

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

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**Speaker:** Mr. Douglas Pettman

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## The God of all Grace: The God of Peace

I remember that, when I was a boy, several of us often got together when we were free and played our own games in a local park. These games would often require two teams and a type of game where one group was set to search for the other. On occasions, it might be that a player would need to leave the game. To do so, it was agreed that, to be free from the search, such player would cross his fingers, hold up his hands and cry 'pax'. I do not remember now why we chose that word but, since that time, I have learned that this is the Latin word we use in our language for 'peace'. Simply, it means 'a cessation of hostilities'. How clear this becomes when we have been at war and peace is declared! Hostilities cease. There are both victors and vanquished.

When we turn to the Bible, we also read of peace but the Bible word comes from the Hebrew 'shalom' and the corresponding Greek 'eirene'. The basis of the word is different. It is less concerned with a cessation of hostilities but brings out the sense of the harmonious relationships enjoyed between men and women and, particularly, between man and God. What a difference this makes! In our relationship with God, we are concerned, not just with a ceasing of the hostility which has ever existed between us, but with the much more positive and active state of enjoying a harmonious relationship with God. Sometimes we think that it would be good to get away from the rush of our daily life for a break, to a place of quietness and rest, which we regard as peaceful. The full meaning of the biblical word is much more than this. It emphasises activity, where every part exists together in harmony and working together. I once heard it illustrated by an engineer. He pointed out that if you stand a coin on its edge on top of a generator and start the motor, that coin is very likely to fall off. However, if you stand that same coin on the bonnet of a Rolls Royce, the coin will remain standing when the engine starts; the whole engine is smoothly and actively running together and there is no jarring to spoil the harmony.

The Bible speaks quite clearly of peace as active harmony, the relationship which should exist between man and God. We know full well that, normally, there is neither peace nor harmony between man and God apart from what God has done. This is not a peace that we can make or imagine, but there is a God behind it whose power makes it a reality to each one. Thus our remarkable position is now that we can know the God of peace in a very close relationship. We shall consider this together today.

The first essential, in order to know the God of peace, is to have **PEACE WITH GOD**.

In the early chapters of the letter to the Romans, Paul shows how impossible it is for man, by his own efforts, to come to know God. 'There is none righteous, no, not one...there is none that seeketh after God...all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God', Romans 3:10, 11 and 23. That is our position; as Isaiah 48:22, tells us, 'There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked'. 'But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace...' Ephesians 2:13 and 14. The Lord Jesus alone has made peace between us and a righteous God and we have peace only by Him. He 'came and preached peace to you', verse 17 tells us, so it affects each one of us personally. Let us never get away from this tremendous blessing that, through the work of the cross, 'we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ', Romans 5:1.

Perhaps we feel that life in this world is very frustrating and difficult. How can we face the problems that will arise today which leave us stressed and depressed? The great comfort to our souls is to enjoy peace with God! The Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples of the coming events of the cross and He ends the discussion with the words, 'These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace', John 16:33. There can be no peace with God, even for the disciples, without the Lord; but with trust in Him, they could have enjoyed full peace in all the harsh problems of that moment. This peace with God now means that we have the power to deal with present sin. Paul writes to the Romans, 'Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof...for sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace', Romans 6:12, 14. When peace with God is established through the death of the Lord Jesus, there is lasting peace and that cannot fail. Harmony with God is re-established forever.

Now we can move on to another aspect concerning the God of peace. It is the **PEACE OF GOD** which should govern our lives. When we first believe, and accept the work of the Lord Jesus and take Him as our Saviour, there is a tremendous change within us. The Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives and we rejoice in the forgiveness of sins. But before long, we find that some things have not changed in our lives as we might think they should. Difficulties,

dangers, the problems of life still surround us. What can we do? The Bible does not promise a life of ease to the believer; on the contrary, we find that life as it should be lived in obedience to the Word of God, is intended to mature us as believers and prepare us for the presence of the Lord. In all the trials we need the peace of God to sustain us. Let us note the following:

### 1. The Lord gives His own peace to His disciples.

When He was going to leave His disciples, the Lord Jesus told them, 'Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid', John 14:27. Let us understand this. The Lord Jesus was saying that the peace that was His, part of His personal character, that which was His, He was going to impart to His disciples. He could never lose it because He is peace, but that peace should now characterise all His disciples. As believers, subject to the Lord and the Father, in every circumstance we can have this peace!

The peace the Lord Jesus enjoyed throughout His life is illustrated in the Gospels. The Lord had been very active in teaching the people. In the evening, both the Lord and the disciples entered a ship to go to the other side of the lake. Being tired, He fell asleep leaving the disciples to row the ship. A storm soon broke and the ship was in danger of sinking, so the disciples awoke their Lord. 'Carest Thou not that we perish?' they cried. Having rebuked the storm, He asked the disciples, 'Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?' Mark 4:38, 40. The Lord was at total peace in those frightening conditions. It is remarkable that peace with God can allow man's trust in God to be so comforting. The Psalmist could say, 'I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety', Psalm 4:8. Peace with God provides the solid ground for each one of us to enjoy the peace of God in a world of shifting sands.

### 2. This gift of peace is a possession we develop as believers.

In the epistle to the Galatians we find in chapter 5:22 and 23 that the Holy Spirit develops nine gifts from God in every believer. The first three of these are given by the Lord Himself, and listed in the Gospel of John as love, joy and peace. Now this epistle shows that the Holy Spirit develops them, with others, in our lives. Little by little, as we come to know our Lord better, these gifts should become more real and active in our lives. How does this work out in practice? Do you remember what happened in Philippi? You will find the story in Acts 16. In answer to their real testimony to the power of their Lord, Paul and Silas were accused, suffered a beating and were imprisoned in the safest dungeon in Philippi. This should have depressed them if anything would! Had God let them down? Never! At midnight these men began singing and praising God. If it had been written, I can imagine them singing the hymn by Mrs Will Murphy,

*There's a peace in my heart that the world never gave,  
A peace it cannot take away;  
Though the trials of life may surround like a cloud,  
I've a peace that has come there to stay.*

*Constantly abiding, Jesus is mine;  
Constantly abiding, rapture divine;  
He never leaves me lonely, whispers O so kind:  
"I will never leave thee," Jesus is mine.*

The more we grow in our communion with our Lord, the more we will enjoy this peace.

### 3. The peace we have is just as active in troubling circumstances.

Paul writes to the Philippians in chapter 4:6 and 7, 'Be careful for (anxious about) nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus'. When we trust the Lord in difficulty, we may have to own that we do not understand the peace that He gives, but what certainty is claimed! All the feelings and senses of our innermost being, the heart, and the concerns of our thoughts, our mind, are surrounded, as by soldiers surrounding a fort, by the peace we have through Christ Jesus. An illustration from Elisha comes to mind. In 2 Kings 6 the story is told of a war between Israel and Syria. Each time the king of Syria set an ambush for Israel, Elisha warned the king of Israel of it. The king of Syria thought he had a traitor in his own ranks and asked who was giving away the secret plans. His servants point him to Elisha so the king sends a great host to Dothan to take Elisha. The man of God is totally at peace in these circumstances but his servant cannot understand why. He says to Elisha, 'Alas my master! How shall we do?' Elisha prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant and, as God did so, the servant saw, 'the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha', verse 17. No wonder Elisha remained at peace and so can you and I, even in desperate conditions.

#### **4. In many circumstances in the world there is another side to all of this.**

It is true that the peace of God is available to every believer but we must ensure that we use this peace. 'Let the peace of God rule in your hearts...and be ye thankful', the apostle tells the Colossians in chapter 3:15. Don't let us ignore that little word 'let'. Then, the word 'rule' can be better translated as umpire. We know how an umpire acts; he maintains a proper balance between the parties and controls what is taking place. So it is in the problems of life. We face a problem and, perhaps, we don't know what to do, but we commend the matter to the Lord in prayer. In our consideration we sense a satisfaction with one solution which arises. This satisfaction we call peace, the peace of God, which acts as umpire in our mind bringing us to the point of following what is pleasing to the Lord. In our responsibility we gladly let the Lord lead us in the decisions we have to make.

We can see that our responsibility takes us further. Paul writes in the letter to the Romans chapter 14:19, 'Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace'. Again, in Hebrews 12:14, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness...' Peace with God allows us to display that peace day by day in every part of our lives. This allows no room for criticising or attacking one another. If we do so, we are not following those things that make for peace.

Now that we have peace with God and we know the peace of God in our lives, finally we can consider the fact that God is **THE GOD OF PEACE**.

We learn from the Scriptures of this matchless Person, the Eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creator and maintainer of all things, that one of His great characteristics is that He is a God of peace. Active harmony is His great purpose, a harmony with the man He made. How small this makes us feel, as we ponder His greatness, that He should be concerned with us. We learn from our Bible that:

##### **1. The God of peace unites.**

As Paul writes in Romans 15:33, he says, 'Now the God of peace be with you all'. He had been asking his readers to 'strive together' in their prayers for him, so that he could be freed to continue his work for the Lord. He seeks harmony in them and then desires the God of peace, the real harmonising influence on their lives, to be with them. In Acts 12 we find that Herod had killed James and had imprisoned Peter with the intention of bringing him before the people. The believers gathered together and prayed all night. Here was striving together in prayer and the God of peace actively answered their prayers in releasing Peter. Here is a unity which worked.

##### **2. The God of peace desires to set us apart from the influences of the world.**

'The very God of peace sanctify (set apart) you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ', 1 Thessalonians 5:23. This 'God of peace' will wholly set apart from the world's interests and the apostle desired that in completeness, spirit, soul and body, there would be maturity, a freedom from blame in the sight of God, for every one of His children. There is more spoiling of the Christian testimony through attachment to the world and its influences than in any other way. Today, sanctification is just as vital and, as we stand before our Lord at the judgement seat of Christ, the entry into the glory of eternity will be so much happier with His 'well done'.

##### **3. The God of peace desires to perfect us.**

The writer ends his letter to the Hebrews with his desires for them. One of these, chapter 13:20 and 21, is that the God of peace will make them perfect, that is, bring them to full maturity for their Christian testimony. The reason for this is that it has already cost God the life of His Son whom He has brought back from the dead. So He desires the greatest blessing for His children while still in this world. It surely must be our greatest desire to be worthy of the One who gave His life for us. We have a good example to follow in the apostle Paul in our next point.

##### **4. Paul gives us himself as an example to follow, knowing that the God of peace desires to encourage.**

In Philippians 4:9, we read: 'Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you'. The whole aim of Paul's life, since he received new life from his Saviour, was to walk worthily of His Lord. So he knew the presence of the God of peace. What an example for us to follow today! In his missionary journeys, he was ready to suffer, even almost to death (Acts 14 etc); he sat down quietly by the riverside in Philippi with a group of women and explained the gospel (Acts 16); he was seen publicly alleging the value of the work of Christ (Acts 17), he would take nothing from those in Corinth when he was with them, that he be not a burden to them (2 Corinthians 11:9), and in many other ways he demonstrated his walk with the Lord. There is much encouragement from the God of peace as we walk with Him.

**5. Sometimes we find, even among Christian people, those who will cause divisions; they bring in dissension.**

This is a terrible and unnecessary diversion which plays into the hands of the Enemy. Avoid them, the apostle tells the Romans in chapter 16:17; they do not serve Christ. But who is in control? 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,' verse 20. How good it is to have this God, whose character is peace, supporting the believer! We can leave all things in His care.

**6. The God of peace sets the pattern.**

'Finally, brethren, farewell', Paul writes to the Corinthians. 'Be perfect (or mature), be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you', 2 Corinthians 13:11. Let us ensure that the God of love and peace is with us every day.

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