all humankind and their peace with God: “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). This promise was later amplified to indicate that the blessing upon all men would be through Abraham’s “seed”: “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:18). God later made this same promise to Abraham’s son, Isaac (26:4) and to his grandson, Jacob (28:14). Thus, the “seed” theme appears prominently in these promises. The reader is reminded of the broad definition-range of “peace” in the Old Testament – its general connotation is a state of great blessing. Hence the “blessing” that God promised through Abraham should at least embrace, if not particularly refer to, the peace and fellowship with God that all men so greatly needed. That peace was not fully available at the time of the promise, but was proffered as a future blessing.

Upon first reading God’s promise that through Abraham’s “seed” He (God) would bless all men, one is tempted to understand this promise to refer only to the nation which would flow from him. However, when we allow inspired men to interpret Scripture, we learn the true and limited import of God’s ancient Abrahamic promise. Paul specified its meaning as follows: “Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). In this part of God’s series of promises He didn’t have the aggregate of the patriarch’s posterity in view, but only to One among the multitude that proceeded from Abraham’s loins – the Christ.

Both Matthew (Mat. 1:1-2) and Luke (Luke 3:34) clearly identify the Abrahamic lineage of Jesus, the Christ. Let us remember that He was prophesied under the identity that included “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). When John the baptizer was born, his father, Zacharias, uttered a remarkable prophecy in which He identified the coming of the Christ with “The oath which he [God] spake unto Abraham our father” (Luke 1:73) and referred to the Lord as He Who would “guide our feet into the way of peace” (v. 79). At Jesus’ birth, the angelic host proclaimed to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men in whom he is well pleased” (Luke 2:14).

A millennium after the time of Abraham, according to His promise, God made of Abraham’s descendants a great nation and gave them the land He had promised (Gen. 15:18; Jos. 11:23; 21:43-45; 22:4; 23:14; 1 Kin. 4:21; 2 Chr. 9:26). Ten Centuries later God set David upon the throne of Israel, His chosen nation, and made the following “seed” promise to him through Nathan the prophet: “When thy days are fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, that shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom”

(2 Sam. 7:12). The promised kingdom was to be “everlasting” (vv. 13, 16). While admitting that part of this extended promise to David was in reference to Solomon and was fulfilled by him, the fulness of the promises pointed to One beyond him. This is obvious from the fact that some three centuries after the time of David, Isaiah foretold that the ultimate “seed” of David who would occupy the prophesied throne was yet to come:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:7).

When Gabriel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son, the angel identified Him with the following remarkable words: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). Notice that in three specifics Gabriel declared Jesus to be the fulfillment of God’s promise to David through Nathan:

1. He would be the son [seed] of David
2. He would be given David’s throne
3. His kingdom would be endless

Likewise, this “seed” in God’s promise to David was identified by Peter in his Pentecost sermon as Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, resurrected Christ of God:

Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him [i.e., David], that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption (Acts 2:30-31).

Peter further declared that this resurrected Son of David/Son of God had ascended to and had been enthroned at the right hand of God, thus fulfilling the prophecies of both Nathan and Isaiah.³

When the time came for God to create the promised nation from the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, He gave them His Law through Moses. While its basis was the Decalog (Exo.20:1-17), it contained hundreds of additional ordinances by which Israel could be in fellowship with God. The Law also contained numerous commandments having to do with the relationship of the Israelites to one another and to the Gentiles. The Law is often depicted as God’s Covenant/Testament exclusively with/to the Israelites. If they would keep

its terms, God promised to bless and protect them, but if not, His curses would be upon them (Deu. 4:40; 7:3; 12:28; 30:15-19; et al.). The God-given Law was thus God's instrument of peace and fellowship to His chosen people. However, it was never intended to be His permanent arrangement for reconciliation of man to Himself. Its institutions were only copies and shadows of the permanent, heavenly, final arrangement God had planned for making possible again man's fellowship with his creator (Heb. 8:5; 10:1). The sacrifices of both the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages had only the blood of bulls and goats, which could not/cannot take away sin (v. 4). Since there is no remission of sins (necessary to restoration of fellowship with God) without the shedding of blood (9:22), it is made plain that blood more powerful than that of animals must be found to provide our peace with God.

"What then is the law?" (i.e., If the law of Moses was not God's ultimate covenant of peace with man, what was its purpose?), Paul (assuming him to be the writer of *Hebrews*) asked the law-struck Galatians (Gal. 3:19a). He answered: "It was added because of transgressions, **till the SEED should come** to whom the promise hath been made" (v. 19b, emp. DM). Paul is apparently saying that Moses' Law was given to provide God's people a perfect standard of conduct and to convict them of sin in their violation of it. Thus, Paul wrote, "where there is no law, neither is there transgression," and as one who grew up as a Jew under the Law, declares, "I had not known sin, except through the Law" (Rom. 4:15; 7:7). From the general teaching of the Bible, it is evident that the Law was also given to keep Abraham's physical lineage distinct till such a time as He could bring into the world the promised Seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gal. 4:4). But notice Paul's limit of the duration of the law: "till the seed should come." The Seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16), thus, the Law was given only until the Christ, the "Prince of Peace," should come, Who would bring the final Covenant/Testament of peace.

Jesus of Nazareth was the seed of Abraham and of David according to the flesh, but also the "Son [seed] of the Most High," having been conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, not by a human father, but by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:32, 35). He alone was able to live perfectly above sin, never once transgressing or falling short of the Will of the Father (John 8:48; Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5; et al.). He alone was thereby qualified to be the sacrifice for sin, by Whose blood the sins of men could be fully expunged. Paul states this fact emphatically: "Him who knew no sin he [God, the Father] made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21). He was "made to be sin" not in the sense of becoming **guilty** of the sins of men (as Calvinists falsely aver), but of becoming the only adequate **sin-offering** for us where all other offerings failed. Thus, Jesus the Christ is depicted

as the quintessential archetype of the high priests and their annual sin offering of blood under the Law.

But Christ having come a high priest of the good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?... For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own (Heb. 9:11-14; 24-25).

Jesus Christ came to make it possible for human beings to be at peace—in fellowship with—God: “Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Pet. 3:18). Through His Son, God reconciled all things unto Himself, and the Son “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1:20). The most important concern to every human being should be the way by which Jesus’ sin offering of His blood may be appropriated and accessed so that one may be at peace with God and one day live with Him forever. Is this peace unconditionally bestowed because of the death of Christ? Is the blessing promised for all nations through the Seed of Abraham something possessed by men universally and unconditionally? The Bible, the “book of peace,” answers “no” unequivocally!

Just as Israel of old could have its limited measure of peace with God only upon the condition of compliance with the Will of Jehovah, so all among the nations who would have peace with God may have it only conditionally. The only ones who will enter the kingdom of heaven are those who do the Father’s Will (Mat. 7:21). The message of Christ is the “gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15)—that is, the message through which we learn the way to have peace with God. Paul thus asserted the Gospel to be “the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16). He also stated that at His return, the Christ will render “...vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that **obey not the Gospel** of our Lord Jesus: who shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of his might” (2 The. 1:8-9; emph. DM).

In His last words to His apostles before ascending to His heavenly throne, Jesus commissioned them to take the soul-saving Gospel to every creature in all the nations, with the

promise that those (and only those) who believe it and obey it will be saved, and that all others (i.e., “disbelievers”) will be lost (Mat. 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16, 19; Luke 24:47).

The only way one can apply the atoning blood of Christ, which alone can take away sins, is to obey His “plan of peace.” This plan begins with belief in Jesus as the Christ and in His Gospel, and it is consummated in baptism/immersion, as revealed in the Lord’s commission (Mark 16:16). This baptism is in water, as attested by various passages (Acts 8:36–38; 10:47–48; 22:16; Eph. 5:26–27). Baptism not only puts one “into [i.e., into fellowship with] Christ,” but also “into his death” (i.e., into the benefits of His death, wherein He shed His cleansing blood) (Rom. 6:3). The sinner’s “newness of life” (in which peace with God is achieved) occurs only when one is raised from the “water-grave” of baptism, **not before** (v.4). Hence, baptism is the act in which one receives forgiveness of sins and in which one’s sins are “washed away” (by Jesus’ blood, not by the water!) (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rev. 1:5). Baptism is a part of God’s plan of mercy for our salvation (Tit. 3:5). Christ Jesus is the author/source of salvation only to those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9).

Further, an inductive study of various passages relating to the Divine plan of reconciliation reveals that between the initial belief in the sinner’s “heart” and baptism that brings salvation, other actions must take place:

1. An oral confession of said belief is required: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Rom. 10:10). This confession is required precedent to baptism (Acts 8:37–38, KJV). The pentecostians (whose hearts the Gospel had “pricked” to believe in Christ) asked the apostles, “What shall we do?” (thus orally confessing their faith) (Acts 2:37).
2. Peter replied, “Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...” (Acts 2:38).
3. The response was the baptism and salvation of “about 3,000 souls” who were thus saved (v. 41) and who the Lord “added to the church” (vv. 41, 47 KJV). When God forgives the sinner there is no longer a barrier between him and his Holy Creator; by His grace the sinner is thus at peace with Him. This sublime fellowship continues only as one faithfully serves Him. “If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we [who have been reconciled to God through Gospel obedience] walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:6–7; cf. 1 Cor. 16:58; Gal. 6:9;

et al.). The Bible is indeed the book of peace in revealing to men the only way they may have the peace with God restored that was sundered so long ago in Eden. What a glorious, wonderful, and welcome message this is for all sober-minded persons!

Peace Between Men

If the peace between God and man may be described as “vertical” in its direction, the peace that human beings may have among themselves is aptly described as “horizontal.” Only when men achieve peace between themselves and God can they enjoy the fullest peace and fellowship with one another. Spiritual peace/fellowship between “person a” and “person b” is possible only when both persons are in fellowship with God. Such peace isn’t the result of mere human desire, decision, and declaration, apart from doctrinal differences. This peace is the result of common submission to the Will of God, and it is manifold.

Peace Between Jews and Gentiles

As previously noted, the Gospel is a universal message addressed to all men, the blessings of which are accessible to all. Due to its universality, it removes the age-old barrier created by the law of Moses between Jews and Gentiles. They are both brought into one body of reconciliation, the church of Christ:

For he [i.e., the Christ] is our peace, who made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; that he might create in himself of the two one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh: for through him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:14-18).

Thus Paul declared, “There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Peace with Others Who Have Made Peace with God

As with our peace with God, so with our fellowship with other Christians – we first **attain** peace with others by our common obedience to the Gospel. Then, by continuing in the Gospel of Christ we are obligated (and able) to **maintain** that peace. The principles that enable brethren to be at peace with one another are numerous and frequently stated in the New Testament. Near the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus declared that those who work at keeping peace (“peacemakers”) are blessed and are God-like (Mat. 5:9). Jesus taught us to love one another as he loved us (John 13:34). We are to rejoice with them that rejoice and weep with them that weep (Rom. 12:15).

In matters of option, weaker brethren are not to force their scruples upon stronger brethren, and the stronger are not to despise the weaker ones, but all are to “follow after things which make for peace, and things whereby we may edify one another” (14:1–3, 19). In matters of doctrinal obligation, Paul ordered that we must “...all speak the same thing and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10; cf. Rom. 16–17; et al.). We cannot fulfill the law of Christ without doing our best to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). Such principles as lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance in love are the principles that should guide our diligent efforts to keep the “unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2–3). We must be concerned not only with our own needs and interests, but with those of our brethren, even as our Lord sacrificed Himself to serve the needs of others (Phi. 2:4–8). The summation of all such virtues takes us back to the love that Jesus commanded us to have for one another, earlier mentioned. Peter echoed Jesus’ words recorded in John 13:34: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22).

Many problems exist among the Lord’s people which are related to doctrinal Truth. These break the peace and cause divisions among brethren, but they are necessary if we would be loyal to the Truth and to the Lord. However, many breaches of the peace between individual brethren in local congregations have nothing to do with doctrinal issues. They rather arise out of utter selfishness, insensitivity, lack of discrimination, absence of control of both temper and tongue, the determination to rule or ruin, and other such wicked attitudes and practices. The spirit of Diotrephes of old who craved preeminence (3 John 9–10) still destroys congregational peace where tolerated. One would perhaps as well stand before the Lord in the Judgment as an outright atheist as one who divided the body of Christ by such works of the flesh! In a day when so many forces are arrayed against the Lord’s church, both from without and within, how badly we need to “seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet. 3:11) so that our efforts to press the claims of and defend the Gospel may not be thereby impeded.

Peace with Those Who Are Not at Peace with God

While we cannot have spiritual fellowship with our fellow men in general, God expects us to live as peaceably as possible with all men: “If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18; cf. Heb. 12:14). The “book of peace” gives us instructions on

the way to maintain such peace. The immortal principle commonly called the “Golden Rule,” stated by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount, is a principle that makes for peaceful relationships: “All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Mat. 7:12). Paul states another principle that will promote peace generally: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith” (Gal. 6:10). His instructions to the Romans are also aimed at promoting peaceful dealings with people in the world, as indicated by his references to “all men”: “Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honorable in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17). In summary, the message of the Bible, particularly the Gospel, when put into practice, produces peace between and among men. The Bible is the “Book of Peace.”

Peace with Oneself

There is another facet of peace that results from hearing and obeying the God’s Word: personal and inner peace. This much-desired peace derives from knowing that one is at peace with God and that he is doing his best to live at peace with all men. The result of such a life is a clear and uncondemning conscience, which allows one to possess blissful peace. Jesus promised this sort of peace to His apostles, and, indirectly, to all those who would follow Him:

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 fearful.... These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 14:27; 16:33).

Paul wrote: “For the mind of the flesh is death; but the mind of the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8:6). One whose thinking is governed by the words of the Holy Spirit has life and is at peace with God and himself. The summation of the inner peace that belongs to the faithful child of God is Paul’s great statement to the Philippians: “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Phi. 4:7). Let us emphasize again that the Bible alone provides the basis for this peace.

A Paradox Concerning Peace

Notwithstanding all the emphasis in the Bible on peace, concerning which the foregoing material is but a sampling, the Bible also teaches that peace is not always acceptable to God and in such circumstances must be unacceptable to us. As already noted, Jesus was prophetically announced as “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), and His Word is called the “Gospel of peace” (Eph.

6:15). We have seen that peace is generally exalted and urged upon mankind in the Bible. However, as in all our Bible study, we should not quit reading too soon" regarding this subject; that which we have stated above is not all the Bible says on the subject. The "Prince of Peace" also said the following:

Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. They shall be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law (Luke 12:51-53).

In Matthew's record of the same declaration by the Lord, we read:

Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: and a man's foes shall be they of his own household (Mat. 10:34-36).

From these passages one must conclude that "peace" is not always pleasing to God and division is not always displeasing to Him. One must thus also conclude that some ideals and principles are more fundamental and necessary than peace and unity among brethren. While peace with God is the highest and noblest aim of which man is capable, peace with and unity among men are not the principal aims of the religion of Christ. Although Jesus is the great uniter of men who will hear and obey His Word, He is also the great divider of men, as some refuse to hear Him and strongly oppose those who do. This principle involves not only strangers and acquaintances, but, as the Lord shows, in some cases the closest of family members.

While the Bible most certainly urges peace, it just as certainly forbids the pursuit of "peace at any price." In other words, we may correctly paraphrase the Lord's beatitude that pronounces blessings on peacemakers (Mat. 5:9) to read, under certain circumstances, "Blessed are the peacebreakers...." Brethren who are clamoring for "peace," "unity," and "fellowship" with those outside the body of Christ have proved themselves willing to sacrifice Truth, sound doctrine, and the distinctiveness of the blood-purchased church of Christ in the pursuit of their goal. If the Bible forbids us to be at peace even with **brethren** who forsake the Truth (as it does [e.g., Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 2 John 9-11; et al.]), much more does it forbid us to have spiritual fellowship with those who are not God's children.

Whoever pontificates that all those who call God their Father are his brethren (as our apostate brother, Max Lucado has done) has made "shipwreck" of the fellowship set forth in the

Bible. Those brethren who consort with the denominations in an attitude of acceptance of and participation in their error (as another apostate brother, Rubel Shelly, has famously done) are practicing a “peace” that is an abomination to the God of Heaven. Those who declare that such as issues as a literal millennial reign of Christ on earth, employment of instrumental music in worship, and the purpose of baptism were not worth severing fellowship over (as Carroll Osborn, a “distinguished” religion professor at Abilene Christian University has done) have erected for themselves an idol of unity at the cost of Truth. And the foregoing are but representative of numerous others have done and continue make such evil compromises. This malicious practice is destroying the true peace, unity, and fellowship between God and men, and among men themselves, for which the Lord died. May we always seek peace with others based only on the Truth of God’s Word.

Conclusion

The theme of the Bible may be summed up as that of seeking and attaining (1) peace between God and man and (2) peace among men. Man does not have a clue as to the means of attaining or maintaining a peaceful relationship with God apart from God’s revelation of these matters in the Bible (Jer. 10:23; Psa. 119:105; et al.) The Gospel obedience that unites a person with God also causes that person to be at peace with all others who have become and continue to be united with Him. This is the only means of having true spiritual fellowship with other men. All other claims and declarations regarding peace are counterfeit and synthetic and are an affront and insult to the God of Peace and the Prince of Peace. The personal and inner peace for which men universally long is found only in belief in and obedience to the one True and Living God. The specifics of God’s plan of peace that will take men at last to Heaven, the place of eternal and uninterrupted peace, are found only in the Bible. Verily, the Bible is the “Book of Peace.” Alas, how few are wise enough to heed its message!

Works Cited

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Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. This verse is often misquoted as “All have sinned, and have fallen short of the glory of God” as if

Paul were being redundant. This misquote produces a misapprehension of Paul's statement. The apostle used two different tenses to describe and emphasize man's perpetual record of sinfulness. *Have sinned* is an aorist indicative verb form which describes the occurrence of action in the past (in this case, all of man's history), while *fall short* is a present active indicative form signifying action which is now in progress. The idea of the verse is that sin **has** characterized all men and **continues to do so**.

3. In Acts 2:33–36 Peter unmistakably identifies the throne of David with the heavenly throne to which Christ ascended. Thus, the premillennialist's argument that Jesus must yet receive the Davidic throne and kingdom on earth and reign from David's throne in Jerusalem to fulfill Nathan's prophecy is falsified. Peter makes it clear that David's throne is in Heaven, from which the Christ now reigns over his everlasting kingdom, the church (Dan.2:44; Heb. 12:23,28). Further, the Kingdom of Christ is an unending one, not lasting for a mere one thousand years!

[Note: I wrote this MSS for, and presented a digest of it orally at the 17th Annual Southwest Lectures, hosted by the Southwest Church of Christ, Austin, Texas, April 12–15, 1998. It was published in the book of the lectures, *"Be at Peace Among Yourselves,"* ed. Gary Colley (Austin, TX: Southwest Pub., 1998.)

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