

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 18 January 2015

No. T0868

Speaker: Mr. Peter Ollerhead

Four things we need to follow: Follow Peace

Good morning, and welcome to *Truth for Today* where we are discussing the Apostle Paul's injunction to Timothy to follow after peace. This can be found in 2 Timothy 2:22-23, where Timothy is to: *"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels."*

You will probably have gathered from those verses, which I read from the English Standard Version, that this talk is the fourth in the series, the others being concerned with righteousness, faith and love.

Before I deal with Paul's request for Timothy to *"pursue peace"*, I want to talk about what the word 'peace' means, in a biblical context. We must alter our English understanding of peace, which usually means an absence of internal or external strife. We long for the end of strife in the Middle East, or in the other troubled areas of the world, where our statesmen and leaders seem helpless in the face of the many warring factions. Similarly, many of us are troubled in our minds caused by such matters as unemployment, or divisions in the family. When we come to the Old Testament, however, the word most often translated 'peace' is 'shalom', which basically means 'well-being' or 'soundness'. In everyday terms this simply stands for concord, or harmony, with another person, or material prosperity. Perhaps the best illustration is when 'shalom' is used as a greeting when people meet, where it has the thought of 'May your life be filled with prosperity and health'.

The Old Testament also includes, within its shades of meaning, the thought of spiritual harmony or well-being. From Psalm 85:10 we learn that: *"Steadfast love and faithfulness meet: righteousness and peace kiss each other."* Or from the book of the Prophet Isaiah 48:18 and 22: *"Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the sea; ... 'There is no peace,' says the LORD, 'for the wicked.'" These verses make it obvious that the Old Testament firmly states that peace is associated with righteousness and truth but never, never with wickedness.*

One of the first texts I ever preached on, nearly sixty years ago now, can be found in Isaiah 32:17. If you find this verse in the Bible you will see that it says: *"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."* This time I have read from the Authorised Version, which was the translation I used all those years ago.

Time allowing I will take up Isaiah 32:17 again later in the talk. Suffice now to point out the relationship between righteousness and peace. Looking back I have no regrets that I chose that verse to preach on when I was in my late teens, as the truth it contains has been the theme of my ministry ever since.

This brings us to the major point this morning which is that 'peace', in the final analysis, is the gift of God. I now want to emphasise and enlarge upon this in our discussions together this morning. Another illustration of peace being in the gift of God is seen in Gideon's altar which we can read about in Judges 6:22-24: *"Then Gideon perceived that he was the angel of the LORD. And Gideon said, 'Alas, O LORD God! For now I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.' But the LORD said to him, 'Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die.' Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, The LORD is Peace. To this day it still stands in Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites."*

Gideon's response, when he saw the angel, was one of dread, for he expected that the sight would cause his death (see Exodus 33:20). Notice, however, that he was quickly assured that he would live, as God promised him peace and well-being for he was not going to die. In gratitude to the LORD, Gideon constructed an altar to commemorate God's promise. Notice, also, that the name he gave to his altar shows he was intensely aware that God was the author of his peace.

The true prophets in the Old Testament were always anxious that the nation's peace and well-being were based upon the solid foundation of God's righteousness and the people's obedience. Ezekiel was charged with acting as watchman over Israel, as we can read in Ezekiel 33:7-9, and I am reading again from the English Standard Version: *"So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you*

shall give them a warning from me. ... But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul."

One can see, from this quotation, the seriousness of passing on a false message by seeking to base peace on fair words. Later in his prophecy, Ezekiel proclaims that God's covenant of peace would be established when the Messiah came: *"And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the LORD; I have spoken. I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places all round my hill a blessing, and I will send down the showers in their season; they shall be showers of blessing"* (Ezekiel 34:24-26). In that covenant of peace, we have the features of shalom, such as security, well-being and prosperity.

I have heard it said that inward and personal peace is not mentioned in the Old Testament. Far be it from me to argue with theologians, yet Isaiah 26:3, where the prophet promises perfect peace to the person whose mind is stayed upon God, seems, to me, to promise inward peace to the those who trust in God.

We must now move on to discuss the thought of 'peace' as recorded in the New Testament. Before we do so, however, can I welcome any who have just joined us and inform you that you are listening to a broadcast from *Truth for Today*, where we seek to examine the Scriptures, so that we may learn more of the greatness of God's love to us and of the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. This morning we are looking at Paul's injunction to Timothy to follow after 'peace' (2 Timothy 2:22). Up to this point, we have been considering the meaning of the word peace in Old Testament terms. Now, as I said, we must move on to consider its place in the New Testament, all the while keeping in mind what we have previously learned from the Old Testament Scriptures. One important factor as we move onto the New Testament is that peace now has a deeper meaning, being linked with mercy and pardon and associated very closely with God's salvation in Christ.

Anyone familiar with Paul's letters will know that 'peace' is used regularly as a greeting. The Apostle must have considered it to be crucial to the young churches, as every letter includes his desire that they should experience peace in their fellowships. To give one example, I will read Romans 1:7: *"To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

I would suggest that the regularity of its use by Paul is indicative of the importance that he places upon peace, both amongst and within the individual saints that made up the church at Corinth, Rome, Ephesus or wherever he was writing to.

For each of us listening this morning, the first and most important participation in the peace of God must come through the removal of our sins by the great redeeming act of the Lord Jesus, when He died and rose again. If we reject God's offer of mercy and forgiveness, that is offered to all who become believers in the Lord Jesus, there can be no peace with God. As Paul writes in Romans 3:21-25: *"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."*

This rather long passage would lend itself, with much profit, for a prolonged examination. Though peace is not mentioned in this passage, it is just one of many Scriptures that inform us of the basis of our salvation. Nothing we can do will earn us salvation, as it is all by God's grace and not human effort. When I was taken to a Sunday School, by my sister, in the dark days of the Second World War, there was a hymn with a catchy tune which we used to sing on occasions. Some might consider the words simplistic, yet I think it contains an important message, so I will quote the last two verses and the chorus:

*Nothing can for sin atone,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
Nought of good that I have done,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*Oh, precious is the flow
That makes me white as snow;
No other fount I know,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*This is all my hope and peace
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
He is all my righteousness
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Through God's grace, while I was at that Sunday School, I came to believe the truth of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus.

We need now to pass on to Romans 5 to read of peace with God. Peace, notice, **with** God. Notice as we read Romans 5:1-2 how our peace rests on the same redemptive act of the Lord Jesus that we read about in Romans 3: *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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."*

The important question for each one of us this morning is whether or not we have peace with God? We can only gain this peace on God's terms which, as we have read, is by faith in the Lord Jesus.

I feel that I must emphasise the supreme importance and greatness of the Man who is at the centre of this redemptive act that establishes our peace. One of the passages of Scripture that does this is Colossians 1:15-20: *"[The Lord Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."*

Again this rather long passage would amply repay further study, though all I have time for this morning is to point out the supreme greatness of the Christ of God, who suffered death on the cross for our salvation that we should have peace with God.

The Lord Himself promised His disciples that they should know real peace. We find this promise in John 14:27. He was very near to His betrayal and mockery of a trial, where he would be condemned to death. Despite this He spoke of leaving His peace with them as gift. According to the Lord's words, as recorded in John 16:33, the believer in Jesus could experience this peace in the midst of tribulation and affliction. The secret of enjoying peace in the midst of trouble is unfolded for us by Paul in Philippians 4:6-7: *"... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."*

Prayer, therefore, is the vehicle we use to bring us into touch with the peace of God. We can read similar words in Colossians 3:15, where Paul urges the Christians at Colossae to *"let the peace of God rule in their hearts."*

We must now begin to draw our discussions to a conclusion, as time has almost gone. Before we finish, however, we must return to the words of Paul to Timothy with which we started this morning. Do you remember that Paul was urging Timothy to *"pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace and to avoid foolish and ignorant controversies"*? (see 2 Timothy 2:22-23)

'Peace' in this context is to do with keeping clear of stupid arguments, thus making an effort to keep the peace to use a current saying. Paul is telling Timothy, and each one of us if we are Christians, that we should always endeavour to maintain a harmonious relationship with our fellow believers. This is easier said than done, though we should note that the command is to *"all who call on the Lord out of a pure heart"* (2 Timothy 2:22) so, therefore, we should expect that others will also be striving to maintain peace within the church. Thus it is incumbent upon each one of us to do what we can to maintain harmony and peace in our Christian fellowships and to stay away from controversies and futile arguments. Such action is also urged upon the Ephesian church, when Paul instructs the believers there to try *"to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3). The Apostle James also follows the same line, in his letter, when he states that *"a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace"* (James 3:18).

From all the Scriptures we have looked at together this morning, we have learned that by faith in the Lord Jesus we can have peace with God, which leads us to know something of the peace of God, as we make our requests known to Him. Finally, we have to endeavour by grace and by the power of the Spirit to pursue peace in our dealings with one another.

I finish this morning with the verse of a hymn by Horatio Spafford who wrote it during a traumatic period of his life, when his daughters were drowned at sea, a son died of scarlet fever and he himself was ruined financially through the great Chicago fire of 1871. You probably know the hymn.

*“When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know,
It is well, it is well with my soul.”*

I pray that through grace God’s peace will be experienced by each one of us this day. Good morning and thank you for listening.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.