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### The Gift of Peace

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# The gift of peace

By SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI

## The scorn of enemies and the betrayal by friends did not discourage Christ, because He was seeking the smile of God rather than popular approval.

Just before His death Christ carried out the duties of a dying man. He gave His friends final instructions, prayed for them a last touching prayer, and instituted an expressive ordinance.

He disposed of all that He possessed by placing Himself in the hands of His Father, entrusting His mother to the care of John, and allowing His garments to be divided among the soldiers.

To His disciples He left the most treasured possession—not houses and lands, not silver and gold, but something far better: His peace. “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” (John 14:27).\*

Why did Christ choose to leave His disciples peace rather than possessions? Obviously because He knew that peace is far more valuable. My mother likes to say that she would rather live on bread and water with peace in her heart than on fancy food with inner conflicts and tensions. Peace is as essential to our souls as food is to our bodies. For this reason millions of persons today are seeking for peace, the release from inner tensions, by joining exercise programs and meditation groups and by taking tranquilizers, drugs, alcohol, or vacations to fantasy islands.

Experience tells us, however, that “magic” pills and “fantasy” places can at best provide only a temporary evasion, not permanent peace. Lasting peace is not a human achievement, but a divine gift: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

### The source of peace

Why do we need Christ’s assistance to experience genuine and permanent peace in our lives? Because true peace results not from control of external circumstances, but from harmony among the physical, mental, and spiritual components of our being, something we cannot achieve by ourselves.

We may try to find inner peace, for example, by exercising or resting our bodies, but if our mind is troubled, we experience not peace but tension, agitation, restlessness. As the instruments of an orchestra need a skillful conductor to blend them into harmonious music, so our several faculties

\* Unless otherwise noted, all verses quoted in this article are from the Revised Standard Version.

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need the guidance of a Saviour if we are to experience peace (1 Thess. 5:23).

The Scriptures present Jesus as the only source of peace. Isaiah announced Him as the “Prince of Peace” of whose “government and peace there will be no end” (Isa. 9:6, 7). At his birth the angels joyfully proclaimed “peace on earth” (Luke 2:14, T.E.V.). During His ministry Jesus told those whom He made whole to “go in peace” (chap. 7:50; Mark 5:34).

At the time of His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem the people shouted, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (Luke 19:38). To them Jesus said, “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace!” (verse 42). After His resurrection Christ greeted His disciples by saying, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). New Testament believers recognized Jesus as the source of peace by calling Him “our peace” (Eph. 2:14) and by proclaiming His “gospel of peace” (chap. 6:15).

What is the nature of this gift of peace that Christ bestows upon His followers? How do we experience it in our daily lives?

A spiritual gift such as the peace of Christ cannot be fully defined, for it “passes all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). The most we can attempt is to reflect upon three aspects of Christ’s peace that are suggested in John 14:27: (1) the *nature* of Christ’s peace, (2) the *method* of Christ’s peace, and (3) the *power* of Christ’s peace.

### The nature of Christ’s peace

Christ tells us that the peace He offers is not an impersonal formula but the very peace that He personally enjoyed during His earthly life. “Peace I leave with you; *my peace* I give to you” (John 14:27). Since Christ wants us to enjoy His personal peace, it behooves us to have some understanding of the kind of peace Christ experienced while on earth. The Gospels suggest that Christ’s peace consisted of the inward serenity He derived from a harmonious relationship with His Father, with Himself, and with others.

Christ enjoyed *peace with the Father* through communion with Him and obedience to Him. Conflicts and tensions arise when our will works at cross purposes with God’s will, but Christ never became unmindful of His Father’s will. “I have come down from heaven,” He said, “not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me” (chap. 6:38). To the very end of His earthly life He prayed: “Not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39).

This harmony with the Father enabled Christ to enjoy *peace within Himself*—that internal serenity that no external distress can destroy. No one ever saw Him disturbed in His soul, save when in grief over a friend’s death, in pity for a doomed city, or for some other reason outside Himself. The scorn of enemies and the betrayal by friends did not

discourage Christ, because He was seeking the smile of God rather than popular approval.

Oneness with God enabled Christ to enjoy *peace with others*, because He nourished no hatred, jealousy, or suspicion toward them. We lose our peace when we open our hearts to such feelings. But the more people hated Jesus, the more He was moved with compassion toward them because He saw their need of God. He prayed even for those who reviled and crucified Him, pleading, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Christ desires each one of us to experience this personal peace that He enjoyed with God, with Himself, and with others. How can we experience communion with God, inward serenity toward others, and trust during tribulations?

Our text suggests the unique method by which Christ's peace is given: "Not as the world gives do I give to you." Notice four contrasts between the two methods of imparting peace.

### 1. Atonement versus attainment

The first contrast may be characterized as *atonement versus attainment*. The peace that the world offers depends upon personal attainment, while that of Christ depends upon His vicarious atonement for our salvation. The world says, "If you want to enjoy peace and happiness, you must overcome the causes of anxiety by attaining success and financial security." In reality, those who achieve fame and wealth most often experience conflicts and tensions. Some become so disillusioned that they end their quest for peace by taking their own lives.

Christ offers us peace in a radically different way. He does not say, "If you want My peace, you must attain it by yourself." Rather He says, "If you want My peace, accept the gift of My atonement for your sins and experience the peace of forgiveness and reconciliation with God." Peace begins when the separation from God that is the root cause of inner conflicts is terminated. Jesus brought "the hostility to an end" and reconciled us to God by paying the penalty for our sins on the cross (Eph. 2:14-17). "Since we are justified by faith [restored to a right standing before God], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Reconciliation with God gives us peace by enabling us to see new possibilities in ourselves and others.

### 2. Commitment versus compromise

A second contrast between the method of Christ's peace and that of the world can be labeled *commitment versus compromise*. The peace of the world comes most often through compromise, while that of Christ is received through commitment to His will. The world says, "If you want to achieve peace and happiness, you must learn to compromise, to give up principle whenever necessary," whether in military, political, business, marital, or personal conflicts. The fact is that compromising principles may alleviate temporarily some external conflicts but ultimately only intensify internal tensions.

Christ offers us His peace, not through compromise but through commitment to the principles He has revealed. "If a man loves me," Jesus says, "he will keep my word" (John 14:23). In the same discourse He explains that if we keep His commandments, we will abide in His love and our joy will be

full (chap. 15:10, 11). Obedience brings the peace of a quiet conscience, which is far better than all the honors the world can bestow. "Great peace have those who love thy law; nothing can make them stumble" (Ps. 119:165).

Christ gives not only *peace with God* by reconciling us through His sacrifice, but also *peace within ourselves* by enabling us to live committed to God's will (Rom. 8:3, 4). In His last discourse the Saviour promises His peace through the Holy Spirit's guiding us in doing God's will (John 14:26; 16:13). When by His Spirit we live in harmony with God's will, we enjoy the peace of a quiet conscience.

### 3. Concern versus indifference

A third contrast between Christ's peace and that of the world may be designated as *concern versus indifference*. The peace of the world is most often achieved at the expense of others, while the peace of Christ manifests itself in concern for others. The world says, "If you want peace, think about your own well-being and do not worry about what happens to others. Any course of action that enhances you is justified, even if it comes at others' expense." The results of these principles are evident today in the cutthroat competition that drives smaller enterprises out of business; in the rich that become richer at the expense of the poor; in the social, racial, and cultural barriers that cause so much unrest in the world.

Christ offers peace by teaching us concern toward friends and foes. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (chap. 15:12). "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). When the love of Christ dwells in our hearts we have peace with others because we nourish no feelings of hatred, suspicion, jealousy, or indifference, but only those of concern and love. If someone sends us an angry five-page letter, we do not lose our peace by writing a fiery ten-page response. Instead of appeasing our hurt feelings by taking revenge, we seek to understand and help the person who has hurt us. If we hear damaging gossip, we throw not fuel, but cold water, on the fire.

To have Christ's peace in our hearts means not to give in to our natural inclinations to retaliate. The priests of ancient Rome were called pontiffs, which means "bridgemakers." Every person who has received Christ's peace should build bridges of understanding and love where there is misunderstanding and hate.

### 4. Present versus future

A fourth contrast between Christ's peace and that of the world can be described as *present versus future*. The world

## Sacred time

By DEBBIE NOEL

Six sunsets—six dawns—  
hanging suspended in peace  
the Special Seventh.

promises peace by urging us to live for the present; Christ offers peace by challenging us to live in anticipation of the future. The world says, "If you want peace, enjoy the present life because it is the only one you have. Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you shall die." To live from day to day, trying to find peace and joy in the passing moment without hope of a meaningful future, means to deny the deepest longing of the human heart, to live without real peace.

Christ offers peace in the present by giving us a future to live for. He told His disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled; . . . I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (John 14:1-3). This blessed hope has enabled believers through the ages to enjoy Christ's peace, because they believed that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

### The power of Christ's peace

Christ's peace gives courage and confidence: "Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27). We, His followers, are to be of good courage while sailing through the rough sea of life, because while not guaranteed a smooth ride, we are promised a safe arrival at our destination—eternal life. Christians are not exempt from the pain and problems of life. Like all mankind we experience loss, failure, sickness, and trial. "In the world you have tribulation," Jesus says, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (chap. 16:33). This assurance that Christ has gained the victory for us allows us to hope when others despair, to have courage when others fear, to be cheerful when others become despondent.

The power of Christ's peace impressed me through the testimony of a dear old lady whom I met recently at a camp meeting. Her body was bent over and twisted by arthritis. She could not lift up her head to look at people but could only turn it a little bit.

When I asked her, "How are you doing, sister?" she smiled and replied, "I can't complain. The Lord is good to me; He gives me strength every day."

The peace that Christ gives cannot be taken away by unfavorable circumstances. Sickness cannot mar it; the believer who lies on a bed of suffering remains cheerful in the midst of pain. Poverty cannot destroy it; many hungry Christians wearing rags have Christ's peace in their hearts. Persecution cannot ruin it, because persecution cannot separate the believer from Christ. When we have Christ's peace in our hearts we can say with the psalmist, "Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea" (Ps. 46:2).

A wealthy man once asked two artists to paint for him their concept of peace. The first chose to portray an unruffled lake high up in the mountains. The second represented peace as a robin singing on the fragile branch of a birch tree bent over by the foam of a thundering waterfall. The latter illustrates the peace that Christ offers: not the passive peace of inaction but the active peace of hope and gladness.

We need to accept the gift of Christ's peace; the gift that enables us to live at peace with God, with ourselves, and with others; the gift that makes us ambassadors for peace in a strife-torn society. □

## FOR THE YOUNGER SET

# The dog who barked for help

By AUDREY LOGAN

"Go away, you noisy old thing," shouted Joseph. But the big black dog would not go away. The more Joseph, a farmer, tried to dig in his field, the more furiously the animal barked.

It began to circle Joseph, jumping up and down, snapping and yelping. The man backed away in fear. The frantic animal eventually forced the farmer across the field, through some bushes, and finally onto the railroad track.

Then Joseph forgot all about the dog. For there, with her right foot trapped in a drainage grid between the railroad tracks, he saw a 9-year-old girl weeping bitterly.

Joseph tried to free Tessa, for that was what she said her name was, but failed. Then to his horror, he heard a train approaching. Still unable to release the girl, he ran toward the train, frantically waving for it to stop.

The engineer slammed on the brakes, and the train shuddered to a halt.

The engineer got his

crowbar and jumped from the train. For some time he and Joseph struggled to free Tessa. When they had torn the grid away from her foot, they noticed the dog, still there, but now silent.

Quietly, it ambled to Tessa and gently licked her hand. Then it walked off.

Joseph took Tessa to the doctor who treated her badly bruised foot. Joseph told the doctor, "I thought that huge dog was going to attack me. But now I have no doubt that it deliberately set out to save Tessa's life."

Tessa said, "I was playing near the track, even though Mother has told me never to go near there. But I saw some pretty flowers and started to cross the tracks to get them. The dog came up and stood by me. I thought it looked hungry, so I gave it half of my sandwich. Then my foot got caught and I couldn't move. The dog ran off barking."

That black dog has not been seen since. I think God used him to help Tessa, don't you?

