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Rev. Dr. Thomas Evans

Ephesians 2:14-20

Fruit of the Spirit: Antidote for the Modern World:

Peace



At the time of the Reformation peace was acutely absent for people from every walk of life.

.... No peace with the government because the King was divinely appointed so you could not speak against him...

.... No peace for your departed loved ones because you spent all your money trying to buy them out of purgatory...

... No peace with the church because doctrinal disputes could land you on the torture rack...

... No peace with God for every sin had to be confessed lest you die with an uncleansed sin which could land you in damnation...

In the midst of this torturous time, the German monk, Martin Luther, turned to the word of God and encountered the words in Romans 1:17, *"The righteous shall live by faith..."* Until this point Luther was plagued by Satan and obsessed with the confession booth with a tortured soul that never felt good enough. But this one phrase opened him to a loving God that forgives us and redeems us. John Calvin, the Presbyterian theological founder, explained that Christ's sacrifice was once and for all sufficient to cleanse and purify any and all sins, be they past, present, or future. Our peace with God is assured by Christ, not our own doing.

Thus, our Ephesians passage declares, *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace."*

And because we have peace with God, we become empowered to demand peace with others. This meant abandoning the medieval notion that a king's authority was absolute and ordained by God. In fact, it was Presbyterians in America that insisted on this notion, spearheading the Revolutionary War.

As Thomas Smith, a supporter of the Crown in Pennsylvania at the time, said, "That the whole [war] was nothing but a scheme of a parcel of hot-headed Presbyterians." In 1779, Benjamin Franklin stated that George III hated the American Revolutionaries because the king perceived that they were *"whigs and Presbyterians"*. And a London newspaper printed these words, *"Believe me, the Presbyterians have been the chief and principal instruments in all these flaming measures, and they always do and ever will act against Government, from that restless and turbulent anti-monarchical spirit which has always distinguished them everywhere."*

Peace with God was a hallmark of the Reformation but clearly even within the church it did not translate to peace with others or even today within our souls.

Anxiety is a hallmark of modern life, though we are not at war with the church or the government, we are at war within ourselves. And it is the peace of God that passes all understanding that is the antidote to all these ills; the anxiety that keeps you up at night; the tension that lays just beneath the surface, just waiting to boil over.

Peace is such an elusive concept because we have allowed our quest for it to be defined too narrowly. For a greater grasp and a firmer Biblical foundation, we need a clear understanding of just what the word “peace” means.

In Latin, the word is *pax*. This is largely understood as the absence of conflict, as in a truce. During the Roman Empire, the period between 27 BC to AD 180 was marked by a long period without major wars and is known as the *Pax Romana*. But clearly for the Jews and the Christians it was not a time a peace. Jesus was crucified, Christians were fed to lions, and the Jewish temple was destroyed. Biblical peace is a much richer concept than the mere absence of war or a feeling of calm.

Paul devotes a lot to talking of peace because he knew, more than most, what it was to be at war...

...at war with himself, the ever-present demon of temptation in the side of his flesh...

...at war with his past, his murderous actions against his fellow Jews...

...at war with his kin, his fellow converts who rejected his authority....

...at war with the government, though a citizen of Rome, they imprisoned him, beat him, and ultimately killed him.

He wanted the Ephesians to know that peace with God is the peace that ensures all other peace.

In the New Testament, εἰρήνη (*eirene*) is drawn from the verb *eiro* meaning to draw together, to tie together into a whole.

The goal of peace is not simply the absence of conflict, that is two warring parties stepping away, but rather coming together in a new, powerful way. Biblically peace is not so much the absence of something: hatred, anxiousness, enmity etc. but the presence of something.

This is what is missing from our quest for a more just and peaceful society – coming together in the name of God.

Rigoberta Menchú, the Nobel Peace Prize winner from Guatemala we learned about a few weeks ago – even though the military junta murdered her family she wrote, “*We have learned that change cannot come through war. War is not a feasible tool to use in fighting against the oppression we face. War has caused more problems. We cannot embrace that path.*”

Thus, our mission in the world is not only to declare that we have peace with God through Jesus’ sacrifice but peace with others as well. Paul joyfully concludes in Ephesians in a stirring crescendo of thought:

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the

hostility between us...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. Ephesians 2:13-19

Jesus' peace pulls people together. Walls are torn down and those we see as strangers and enemies are friends. Tearing down walls is not just a metaphor. The peace of God has spread past national boundaries, through enemies, straight into people's hearts. And it happens by prayer. As Paul wrote in Philippians, *"Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation with prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. And the peace that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:6

History has proven Paul to be correct!
Prayer breaks down real walls!

Ann Clark, a journalist reporting on the fall of the Berlin Wall wrote this story:

In East Germany after the fall of the wall the media scrambled to explain what had happened. They pointed to Gorbachev's refusal to dispatch Soviet tanks to the West's 40 year stand against communism. Certainly, these and other factors played a part yet a crucial part of the story played by God's church remains largely untold. St. Nikolai a church in Leipzig was led by a pastor named Christian Führer. He began meetings on Mondays to pray for peace. At first there was just a handful but soon it swelled to thousands. On Monday October 9, 1989, a month before the collapse a crisis point

was reached. Berlin was celebrating 40 years of communism they feared allowing the prayer service at St. Nikolai as usual. So, they arranged for busloads of communist party members to fill the pews. The regular attendees were kept outside the church and the crowd swelled to 70,000. Soon all over the country marches took place. The church gave the people faith and calm. In early November the largest march of all took place, some 1,000,000 marched through East Berlin, Erich Honecker, the communist dictator resigned in disgrace, police refused to fire on demonstrators, no Soviet tanks rolled in. Then without warning the order came to open the dreaded wall. People streamed freely through check points, past border guards who for 25 years had orders to shoot to kill. East Germany had collapsed with no bloodshed.

This is the peace of God; the peace that passes all barriers, walls, and blockades. It is the peace that makes enemies friends, and it is the peace that only comes from the love of the Prince of Peace, Amen.