



In Christ I Am...At Peace

Main Thought

God is all about reconciliation and peace

“Peace.” Growing up as an Army brat, that word had significant personal meaning. If we were “at peace” it meant my dad was home. It meant no war. Hostilities had ceased. As a teenager in the '60s, it took on the meaning of “be cool, live and let live.” As a young mother, I saw peace redefined as the famous commercial slogan, “Calgon, take me away” to a place of no toddlers needing, no phone ringing, no dog barking, no food burning, quiet solitude. The Hebrew words “perfect peace” in Isaiah 26:3 are “shalom shalom,” a picture of peace upon peace; as the waves wash to the shore: just when one is subsiding, another wave comes, refreshing the peace that was given in the first wave, continuing endlessly.

Scripture

Ephesians 2:11–18 (NIV)

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man

out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Unpacking the Context

In Ephesus, there was not this kind of peace in the community of believers. There were two groups of people, previously separated by belief and nationality: Jews and Gentiles. Jews were a people who could physically trace their genetic heritage back to Abraham the Patriarch of their faith, through one of the 12 tribes of Israel (the 12 sons of Jacob, Abraham's grandson). They were also called "the circumcised" because the physical circumcision was an outward sign on Abraham's people, of the covenant God made with him and his descendants.

Gentiles were any other people who were not included in this genealogical heritage. Since Jews were called to be a separate people, set apart as God's own, they did not intermarry with other cultures or adopt the customs of those cultures. They remained separate. Because of this, they often looked down on other cultures as unclean, and wanted nothing to do with them. This created a distance between these people groups, becoming a barrier or wall separating their interactions.

But now, Paul comes preaching that Gentiles can have access to God as well. By believing in Jesus Christ as God's Son, Messiah sent to the world, these "unclean" peoples become the spiritual offspring of Abraham, sharing in the covenant and promises given previously to only the Jews. Even though these new believers worshipped with the believing Jews, there was a physical barrier, a wall, dividing the synagogue, the "m'chitza" keeping the Gentiles from the holy places.

But God is a God of reconciliation. He loves both groups, and intended that all those who believe in Him and accept Him as Lord, live in unity. He sent Jesus to lay down His life for the sake of saving all who would believe He is the Son of God, and accept him as Savior. In this belief, He "broke down the barrier which is the dividing wall" and joins the two groups together "in one body" which is the body of believers. He brings peace to those near (the Jewish believers) and peace to those far (the Gentile believers) by giving us all access to the Father.

Even as Christians today, we don't all "look alike," or come from the same background. We are all in different places of maturity in different areas in the process of our walk with Christ. Yet sometimes we are even more judgmental of each other than those outside the church. But God reminds us that we are, and are to operate, as one body, with Him as our "head."

For Discussion and Application

What part of “the body” do you see yourself as, and why?

Is there anyone in “the body” who is very different from you?

Do you feel any barriers between you?

If yes, how do you overcome these barriers so that you both benefit the body?

What does the word “peace” mean to you? Is it merely the absence of conflict? Or is there more to it? Give a definition.

Are you experiencing peace today?

What typically robs you of your peace, or is robbing you of your peace today?

Finding Peace

Often, when we don't feel at peace, it is because we are not truly trusting God. We wonder if He knows what's going on and is really in control. We fear He may not actually be aware of our circumstances. Or really care about us. We trust the world instead: the world's assessment of our situation, the world's view of our condition, and its solution, or lack of one.

I love acronyms, and made this up to remind me what peace stands for:

Possessing

Equilibrium

Amid

Chaotic

Events

Possessing equilibrium is a balance between Faith and Fear. Where faith exists, fear is cast out. Where there is fear, faith shrinks.

What was the last chaotic event in your life? How did you respond?

If it was in faith, praise God! Thank Him for carrying you through it and ask Him to continue to grow your faith. If it was leaning more towards fear, pray and ask Him how to give it over to Him, and to grow your faith.

Additional Study

Romans 12:18 “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

What does that mean?

What is your part in living at peace with everyone?

Do you feel that “IF it is possible...” lets you off the hook?

Paul goes on in Ephesians 4:25–6:18 to outline the YBH? (Yes, But How?) to live at peace. Draw a line down the center of a page. On the left, list things you see we are not to do. On the right, list things we are to do. For example in verse 4:25, “speak falsehood” would go on the left and “speak truthfully” on the right. Very shortly you will see a lot of what goes into living a life “at peace” with others—including our roles as husbands, wives, children, workers, and employers.

It may seem impossible to avoid all the things on the left side, but for most of the time, if you focus on doing the “right” thing, you won’t have the time or inclination to do the other. It’s like Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16L: “Walk by the Spirit and you won’t carry out the desires of the flesh.” They are opposites; if you do one, you will automatically not do the other.

Be encouraged! It’s not as hard as you think. Pray and ask God to give you a heart and the energy to do the “right” thing. You’ll be amazed how motivating a sense of peace can be as the Holy Spirit produces this fruit in your life.

For further insight on Peace

Go to <http://www.dare2share.org/devotions/got-peace/> and read the short *Picture of Peace* by Catherine Marshall.

For personal reflection on Reconciliation

With others:

Is there someone you need to be reconciled with?

What would it look like for you to make peace with them?

Pray and ask God to show you *if* and *when* and *where* and *how* to talk with them to reconcile your differences. You should only move forward if and how He directs. Jesus gives us a process in Matthew 18:15–17. But sometimes, offenses arise because a relationship was unhealthy to begin with and God may not choose to reestablish it. It is your task to forgive. You can also pray for them. If even these things are too difficult, speaking with a Christian Counselor can help.

With yourself:

It is hard to reconcile with others if you are not at peace with yourself. We are often harder on ourselves, feeding on guilt and remorse, and allowing bitterness to grow and ruin our lives. Do you know that it is not our job to forgive ourselves? It is God's. And He has *promised* that "If we confess our sin (Greek 'homologo'—to say the 'same word' in agreement with Him about what is sin in our lives) then He is faithful and just and *will forgive us* of our sin and purify (cleanse, wash) us from all unrighteousness."

If we accept that forgiveness, it removes all guilt and shame as well. If we continue to walk in that guilt and shame, we are not living in the truth and freedom Christ died to give us.

Get alone with God. Ask Him to show you anything keeping you from peace. If it is sin, confess it as such and repent. Then accept His perfect forgiveness, removing all guilt and shame. Ask Him to help you walk in that victory.

With God:

Often, we cannot have peace within ourselves if we are not at peace with God. There may be circumstances in your life that have kept you from believing or accepting God as your Lord and Savior.

The truth is that God is the creator of the universe. He made you. And He loves you. With a love that is so great it defies definition by human standards. And He wants a relationship with you. He is not only waiting for you, but is knocking at your door. If you will answer and tell Him you want a relationship with Him, He will help you understand.

Every single one of us is a sinner and undeserving of His gift. The penalty for sin is death, meaning eternal separation from God. Yet He desires to give us this free gift of eternal life with Him. Telling Him you believe He sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross as a substitute for you in the death penalty we deserve, and that you accept that gift of eternal life with Him, will reconcile you to God. It will begin a relationship that will grow and bless you. Peace is one of those blessings.

You can do this totally on your own. But if you share your decision with another Christian, we will rejoice with you! And try and direct you to someone who can encourage you in your new walk with Jesus Christ.