

PRINCE OF PEACE

Isaiah 9:6 (2016 ESV) — 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Welcome to the most divisive time of the year! 31% of the world's population at least claim to be Christian; about 25% are Muslim; about 15% are atheist or Hindu; about 7% are Buddhist. Folk religions and other belief systems make up the rest.

Within Christianity, Roman Catholics comprise about 52%, Protestants about 36%, and various Orthodox branches about 12%.

Within Protestantism in the United States, there are a number of divisions. Even within the framework I believe is most Biblical, Reformed Baptist, there are differences of opinion and practice. This among people who are firmly convinced that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace!

All of this is evidence of the fallenness of mankind; conflict is the norm for us. Sin makes true peace impossible on earth. Peace is not even fully possible for Christians, which is why Scripture so frequently urges Christians to forgive one another, stop judging one another, bear with one another, put up with one another.

When Jesus' disciples asked Him about the signs of the end times, He answered, "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; those things must take

place, but that is not yet the end.” (Mark 13:7, LSB).

Now, people talk about world peace, especially at this time of year. We even sing “Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven’s all gracious King!” But we don’t get any peace. The first child born – Cain – murdered the second child born – Abel. The United Nations was created to foster and encourage peace, and has pretty much failed in the effort. The UN hasn’t failed because peace is a bad idea; it’s failed because peace is impossible. There can be no peace apart from the energetic, active involvement of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

WHAT IS PEACE?

Now, what is peace? It’s always helpful to have a good definition. Some think of peace as the absence of conflict. “All we are saying,” John Lennon sang, “is give peace a chance.” What a lovely thought.

But even earthly peace is far more than the absence of conflict: it is the presence of good relationship, friendliness, trust, cooperation. Sadly, relationships are easily broken, friendships easily turn to enmities, trust rots into suspicion, cooperation crumbles into self-seeking.

But Biblical peace is far more than anything the world can conceive. It is the active, positive state of wholeness, prosperity, and blessing. This sort of peace will not exist until Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, returns and institutes it on earth by His sovereign authority as Lord and God.

TRANSITION: There are three aspects to true peace. We can loosely describe them as peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with others.

PEACE WITH GOD

“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace **with** God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1, LSB).

Peace **with** God is exactly what we have through Jesus Christ, as Romans 5:1 says.

Let's understand that this is not peace that we contribute to. It is a **costly** peace, purchased through the blood of Jesus Christ. It is a **gracious** peace, given to us by the love and mercy of the Savior. It is the peace that **follows transformation**; it is only experienced by those who are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, God is not at peace with unrepentant, proud, committed sinners.

The peace which we receive through the cross of Christ is not a peace that we even thought we needed, until it was given to us by the grace of God, and our eyes are opened. Sinners go through life assuming that *if* there is a God, they are ok with Him. They can have unending conflict with every person they know, and be filled with inner conflict and self-hatred, but they assume that God is on their side.

It takes a work of the Spirit of God to open our eyes to the judgment to come. It takes a work of the Spirit of God to make us know our own guilt and powerlessness, and to also

hope in our Creator for reconciliation. The Holy Spirit puts power into the preaching of the Gospel, so that it has an actual impact. He causes the sinner to actually hear the Gospel so that a change takes place. He softens the heart that was numb to Christ, and frees the mind that was hostile to Christ. The hard, unrepentant, proud sinner is suddenly filled with a deep, urgent longing for forgiveness and eternal life, and trusts in Jesus Christ and His saving work. The Spirit of God fills them with faith in Jesus, and with faith comes justification – the gift of Christ’s own righteousness before God. The judgment of God is satisfied because of Jesus’ death on the cross, and the sinner is born-again as a child of God. In that moment we can call Him Father. We can come boldly before Him for grace and mercy in time of need. We can lean on Him for strength and comfort. We know that He is for us, and will not abandon us or throw us away. We know nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

That is peace; it is the peace that we need most. What God said through the prophet Hosea almost 3,000 years ago is brand new. God says,

“I will have compassion on those who had not obtained compassion [that’s me]. I will say to those who were not My people [that’s me], ‘You are My people!’ And they [that’s me, too] will say, ‘You are my God!’ (Hosea 2:23, LSB).

This is the peace that makes all peace possible. It is the peace we most need on this earth.

TRANSITION: We can have peace with God through the cross of Jesus Christ. But the most mature Christian continues to experience the turmoil and grief of sin and in this world, as Romans 7 and other passages describe. We continue to struggle with our sin and

weakness, with regrets and fears. Peace **with** ourselves is not realistic.

PEACE WITHIN OURSELVES

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, not let it be fearful.” (John 14:27, LSB).

This is not peace **with** ourselves, but peace **within** ourselves. It is the peace of Jesus Himself, given to us as a gift. It is the peace of His own holiness and righteousness, His own unhindered relationship with God the Father, the security and certainty of the love of God, sweet trust in the providence of God, surrender to the will of God.

People are full of turmoil. Even Christians are full of turmoil.

But Jesus had zero inner turmoil; none. The peace of Christ on earth, the peace that allowed Jesus to sleep in the midst of a storm, remain calm and silent in the midst of a mock trial with a pre-determined outcome, and finish every last task assigned to Him on the cross, was peace with His Father. He knew who the Father was, who He was, what He had come to do. He had no need of human approval because He had peace with the Father. He had no need for human acclaim because He had peace with the Father. He had no need for an easy, comfortable life because He had peace with the Father. He had no need for psychological counseling, or mental escapes, because He had peace with the Father. He had no need for circumstances that were tightly controlled and predictable, because He had peace with the Father.

That is the peace that He gives us. It is not just generic peace, but *His* peace. It is the peace of the holy Son of God who lived in perfect, unhindered, unbroken relationship with His Father. That is the peace Jesus gives us.

So, why are Christians so often unsettled? Because we still want human approval and acclaim. We still want comfort and ease. Our hearts are weighed down by guilt over sin, but we aren't sure about the forgiveness God has already given us. Our minds are confused because our circumstances are confusing. It doesn't take much of a crisis, and suddenly we're not sure if God really is in control.

And still, like a precious gift, like a massive aquifer, deep within our hearts, immeasurably deep and wide, the gift of Christ's peace is within us. And as we grow in Christ, we learn to drink from the peace of Christ more frequently, to trust the Father's love and providence, to prefer His purposes and will, to rest in the peace He provides.

TRANSITION: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1, LSB). We can also have **peace within ourselves**, the peace of Jesus Christ given to us by Jesus Christ. But peace **with** even one or two others is really not impossible, much less peace with all others.

PEACE TOWARD OTHERS

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, being at peace with all men." (Romans 12:18, LSB).

The world around me seems utterly insane at times. When I want quiet, there's noise. When I want acceptance, there's rejection. When I want understanding, there's criticism. When I want to receive, I am called upon to give. And I'm just talking about my dog!

“Can't we all just get along?” Rodney King asked. Well, no, we can't, can we? We can't get along with the most important people in our lives, much less the people in the next town or state or nation. Even in our best relationships we don't have genuine peace, just a mutual truce.

In 1955 a trite little song was written, called “Let There Be Peace On Earth.” Did you know that there are alternate versions of the lyrics? That's because the original lyrics to “Let There Be Peace On Earth” offended some people! You have to appreciate the irony of the song “Let There Be Peace On Earth” causing new conflicts between people!

So, no, there is no peace WITH others.

What we are called to as Christians is peace **toward** others. But notice that even with that caveat the Scripture doesn't say “be at peace with all men.” It doesn't even say “*so far as it depends on you*, be at peace with all men.” It says “*If possible, so far as it depends on you*, be at peace with all men.”

You see, we can't even get along with ourselves!

“For what I am working out, I do not understand; for **I** am not practicing what **I** would like to do, but am doing the very thing **I** hate.” (Romans 7:15, LSB).

Isn't that the truth? Man, I bug me so much.

How can we have peace toward others, then?

First we must be at peace **with** God. We must be reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus Christ. Jesus must be our Wonderful Counselor – the source of all our truth and wisdom. Jesus must be our Mighty God – our Lord and King. Jesus must be our everlasting Father – our own peace and safety and security must be found in Him.

And then we must have Christ's peace **within** ourselves. We must pursue His goals, His aims, His glory. We must orient our lives to serve Him and please Him. We must accept that we are forgiven sinners, recipients of grace, pardoned criminals.

And then we must do what the Scriptures call us to do toward others. We must forgive others, bear with others, serve others, love others, regard others as more important than ourselves, encourage one another, give preference to one another, be devoted to one another, and all the other "one another" found in the epistles.

That is, we must accept the truth that we are prickly and easily offended, and make every personal effort to suppress our own irritation and bless others with kindness and patience.

Ultimately, true peace with others requires that we and they have a perfect nature, and that the world we inhabit is free of sin. We need what is described in Isaiah 9:7:

Isaiah 9:7 (2021 LSB) — 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or

of **peace**, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. **The zeal of Yahweh of hosts will accomplish this.**

Peace is inseparable from the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. For that matter, peace is inseparable from God's justice and righteousness. And, everything God is accomplishing, including peace, requires the zeal of Yahweh of hosts to accomplish

This is what world peace requires: the fulness of the government of Jesus Christ, the establishment of the Davidic throne and the Kingdom of God, the implementation of God's justice (which people only claim they want) and God's righteousness (which most people bitterly condemn as legalistic and narrow), all brought about by the determination and passion of God to have His own way in His Creation.

BRINGING IT HOME

Here's the thing to remember. The zeal of Yahweh of hosts **WILL** accomplish all of this. We have His word on it. He will put an end to all of His enemies, all rebellion, all conflict.

He will do this because Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace.

He has reconciled His people to God the Father through His own blood.

He gives us His own peace as a permanent, ongoing gift.

He teaches and leads to be at peace toward one another.

Because of His own zeal, He will never fail in His efforts; never.

Our God will, without any doubt, bring an end to the suffering of creation. He will, unquestionably, fully and perfectly resolve the issues with mankind. Those who reject peace with Him through Jesus Christ will receive perfect justice according to the righteousness of God; He will bring that justice about through His own zeal. And those who look to Jesus Christ for peace with God, calling on Him for salvation, will be brought into His eternal Kingdom of peace.