

PURSUIT OF PEACE

"Seek Peace and Pursue it" - Psalm 34:14

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CHAPTER THREE -

THE WAR IS OVER

"EXTRA, EXTRA," newsboys were calling on the streets of our small town in Western Pennsylvania where my husband was serving his first pastorate. The only other time that news boys called in the streets was on Pearl Harbor day, so we knew something very important had happened. "The war is over, peace has been declared." A group of our church people, who had been enjoying a picnic on the lawn of a friend, gathered with others on the main street to celebrate. The railroad ran through the middle of the downtown section and while we were jubilantly greeting one another with the good news, a troop train stopped for a few minutes right across the street. The men in uniform jumped off and yelled, "The war is over, we're free. Peace has been declared."

The close of World War II brought peace and freedom to millions of people, but not to all. There were many people who had been set free who either didn't know it or wouldn't believe it. What a tragedy! A few months after peace was declared, there were news stories of Japanese soldiers who wouldn't believe that they were free and that the war was over. Our servicemen flew over the jungles of Guam and other islands of the Pacific, announcing over loud speakers that the war was over. They promised that if the men would surrender, they would be free, have food, good beds, clean clothing and a chance to go home again.

Many of these soldiers had to be captured and brought in before they would believe that the war was over. Just a month ago, some fifteen years since peace was declared, a Japanese soldier was found and brought to our military headquarters. He still had his gun, and wore tatters of an old uniform. He was not much more than skin and bones. He had been living in the jungle on what he could steal, or gather from trees and bushes. He had suffered great privation for fifteen years because he wouldn't believe that peace had been made.

Just as World War II is over and peace declared, so the war with GOD and the sinner is over, and peace has been declared in the spiritual realm. Romans 5:1, 2 gives us the terms of the treaty: **"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."**

To be justified means that we have been declared righteous before GOD apart from anything that we might do. Our good works have nothing to do with our justification. Being a member of a

church, being baptized, giving sums of money to charity, and keeping any set of rules have no bearing on this fact. Justification is a legal term. This is a picture of a judge who has found the individual guilty of all that is stated, but the guilt is laid on another. Therefore the judge can be just and at the same time let the prisoner stand in the righteousness of another.

During the depression years, a father of four children couldn't find work. To keep his children alive, he stole milk and bread from people's doorsteps. One day he was caught. The judge tried the case in all fairness and set the fine at five dollars. The man nearly burst into tears. He didn't have any money; he couldn't pay. The judge laid aside his judicial robes, stepped from the bench and said, "I will take this man's punishment." He took the five dollars from his wallet and paid the clerk. The father went free at no cost to himself. His fine was paid by another.

Being made right with GOD does not imply that we were not guilty before GOD, and there is no suggestion that we had anything to do with the giving of CHRIST's righteousness. The entire plan of salvation was brought about while we were "**yet sinners**" as recorded in Romans 5:8 and "**ungodly**" as in 5:6. We are told in verse two that we stand in the "**grace**" of God, which is GOD's gift apart from any merit of our own. Grace is favor without merit.

We receive by the act of faith the justification that has been provided for all sinners. This is the only way it can come to us. In the simplest terms faith is just believing what GOD says and acting on it. "**For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God... The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**" (Romans 3:23; 6:23).

When Adam and Eve disobeyed GOD in the Garden of Eden, they turned their backs on GOD. Because He is perfectly holy and cannot look on sin, GOD turned His back on mankind through Adam. But all through the ages GOD had a plan whereby the Lord JESUS CHRIST was going to be the One who would die for all the sins of all mankind. At the time of CHRIST's death GOD was then in a position to turn again to face mankind and to receive all those who, through faith in CHRIST, take Him as their Saviour. Now as each one of us comes to CHRIST for salvation, our faces are turned to GOD. There can now be a face-to-face fellowship because CHRIST died that we might be justified in GOD's sight.

Up until this point there was war between the sinner and GOD. In spite of His love for mankind, His holiness and justice demanded that the sins could not be forgotten or overlooked, but must have just punishment (Ephesians 2:12-18). Now as a sinner comes to CHRIST for salvation, he is cleansed of all sin. Then CHRIST's righteousness is added to that one, making him just in GOD's sight and completely acceptable to Him.

The "**therefore**" in the first verse of chapter five of Romans refers to what has gone before in the preceding chapter. It tells how Abraham's faith in GOD's promises was counted to him for righteousness. "**And [Abraham] being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it [his faith] was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it [righteousness] was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it [righteousness] shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification**" (Romans 4:21-25).

Justification and peace come to us hand in hand. Peace with GOD is the natural result of justification. There cannot be the one without the other. Peace with GOD has been declared by GOD. The terms of the treaty are plainly stated. This is not like a treaty made between two equal nations. This is a treaty made between a King-Creator and His subjects. GOD will always keep His Word. This can never be broken or changed because we have no part in it at all. We can accept GOD's way and have this peace or we can refuse. But if we refuse to believe, and remain at war with GOD, we are separated from Him and all His blessings.

GOD will never beg or bargain with us. He will not accept anything from us for a payment for this peace and justification. This is only given as a free gift. Will you surrender to the terms that GOD has made or keep fighting as the Japanese soldier did who refused to believe that there was peace for him? He had missed fifteen years of being at home with his loved ones. He had missed good food, medical care, adequate clothing because he would not believe that peace had been made for him. If you are refusing to believe what GOD has done for you to make an end to spiritual warfare, you are missing far more than the Japanese soldier. You are separated from GOD, from His blessings of care, protection, joy and peace.

Sin is first of all a crime against GOD. For that reason no one can have peace in the heart who has not first found peace with God. This truth is a basic foundation of all peace whether peace with GOD or the peace of GOD.

Peace with GOD is not an effort on our part to make ourselves right in GOD's sight. Peace is the effect of CHRIST's work on the Cross in our place. It is not a reward in future glory nor is it a reward on this earth for deeds well done. It is a gift that comes with salvation, through no effort of our own.

"**We have peace** [now]" (verse 1). "**We have access** [now]" (verse 2). In other words, we have peace through faith in CHRIST and through Him we also have access to GOD and His great love. To have access means that we have a free admission to GOD's presence and promises.

The Bible presents peace in two major aspects. One is the "**peace of God**" or the peace that comes from GOD to the Christian. This book is written almost entirely about this kind of peace. However, the second kind of peace, which we have discussed so far in this chapter, is "**peace with God.**" It was necessary to speak of this kind of peace here only to show that without peace with GOD, there can be no peace given from GOD.

Peace with GOD is our position and possession the minute we believe on and receive CHRIST as Saviour. This is our standing before GOD that cannot be changed. This is done once for all time and eternity.

The peace of GOD is given or taken away from Christians largely on the basis of how we meet GOD's terms and promises for peace. This might be called our experimental or practical peace. This is the peace which we are so longingly looking for each day of our lives because we often live in depression and discouragement.

GOD has given a clear formula for having peace of GOD in our hearts. It is found in Philipians

4:6, 7, "**Be careful for 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.**" While the Bible does not give us an exact definition of peace, verse seven gives us a description of peace that should make each of us anxious to have this peace as our present possession.

The prescription for peace sounds simple at first glance and for that reason many Christians are afraid to completely trust themselves to it. We are given three things to do.

First, we are not to worry about anything.

Second, we are to pray about everything.

Third, we are to give thanks for everything.

Do you believe that there is such a thing as having GOD's peace? All the time? Is it possible to have a rest of heart every day that GOD is working out the details of your life for your good? GOD promises just that. Why don't you try His way and see how wonderfully it will work for you?

Don't worry about anything. "Oh, wait a minute," you say, "that is impossible. Who would keep my family together if I didn't worry? After all, everybody worries about something." We are told in other places in the Bible to provide for our families and in one place that those who won't work shouldn't be allowed to eat. This verse means that we are not to be anxious and concerned about that provision. We are to do the best we can under GOD's direction and leave the worries and care to Him. He has promised that He will meet every need (Philippians 4:19).

Scripture not only gives no room for worry but definitely commands us not to worry. We have been given an abundance of promises to cover every possible need so that it won't be necessary for us to worry.

When we worry we are really not trusting GOD. We are saying, "GOD, I don't believe that You can take care of this situation, so I have to worry about it myself." If we take this one step further, we will have to admit that we often are not so much worried about GOD giving us what we need but we are not contented with what we think GOD is going to give us. We become upset and worried because we are afraid that GOD might not work out things for us in our way. We are sure that we will have enough clothes, but we worry because they might not be the latest styles or ones as nice as our friends have. We firmly believe that some provision will be made for a roof over our heads but we worry because it might not be a new ranch-style house in the best neighborhood.

When GOD promises to meet every need, that does not necessarily mean that we will have all that we want or even all that we think that we need. It is possible that GOD might find it necessary to meet our best interests by taking away some of the things we want that we might learn to trust Him more. The Word teaches us that GOD likes His children to have nice things. He never deliberately distresses us. However, we might by our lack of love make it necessary for Him to withhold something that is more attractive to us than He, so that we will turn to Him again.

Telling a person not to worry is foolish, for it is nearly impossible for him to stop thinking about these things. Neither can we get rid of anxieties by suppressing them. Pushing them down into the cellar of our minds will only make them return in vague uneasy feelings that we often can't recognize as the source of our troubles. There is only one answer to how to stop worrying. **"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you"** (I Peter 5:7).

The Bible does not tell us to forget, but instead we are to bring them to the fore and cast them overboard. The cares are still real, but they are to be faced and handed completely over to the Lord. "He cares!" What a blessed truth. If we could just believe with all our hearts that He does truly care and will take the responsibility for all our worries, we would have this problem licked.

An elderly colored woman was carrying a heavy load of wash. A kindly gentleman stopped his car to offer her a ride, after they had traveled a few miles, he suggested that she put the wash down on the seat beside her. "Oh, I appreciate your giving me a ride so much that I wouldn't think of letting you carry the washing, too," she replied. How like the colored lady Christians are! Even though GOD is carrying our load of cares and worries, we insist on carrying them, too.

GOD has also given us the antidote for worry. Take heart; there is a cure. GOD's method is prayer. Worry is a sense of need and of failure and a fear of something that might happen. Prayer connects that need with Omnipotence. It connects that need with the only One who can fill it. So, don't worry, adopt the prayer method instead. We are to pray about everything. That is why we are commanded to **"pray without ceasing."** Does that mean that we are to pray about a sore finger, a shopping trip, or a housecleaning job? Absolutely! GOD cares about everything that concerns us. He cares about even the smallest details in our lives.

Many times the seemingly unimportant affairs in our lives turn out to be the biggest factors in our future. We have little idea of the influence that the little circumstances have on our lives. What we might consider just a small detail now might be a very big one in GOD's sight. The little items might be just the things that will lead us toward God or away from Him. Pray about the small irritating situations that arise in the home or business because so often it is not big circumstances that weigh us down. Little normal routines in our lives often upset and worry us more than the big troubles that occasionally come. We are told to turn everything over to the Lord - whether little or big.

In praying and bringing these things to the Lord, we show that we trust Him. We show that we believe that He is interested in us and that He has promised to work these things out for our own good. When we do not pray, but try to take care of things in our own hands, then we hurt the heart of GOD. His heart can be hurt much more than ours when His children turn their faces away from Him, for His is an infinite heart.

Suppose one of your children came home from school hungry. "What are we having for dinner? I'm starved!" You might tell him just what you are having. Then later, suppose he went to a neighbor and said that he doubted that his mother would feed him. "Please give me something to eat." Wouldn't you be terribly hurt to think that he didn't believe you would provide for him even though you had given the child dinner every night and had even told him what you were cooking right then? That is what we are doing to our loving heavenly Father when we doubt His care in spite of His promises to provide our every need and His faithfulness in the past. This shows a

tendency in our hearts to doubt if we have a big enough GOD to take care of the difficulty in our lives. We will have to work this out for ourselves. It is just another way of showing that we think we are bigger than GOD and can manage our affairs better than He can. Though we might not be willing to admit it to ourselves, if we are really honest that is exactly what we are doing when we worry about GOD's care not being adequate for our needs.

This prayer is to be supplication and thanksgiving. One of the most mentioned commands in the Bible is to give GOD thanks. Hundreds of verses stress thanksgiving. "**O, give thanks unto the LORD, for He is good, for His mercy endureth forever.**" "**In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.**"

Do you mean that we are to give thanks for even the unpleasant and trying things that happen to us? Yes. That is what GOD says. You may not be able to rejoice in these circumstances but you can give thanks for them. You may not have the feeling of happiness while you are going through troubles but you can find joy in the Lord in spite of them. That may seem silly or utterly ridiculous, but GOD never asks us to do something unreasonable. He gives us a basis for such a request. He has promised that "**all things work together for good**" and that "**the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,**" GOD has a will and purpose to work out in each life and that will is "**good, and acceptable, and perfect.**" What more do we need to know to bring thanksgiving to our hearts for even the hardest things we have to endure?

This sounds good on paper but how can we make it work in our lives?

First, recognize GOD's hand in everything that comes into your life. When you realize that all belongs to GOD and that He sends everything we have, it is easy to remember to thank Him for His gifts.

Next, get in the habit of talking to GOD as you work or play or rest. Thank Him for the beautiful sky, for the ability to hear the birds and planes. Thank Him that you can see and are able to work, to walk, and for the little everyday abilities that we often forget could be snuffed out in a moment of time if GOD so wills. Prayer is not just a formal message delivered to a Higher Being "out there somewhere." Prayer is communion and fellowship with the dearest and closest friend you have. "**In him we live and move and have our being.**"

He is nearer than hands and feet and closer than our breathing. He already knows everything about you. Of course, we are to remember that He is divine and we are not to have a "buddy buddy" attitude or to be flippant in the way we talk to Him.

We have to remember also that the hard things that happen to us are from GOD's hand, too. These very things probably are doing us much more good than the pleasant ones. We usually learn more by failures and difficulties than we do from smooth circumstances. Tell GOD honestly that this experience is hard and that you are giving thanks because that is His will. Then ask Him to let you really mean your thanks with all your heart as well as with your mind. Gradually you will come to the place where you can truly appreciate suffering and trials. But this can only come as you recognize what GOD is accomplishing for you through these experiences. As long as you think of them as disasters or unfair treatment from GOD, it will be impossible to be thankful. But as you see what GOD is working out in your life, both for this life and for His

and your future glory, you will have a truly grateful heart.

Practice giving thanks even when it is hard and asking GOD's help in making you thankful; before long, thanksgiving will automatically come into your prayers. It is odd that Christians expect constant care and good things from the Lord but never think of thanking Him for even these things. Some people who would be very careful to write a thank-you note to a hostess who had entertained them or to a friend who had given them a gift, seldom remember to thank GOD for His gifts. If you gave a friend a gift every week and she just grabbed it without saying a word, you would be hurt.

You may have sacrificed time and money to secure that present. You would be very hurt by her indifference. Surely you wouldn't continue the gifts long if you were treated that way. Why do we expect GOD to continue His care and gifts when we forget to give thanks, but grab them as though they belong to us because we deserve them? Every day we receive many things from the Lord that we neither recognize as coming from Him nor give thanks for to Him.

A retired colonel in our church tells fascinating stories of restoration days in Japan immediately after the war.

One day a starving Japanese soldier in ragged uniform was brought to him just as he was planning to have his dinner served. Before the colonel would eat himself, he commanded that the soldier be fed, given clean clothes, and other needs. Even in his wretched condition with the good food before him, the soldier would not eat until he had bowed to the floor with head down to worship and thank the colonel for what he had done for him. Many of us have taken CHRIST as our Saviour and have enjoyed all spiritual and material blessings that come to those who have been set free in CHRIST. But some of us grab what is promised us through CHRIST and run away without even thanking GOD for what He has done. We have GOD's gifts in abundance but we live as though we don't want GOD. We live as far away from Him as we can without missing the blessings promised in the Bible.

"Let your requests be made known." This emphasizes the fact that we must make definite petitions both for ourselves and others. It is necessary to ask for our needs and desires.

James says, "**Ye have not because ye ask not.**" We must ask and not just wish for something, in spite of the popular song that says, "Wishing Will Make It So." Sometimes we have keen desires in our heart but get no answer. Check back to make sure that you have been making your requests known and not just thinking about them. CHRIST taught several parables in which He showed us that persistence or continual asking does not weary Him.

Contrariwise, He states that much asking will bring the answer. If it means enough to you to keep on asking GOD for something, you can be sure that He will give it to you or make you contented to do without it.

When someone rings my doorbell once and goes away before I have time to reach the door, I conclude that it wasn't very important. If you don't want your answer enough to ask for it more than once or twice you must not want it very much. Though GOD already knows our needs, He may be just waiting to see if this thing means enough to us that we will labor in prayer for it.

Keep on asking GOD for things; don't ask others for your needs; and don't scheme for ways to help GOD answer your prayers. Just let GOD take care of it in His own way. His way is always best!

Some people have asked me a question that might be in your mind too. Since GOD already has a will for my life, why should I pray? He will only give me what is in His will anyway. There is no standard, pat answer to that question. But we do know this. GOD says that we are to ask. "**Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened**" (Matthew 7:7, 8).

Since He has commanded us to pray and gives many promises to answer, saying that we have not because we ask not, the only safe thing to do is to keep right on asking. There is only grave danger in not praying. We know that we can never be wrong in making our requests known because He has willed that we do so. Since it is in His will for us to pray, then it must be a part of His plan to provide for our needs and desires in accordance with our prayer life. He might be waiting to give us things until we ask. Prayer also shows a dependence on GOD which He longs to see in His children. It shows a trust in His power and wisdom to send the best things into your life. Anyway, prayer is a great deal more than just asking and receiving things. It is also confession, thanksgiving, communion and praise to our Lord.

All prayers are answered in one of three ways.

GOD may say, "Yes."

He may say that you will have to wait awhile and later He will grant your wish.

He may say that what you are requesting is not for your good and you may not have it.

But along with the third answer we have His great promise that He will give us the grace to bear our burdens or to do without what we think we need. Remember GOD's reply to Paul's prayer when He did not see fit to remove Paul's physical suffering; instead, He gave him the grace to continue his work in spite of his handicap. So, if God does not see fit to give us what we ask for, He will give us sufficient grace to carry on in the situation (II Corinthians 12:9).

The result of this threefold program is peace. Don't worry; pray and give thanks, and He promises a peace that "**passeth all understanding.**" This sounds too good to be true. But it is true, because GOD says so, and GOD cannot lie. It has worked for me and in the lives of many, many other Christians. Try it and you will see that it works for you, too.

There have been times when my circumstances have been so upsetting, and the burdens so frightening, that peace seemed utterly impossible. I have taken this verse as GOD's promise to me. There are no words that will adequately describe the peace that has resulted. Truly, it is beyond comprehension. I have even tried to frighten myself a little to see if I was still normal. It seemed like a form of emotional insanity to be so peaceful and unconcerned when the normal reaction would be distress and frantic endeavor to correct the situation. It is so peaceful to calmly

wait while GOD works out the conditions in our lives.

This same promise includes our "**hearts and minds.**" What a comfort that is. Sometimes we can calm our hearts with GOD's Word only to find that we can't turn our thoughts away from the happenings that are so unpleasant. The more our minds dwell on something, the more it takes control of our hearts too. When heart and mind together know this heavenly peace, then the entire body and spirit will be at peace. There will be a relaxed, peaceful outward appearance as well as comfort and spiritual peace within.

Do you really want this "**peace that passeth all understanding**"? You can have it if you are willing to meet the conditions set down in these two verses. Is peace worth the price?

This promise is for those who are "**in Christ Jesus.**" In other words, this is not a promise for everyone. It is for members of GOD's family - for Christians.

We are GOD's possession because He created us. But we can only become His children and enter into His family blessings when we come to Him through CHRIST. This brings us right back to the verses in Romans 5:1, 2. First, there must be peace with GOD. This is given us because CHRIST died on the Cross to pay for our sins and to make us righteous before GOD. This is our position or standing with GOD that nothing can change. After our relationship with GOD is right, then we can apply this promise for the peace of GOD in Philippians to our daily lives.

Don't worry, pray about everything, and give thanks for everything. The result is always the same - a peace that cannot be understood or copied, which will keep our hearts and minds through all experiences.

~ end of chapter 3 ~
