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‘THE PEACE OF GOD’

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‘There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked’, exclaims Isaiah the prophet twice over!, as, out of the anguish of his heart for his people’s backsliding, he exposes the state of moral corruption they had reached. In vivid metaphor he describes it: ‘The wicked are like the troubled sea, for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up dirt and mire’.

But God was patient and merciful. So that in chapter 27:5 the prophet is given a message of promise, of comfort and restoration: ‘Let him (Israel) take hold of my strength (cf. 25:4), *that he may make peace with Me*’. And in the next verse he sets forth a wonderful prediction of future blessing: ‘Israel shall blossom and bud; and they shall fill the face of the earth with fruit’. But the fundamental necessity for Israel, and for the Gentiles, is to come into the full realization of what Peace with God, and the Peace of God, really imply. In other words, what it really means to the individual as well as to the collective company of believers. Peace with God and the Peace of God are profound realities, and the divine objective in Redemption is to turn men’s hearts in the right direction of obtaining them.

Centuries have passed since that prophecy was uttered, but time does not count with the Most High: ‘A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night’ (Ps. 90:4). Israel will be restored to her allegiance to God. Not only so but the Church of God, the whole company of the redeemed both Jew and Gentile will also enjoy the eternal felicity of peace because redeemed by the *precious blood of Christ*.

There is a third reference which provides not merely an encouragement to faith but a stimulus to active personal effort, to be maintained in face of every hindrance—see 1 Thessalonians 5:23. 'Now he God of Peace sanctify you wholly; and your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord' (R.V.). It is the apostle's fullest reference to the 'tri-unity' of man's personality: 'spirit' (Gk. *pneuma*) is the constituent which enables us to apprehend our relation to the things of God; to know the will of God the mind of God. It is that which makes it possible for us to worship God in spirit and in truth. The soul (Gk. *psuche*) combines the intellect, the affections and the will. To be 'spiritually minded', therefore, involves the active functioning of both spirit and soul in complete unison, and both under the control of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, Paul describes the natural mind, heart and will alienated from God in Eph. 4:17-19, which are the objective of the Devil's evil designs. But when the God of Peace is given free access by the regenerating and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit. He makes the whole personality to function according to His own blessed will and purpose.

But let us turn now to consider the other aspect of the subject, which we might term the subjective, namely, the enjoyment and blessing accruing in *the possession of the Peace of God*. Here also there are three most prominent references.

1. Philippians 4:7. '*The Peace of God* which passeth all understanding shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus' (R.V.). Here we see the *Peace of Defence*.

Look for a moment at J. B. Phillip's rendering: 'Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer, and *the Peace of God*, which transcends human understanding, will *keep constant guard over your hearts and minds* as they rest in Christ Jesus'. Here surely is the divine Sentry on guard continuously and effectually—IF (N. B. it is an important IF) we put our whole personality and our affairs into His keeping. Here is our defence against hidden dangers, lurking doubts, corroding despair, and the shame of defeat.

But also notice the three-fold '*shall*' of the apostle's statement (vs. 7, 9, 19): first of course is '*shall guard*' (v. 7); the literal translation is even more striking: '*shall garrison your hearts*'. God's garrisoning grace and power are not so much a matter of 'place', or 'power' but a *state of soul within*, where the Holy Spirit's Presence means *Peace!*

That is verified in verse 9, where the next '*shall*' occurs: '*The God of Peace shall be with you!*' (also see Rom. 15:33). And as if to complete the picture of the glory of divine generosity in all its lavish grace, Paul declares: 'And my God shall fulfil *every need of yours* according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus' (v. 19).

2. Turn now to Colossians 3:15. 'Let the Peace of God rule in your hearts, to which ye were called in one body; and be thankful.' Here the reference is to the collective body of believers as a whole or in separate assemblies. In all such congregations unity of purpose and action are essential, for the blessing and felicity of all concerned. Here we have

'The Peace of Decision'

The word 'rule' has rather the meaning of 'arbitrate'; or even 'preside': Not as a judge, but rather as an inward principle controlling, sustaining, encouraging, so that there shall be no schism in the Body. Such a disposition of Peace also holds out help for the individual soul who may be disposed to doubt, or fear, or be tempted to vacillate between two opposed lines of action, or ways of living. In other words, it is a 'determinative factor' in building up of a strong, united testimony within the body of the Church; or in the every-day life of the family circle; or in the varied life of the business world, where we have to rub shoulders with men and women who have no fear of God in their hearts. This can be seen by a careful reading of the subsequent passages of the chapter.

In verses 16, 17, the reference is primarily to the body of believers meeting together in united assembly or church testimony and fellowship. The foundation of such an effective testimony is the Living and the Written Word—not the one without the

other. In verses 18 to 25 the reference is to our daily routine of life, in which the supreme motive for all and every type of service for the Christian is: *Whatsoever ye do, work from the soul* ('heartily') *as unto the Lord*, and not (merely) as unto men; knowing that *from the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance: 'ye serve the Lord Christ'*; and that being so, *'Let the Peace of God rule in your hearts'* therefore, and the God of Peace shall truly be with us!

3. Finally there is the

'The Peace of Self-Discipline'

seen in Ephesians ch. 6:15. The whole context of verses 10 to 18 should be read in this connection. 'Stand therefore . . . having shod your feet with the preparation (or "equipment", R. V. marg.) of the Gospel of Peace'.

The Apostle is here concerned not so much with the idea of progress and conquest—although these objectives are intimately related to the subject, but with the imperative necessity of steadfastness of purpose to reach the objective in view, namely victory and fruitfulness in life testimony. The scene is filled with the marshalled hosts of the Evil One, bent on dislodging the individual soul and the church at large from the one possible vantage ground of life and power, viz., union and communion with the Lord Himself.

The whole chapter revolves around this point. It opens with an appealing word to the family circle of home life (vs. 1-4): Then such as serve within that sphere (vs. 5-9). There follows the appeal to the whole company of believers collectively and individually: 'Be strong in the Lord . . . Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to STAND!' This 'putting on' is a process of growth in character and disposition; a disciplining by the Holy Spirit within our own personality—our soul-life; including heart, mind and will. It is a ceaseless ministry: the Equipment arising out of our acceptance of the Gospel of Peace. Note the details somewhat, though *very* briefly.

Firstly there are the Truth-girded loins of integrity and sincerity, as the protection against the Enemy, *the Devil, as Liar*

(John 8:44). Next we note the Breastplate of divine righteousness to protect the heart from *the Accuser* (Eph. 6:11-18). Over all we have the shield of The Faith—it is both objective and subjective: the Promises of God for our succour and encouragement in His Word, which we become possessed of by personal faith in that Word: And then intimately related, the Sword of the Spirit, together with the holy *practice* of ‘praying at all seasons in the Spirit, keeping ever wakeful, watching thereunto in all perseverance. . . .’

The warfare may often be fierce, the work may seem hard and fruitless at times, the way to the Celestial City long and difficult, the succour and encouragement of fellow-travellers and brother-warriors fitful and tardy, the Devil may test our faith and our faculties in a variety of ways—but ‘the Peace of God which passeth all understanding will keep constant guard over your hearts and minds as they rest in Christ Jesus’; the ‘God of Peace shall be with you’; and ‘the God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly’!

AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN’S GOSPEL

(Continued)

Prof. F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1:19-12:50)

(c) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND BY THE LAKE
(John 4:45—6:71)

(iii) *The Father and the Son* (John 5:19-47)

Ch. 5, v. 30—*I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgement is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.*—From here to the end of the chapter Jesus speaks on the subject of witness—a subject which, as we have already seen (see note on John 1:7), is a main theme of this Gospel. It is introduced here by an assertion that the judgement which the Father has committed to the Son (vv. 22, 27 ff.) is executed righteously, because in judgement as in all His other activities the Son does not act independently of the Father, but