

The Priority of Peace

Christian Peacemaking

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I'm so glad that you're here this morning on this beautiful day; every day that the Lord has made is a beautiful day for us as Christians and we just sang the line that kind of helps prepare our hearts for what we're going to look at today,

"Peace! Peace!

Jesus Christ was born to save
Calls you one and calls you all
To gain His everlasting hall."

This is a time of year where we are happy to talk about peace and the word is bandied about in secular circles as well as in Christian circles here today and quite providentially, it's a theme that we were looking at just last week in Ephesians 2. I'd invite you to turn to Ephesians 2 just to remind you of where we have been as we have looked at God's word, and we're dealing with the subject matter of peace in this passage and also peace today as you'll see as the message unfolds. In Ephesians 2:13, Paul speaking to the Gentile readers who were now Christians says, "Now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." And we looked at that passage last time and saw how Christ in the, as it were, the horizontal beam of the cross had brought believing Jews and Gentiles together in peace at the cross, and the topic of peace is central to being a Christian. I'm not sure that we realize just how much that is at the very core of what it means to be a Christian and what the objective and what the call of the Christian life is as we consider this topic of peace, however, as I think you will see in just a moment, it is certainly a concept that is elusive to understand, it's elusive to give it its proper place in the Christian life because it has been so distorted by what has happened in the professing Christian world all somehow or another turning around this idea of peace. Some claiming the name of Christian have buried the concept of peace as they fight their political grievances in society and so you would never have the idea that some of these people, and I'm not saying anything about whether they're genuinely converted or not, but in the name of Christianity, in the name of what used to be called the so-called moral majority, political battles were fought and lines were drawn in the name of Christianity and you could forgive those who were observing to think that Christianity had some sort of idea of political conflict at its center as opposed to the concept of peace. Should peace be silenced for the sake of politics?

On the other end of the spectrum, some object to the teaching of biblical doctrine because it exposes differences between competing truth claims. Some would silence the very Gospel itself just for the sake of some kind of superficial harmony and within the church, there are those voices that would call us to minimize doctrine so that we can all just get along together as if this was the church of Rodney King instead of the church of Jesus Christ. It is not unkind to observe that most churches prefer a brief, minimalistic, doctrinal statement so that as many people as possible can fit under their spiritual roof. So we ask a different question: should truth be silenced for the sake of peace?

In other circles, marital conflict, divorce and church splits are more common than baptisms signifying true conversion. Does peace change the way that people live? There are so many different ways that we could approach this. I just want you to see that in a brief looking at what's happening around us, the whole concept of peace and what it means is difficult and elusive to see in what's happening in the church around us. We need to face these profound questions if we are going to take the Bible seriously and honor the Christ that we claim to serve, the Christ who is called the Prince of Peace. I mean, one of the primary names of the Lord Jesus Christ embodies the concept of peace. The Prince of Peace, the one who rules over peace, the one who brought Jews and Gentiles together because he is our peace, the one who brings peace with God.

Beloved, do you see that somewhere along the way, somewhere in time, somewhere as a church, we have to come to grips with and realize that this concept of peace is somehow really important to us as Christians and somehow we need to understand it and respond to it in a way that is worthy of the Scriptures. So today and for next Sunday, I want us to park on the side of the road in our exposition of Ephesians 2. You know, you drive along a road and you see a scenic viewpoint and you pull off and you stop your trip for a moment and you take advantage of the scenery that's there, well, that in a sense is what we want to do this week and next week. We want to pull off and stop at this concept of peace and contemplate what it means for us as Christians and what it means for us as a church, what it means for our church life, and just to come to grips with it. You know, it is not a badge of honor to be a contentious Christian. It's actually a contradiction in terms, really, and realizing that we are all subject to our passions and our flesh and we all sometimes find ourselves engaged in conflict, sometimes we're responsible for it, sometimes we're not, I want us to stop and take a look at this and just step back and look at the biblical concept of peace and realize that in some ways we are simply looking at what it means to be a Christian as we look at this. Don't view this as some esoteric topic that we're getting off tangent on. No, we're just looking at something very basic and fundamental as we consider this. We need to drink deeply from this well of peace and we need to let it have a defining impact on our own lives and on our own hearts individually and we need to let it have a defining impact on the kind of church that we are becoming.

I am very grateful to the Lord as I look out on your sweet smiling faces and I say this a lot and it is so important for you to understand the spirit from which I speak. I believe that we have a peaceful church. I am glad that we have a peaceful church. I am grateful that before me is a congregation of peaceful people. That is what it should be like, and

what I want us to do is to recognize that and to realize that that's not something incidental, that this is deeply rooted in what it means to be a Christian, and also for us to value it so much so that as we go forward in the future, as we kind of, as it were in our nomadic existence which is about to come to an end in four weeks, as we pick up, as it were, geographically from Northern Kentucky and the pillar, as it were, moves over and settles down on Eastern Cincinnati, I want us to carry with us a sense of something that is central to our existence. There will be transitions and change that comes and if we have this as a common core, as a shared understanding of why we exist, it is going to serve us well in the years to come and it is going to help us through this transition to glorify our Christ and be prepared to become even more the church that Christ would have us to be.

I've said it many times in the past, I need to say it more often and just a reminder, and it's just so important for you to understand that I am speaking to you as a sympathetic grateful pastor, not correcting anything in this message but rather affirming and deepening that which we possess. This church belongs to Christ. This isn't your church, it isn't my church. A true church belongs to its Lord Jesus Christ and we're just servants. We are just under-workers. We're just sharing in the joy and the privilege together of being a part of this but this church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ like any true church does. So Christ is at the core and at the center and this one of whom we sang who was incarnated and who lived and died and rose again, this church belongs to him. And as we preach the Bible, we're preaching the word that belongs to the Lord of the church, and in that, in our responsibility to glorify God in everything that we do, we must come to grips with the concept of peace so that we would more closely approximate what it is that Christ wants us to be. And if we understand the concept of peace, we have a sense of what the goal is; we can look out on the horizon, as it were, and see the point toward which we are supposed to move rather than just drifting along and being tossed about by waves and when problems come up letting it turn into conflict. No, we're not going to be that way as a church. We're going to honor the concept of peace because our Lord is a Lord of peace. So today and next week, we're going to kind of delve into this on a biblical way.

What is peace? One commentator defines it this way: peace refers to wholeness, to righteous harmony, overall well-being and an absence of conflict rather than strife and discord in life. When a man is born again, when you were born again as a Christian, you received a new nature. God made you into someone new. The old things passed away, behold new things came. God imparted a nature to you that was distinctly qualitatively different from the one that used to mark you. That is part of being a Christian is you receive a new nature that is like unto the nature of God himself in that it carries the moral characteristics and the moral qualities in embryonic form of that which marks God himself. The Holy Spirit came to indwell you; he whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. To be a Christian is to be indwelt by a Holy Spirit who is like that. To be a Christian is to become a member of the body whose Lord is the Prince of Peace. It's to become a son of God, as it were, the God who is a God of peace; the God who sent Christ because he is a reconciling God toward sinners; a God who would take his enemies and reconcile them to himself so that they might be at peace together.

So this is so fundamental and when there is so much confusion in the church that we have to try to swim through, it's kind of like trying to swim through a sewer to get to the purity of what peace means, that's why we want to spend some time on it. It's fundamental to our nature. God reconciles a man to himself and places a principle of peace deep within that man's heart.

I can remember one of the surest marks, early marks of my own conversion. It may surprise you, it might not surprise you, but before I was a Christian, I was an angry, contentious young man and there was turmoil in my heart and it spilled over in the way that I interacted with people. There was a reason why at that period of time in my life I wanted to go to law school. I liked the idea of the litigious conflicting nature of what I thought a career in law would be like. Well, when I was genuinely saved, I didn't even know that this was going to happen, I had no idea that this was part of the deal, but as the days and those early weeks went by, I started to realize, it started to dawn on me, "I'm not angry anymore. I don't want to fight with people anymore. I'm not interested in the conflict." There is just a settled sense of harmony in my soul, the sense of completion, the sense of well-being, the sense of wholeness, this absence of strife vertically that it just naturally spilled out in my life. It wasn't that I had to go to a seminar and find out the principles that I had to do to make that happen, it started to spring out of my heart and I have no doubt that for some of you when you became Christians, you know what that's like as well. It's not because my experience was unique or special, this is just what it means to be a Christian. The Spirit who is peace takes up residence within us.

So and all of a sudden, the discord and the strife and the antagonism no longer even seems attractive to a true Christian because the discord and strife that marked the conflict of our world is different; it is in conflict with what we are by very nature. We're no longer comfortable in that environment of contention because it's contrary to the very person that we've been born again to be. So what I want you to see is that part of being born again, of being a Christian, of God making you new, is that you come into line with this principle of peace before you even really begin to understand it and then when you read Scripture and you see the theme of peace woven throughout its pages, you start to say, "Aha, that's what I need to even more move my life toward." So here we are as we were once sinners under the judgment of God and in hostility toward him and now we find ourselves, through no merit of our own, through an act of God upon our souls, of God being genuinely kind and gracious to us and bringing us to saving faith in Christ and placing that principle of his Spirit, that new nature, that principle of peace deep in our hearts, and we realize, "I don't deserve this. This is so good and so sweet and I don't deserve what God has done. I am unworthy of this and yet here I am."

And you read a little further in the New Testament and you realize something really important that maybe was presented to you before you became a Christian, maybe it wasn't, but the principle of self-denial is at the core of being a Christian. Jesus says, "If any man wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow after me," so that there is an act of self-denial as we come to Christ, as we receive him in peace, and now here's what you've got, here's what you have as a Christian. You know, a

Christian is somebody who has denied himself in the sense that he is no longer oriented toward insisting on his own rights because he denied himself when he came to the cross, right? When we came to the cross, when we came to the Savior, when we came to our Lord Jesus Christ, we came to one who had already embodied perfectly self-denial. He denied himself and left of the glories of heaven to come down, ultimately to go to a cross. Well, we come in self-denial to one who denied himself for our sake and so you've taken away this self-centered approach to life in principle, you've received a gracious peaceful spirit, well, all of a sudden things are completely reoriented and here's all of this leading up to this point that I want to make. I realize I haven't gotten to any points in my message yet but don't let that concern you. People like that, people who are Christians in the sense that we've described here, when you understand the sense of what it means to be a Christian, what God does and what our response is like to Christ, beloved, here it is, alright, here's the point: people who are truly like that are people who are going to leave peace in their wake. As they move forward through life as those who have denied themselves and taken up their cross and followed Christ, as those who have an indwelling Spirit who is a peaceful Spirit, as we follow the Prince of Peace, as we have been radically changed into somebody that we once were not but now we are, people like that are going to leave peace in their wake. It is fundamental to the essence of being a Christian. And so we know the peace of God in our souls and peace spreads from our lives into the lives of others. That is just the way it is. That's the way that it should be.

Now, we intuitively recognize this even if we don't think about it consciously. If the topic has somehow escaped us as we have gone through our Bibles, if the topic has escaped us, still we intuitively understand this as people who are born again. As a young Christian, I went to a friend's house to have a Bible study with him and a few other people. His dad was a prominent man in our church, not our church here at Truth Community; this was many, many years ago and this was not Grace Community Church, just so you know, it predates all of that. His dad was influential in our church and so I arrived at the appointed time, maybe a minute or two early, and walked up to the glass door, the main door was open and so I could see into the house and see into their living area as I'm approaching the door and getting ready to knock. And as I am just about to knock, I look in and I see on the stairway my friend underneath his 6'2" father while his father is raining his fists down upon his son. I had been a Christian maybe three years at that point. I didn't need a lesson in doctrine to understand at that moment that that is wrong in the sense that it's not just a matter of physical abuse, that's not even the point that I'm making; the point is that here is a prominent man in an evangelical church professing to be a model of Christian living and he's on top of his son beating him with his fists. The point here for us today is that you and I intuitively, implicitly understand that that is not what Christlike living is like. We understand that whatever else is going on in that situation, whatever else is happening, a man who leads with his fists is not a peacemaker in his home. Whatever else we say about that situation, that is totally contrary to the spirit of what it means to be a Christian. We intuitively understand that, at least we should. If that's not immediately obvious, we've got to come back to the Gospel ultimately. I never learned what that dispute was but I could never see that man in the same way again.

You know that that is far outside the realm of godly behavior. We would mourn over the lack of peace that that kind of sin represents. It doesn't matter what the provocation was. None of that matters. We're talking about the essence. I mean, to be a Christian, to be a Christian doing this to your own flesh and blood no less, what we have to see, the whole point of this for us here today is to say that we would reject even granting the label Christian to something like that because it's so contrary to the Spirit that we have received. That it is so contrary, I mean, it is the exact opposite of Christ, isn't it? Christ did not come and beat, Christ came and was beaten for us. So we mourn over that. We grieve over that and we understand it. That's my point. You understand. I don't have to exegete anything for you to say, "That is not Christian."

Now what may not be as immediately obvious to you, what we may not be immediately as able to articulate, it's one thing to say it in a negative sense, "That is not Christ. That is not of Christ," but what may not be as immediately easy for us to do is to define the positive side, to define it in positive terms why it is that peace and harmony must necessarily be present in the life of the true Christian. The nature of Christianity itself calls for something different as we have seen and this is what I want to just kind of bring out for you from Scripture here today. I want to show you four different aspects of the person and the work of Jesus Christ that inevitably make a true Christian a peacemaker; that inevitably make us people of peace; people that aspire after peace; people that don't enjoy conflict for conflict's sake. And what we're going to see here is that this is all bound up in who our Savior is. It's not a matter of abstract moral values that to fight is bad or, you know, we're not talking about such superficial things as don't be selfish and don't hit your family members. It's so much more than that. What I want you to see is that when we grab hold of this topic of peace and we start to pull the rope in to bring it closer to ourselves, what we find is that we're pulling Christ ever closer to us; that this concept of peace is so thoroughly completely wrapped around him that as we pull on the rope of peace, as it were, we find suddenly that we have brought Christ into our midst and that it is because of who Christ is and because of what Christ has done that this concept of peace becomes the defining aspect of what it means to be a Christian. So we're going to look at four aspects of this here this morning in the time that we have remaining.

First of all, we want to consider this from the perspective of the person of Christ. The person of Christ and we already saw one of the passages that we want to look at. You should still be in Ephesians 2. We looked at this last time so I won't spend any time here, but just to remind you and to kind of bring us back into the text here this morning. Jesus Christ himself in his very person is peace personified. He is the incarnation of peace. He is the manifestation of peace. Peace permeates who he is and we see it there in Ephesians 2:14 where it says, "He Himself is our peace." It's not that Christ is peaceful, although that's true, it's a statement beyond that. He himself is our peace. He himself is our reconciliation. He himself is our harmony.

Turn back to Isaiah 9:6. I alluded to it earlier without actually having you turn to the text. Isaiah 9:6, a prophecy about the incarnation of our Lord; the reason we sang about the child being born this morning is because that is a scriptural concept to celebrate. Isaiah 9:6, "A child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest

on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." Beloved, as you contemplate the glory and the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we contemplate the glory of his incarnation as Isaiah prophetically said it 700 years before Christ was born, look at the titles that are parallel to one another in its description of Christ. Wonderful Counselor, lofty. Mighty God, that's a sovereign declaration of who Christ is. This Son that will be born is mighty God. He is the eternal Father and here's the point for today: side-by-side with that, with those lofty designations of the deity of our Lord, is the concept that he is the Prince of Peace. Parallel to his deity is this emphasis on the peace that is central to his character. The Prince, the ruling authority of peace and harmony. The point is that quite apart from you and me, quite apart from our lives, before we were born and after we are gone, completely independent of us, Jesus Christ is the Lord of peace, the Prince of Peace. He himself is our peace. So when we're talking about this concept of peace, I want you to start your thinking at the right place and forget about the conflict in your life and just look at the Lord that you own, the Lord that knows you, the Lord that saved you and to realize that central to him is this principle of peace.

So when you received Christ, when God saved you and brought you to himself, when you received Christ into your life, beloved, understand what happened here and understand that we're talking about something supernatural and biblical, not simply an earthbound concept of getting along with one another. This transcends that. When you received Christ, you were brought into an intimate spiritual union with him such that Jesus parallels it to his life coursing through us spiritually is like the physical Jews that the vine extends to the branch. The same life principle that animates the vine, animates the branch and therefore brings fruit therefore in the same way, Jesus says, you've been brought into union with me and if you're brought into union with Christ, then the very defining principle of who he is starts to course through you as well. Your nature becomes more and more conformed to that sense of peace. You have deep in your heart, deep in your inner man, this principle that defines Christ now becomes a defining principle of who you are as a Christian.

So, beloved, when that happens, when you're brought into a union like that, when the hose, so to speak, has been connected to the faucet and the valve is opened up and water flows through the hose, so in the same way when you are brought into union with Christ, the valve of peace has been opened and that starts to pour into and through your life. That is a defining nature of every true Christian without exception. There is no such thing as a Christian who is totally foreign to the concept of peace if he has been brought into union with Christ, and that's not because of who you are or I am. It has nothing to do with us, it has everything to do with who Christ is. He takes us, he indwells us and therefore who he is starts to animate and define and characterize who we are. It has to be that way because of who Christ is. So the person of Christ inevitably makes us peacemakers and peace lovers as true Christians.

Timeout. Does your life know something of that peace? Do you know something about having your character transformed into a peace loving person, something where you're more at home with peace than you are with conflict? Do you know something about that?

Because this is what's true of a Christian without exception. So as we consider the concept of peace, it brings us right to the defining question of your eternity. Have you put your faith in Christ for salvation? Because it all starts right here. Christ came on a mission of reconciliation to reconcile sinners to God, to make peace between sinners and a holy God. If we partake in that saving person who does that, than peace is going to be reflected in our lives.

Secondly, not just the person of Christ but the work of Christ. The work of Christ guarantees this outcome, guarantees that true peace will be a defining mark of a Christian. The Prince of Peace came and did a work of peace. Christ was making peace when he was on earth so it's the person of Christ and the work of Christ, just to make sure I'm getting my outline out there. Those who have been justified by faith in the blood of Christ have peace and manifest peace because that was the whole design of the atonement was to bring about peace.

Look at Colossians. Actually, go first to Romans 5. We'll try to go in canonical sequence here. Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." We have peace with God. We have been declared righteous in his sight. We are no longer the objects of his wrath. This is describing an objective peace that is brought about when someone becomes a Christian and notice there in verse 2, our Lord Jesus Christ through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace. We enter through the door into true salvation. We enter through a door who is himself peace. The only outcome possible would be peace.

Look down at verse 5, "hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Father, Son and Holy Spirit, stated here in these five versus; this is a Trinitarian work that's being discussed here. Verse 6, "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly." Verse 8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Now that we are justified, we have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ and as I was saying earlier, the Spirit poured out in our hearts guarantees that this work not only begins but it continues. This is an enduring aspect of what it means to be a true Christian. It is inevitable. It is a spiritual certainty. And so we must insist upon it and not tolerate the concept that a man who could beat his son, going back to my illustration earlier, is entitled to carry the name Christian with him. That's a call for serious profound repentance because, not just because you shouldn't do that, that's incidental to my point here today, it's because it's such a violation of Christ who is the Prince of Peace, who did a work of peace, who brought us into peace. You see, we're defining this vertically, not horizontally. We're defining this in relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ and so that kind of attacking, contentious mentality is a total violation and transgression against the very person of who Christ is and that's why it's so sinful and

so wrong and why we discussed this is to see how it must be different for us as believers in Christ.

Look over Colossians 1:19, "it was the Father's good pleasure." Colossians 1:19. If you ever want to make me pause, even if you already know the text, just crinkle the page of your Bible because I think, "Okay, somebody needs to catch up with me," and if you want me to pause, just crinkle your Bible and that will usually do it because I want you to see the text for yourself, you understand that. Colossians 1:19, "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him," all the fullness of deity dwelling in our Lord Jesus Christ. Look over at chapter 2, verse 9, just to see that that's what Paul has in mind, "in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." All of the fullness. All of the measure of the Godhead dwelling in the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 20, going back to Colossians 1 now, verse 20, "through Him," through Christ, that is, "to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." Only point here in this passage for right now is that in defining the work of Christ and going right to the cross to that self-sacrifice of the Son of God, it's defined in terms of peace. He is making peace. He is reconciling things to himself. This is defining. This is fundamental. The person of Christ, the Prince of Peace, the cross of Christ, the work of peace. If we have come through the cross, if we have come through the man, the God-man, the Lord Jesus Christ, we're coming through the doors that have peace written on the mantle above them. Peace. Peace. Peace. So the person and the work of Christ inevitably turn the true Christian into a peacemaker, someone who defined at his core has this concept of peace, absence of conflict, harmony.

Thirdly, the person of Christ, the work of Christ, this is a sweet one. They're all sweet to us who love God's word, aren't they? Point 3: the gift of Christ. The gift of Christ. Jesus Christ as part of his gracious gift to us, his loving concern for us that it might be well with us and well with our soul, Jesus Christ gives peace in contrast to the things of this world; in contrast to the conflict that the world brings, Christ says, "I give peace."

Turn to the Gospel of John chapter 14, if you would. John 14, beginning in verse 25. Actual, go over to verse 1 just for a moment to help set the context. John 14:1 because this helps establish things. Jesus speaking to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." Precious passage of Scripture, "Don't let your heart be troubled."

Now we're shifting here to the concept of subjective internal peace. Look at what he says in John 14:26 as he speaks about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Here again you see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a Trinitarian work on behalf of the people of God. Verse 26, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." So the Father since the Spirit, and the Spirit does his work. He'll bring all things to remembrance to your mind and what's the first thing that Christ says? Verse 27. After what a great

introduction, the Father, the work of the Holy Spirit, here's what he's going to bring to remembrance things to you. First on the agenda Jesus says, verse 27, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." Jesus says, "Part of my gift to you as one of my disciples is this principle of peace. I impart my peace to you. I give my peace to you to replace the turmoil that animated your heart when you belonged to the world." This is a gift from Christ that we acknowledge, that we enjoy, that we cultivate.

Look at John 16, "These things I have spoken to you," my discourse is about done. He's going to pivot toward prayer now in John 17 and begin praying to the Father, and so his discourse is finished and he is going to pivot and start praying to his Father now, and what does he end up this discourse with in John 16:33? Why did you say all of these things? Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." He says, "My beloved disciple, man of God, woman of God, young person of God, understand that I understand that as you walk through this world there is going to be turmoil that assaults you from without but don't be discouraged. Don't be disheartened. Take courage. Rest in me. Know that the whole reason I spoke these things to you was so that you would have peace that transcends all of that." If I had a voice, I'd start singing,

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul."

This is defining. This is fundamental. This is not peripheral. This engages the very environment in which we live. It is extraordinarily practical and Christ, our Lord, Christ, our Captain, Christ, our Savior, Christ, our peace, says, "I give this to you." "Lord Jesus, do you mean to tell me that as I'm bounced about on the waves of this world and people reject me like they rejected you, people despise me like they despised you, people contend with me like they contended with you, that the very peace that animated you and sustained you through your incarnation, do you mean to tell me that that is the gift that you have given to dwell within my own heart?" "Yes. That's exactly what I say. In me you may have peace." John 14:27, "My peace I give to you." He didn't give us the cut-rate version that you might get at the Dollar General store. No, no, he went to Fort Knox and drew upon his own possession of the gold of peace and delivered it and handed it over to us. His peace, not a secondary cheap imitation. The peace that sustained Christ is the peace that reigns in the heart of a believing Christian and now we appropriate it and bring that to light. Peace in this sense is the absence of a troubled heart. Peace in this sense is the absence of fear. Peace in this sense is courage and calm and overcomes discouragement. Jesus could say, "My heart is deeply troubled within me," and yet there was a prevailing, animating principle of peace that prevailed even over that. And for you, beloved, as a Christian, that's what Christ has given to you to dwell in your heart as well and the troubles and the tossing and turning of life, this is the gift that he gives. This is what he has promised. This is why we can lay our head on a pillow at night and go to sleep because Christ, our Prince of Peace, the Prince of Peace, has given us peace as a

gift as part of the inestimable wonder of the free salvation that he gave to us when we were born again.

Now, I've got a fourth point here that I want to summarize to set the stage for it. Our Lord is a person of peace. Our Lord did a crowning, defining work on the cross which was the pivot point of time that Scripture calls a work of peace and now he says, "In salvation I impart to you this principle of peace even to your own heart and to your own inner man and to your own disposition as this reigning principle of peace." The value of this is astounding. It cannot be measured, that the mighty God, Prince of Peace, on parallel terms and Jesus says, "From this position of authority over peace that I have, I impart this gift that dwells within me. I impart it to you as well." Wow. The inestimable, wonderful quality of that peace; this has eternal value and it's just given to us as a gift from he who himself was a gift.

Now, point 4 brings us, how do we know that this peace must be manifested in our lives? How do we know that we can't just partake of it for ourselves but then not share it in the lives and relationships that the Lord gives to us? How do we know that we can't receive with one hand and withhold with the other hand, in other words? Point 4 brings us to the command of Christ. The command of Christ. You see, the Prince of Peace has appointed us to be ambassadors of peace. He doesn't simply bless us with peace for our own selfish ends so that we inside could be untroubled while our lives bring conflict to those around us. You see, there is a continuity between what Christ gives us and what Christ commands from us. What we have received so freely, we are to give so freely. What he did in his work on our behalf, we now become those who work at that same thing. The command of Christ is consistent on this area of peace with the work that he did and with the gift that he gave and with the person that he is. It goes from beginning to end and all points in between as I hope to show you in just a moment. Over and over again, Scriptures command us to a life of peace. It is a command. The same Lord who is peace and gave us peace also commands us toward this peace. By virtue of his unparalleled, unchallenged, unquestionable authority, especially over his people by his authority which he intends for us to obey and to follow and respect and submit to, he commands us in this direction of peace as well. There is something for you to do in response.

Look at Romans 12:18. We'll look at about four passages here and then we'll bring things to a close. Romans 12:18 in the same book where Paul spoke that having been justified by faith we now have peace with God, in verse 16, Romans 12:16, Paul says, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you," here's a command, "be at peace with all men." There is a bit of a recognition there, isn't it, that we can't always have the peace that we would desire, but don't let the qualification empty the command of its meaning; the central command here is, "You be at peace with all men."

Look at chapter 14, verse 19. We'll just kind of let Scripture speak here for a couple of minutes. Romans 14:17. It's just everywhere. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking." Don't get caught up in different kinds of foods and drink. That's not what the

kingdom of God is about at all. It has nothing to do with that. Jesus declared all food clean. It's not about eating and drinking. The kingdom of God is not about those things. "What is it about then, Paul, I'd like to know? Don't just give me the negative, give me the positive instruction as well so that I could orient my life under the headship and the Lordship of this God who so graciously saved me and gave me peace. What is his kingdom about, Paul, as you write under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit?" "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things," it could be translated, "let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."

Beloved, understand and we're not making individual applications here yet. I just want you to see the totality, the force of the whole picture of who Christ is and what he has given us and now what it means to be a citizen of his kingdom. Paul says, the Bible says, "Don't focus on these externals. You be a people that are marked by righteousness and joy and peace. And since that's the defining nature of the kingdom of God, you pursue that. You be like that because that is what is acceptable to God." And when you're a Christian, what's acceptable to God ultimately is the only thing that matters to you in life. Nothing else matters than to be found pleasing to this one who has so graciously dealt with your soul. Do you get that? Do you understand it? That we are living out a response of peace not because the people around us necessarily deserve peace from us, we're motivated by something vertical, not something horizontal; motivated not by the merit of the person beside us but by the glory and the merit and the worth of the one who saved us. Our motivation in this area of peace is entirely vertical.

Look at Hebrews 12:14. And as we are reviewing this, let me just remind you where I started. I haven't moved off of where I started. It's my joy as a pastor to preach a message like this to a people that I know to be marked by this kind of peace. This is to deepen and affirm you, not to rebuke and scold you, but we have to understand what it means to be a Christian if we're going to live like one. Hebrews 12:14, "Pursue peace with all men." Pursue peace with all men. Do you know why I have lost interest in politics? I can't pursue peace with all men if politics is what defines my life view and what I want out of life. Do you understand that? Do you understand why politics is a deadly minefield for Christians to get their minds wrapped up in? Politics is about conflict. It's about me getting what I want over what you want. And if I don't get what I want, I'll protest or whatever. How can you be a peacemaker, how can you pursue peace with all men if that's your defining ambition in this earthly life? How could that be? "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."

1 Peter 3:8. Boy, you just see it in Paul, you see it in Hebrews, you see it in Peter, you see it across these different biblical writers. You see it on the lips of Jesus. Do you know what? It must be important. Do you know what else? You know there is something else that we should be mindful of right here. If this is emphasized so many times by so many writers in Scripture, do you know what must be true? We must be prone especially to failure in this area. If Scripture continually reminds us and continually points us to this,

we must be weak and vulnerable here. So we're reminded, it's brought to our attention again and again and again through the word of God.

1 Peter 3:8, "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing." Here's the purpose of your calling. Here's why you're a Christian. Here's why God saved you. And what does he say after he says here's the purpose? "For," flowing out of what I just said, "the one who desires life, to love and seek good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it."

So, beloved, we're going to talk about peace more next week and practically how can we work some of these things out in our lives. What I want you to see this morning is this: is that Christian character, the essence of being a Christian, woven into the fabric of what it means to be born again, to be a child of God, to belong to Christ, Christian character is fundamentally about peace. Peace with God, restored harmony through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, no longer his enemy but now his friend, because Christ has reconciled us though we were sinners to a holy God, reconciled us through his righteousness and his shed blood. Christian character is fundamentally about that and it is also fundamentally about peace with men. It is commanded. The same Lord who spilled his blood is the same, and that we trust in and that we love and we say, "That's my salvation is right there." The same Lord who did that is the same one who commands, "Be at peace with all men. You seek peace and pursue it. As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Jonathan Edwards said this and I quote, "The Scripture knows no true Christians of a selfish and contentious spirit. Nothing can be a greater absurdity than a hard, spiteful, true Christian." He said in two lines better than what I said in the past hour.

Now, beloved, I realize that for some of us, this hits really close to home, that words like this are convicting over how life has unfolded in you over the past week or so, but when the Spirit of God trains the arrow and let's the bow go and the arrow hits your heart, don't dodge it. Let it make its bull's-eye. God convicts us in these things so that he would change us and make us more into the image of what he wants us to be. Don't adopt a self-defensive posture in response to the word of God. Have the integrity before the Lord to say, "I have fallen short here. I need to make some changes here."

In light of that, reminding me one more time that I speak to you as a pastor who loves you and prays for you, one who is in need of grace on this very point myself, let me ask you with that spirit: what is your home life like? Would your family describe you as a basically peaceful man or a peaceful woman? Are they more likely to see your hands folded up in prayer for them or clenched in a fist against them? What would your business contacts say about you, the people that you work with? What is your first impulse when someone differs with you? Do you tense up and get ready for the fight or is your first impulse to diffuse and to make peace? It gets that practical and I realize that in some relationships there is a lot of accumulated time and a lot of accumulated things that go into some of the reactions that you have but, beloved, you've got to look past that.

You've got to transcend. You've got to look at this not through the prism of whose face is on the other side of conflict. You've got to look up and say, "This is the person and work of the Prince of Peace who has given me so much and who commands me toward this." And let that dislodge you from the inertia, the spiritual inertia that has tolerated, you've tolerated in your life that contentious, selfish spirit, and excused it. You see, Scripture doesn't leave us there. Scripture convicts us in order that we might repent, that we might turn away from that. And if you've mastered the principles of peace, then great, you know, help someone beside you learn it as well.

This is defining, you see that, right? This is defining. This utterly sets the agenda for what kind of people we would be in the remaining years that the Lord has given us. And if the conviction is really strong right now as I'm guessing for some of you it is, remember that Christ came because he is gracious. Christ came because he loves you. Christ came to be a reconciler between you and God. That Christ will receive your confession of sin willingly, gladly and graciously cleanse you when you come with the spirit that says, "Lord, I've been so wrong. God, my life has been the opposite of what it should be in this or that relationship. Forgive me, O God." And then humble yourself far enough to go to the point, to go to the person and say, "I'm sorry. I should not have said that. I should not have done that. I should not have been this way these past many years." Humble yourself all that way. Don't spare yourself. Let the Spirit have that cleansing, sanctifying work that his word calls you to here today so that you might manifest the true fruit of what it means to be a child of the Prince of Peace; so that you might honor this one, this Prince, who came down and spread his hands out for you. Let the power, let the person of who Christ is, the wonder of what he's done and that he did it for you in your unworthy state, let that dislodge you from the pride that would keep you from simply doing the right thing in response. We do this for Christ, not because it feels good. We reconcile because it honors the great reconciler of whom I receive the benefits of reconciliation, for his sake, respond. And even if the person next to you is unworthy of it, so to speak, you and I were never worthy of what Christ did for us, were we? That's irrelevant. That's irrelevant. We look into the face of our Lord and say, "Yes, Lord. Yes, I see in your face peace. O God, just like when Moses received the law, how the glory of that just carried over in his countenance, O God, let the transcendent grace and peace as I look upon my Lord Jesus Christ spill out of my life as well. And Father, help me so that my past failures would not define my future as well. O God, let it be the defining principle of peace from my Lord that defines my future henceforth and forevermore."

Beloved, we need to love Christ enough to set aside our conflict, to be makers and doers of peace. Pursue peace with all men. This is a central part of what it means to live the Christian life.

Let's bow in prayer.

Father, help us as we take a moment of quiet and reflect on these things, to be tender and receptive to the work of your Spirit and where you have put your finger on an aspect of our life that we have not dealt with, help us to deal with it today. Lord, let's not hesitate in our obedience before you. Help us to that end, we pray. Father, I thank you that you

brought together a people in this body that so evidently love and value peace, it flows out of their lives but, Father, we live in a fallen world. We're not yet perfected. We've been affected and we've given to contribute to the aspect of that fallen world and we understand, Father, that in our own human power and our own human pride, it's impossible to get beyond it and so we ask you to have mercy on us, to cleanse us from our sins. May those who are genuinely born again Christians, Father, rest in the forgiveness of Christ as they confess their sins to you and may we walk away from here encouraged and renewed in the pursuit of peace, knowing that by the power of God, by the power of your Spirit, that yesterday does not have to define tomorrow for us. So Father, here we are, your people. Here we are, the children of the Prince of Peace. Here we are, help us to live that out as we should. Lord, we pray in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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