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How Do I Experience PEACE this Christmas?

John 14:27; Romans 5:1-2, Philippians 4:6-7; Matthew 5:9

Sunday, December 22, 2019

Pastor Sean Cole

Opening: One of the longest and bloodiest wars in Europe was the Thirty Years War. This was a very sad period in the history of Central Europe because it centered on religion. In central Europe, there was a relative time of peace where individual territories had the freedom to be either Catholic or Protestant. When Ferdinand II became King, he was intolerant of Protestants and tried to impose Roman Catholicism on the people. The northern Protestant states felt it was a violation of their rights. Needless to say, for thirty years—from 1618 to 1648—the Protestants fought the Catholics over power in Europe.

The Thirty Years War is considered one of the most destructive wars in human history with over 8 million deaths—not only from military battle, but from famine and the plague. 20% of the population of Germany died during this time.

The only other battle to see these many deaths was the last year of World War II.

Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Austria, and Bohemia (now the Czech Republic) battled for thirty years over control of central Europe and which group would have dominance—the Catholics under Ferdinand or the Protestants who wanted freedom of religion.

During this time there were massive witch hunts and persecutions in areas where many people were murdered. In addition, the pestilence and disease were one of the worst plagues Europe has ever seen.

Think about how sad it is that for thirty years, the majority of European nations fought over freedom of religion in one of the bloodiest wars in history.

In 1648, the Thirty Years War came to an end with the signing of the Peace of Westphalia.

The war came to an end with a peace treaty—a truce, an armistice. Peace after 30 years.

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent. We light the PEACE candle which is also known as the Angel's candle because of the message they announced to the shepherds.

Luke 2:13–14 ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

At Christmas, we here the slogan “Peace on earth!”

Isaiah 9:6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Yet, what exactly is peace? How can I experience peace this Christmas?

As you study the Scriptures, you find that the Bible gives us THREE descriptions of peace.

First, there is an objective peace WITH GOD that results from our salvation.

Read John 14:27

Jesus is leaving them a wonderful gift—HIS PEACE. Only Jesus can give this peace.

Now, we really need to understand this in the context of both the way the Jewish people would understand the word “peace” as well as what was going on in the government at that time.

First of all, Israel during this time is under the rule of the Roman Empire. If you go back and study history, you find out that Rome conquered most of the known world through military might and powerful armies and by invading and taking over.

Emperor Caesar Augustus led Rome to take over the world from around 30 B. C. to 14 A. D. Ironically, once Rome conquered the world it was called the *Pax Romana* or the “Roman Peace.” As a way to celebrate this conquest, Augustus erected the famous “altar of peace” to inaugurate this new era of peace and this altar still stands today in Rome.

For those disciples their concept of peace was a king coming in military strength and conquering and making people bow down to him to secure peace.

That is the exact opposite of how Jesus would bring peace. It would not come through military might or powerful conquest, but as the baby born in Bethlehem, who grew up as the spotless lamb of God dying on the cross for our sins.

That is probably why Jesus says that the world cannot give this peace. The world may promise you false peace, but because it is so cut-throat and selfish and prideful and sinful, the world cannot promise anything that resembles the true peace of Christ. It is a false peace.

Jeremiah 6:13–15 ¹³ “For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,” says the LORD.

The world says, “Cheat on your taxes and then you will know the peace of having that extra income to take that trip you’ve always wanted.”
And then late at night you get a gnawing in your stomach because you’re overcome with guilt.

The world says, “Stab your co-worker in the back and gossip about her and you will know the peace of getting a promotion and have it easy from here on out.”

Then two months later, the same thing happens to you and you get your reputation ruined at work.

The world says, “Go ahead and have sex with your girlfriend before marriage, after all you’re going to get married one day and you can experience the peace of being in love.”

And you sit alone with your thoughts reeling with guilt on the inside and you’re never at peace.

The world says, “Go into debt to have your American dream. You can always pay for things later, you need the peace of immediate gratification now.”

And 2 years later you have to go to debt counseling because you’re so overwhelmed and stressed as your marriage almost falls apart due to poor financial decisions.

The world may promise you a kind of “peace” but it will never deliver true peace.

In our 21st century selfish mindsets, what would we really want Jesus to give us? Money!
Worldly comforts! Temporary financial prosperity! Health!

Unfortunately, this is what many are selling today. They are selling financial prosperity and promising that you will never get sick or die of cancer if you just sow your seed into their ministry.

But Jesus promises to give us this sense of spiritual blessing and contentment and security that comes from having our sins forgiven and being in a right relationship with God.

Yet, secondly, these Jewish men understood the word “peace” as it was used in the Old Testament where we get the word “*shalom*.” The word “peace” that Jesus is referring to means more than just an absence of war, but it means something deeper.

Leon Morris has given a great definition of this word “*shalom*”: “It stands for spiritual well-being at the highest level, a prosperity of soul resulting from being in right relationship with God. Not just a feeling of calm, but the life-confidence of reconciliation with God.”¹

This was the *shalom* or peace that was promised in the Old Testament.

Numbers 6:24–26 The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

Psalms 29:11 May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Paul tell us about this objective peace WITH God in Romans:

Romans 5:1–2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Jesus gives us this objective peace that is not based upon feelings but upon fact.

By His death, burial, and resurrection He grants us the blessing of having our sins forgiven and having access to God to be in His grace so that we can be accepted and forever loved and righteous. We have the objective, absolute never to be taken away peace with God.

This assumes that before our salvation we were at “war” with God. We were enemies of God.

Romans 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

This verse says that we were enemies of God—this word actually means a hostile enemy, an arch enemy who hates God.

Most people don’t think of themselves as “enemies” of God that need to be reconciled to Him. To be reconciled means to be brought back into a right relationship of peace. To end the war. To bring a close to the conflict. To bring two estranged parties back together as one.

Romans 8:6–8 For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

¹Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 242.

In our flesh, that is those who are not saved or not Christians, their minds are hostile to God. There is a seething hostility against God because at the core of our beings, we don't want God to tell us how to live or what to believe. We want to be in charge. We don't want to submit to His laws. In fact, we cannot submit because we are dead in sins.

To reconcile means to bring together or restore after hostility. This word is only used by Paul in the New Testament.

God is the offended party. He is the one who we have sinned against in outrageous lawbreaking and rebellion. We are the ones who have declared war on God by our sin. The cross reconciles us to God. The cross gives us peace WITH God.

Ephesians 2:12–14 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility.

Notice the wording: Christ Himself IS our peace. How did this peace come? Through His blood on the cross. We were once strangers and alienated from God, but have been brought into an objective permanent relationship of being reconciled. We have peace WITH God.

Colossians 1:21–22 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

The first type of peace the Bible addresses is peace WITH God.

This peace comes from having your sins forgiven and being forever in a permanent position of acceptance before God through justification.

When you trust Christ for salvation, all of your sins are credited to Him and you will never have those sins counted against you. You are no longer under rightful condemnation.

In addition to your sins being credited to Jesus, there is another aspect to being declared righteous. When you trust Jesus for salvation, His perfect record of obedience is credited to you so that God can see you as if you had lived the life Jesus lived.

You are credited with Christ's righteous record and as a result, the Father can legally declare you not guilty on account of Christ.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

You have peace with God. This is an objective peace. This is a permanent peace. This is a peace that can never be taken away from you because it came as one-time gift from God when you trusted Jesus for salvation.

This lasting, objective peace with God should give you confidence to know that He accepts you. He has forgiven you. You can never be punished for your sins. You will never have to experience the condemnation of hell. This wonderful news.

This is the first and most important peace we must have. This objective peace is the basis for any other type of peace the Bible describes.

Second, there is the subjective peace OF GOD that results from prayer.

In John 14, Jesus here tells them not to have troubled hearts or to be afraid.

In those times when we doubt, or fear, or are stressed, or confused, or bothered, or anxious, Jesus gives us that subjective or experiential peace deep within our hearts that lets us know His presence.

Deuteronomy 31:6 ⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

Philippians 4:6–7 ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The opposite of peace is being anxious. Anxiety!

One thing we don't see in this passage is HOW and WHEN God answers prayer. All it says is that we will experience peace. God may not answer our prayers in the way that we think He should have. He may not answer our prayers in the timing that we think He should have. Our Father knows best.

Read Matthew 6:25–34

Jesus mentions the word “anxious” SIX times in this passage!

This is the beauty of prayer. We can go to our heavenly Father and make our requests known to Him. We can approach His throne of grace with help in time of need.

This subjective feeling or sense of peace is grounded in the foundation of our justification or acceptance by God in Christ.

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

So in a sense, this peace is something you stand in at all times due to your justification. But this peace is also a subjective sense of joy and calm and contentment that Christ gives you experientially.

You need this peace because you get anxious!

2 Thessalonians 3:16 ¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

But yet regardless of our circumstances, He does promise to grant us this unusual peace, which will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

The word “guard” is a military term implying that peace stands on duty to keep out anything that brings care or anxiety.

1 Peter 5:6–7 ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

So the first type of peace the Bible describes is peace WITH God—that objective peace that comes from our being justified freely by His grace. We are in a permanent position of acceptance and forgiveness and access to God.

This should give us great confidence and assurance of our salvation. This peace does not depend upon how we feel, but on the objective reality and truth of what Christ has accomplished to give us peace.

In addition, the second type of peace the Bible describes is the peace OF God—that subjective feeling or deep sense of peace that comes after times of prayer and seeking God’s guidance. This should also give us great encouragement that God cares us about us.

Third, there is the relational peace with OTHERS that results from being peacemakers.

We can be very self-centered with our peace if we’re not careful and think it’s all about us.

Our salvation is personal, but never private. Our salvation is individual, but to be lived out with others in healthy relationships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us the Beatitudes which describe the person who has been saved by grace and displays the fruit of the Spirit in God’s Kingdom.

Read Matthew 5:9

What is a peacemaker? It is person marked by humility and gentleness, as opposed to arrogance and cockiness.

Proverbs 13:10 By insolence comes nothing but strife, but with those who take advice is wisdom.

We don't often use that word "insolence" but here's what it means: Being arrogant and presumptuous. Being cocky and trying to force your way through pride. It means having an inflated view of yourself and this is not characteristic of a peacemaker.

A peacemaker seeks wisdom. He or she listens to advice and moves slowly.

Proverbs 20:3 It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.

It is an honor to be a peacemaker. It defines who we are as Christians. Our very character is one of humility, gentleness, and peace.

Ephesians 4:1–3 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul tells us that one of the ways that we walk in a manner worthy of our calling as Christians is that we maintain unity and seek peace. We are marked by humility and gentleness and patience. We are peacemakers.

A peacemaker seeks godly wisdom. A peacemaker is a gentle, humble, meek, Spirit-controlled child of God by his or her very nature. It is our character to be a peacemaker because of our attitude of peace.

To truly be a peacemaker you have to be free from SELF. A peacemaker has been given a new heart by God and is delivered from self-interest, self-pleasure, and self-focus.

A peacemaker cannot be arrogant or so wrapped up in himself or herself that you think you are the center of the universe. A peacemaker thinks outside of SELF and sees the reality of who we truly are. Sinners saved by grace who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to display the fruit of the Spirit.

Not only is being a peacemaker an attitude that is part of our nature or character as a believer, but is also an active desire to actually attempt to make peace. That's what the word implies—you desire to make peace. You attempt to make peace. You are seeking situations that are hostile or out of control or divisive or war-like and you want desperately to make peace out of those situations.

Psalms 34:14 ¹Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Romans 12:18 ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 ...Be at peace among yourselves.

Hebrews 12:14 ¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Are you a peacemaker? Do you seek to bring people who are at odds with one another back into a reconciled relationship.

So we've seen three types of peace in the Bible:

First, a peace WITH God that results from being saved, forgiven, and accepted by God. This type of peace is permanent.

Second, the peace OF God that results from prayer and seeking God's guidance. This type of peace is an internal sense of confidence the Holy Spirit gives you during times of anxiety.

Third, the relational peace with others where you strive to be a peace maker and seek healthy, loving relationships.

How do you experience peace this Christmas?

First of all, you will never experience true peace unless you have trusted Christ to forgive you of your sins and give you that objective peace WITH God. Turn to Jesus in faith and believe He died on the cross and rose again and can forgive your sins. Call upon Him to save you and grant you that peace.

Second, many of you may be anxious or worried or discontent this Christmas with so many things on your mind and issues facing your life. You are tied up in knots.

Cast all your cares upon Jesus. Seek His face in prayer. Ask Him to give you the peace that passes understanding.

Third, some of you may have some difficult relationships where you are having conflict or irreconciled differences. Your family is at war or you're in a negative situation with a co-worker or even a spouse.

I could simply tell you to be a peacemaker and just get busy about doing your job of being a good Christian this Christmas and get along.

I could do that and then you would think it's all up to you to muster up enough strength within you to handle these problems and be a good peacemaker.

But I'm not going to do that to you. You don't need to hear how you need to be better. You need to hear the good news of the gospel.

Hebrews 13:20–21 ²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The God of peace who sent Jesus to die on the cross and shed His blood and then rise again, promises to do something for us. He promises to EQUIP us. With what?

Everything good to do His will.

And we are not left to ourselves to somehow do it in our own power. God promises to equip us by working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.

We can have the confidence that as we live the Christian life and approach Christmas and we launch into 2020 and we face whatever trials and issues come our way, the God of peace will be working in us and equipping us and empowering us and not leaving us to ourselves.

And to what end? What is the goal of this? Why does God do anything God does?

To the glory of Jesus Christ! It's all about His glory.

Do you have peace WITH God?

Do you have the peace OF God?

Do you have peace with others?

If not, call upon the God of Peace who can give this peace to you. Ask the Prince of Peace, King Jesus, to give you this peace.

Let's hear Jesus' words again and let them give us hope today:

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.