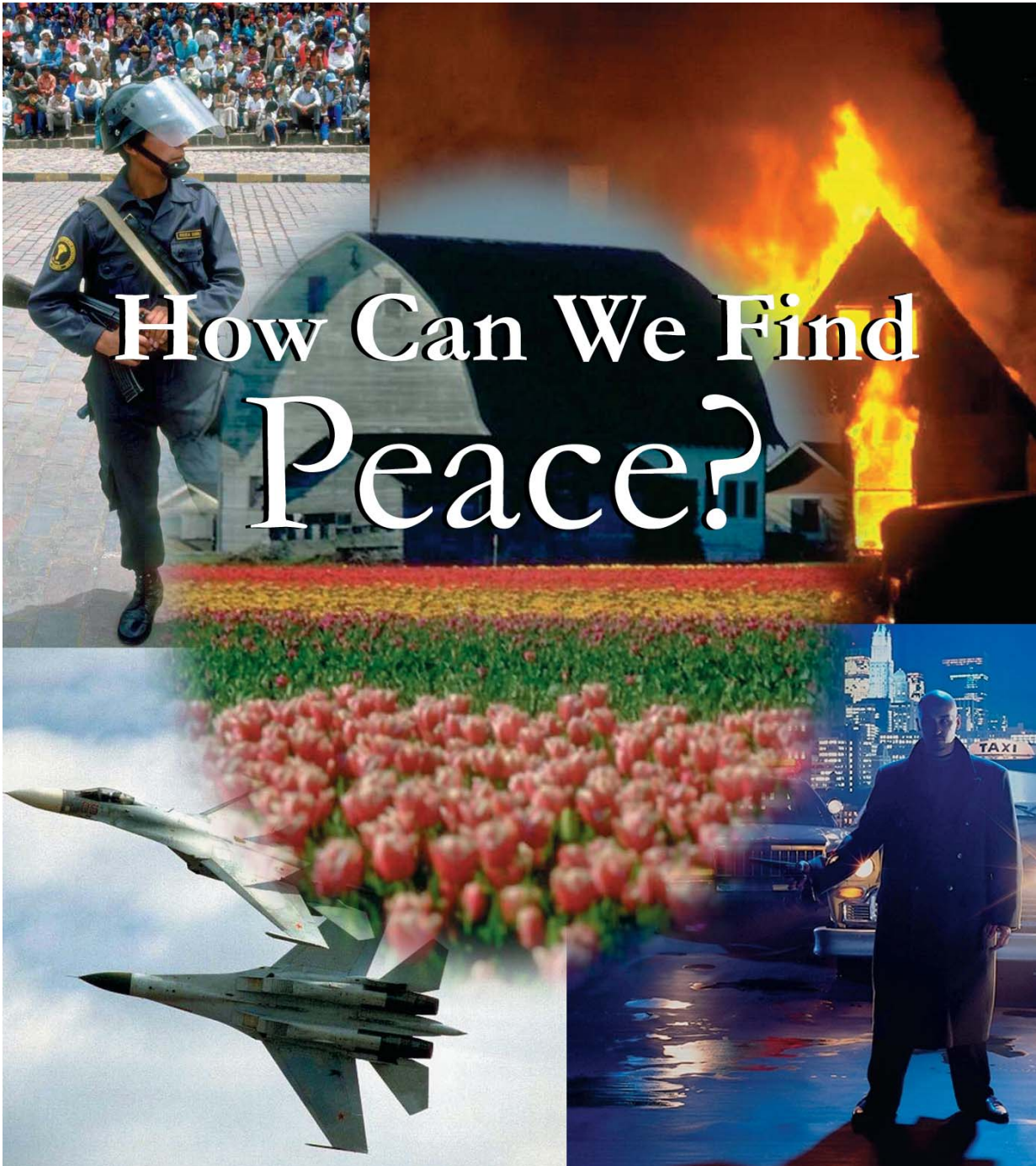


Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 7, Number 5

May 1998



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About Our Cover:

Ours is not a peaceful world. War, crime, violence and disaster surround us on every side. Nevertheless, we can have peace, a peace that "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:6-7). This peace is a gift of God, and it can be ours through our relationship with Him.

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THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: PEACE

Dwight Eisenhower, former U.S. president and supreme Allied commander in Europe during World War II, was quoted by Richard Nixon in *Six Crises* as saying, "In preparing for battle, I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." He said this because during the heat of battle, whether political or military, events never seemed to unfold the way the plans anticipated. However, the planning itself stimulated thought so that leaders could make adjustments to meet fast-changing and challenging circumstances as the battles raged. In this way, events did not become completely out of control.

Life is difficult and at times seems unfair. Events almost never turn out exactly as planned, yet a major reason we plan is to avoid the disquieting stress of things beyond our control. It is certainly understandable why we all want tranquillity. But the reality of man's history is that that tranquillity is rare indeed, whether between nations, families, individuals and at times even within ourselves. We may be quite intent on planning and striving for security within the framework of our "world," but people and events beyond our control constantly intrude and sometimes seriously disrupt our desired order.

It is astounding to contemplate how many things that form and shape our "world" are truly completely beyond our control. It begins before we are born. We have no control over who our parents are or when or where we

are born. Our parents pass on to us a set of genes that determines what we look like. Will we be male or female, tall or short? Will our skin and hair be that of the majority or that of a persecuted minority? Will we be born physically or mentally handicapped? Will we be born in a free land with many opportunities for education and wealth or will we have to endure a harsh, rock-scrabble existence? All of us are dealt a hand at birth, and God expects us to play that hand to the best of our ability.

Yet circumstances of birth and genetics are merely the beginning of things beyond our control. What kind of parents gave us the gift of life? Were they kind, generous and farsighted in preparing us to live in this world? Were they abusive or did they fill our lives with loving attention, disciplining us when needed to help form our character? Did they guide our education while gently prodding us to do our best? Did they instill strong moral values or did they just allow us to grow up like an unneeded appendage that disturbed their plans for life?

This sort of illustration could go on endlessly, but it is important to understand that a great deal of everybody's life is totally beyond his control. Even long after birth, we still have no control over major tranquillity destroyers. We have no control over whether our nation goes to war or the stock market crashes. What can anyone do about weather that produces a drought or a sudden flood? Can we halt a terrifying, life-changing earthquake

that can shatter the lives of thousands of people without even a rumble of warning?

Even in the intimacy of personal relationships, our control over the attitudes and behavior of others is minimal. How many of us have actually been successful in getting someone to change or to quit an addiction? If an addict is in denial, despite impassioned appeals, they will rarely honestly face the truth of their addiction until they hit bottom and bounce around a few times.

Do we actually have control of ourselves? The apostle Paul writes in Romans 7:15-17:

For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

It sounds as if Paul was at times under the control of his old nature, not in control of it.

This is important because distress and anxiety undergird much of the restlessness and disquietude that fills so many lives. They are produced by the fear, uncertainty and insecurity of seeming to be at the whim of circumstances and people beyond our control. Our minds become troubled because we fear what is happening or may happen to us or a loved one. We worry that the consequences will be



Eirene also came to indicate inner satisfaction, the contentment and serenity that derive from living a full life.

difficult to overcome, embarrassing, physically painful, damaging to our reputation or that we will be overwhelmed and suffer great loss.

Genesis 41:8, 16 records:

Now it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. And Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was no one who could interpret them for Pharaoh. . . . So Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, “. . . God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace.”

This is a typical reaction. Pharaoh's mind was disturbed, agitated, because he did not understand. His portentous dream left him anxious because, despite his power, he could not control what he did not even begin to understand.

Definitions

Any good dictionary will define “peace” as freedom from war, harmony, concord, agreement, calm, tranquillity, serenity, quiet, undisturbed state of mind, absence of mental conflict, contentment, acceptance of one's state and the absence of anxiety. It will list its antonyms as war, anxiety, disorder, disturbance, disruption, conflict and commotion.

The New Testament Greek word most often translated as “peace” is *eirene*. It has the sense of “joining what had previously been separated or disturbed.” Thus, it frequently is used to signify “setting at one; quietness; and rest.” *The Daily Study Bible Commentary* by William Barclay says it “means not just freedom from trouble but everything that makes for a man's highest good.”

The word did not begin that way. Its classical Greek usage was narrow, con-

fined to mean the absence of conflict. The New Testament's writers, however, also familiar with the Hebrew *shalom*, used *eirene* as its synonym. Thus, *eirene* also came to indicate inner satisfaction, the contentment and serenity that derive from living a full life.

The Hebrew predominantly uses three words, but one we will not consider because it refers to the peace offering. The second is *charash*. It means to hold one's peace, quiet, silent, rest, and a host of nuances both positive and negative depending on the context.

The third is the very familiar greeting, *shalom*. Though it is also generally translated as a single word like peace, rest, favor, safe, health, welfare and prosperity, it has, as the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states, “a basic meaning of totality or completeness including fulfillment, maturity, soundness, and wholeness.”

Thus, like *eirene*, it also implies that which makes for man's highest good. Unfortunately, this sense does not carry through into the English translations. We miss out on the sense that *shalom*, whether used as a greeting or benediction, carries the desire for the recipient's well-being in the widest sense. When applied to the tranquillity of a person's mind even in the midst of trouble, it suggests that the person is being blessed with fullness or that his character is maturing into the image of God, who is perfect.

Other Biblical Uses of Peace

In both Old and New Testaments, the usage of “peace” is consistent with how we use it within our cultures today. It is often understood as the opposite of war and social unrest, as in Ecclesiastes 3:8: “A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”

At other times it is linked with the absence of war. Proverbs 16:7 says, “When a man's ways please the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Jeremiah 12:12 adds:

The plunderers have come on all the desolate heights in the wilderness, for the sword of the LORD shall devour from one end of the land to the other end of the land; no flesh shall have peace.

God shows such conditions to be desirable in a variety of contexts involving tribes, cities and nations. Perhaps these two contrasting references will illustrate:

And in those times there was no peace to the one who went out, nor to the one who came in, but great turmoil was on all the inhabitants of the lands. So nation was destroyed by nation, and city by city, for God troubled them with every adversity. (II Chronicles 15:5-6)

For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphshah even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (I Kings 4:24-25)

The Bible shows that such peace can result from military victory. In Jeremiah 43:11-12, the prophet voices a prophecy God gave him about Nebuchadnezzar and Egypt:

When he comes, he shall strike the land of Egypt and deliver to

How glorious it would be to be free of the burdens of living in this dangerous, unstable, violent world, but... such is not our lot in life.



death those appointed for death, and to captivity those appointed for captivity, and to the sword those appointed for the sword. I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he shall burn them and carry them away captive. And he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on his garment, and he shall go out from there in peace.

In the Bible the king's coming in peace means his coming in victory, his purpose accomplished. Surrender, therefore, is shown as an element in the resulting peace. II Samuel 10:19 records such an occurrence:

And when all the kings who were servants of Hadadezer saw that they were defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and served them. So the Syrians were afraid to help the people of Ammon anymore.

However, the Bible also shows that diplomacy can produce peace:

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth. . . . For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his kindred. (Esther 9:29-30; 10:3)

David also sought peace through

diplomacy as I Samuel 25:5-6 shows:

David sent ten young men; and David said to the young men, "Go up to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name. And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity: 'Peace be to you, peace on your house, and peace to all that you have!'"

The ratification of treaties was intended to produce peace, even as we have the same expectation today. Genesis 26:28-31 is a clear example:

But they said, "We have certainly seen that the LORD is with you. So we said, 'Let there now be an oath between us, between you and us; and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, since we have not touched you, and since we have done nothing to you but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.'" So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. Then they arose early in the morning and swore an oath with one another; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

Generally, peace in the Old Testament is the state that occurs when conflicts are resolved, while in the New Testament that application is greatly diminished. There, peace is more an inner quality of those having been blessed through reconciliation with God, knowing His purpose and trusting in His sovereignty over the affairs of mankind and their lives.

Jesus Speaks on Peace

In the gospels Jesus did not make many direct statements about peace, but one given on the eve of

His crucifixion is very revealing:

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

His use of "heart" reveals that the peace in which He is involved while we are in this world is a state of mind. John 16:33 confirms this:

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

How glorious it would be to be free of the burdens of living in this dangerous, unstable, violent world, but as sons of God such is not our lot in life. God has called us to a life that runs counter to much of this world's practices and attitudes. As such, we are caught not only in general events and circumstances generated in the world, but also when we directly irritate and anger those close to us by determinedly following God's way.

Jesus states in His prayer to the Father in John 17:11, "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world." So we become caught in and must endure this world's wars, economic swings, prejudices, social unrest, natural disasters, and accidents. We are exposed to the same diseases as everybody else. All these can and do strike us with fear and trouble our hearts, destroying peace. In this world it is very easy to anticipate that a disaster can occur at any moment.

In John 17:14, Jesus addresses the source of the more personal persecutions that threaten our peace: "I have given them Your word; and the world



Is it possible for us to grow into the image of God when distracted by conflict and the anxieties and troubles it produces?

has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” The carnal mind is enmity against God (Romans 8:7), and we can feel this hatred to a potentially terrifying degree when it is aimed directly at us. Throughout history, this sort of peace-shattering disturbance has produced job losses, divided families, uprooted lives in fleeing, imprisonment for those caught (Acts 9:1-2; 12:3-4) and for some martyrdom (Acts 7:54-60; 12:1-2).

Peace and Prosperity

Jesus says we can have peace through these kinds of experiences because He can give it to us. When He said this, He was not introducing a new idea. In the “blessings and curses chapter,” Leviticus 26:6 shows that God is the ultimate source of peace and He will give it upon our meeting the condition of obeying His commandments:

I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land.

Here, peace is a quality of life He can give even as he gives rain in due season. Leviticus 26 emphasizes material prosperity as God’s blessing to Israel. Peace is necessary for the material prosperity of a nation. War may be the ultimate distraction from accomplishing anything positive; it is catastrophically debilitating to every area of life. Not only can it break a nation economically, but also warp its people psychologically and destroy its social structure, infrastructure and spirit.

Should we think that peace is no less necessary to spiritual prosperity? Is it possible for us to grow into the

image of God when distracted by conflict and the anxieties and troubles it produces? Even if the conflict is not directly ours, it adversely affects our ability to live God’s way of life. This is why the apostle Paul counsels us as he does in I Timothy 2:1-2:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

Conflict promotes self-centeredness, virtually forcing us to flee, defend ourselves or attack the other to maintain or establish a measure of control. It can also cause us to detour permanently from what we were trying to accomplish.

James 3:17-18 gives more direct and specific reasons why peace is such a great benefit toward spiritual prosperity:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

“Wisdom” indicates influence of heavenly origin, that is, from God. Its effect on the mind is to make it pure and chaste, not more imaginative or intelligent. Its purpose is to make the person upright, inoffensive and good, then peaceable, etc. It disposes a person to live at peace with others. By itself, it corroborates Jesus’ statement that He is willing and able to give a peace unlike the world’s, a state of

being not native to man.

If a person is of a pure spirit, then peace tends to follow. First, this occurs because a pure-hearted person is at peace within himself. He is therefore not self-righteously, self-centeredly and discontentedly seeking to impose his will and way on others to control their lives. Such a person will not induce conflict.

Second, they will follow Paul’s advice, which he gave in two places. Romans 14:19 says, “Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another.” Hebrews 12:14 adds, “Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” It is very difficult for people to have conflict with others who will not fight! This does not mean that we should make peace at any cost by denying truth. We can remain faithful to truth without going to war, though it might appear costly at the moment. Jesus—and many others—did it.

James goes on to say that this approach to life’s relationships produces the fruit of righteousness. This phrase could mean that what is produced as a fruit is righteousness, but it can also mean the fruit that righteousness produces. The latter is preferable. The fruit of the Spirit is the fruit the Spirit produces. The fruit of repentance is the change repentance produces in one’s manner of living and attitude. Some of the fruit of righteousness are the qualities James mentions in James 3:17. Righteousness is therefore the seed from which these things grow.

But a seed needs the proper conditions to germinate, grow and produce fruit. Regardless of how good a seed is, if the conditions are not right, this process will be hindered, and it will bear poorly. The Parable of the Sower and Seed in Matthew 13 shows this

Peace is the proper condition for the fruit of righteousness, and peacemakers are the green-thumbed gardeners.



clearly. Peace is the proper condition for the fruit of righteousness, and peacemakers are the green-thumbed gardeners. Growing a good crop demands the right conditions for good seed.

So important is peace to the Christian's spiritual prosperity that God will permit a marriage to be broken by divorce where there cannot be peace. I Corinthians 7:15 says:

But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace.

Divorce is usually preceded by a fairly long period of contention. It is warfare on a small scale. Living in an environment of warfare right in the home contributes little to growing in the image of the loving God of peace. It forces one to focus on himself, and at worst, it is entirely possible God will lose the person involved in such a contentious circumstance. At the very least, growth will be slow and minimal.

Different From the World's Peace

We have already seen that the peace of which Jesus speaks has a different source than the world's. But there is another element that is vastly different. The world's peace is caused by created things and the manipulations of carnal beings. History proves that the restless strivings of men for the peaceful promise of power, wealth and fame instead leaves them with care, anxiety and remorse. God has not given created things the power to give peace. The result is that once someone attains these things, the endless cycle to achieve their desired peace will only begin again.

False religions, philosophies of men and even close friendships cannot assuage this hunger. These can do nothing to alter the cause of the anxious restlessness born of a guilty conscience or enmity between them and God. These can claim to give peace, but what can they do about the problem of sin and a relationship with God? Can any of these reconcile a person to God and give him a new nature?

Can these give a person the security that comes with knowing his life is in the hands of the Almighty Sovereign Creator of all things, whose attentiveness is so great that He notices a sparrow's falling? Can they give a full vision of the great and glorious purpose God is working out? Can they give lasting and complete healing of a person's bent and twisted mind or diseased body?

The Christian can have the peace that "surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:6-7) because God does all these things and much, much more. We have only scratched the surface of the understanding that undergirds the way a Christian perceives this troubled world and his life in it.

Justification and Peace

Paul writes:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. (Romans 5:1-2)

These verses follow a long section on justification by faith. Paul concludes chapter 4 with the fact that Christ's resurrection was God's evidence that

Christ's work was accepted and thus ensures our justification.

The word "therefore" at the beginning of chapter 5 shows that the immediate benefit of justification is that we have peace with God. This is justification by faith's practical influence on the lives of those justified. Paul says in Romans 8:6-7:

For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

This plainly states that the sinner is the enemy of God, and the state of a sinner's mind is far from peace. It is at war, and his sinning proves the warfare, the rebellion in his mind. He is often agitated, alarmed and trembling and feels alienated from God. God is not in all his thoughts (Psalm 10:4, KJV). Isaiah 57:20-21 explains:

But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

The sinner trembles when he thinks of God's law. He fears His judgments and is alarmed when he considers hell. But as God moves a person toward conversion, He reveals His willingness to be reconciled through His Son's sacrifice. Through faith and repentance, the obstacles arising from God's justice and law disappear, and He is willing to pardon and be at peace. When the sinner embraces it, this process produces peace of mind, a peace the world cannot give or take away because the world is powerless over sin. This peace is a



The Christian's outlook on life can be entirely different from those in the world, untroubled by the calamity they see all around them.

work, a product, of the Spirit of God by which the sinner has been called and led to this point.

Access to God

The second benefit arising from justification by faith is access to God. This plays a large part in sustaining the peace begun at reconciliation. Reconciliation implies a relationship established with God to continue peaceful fellowship. Without access to Him, we can have no fellowship and relationship. The peace will quickly dissolve because we will become estranged, not knowing one another. Through access to Him, we can draw strength from Him to face the trials of life.

Our relationship is one of personal trust that in one sense leaves justification behind to move onward to sanctification and finally glorification in the Kingdom of God. The path we follow is not always easy. Luke writes in Acts 14:22 that the apostles went about, "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.'"

"Tribulations" brings thoughts of trouble, anxiety, fear and doubt. However, Paul writes in Romans 5:3-5 that those who have peace with God and access to Him

... glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which was given to us.

This peace is not a kind of secular contentment that men can find by lowering their standards and expecta-

tions. It is both a gift from God to those reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ and a product of the Holy Spirit in us as we grow in a continuing, trustful relationship through the daily affairs of our life.

The Christian's outlook on life can be entirely different from those in the world, untroubled by the calamity they see all around them. This does not mean that the Christian's peace is a sort of magic or that he ignores the seriousness of the situation. Nor does it mean that the Christian achieves this wonderful quality instantly or that it is always constant. However, it is always available through faith because he has access to the Sovereign, Almighty God. He always has everything under control and is filled with love and wisdom that He is willing to use for our benefit.

Rejoicing in Hope

A third effect of God's revelation of Himself that brings and sustains peace is that we can "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:2). Simply said, a Christian understands the purpose of life and eagerly yearns to be changed and inherit the Kingdom of God. The question, "Why were you born?" is answered, and he can turn his focus in life to yielding to God, secure in the knowledge that God will be working in his behalf to form His image in him.

Paul exclaims in Romans 8:31-32, 35, 37-39:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of

Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The fruit of peace, like love and joy before it, is demonstrated again by Scripture to be the work of God's Holy Spirit in us. All of mankind's history gives evidence of almost continuous warfare motivated by the qualities of character natural to man. "Peace, peace!" men cry, "when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). This is a hollow, impossible cry in this world because Scripture also truthfully testifies, "The way of peace they have not known" (Romans 3:17).

The peace that Jesus offers comes only as the result of God's calling by His Spirit through which He works in and through us to bring us into loving submission to the way of peace. That is the way of daily talking and walking with God, coming to know intimately His faithful, loving use of His wisdom and power to complete His glorious purpose in our lives. It produces a peace that passes all understanding because then everything is under perfect control (Romans 8:28-30).

In Christian love,

No Greater Love

The February 13, 1987, issue of *The Missileer*, a newspaper of the 45th Space Wing, U.S. Air Force, ran this brief and apparently true story by Colonel John W. Mansur:

The mortar rounds landed in an orphanage run by a missionary group in the small Vietnamese village. The missionaries and one or two children were killed outright and several more children were wounded, including one girl about eight years old.

People from the village sent for help to a neighboring town that had radio contact with the American forces. Finally a U.S. doctor and nurse arrived in a jeep with their medical kits. They established that the young girl was the most critically injured. Without quick action, she would die from shock and loss of blood.

A blood transfusion was imperative so a donor with a matching blood type was required. A quick test showed that neither American had the correct blood type, but several of the uninjured orphans did.

The doctor spoke some pidgin Vietnamese, and the nurse a smattering of high-school French. Using that combination together with much impromptu sign language, they tried to explain to their young, frightened audience that unless they could replace some

*"Greater love
has no one than
this, than to lay
down one's life
for his friends."
(John 15:13)*

of the girl's lost blood, she would certainly die. Then they asked if anyone would be willing to give blood to help.

Their request was met with

wide-eyed silence. After several long moments, a small hand slowly and waveringly went up, dropped back down, and then went up again.

"Oh, thank you," the nurse said in French. "What is your name?"

"Hung," came the mumbled reply.

Hung was quickly laid on a pallet, his arm swabbed with alcohol, and the needle inserted in his vein. Through this ordeal Hung lay stiff and silent. After a moment, he let out a shuddering sob, quickly covering his face with his free hand.

"Is it hurting, Hung?" the doctor asked.

Hung shook his head, but after a few moments another sob escaped, and once more he tried to cover up his crying. Again the doctor asked him if the needle hurt, and again Hung shook his head.

But now his occasional sobs gave way to a steady, silent crying, his eyes screwed tightly shut, his fist in his mouth to stifle his sobs.

The medical team was concerned because the needle

A Ready Answer

"Be Ready Always To Give An Answer" – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

should not have been hurting him. Something was obviously very wrong. At this point, a Vietnamese nurse arrived. Seeing the little one's distress, she spoke to him, listened to his reply, and answered him in a soothing voice.

After a moment, the boy stopped crying, opened his eyes and looked questioningly at the Vietnamese nurse. When she nodded, a look of great relief spread over his face. Looking up, the Vietnamese nurse said quietly to the Americans, "He thought he was dying. He misunderstood you. He thought you had asked him to give all his blood so the little girl could live."

"But why would he be willing to do that?" asked the navy nurse.

The Vietnamese nurse repeated the question to the little boy, who answered simply, "She's my friend."

Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend.

The final sentence of this inspiring story is, of course, paraphrased from the Bible, from John 15:13. This scripture from the Revised Standard Version reads, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

This scripture raises many questions: When Jesus said this, was He just referring to Himself and His own sacrifice? Or was He again foretelling how His disciples and many other Christians would die? Must all true Christians literally die for their friends? What was Jesus telling His people here?

We need examine this scripture to understand in what way or ways we, as Christians at the end of this twentieth century, are to lay down our lives for our friends.

Sacrificial Christians

*J*ohn 15:13 is not just talking about the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In the context of

John 14-15, Jesus is talking about the love that should exist among members of God's church. It is not just a casual suggestion or a noble idea that we can adopt if we desire! God repeats it, again through His "apostle of love," in I John 3:16:

By this we know love, because
He laid down His life for us.
And we also ought to lay down
our lives for the brethren.

"We also ought to lay down our lives"! God expects it of us!

Since the death of Jesus Christ, many true Christians have laid down their lives and have died for their friends—their fellow-members of God's church and their greatest Friends, God the Father and Jesus Christ. In John 15:14, Jesus tells us that we are His friends if we keep His commandments. It follows that, if we are His friends, we may call Him our Friend.

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John the Baptist,
Stephen, James
and the apostle
Paul also had
many close brushes
with death.*

Space does not permit telling the stories of the many, many Christians, our brothers and sisters in Christ of earlier times, who literally laid down their lives—either in defending the truth or in conceal-

ing fellow-members from persecutors. Although we cannot go into all the details here, we will mention a few examples.

In the Old Testament, God records some of the accounts of His people who were willing to die for His way of life. In Daniel 3 is the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, three young men who were willing to suffer and die in a fiery furnace. In chapter 6, Daniel himself was willing to die in a lion's den rather than to forsake God's way.

Notable martyrs of the New Testament include John the Baptist (Matthew 14), Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12). The apostle Paul had many close brushes with death in his years of service and dedication to God and His people. He lists some of these in II Corinthians 11. It may be that, when the Jews in Lystra stoned Paul, he actually died but God resurrected him shortly afterwards (Acts 14:19-20).

Paul writes that, before his eventual execution in Rome, he had no fear of his impending death. At least a couple of opportunities for escape presented themselves to Paul on his journey to Rome (Acts 27-28), but he declined them. He tells Timothy that he was "ready to be offered" (II Timothy 4:6, KJV), as he felt he had completed the job that God had given him to do.

We think of Paul as brave for coming so close to physical death so often and bouncing back each time to continue his part in God's Work. His bravery certainly stood out in enduring these trials, but he displays his courageous love even more vividly in Romans 9:3:

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

Paul felt bitter disappointment that the great majority of his fellow Jews were rejecting Christ. Not only was he willing to give his physical life for them, but he would have actually forfeited his eternal life in

God's Kingdom, if necessary, to ensure the widespread conversion of the Jews. That is true courage! That is true love!

Before he received the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter emphatically told Jesus that he would lay down his life for his Master and Friend. Yet shortly afterward, he fled from Jesus' persecutors, denying His Savior three times. After growing for many years in God's Spirit, Peter did eventually lay down his life for his Friend.

All the other original apostles, except John, died in martyrdom along with many other Christians of their era. Some of the gruesome methods of torture and execution they suffered are listed in Hebrews 11. Persecution and martyrdom continued and even intensified in the years following the death of the apostle John. Polycarp, considered the first "post-biblical" apostle, was martyred at Smyrna at the age of 86. The story of his martyrdom, if true, is both inspiring and absolutely astounding.

Whether members of God's true church or professing "Christians" in name only, thousands died in the persecutions of the first four centuries after Christ's death and resurrection. Approximately 100,000 people belonging to a group called the Paulicians, who are thought by some to have been our brethren from the church's "Pergamos era," were slaughtered by command of the Byzantine empress, Theodora.

Give Our Lives?

What about us, members of God's church in the end time? Is it or will it at some future time be necessary for us to give our physical lives for our friends—either for our fellow members of the church or our greatest Friends, God the Father and Jesus Christ?

If we are Philadelphia Christians, then the answer is simply stated in Revelation 3:8, 10:

I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have

a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. . . . Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

*Just as Jesus' life is
totally dedicated to
loving and serving
His Father and
His brethren in the
church, so must our
new life be given
and spent in loving
service.*

God promises protection to the Philadelphia brethren—and we can be sure that this is a Rock-solid promise! However, we should be careful not to be complacent about this comforting promise. We should never assume that God considers us Philadelphians. It is likely that we have been in the Laodicean era for quite some time. We have to prove to God that we deserve to be considered Philadelphians in attitude while amidst the Laodicean era.

Although God's promise to this faithful church is sure, it applies only to those who are truly Philadelphian. Jesus identifies them as having kept God's Word, not denied His name, and kept His command to persevere. Those who fail to meet these three criteria cannot count themselves as Philadelphians and cannot claim God's promise of

protection through the end-time trials and persecutions. We all need to wake up, listen to and act upon the frequent and strong warnings against Laodicean attitudes that still exist within the church today!

Devoted to Giving

There is another way we can lay down our lives for our friends, and rather than having a morbid fear of end-time persecutions, we should be concentrating on it. This "other way" is to lay our old, sinful lives down, to allow them to be crucified with Christ. This means living brand-new lives as Christians, allowing Jesus Christ to live His life through us. Galatians 2 and II Corinthians 4 cover these ideas in more detail. Just as Jesus' life is totally dedicated to loving and serving His Father and His brethren in the church, so must our new life be given and spent in loving service.

One writer wisely described true friendship as "when we totally devote our lives to giving to others." This concept is echoed in John 13:34-35:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Jesus says that we will be recognized as true Christians, not by riches, not by our eloquence in speaking, not by our ability to bring others to conversion, not by our talent to recall scripture, not by our capacity to understand and explain the fine details of prophecy—but by how much we love each other!

We should really be asking ourselves—not only "Would I give my physical life for my friends?" or "Would I sacrifice my life for God as Jesus Christ did for us?"—but rather, "Am I laying down my life for them on a daily basis?"

Greater love has no man than this!

—John Plunkett

A PORTABLE PEACE

An elementary art teacher once asked her class to draw pictures that would illustrate or portray the concepts of peace and tranquillity. The students for the most part predictably latched onto the typical or stereotypical scenes: blue skies, peaceful valleys with babbling brooks, forest meadows, backyard barbecues, or families playing or reclining on the beach.

The picture that caught the teacher's eye depicted a threatening, stormy sky with billowing clouds, ominous lightning strikes, trees bending in the gale-force winds and frothing white caps out on the water. Nestled in a secure crag, a mother bird placed her wings over her brood of hatchlings. In the teacher's mind, this scene captured the essence of peace, a secure peace in the midst of extreme adversity—a kind of “portable” peace. We could describe the kind of peace that the baby birds experienced as a singular undivided trust amidst unstable, inclement conditions.

Throughout the scriptures, Jesus and the apostles illustrated this peace in the face of danger. One remarkable example occurred during a raging, turbulent storm on the Sea of Galilee, threatening to capsize the boats. Meanwhile, the Prince of Peace slept in the stern of the boat unperturbed and tranquil (Matthew 8:24, Mark 4:38).

In another memorable account in Acts 12, on the night before his scheduled execution, Peter felt so much at peace, trusting in God's purpose for

him, that an angel had to use considerable energy to rouse him from a deep sleep. This kind of peace really passes all understanding!

Spiritual Strobe Meter

Perhaps the overriding lesson of the book of James concerns the causes, sources, conditions and deterrents to peace. He suggests that single-mindedness—an undivided trust in God and His sovereignty—leads to peace, while double-mindedness—maintaining a split loyalty—leads to disharmony and strife.

A metaphor from acoustical physics and music describes these antagonistic conditions. Acoustical physics applies the term “harmonic” as an overtone with a frequency *equal* to the fundamental frequency multiplied by a whole number (*Barnes and Noble Thesaurus of Science*, p. 68). Because the harmonic overtones consist of multiples of the same frequency, they will never clash with the fundamental frequency. In music, harmonic intervals blend and complement, creating pleasing wholesome chords, while dissonant frequencies will clash, causing an unpleasant cacophony resonating at cross purposes with the fundamental or original frequency.

One high school band director tunes his band with the help of an electronic strobe meter. When the pitch vibrates at the proper frequency, a solid black bar emerges on the scope, but when the frequency moves slightly slower or faster than the pre-established frequency, jagged lines ap-

pear. The band director wants all the instruments on the same frequency when he asks for a concert A or B-flat.

“Harmony” and “concord” describe a state in which the frequencies do not clash with one another or move at cross purposes. Much of the enjoyment of music comes from the individual instruments adhering to overriding laws of harmony and complementarity. The book of James could be called a kind of spiritual strobe meter, keeping our spiritual instruments resonating in harmonic vibration to God's laws. James, at the outset, urges a sympathetic resonating frequency to God's Spirit, suggesting that a double-minded individual demonstrates instability in everything he thinks, says and does (James 1:8).

James detects clashing, inharmonic frequencies between faith and doubt, yielding to God's Spirit or to lust (James 1:13-14), hearing and doing (1:25), clashes between pure and hypocritical religion (1:26-27), treating rich and poor differently (2:3), faith and works (2:20), pure and unwholesome uses of the tongue (3:1-12), competition and envy contrasted with cooperation (4:2), friendship with the world contrasted with friendship with God (4:4), clashes between patience and rage (1:20; 5:7).

James realizes that maintaining a state of double-mindedness (spiritual dissonance or disharmony) comes from harboring two antithetical thoughts—ideas, desires, or behaviors that clash or run at cross purposes with another. Double-

mindfulness destroys peace and tranquillity.

Fruits of Double-Mindedness

People have often found themselves trapped in jobs or professions they loathed, but learned too late in life to make a course correction. Ulcers, hypertension, strokes and heart attacks may provide the grim icing on a lifetime of dissonance and disharmony between what they want to do and what they must do. Likewise, marital incompatibility destroys more than half of new marriages. A conciliation court judge recently confided to me the frustration and futility he faces in trying to put the pieces together.

As members of God's family, we have the responsibility to reestablish harmony and concord in our lives and with the people with which we associate. "Blessed are the peacemakers," says Jesus, "for they shall be called the sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

By submitting to God's direction and adjusting ourselves to his strobe meter, we receive peace of mind. James 4:8 says:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Peace and single-mindedness or steadfastness seem inextricably related. Isaiah 26:3 teaches us, "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." Focus upon God and His laws automatically lead us to peace. We become at one with God and at peace when we yield to and follow His laws. Psalm 119:165 concurs, "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." God's laws produce peace and tranquillity while disobedience automatically creates friction, tension, and dissonance.

Living at Peace With All

Sometimes law-abiding people become discouraged observing how people in high places from the President to the constable can treat

God's law with impunity and get away with it. They wonder why they should expend the extra effort getting in harmony with God's law while a neighbor, boss or public official does something unethical and appears to profit from it. Some wonder if they should not adopt a kind of situation ethics: one set of standards for church brethren and another for the world. Paul censured Peter for such a set of double standards (Galatians 2:11-21).

Single-minded adherence to God's standards should become a part of our character among family, friends, associates, strangers—and even around those who despise God's laws. Chances are excellent that they will not fault us for remaining ethical when they choose not to. Remember:

When a man's ways please the LORD [when he is in harmony with God's laws], He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. (Proverbs 16:7)

The apostle Paul in Romans 12:18 admonishes us, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

We may find that easier said than done. The modern urban environment has spawned an insidious art form called "urban" or "gangster" rap in which lyrics couched in the most foul language promotes murder, torture, sex perversion, and destruction. Technology has provided super-amplified car stereos to blast this untreated filth and perversion right into our faces. As we look into the eyes of the addicts of this so-called "music," we see how the angry, pulsating lyrics have transformed these young people into sullen, truculent, defiant personalities, exuding hatred, rage, and anger wherever they go.

Truly, those of us who, because of our job commitments, find ourselves trapped in sprawling urban environments must aggressively apply Psalm 34:14: "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." Unfortunately, we have difficulty avoiding taking on the characteristics of the society in which we live. We can become transformed into frantic, stressful, anxious, highly irritable creatures.

We are forced to learn or adapt to a way of life contrary to the mind of God. Many of us endure the day-to-day combat of rush hour traffic. Tempers become short and behavior becomes childish. Road rage has quadrupled in the last ten years. One anthropologist, Edward Hall, in describing the pace and stress of New York City commuters during rush hour, exclaimed:

You know, I've been on commuter trains here after everyone has been through one of these rushes, and I'll tell you, there is enough acid in the stomachs in every car to dissolve the rails underneath.

Who knows what hydrochloric acid would do on cement and asphalt, but the freeways and expressways of Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston and New York City would look like craters of the moon if it were poured on it.

Crowds Versus Space

God Almighty never intended that people crowd together in large urban pens. To the developers of high-rise condominiums and housing projects, jamming people together in stifling cubicles, the Almighty thunders:

Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, till there is no place where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land! (Isaiah 5:8)

The resulting overcrowding has taken away our peace.

Writer Tom Wolfe in his article, "Oh Rotten Gotham" comments:

Overcrowding gets the adrenaline going, and the adrenaline gets them hyped up. And here they are, hyped up, turning bilious, nephritic, a queer, autistic, sadistic, barren, batty, hot-in-the-pants, chancered-on-the-flankers, leering, puling, numb—the usual in New York, in other words.

Peace requires enclaves of solitude, occasionally away from other people. Our Elder Brother Jesus



Christ, who certainly found Himself as busy as any of us, who had been given the Holy Spirit without measure, realized the absolute need for solitude, meditation and renewal.

We find numerous instances throughout the gospels in which Jesus rose well before daylight and departed to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35; 6:46; John 8:1). Luke 22:39 suggests that Jesus enjoyed the Mount of Olives and hiked there frequently.

I grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota containing over a hundred acres of beautiful wooded land on the Minnesota River Valley and a spring bed lake on the other side. I did not fully appreciate these surroundings until I moved into the city.

Urban dwellers have to exercise more resourcefulness in finding such solitary places, but we cannot afford not to make the effort. Actually, each urban area contains a way of escape for those who make the effort. Los Angeles, for example, has the Angeles Crest National Forest and Vasquez County Park within an hour's drive, and New York City has the Catskill Mountains within driving distance.

Currently, my family lives near a university campus with lakes and a nature trail. These environs become deserted during the weekends when the students go home to party.

We should go back to nature periodically to get back in sync with God's timetable. We need to bring this serenity and tranquillity back with us, en-

abling us to become a source of refreshment to those we come in contact, serving as a kind of ambassador to those desperately thirsting for this peace.

We need to absorb the godly lessons from unspoiled nature. In this environment we can immediately sense the fruits of God's Spirit. For one thing, God's timetable seems more relaxed than the frantic, anxious, hurrying found in urban rush hours. The patience of God becomes evident in the care He puts in His creation.

Nature teaches us that God loves variety. We see thousands of flora and fauna projects all taking place at

once, but in perfect harmony with one another. Creation teaches us cooperation rather than strife and competition. The manzanita does not exalt itself over the yucca, the cedar does not exalt itself over the chaparral, nor does the dogwood exalt itself over the magnolia. In nature we do not get a sense of have or have not.

Enclaves of Peace

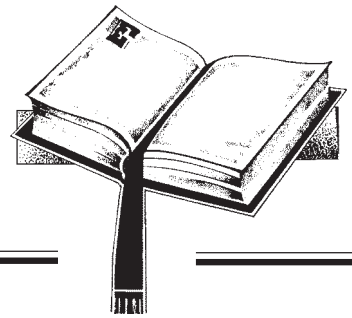
Our everyday lives should serve as oases of God's Spirit to the people we encounter. It does not seem particularly strange to experience peace, tranquillity and gentleness in raw, unspoiled nature. People find it far more refreshing to see this same peace, patience and tranquillity in places that normally lack these characteristics.

Like the mother bird in the elementary classroom picture who carried a portable peace to her offspring, we should provide comfort and peace not only to our brethren, but to all we come in contact.

Then we can fully understand the words of our Elder Brother in Matthew 11:28, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," as well as the words of the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:7, "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

—David F. Maas





IT'S ALL RELATIVE

I do not pray," Jesus says in John 17:15, "that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one." There are times that each of us wishes we would not have to deal with the world quite as intimately as we must. The world, however, is an ever-present reality that our Savior expects us, in imitation of Him, to overcome, not abandon.

Thus, whether we like it or not, the world's events, concerns, methods, ideas and attitudes encroach on us constantly, and we engage in a constant battle to ward them off. Inevitably, no matter how vigilant we are, some of them rub off on us and our children. The world is so pervasive—and invasive—that we cannot help coming away scarred and bloodied from our clashes with it.

The world's most insidious weapons are ideas and attitudes, and in fact, they act in tandem, as one never works without the other's support. Together, they have the power to entrap a person on two very fundamental levels: intellectually and emotionally. With reason and logic, with pathos and passion, they appeal to the natural human desires

for meaning and fulfillment in life. If a person both thinks and feels that an idea—some of this world's wisdom—with its attendant attitudes will benefit him, he is already hooked on it.

Here in the last days, a time God guarantees to be the worst mankind has ever faced, the most virulent, most deceptive philosophy has been sprung upon us. Though various forms of it have assailed other ages, only now has its full potency been unveiled and set loose. It goes by the names of *postmodernism* and *relativism*, and it has staked out the entire earth as its battlefield.

Defining Terms

Philosophers disagree about an all-encompassing definition of these terms, explaining that each discipline it affects has its own unique understanding. This fact in itself aids us in understanding postmodernism, which is an amalgamation of beliefs and opinions, any or all of which may be true depending on the circumstance.

Similarly, relativism holds that ethical and moral truths depend on the individual or group that holds them.

One educator writes:

Postmodernism embraces the eclectic. . . .

Postmodernism reflects an emerging global perspective, of differing cultures living together on a single planet (pluralism, multiculturalism), and an acceptance of these differences, each as valid as the other. . . .

It validates polytheism and a concern for the environment, ecology. It has turned from the theoretical to the pragmatic, from uniformity to diversity, and from elitism to populism. ("What Is Postmodernism," Larry Solomon, Ph.D., p. 2)

In short, everything is right or true, and nothing is wrong or false, in its own context. It is a philosophic restatement of "anything goes." It allows each individual to feel accepted for what he is and believes no matter how divergent





Relativism infests our colleges and universities. Students believe or assume that no absolute truth exists, a stance that they have learned from our culture yet cannot defend. Thus, they graduate without any moral foundation.

he and his views are from the “mainstream.” In reality, postmodernism has no mainstream, just myriads of rivulets that flow of their own accord.

Relativism is postmodernism’s corresponding “belief” system. William Provine gives us the general understanding of relativism in *The Scientist* magazine (September 5, 1988, p. 10):

No inherent moral or ethical laws exist, nor are there absolute guiding principles for human society. The universe cares nothing for us and we have no ultimate meaning in life.

In the same vein, philosophers have derived these five assumptions to delineate relativism:

1. No universal moral rules or standards exist.
2. No single standard or set of standards has been (or is) universally accepted as binding on everyone.
3. Moral norms vary from culture to culture.
4. What is believed to be right varies from culture to culture.
5. Moral codes causally de-

rive from and are determined by social setting or environment.

From this, then, relativists believe that moral rules are binding only within the cultural context that has accepted them. These rules are thus obligatory only insofar as they are thought to be and accepted as morally obligatory. Even though people of a certain culture have moral beliefs learned through their upbringing, it does not follow that their beliefs are defensible or even good. In fact, relativist philosophers cannot even agree on the meaning of “good.”

In a practical sense, therefore, no moral dispute can be settled because no moral standard exists. Each side is right and true in its own way, though we may have a personal opinion about it. From this base has flowed such ideas as “live and let live,” “just do it,” “have it your way,” “everybody does it” and “if it feels right, it is right.” It also spawned situation ethics.

In *The Closing of the American Mind* (pp. 25-26), Allan Bloom documents the pervasiveness of relativism in higher education:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. . . . [Students believe] openness—and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and various ways of life and kinds of human beings—is the great insight of our times. . . . The point [of the study of history and culture] is not to correct the mistakes [of the past] and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all. The students, of course, cannot defend their opinion. It is something with which they have been indoctrinated.

Our Indoctrination

Bloom’s final comment brings us back to society’s influence over our lives, thoughts and attitudes. This indoctrination occurs constantly to each of us every day in nearly every area of life: media, education, work, sports, business, politics, etc. We cannot get away from it!

An obvious example of postmodernism appears in television commercials. Advertising companies rarely develop ads that compare one product head-to-head with a similar competing one. Nor do they tend to emphasize quantifiable advantages of their product. Doing these things would imply a value judgment. Instead, they sell a lifestyle that consumers associate with their product.

High-end automobile ads are famous for this. The commercial may depict a garden party attended by wealthy, upper-class individuals dressed to the nines. They are laughing and enjoying themselves immensely. In the last five seconds of the commercial, the camera pans or its angle widens to include the manufacturer’s vehicle parked nearby. In effect, the ad says, “If you buy this car, you can live like these people.” This move from ob-

jective to subjective is a facet of postmodernism.

Popular music, particularly rap music, presents another example. A flap over the hateful, sexual, violent lyrics of rappers like 2 Live Crew erupted in 1990. The lyrics, too lurid to print, spoke of murder, rape and abuse, activities any moral person condemns. However, rap performers had no lack of defenders among scholars and media personalities.

New York Times' columnist Tom Wicker explains that 2 Live Crew's songs merely contained "quintessentially black lyrics." Music columnist Jon Pareles takes a different tack:

The skills you need to be a good rapper are the same skills you need to get ahead in mainstream society. . . . Rap is about making something of yourself—it's the American dream.

Finally, Harvard's Henry Louis Gates, Jr., a leading guru of multiculturalism, writes:

2 Live Crew is engaged in heavy-handed parody, turning the stereotypes of black and white Americans on their heads. For centuries, African-Americans have been forced to develop coded ways of communicating to protect them from danger.

Thus, their "exuberant use of hyperbole" is merely a cultural legacy, and who can fault them for that? If it is all right among blacks, why should the rest of us object?

The Pentagon's stance regarding women and homosexuals in the military also illustrates postmodernism and relativism. All objective statistics, facts and experiences showing that their presence destroys unit cohesiveness and effectiveness mean nothing

in its final analysis. It wants the armed forces to be "fair" and "inclusive" before being prepared, strong and unified in doing its job, which, to quote Rush Limbaugh, "is to kill people and break things." This emphasis on fairness, openness and inclusion is a hallmark of the new philosophy.

Even religion has been infected by these ideas. The inclusive, non-denominational megachurch is a product of them. Usually, the doctrinal position of these churches is very general and simple to be as inoffensive as possible. They have workshops and support groups for a wide range of interest groups, from single mothers to alcoholism to investment strategies to stamp collecting. They frequently highlight modern "Christian" music and skits that portray "real life" situations.

People who attend such churches, when asked why they like their church, often respond with touchy-feely answers rather than doctrinal ones. They may say their "spiri-

tual" or emotional needs are being met, their fellow members are caring, or the pastor speaks on things they are experiencing. Only rarely do they ever claim that their church preaches the truth.

Presidential Relativism

Finally, the current White House scandal illustrates postmodernism and relativism perfectly. The claim that President Clinton has "compartmentalized" his life into public and private areas with neither infringing on the other is classic postmodernism. His private dalliances with women, he believes, have no affect on his ability to govern the nation. He demonstrated this in his bravura performance of the State of the Union address just days after the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke.

The Clinton White House has become infamous for its ability to "spin" events in its favor. Spin is also typical postmodernism; it is lying or twisting actual fact to fit the desired interpretation of events. Since, according to the relativist, no absolute truth exists, information can be continually revised without fear of contradiction. What is true today in this situation may not have been true yesterday.

For instance, Mr. Clinton said very clearly and forthrightly, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky." To us, this is very straightforward; it is a downright denial of his accusation. However, we find out that the White House has its own definition of "sexual relations." Since words are merely expressions of ideas, a postmodernist can make a word mean anything he wants with or without letting his audience in on his personal definitions. Thus, if someone ever challenges him on a previous statement, he can always dodge it by saying, "You misunderstood what I meant."



Popular rapper LL Cool J is typical of that form of music. Rap is defended by leading pundits as merely "quintessentially black," and not as hateful and violent.

Lance Morrow, in an opinion piece that ran in the March 30, 1998, issue of *Time*, writes:

Clinton is America's first post-structuralist [postmodern] President. He has built a whole career by enacting, instinctively, the principles of the French theorist Jacques Derrida, who has argued that all reality is merely "text," subject to infinite interpretation and linguistic manipulation—but never to definitive judgment. America has become a poststructuralist text, in which all meaning is provisional, "deferred." Kathleen Willey goes on *60 Minutes* and within a few days is deconstructed. As Nietzsche said, there are no facts, only interpretations: the hermeneutics of gossip in a frivolous yet dangerous game. All is spin.

Therefore, "Slick Willy" earns his nickname as a man who can slip out of any dilemma or scandal with a deft turn of a phrase or innocent-sounding explanation. Most Americans, being unassuming and trusting, give him the benefit of the doubt. Though his administration has generated scandal after scandal, he remains popular and trusted among a majority of Americans.

The Path to Doom

Isaiah's description of our society is apt:

The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores. (Isaiah 1:5-6)

He shows the attitude of the leaders of the people:

For we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we

have hidden ourselves. (Isaiah 28:15)

They are unwilling to face the truth:

Now go, write . . . : That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the LORD; who say to the seers, "Do not see," and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us right things; speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits. Get out of the way, turn aside

and prudent in their own sight! . . . who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous man! . . . [T]hey have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of the LORD is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses were as refuse in the midst of the streets. (Isaiah 5:20-21, 23-25)



President Bill Clinton operates his presidency under the principles of relativism and postmodernism. He has been called "America's first poststructuralist President."

from the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." (Isaiah 30:8-11)

The prophet describes the cause-and-effect process of this philosophical stance:

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,

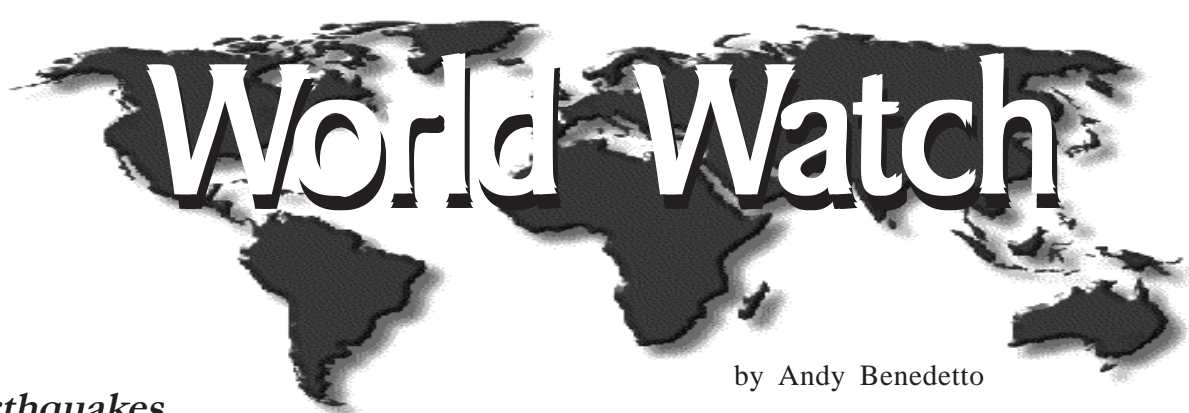
The outlook for the postmodern world, especially America, is not bright. This way of life, totally without foundations and standards, is doomed to decay from within and destruction from without. The only question is how long it takes for the other shoe to fall. Daniel 12:4 implies a speeding-up of events as the end approaches.

Postmodernism and relativism are prime examples of Proverbs 14:12: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death." How different is God's way:

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Your law is truth. Trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my delights. The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting; give me understanding and I shall live. (Psalm 119:142-144)

We can take great confidence in the way of life God teaches, for as Jesus says, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). They are the way to eternal life and joy everlasting in God's Kingdom.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh



by Andy Benedetto

Earthquakes



- ♦ For the fourth week in a row, a devastating earthquake hit northeast Afghanistan, the latest being a 6.4 magnitude quake on February 20.
- ♦ A 6.6 temblor struck south-central Iran March 14, killing 5 and seriously injuring 60.

European Union



- ♦ On March 25 the EU recommended Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain to join in the European Monetary Union, which will begin using the euro on January 1, 1999.

Israel



- ♦ During visits to six Western European capitals, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai made a concerted effort to bring key EU members into the Middle East peace process "as co-facilitators and partners with the U.S."

Religion



- ♦ Evangelist Billy Graham told *Today* show viewers that he forgives President Clinton of his sexual peccadilloes because "I know the frailty of human nature. . . . He has such a tremendous personality that I think the ladies just go wild over him." Mr. Graham also said that Clinton would make a good preacher!

♦ Frank Griswold III, recently elected presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, wrote in a 1994 signed statement that sexual orientation is "morally neutral" and that "faithful, monogamous, committed" relationships among gays are "worthy of honor."

Technology



- ♦ James Leach, House Banking Committee Chairman, said in his opening remarks at hearings on the Year 2000 computer problem: "I was intrigued by a statement Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan made a couple of weeks ago. He pointed out that 99 percent readiness for the Year 2000 will not be enough. It must be 100 percent. Thus, the message seems clear: all financial institutions must be ready; federal and state regulatory agencies must be ready; data processing service providers and other bank vendors must be ready; bank customers and borrowers must be ready; and international counterparties must be ready."

♦ A Cal-Tech biochemist is trying to "reenact" evolution at warp speed to develop new medicines and materials. She first mutates the organisms to create variations, selects the best of them, then breeds or recombines them sexually to produce a new, improved generation. She has bred one strain of enzyme to remain stable at 140°F and perform 100 times better than its natural cousin.

Violence



- ♦ In Jonesboro, Arkansas, a 13- and an 11-year old boy, dressed in camouflage and armed with rifles and handguns, ambushed a group of classmates and staff members as they filed from their school during a fire drill. Five girls and a teacher were killed. Two days later a 14-year-old North Carolina boy was picked up by deputies for questioning after he threatened to carry out a similar attack.

Weather



- ♦ On March 20 a severe storm ripped across northeast Georgia and killed at least 11 people and injuring 80. Later that day, the same storm spawned a tornado that flattened one square mile of Stoneville, North Carolina, killing 2 and injuring 21.

⌚ A twister hit India's east coast on March 24, killing 200 and injuring 3,000. It lifted a crowded boat 20 feet into the air before dashing it into a riverbank. It also hurled a bus filled with 50 people into a canal.

BIBLE STUDY: LONGSUFFERING

The heroes of today's culture, portrayed in the media as angry, aggressive defenders of democracy, destroy without patience or forethought all opposing forces regardless of their personal qualities. In our impatient, self-centered world, one quality of character has all but perished: longsuffering. Similar to patience and forbearance, longsuffering is the quality of self-re-

straint in the face of provocation. A person who is longsuffering is not quick to retaliate or promptly punish someone who has insulted, offended or harmed him. The opposite of anger, it is intimately associated with mercy. Longsuffering is an attribute of God and thus a fruit of His Holy Spirit. In this Bible Study on "the fruit of the Spirit," we will examine longsuffering.



1. What word most accurately describes this spiritual fruit? Galatians 5:22.

COMMENT: Various translations use "longsuffering," "patience" or "forbearance" to translate the Greek word *makrothumia*. This word combines the roots *makro*, meaning "long," and *thumos*, meaning "temper," so it literally means "to be long-tempered." It implies the opposite of "short temper," describing the mind holding back a long time before it expresses itself in action or passion. *Makrothumia* is rarely rendered as "patience" and never as "forbearance" in the New Testament, although both words are considered synonyms of "longsuffering."

2. Is God longsuffering? Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18, 27; Psalm 86:15; Jeremiah 15:15. What does God's longsuffering prove? Luke 18:7; Romans 2:4; II Peter 3:9, 15.

COMMENT: God *bears long* and is *slow to anger*. Longsuffering is proof of God's goodness, faithfulness and His desire to grant us salvation. Romans 2:4 describes God as forbearing and longsuffering. Forbearance is refraining from the enforcement of something that is due like a debt, right, or obligation. Longsuffering differs slightly in that its emphasis is on temperament.

3. Does God's longsuffering delay His wrath? Joel 2:13; Romans 9:22-24; I Peter 3:18-20.

COMMENT: God relents from doing harm. His longsuffering is seen in His gracious restraint of His wrath towards those who deserve it. Despite the rebellious condition of the world, He waited patiently for 120 years while Noah built the ark and gathered the animals. God's longsuffering does not overlook anything. Unlike man, God has the end in view. He has true insight, knows what is best and is not swayed by human emotions.

4. How is longsuffering exemplified in Christ? Matthew 17:17; I Timothy 1:16; II Peter 3:14-15.

COMMENT: Christ's patient and enduring handling of

sinners demonstrates His longsuffering. God promises that He will be long-tempered with us as we repent and dedicate ourselves to the obedience and service of God. As in everything else, Jesus Christ sets the standard of longsuffering.

5. Are others used as an example of longsuffering? II Corinthians 6:4-6; Hebrews 6:12-15; James 5:8-10.

COMMENT: Many of God's servants develop the quality of longsuffering through their service and dedication to Him.

6. Should longsuffering be an integral quality of our character? Colossians 3:12-13; Ephesians 4:1-3; I Thessalonians 5:14; II Timothy 3:10-11; 4:2.

COMMENT: As the elect of God, we must put on or clothe ourselves with longsuffering. By doing this in unity as a church, we rid ourselves of, or at least dramatically reduce, friction. To be loving and effective, a minister must correct, rebuke and encourage with longsuffering.

7. Does longsuffering strengthen spiritually? Colossians 1:9-11. Does it show evidence of Godly love? I Corinthians 13:4.

COMMENT: Paul tells the saints in Colosse that he prays they will possess the trait that is the opposite of wrath or revenge. He speaks of having an even temper, an attitude that in spite of injury or insult does not retaliate. We can develop longsuffering only as a fruit of the Spirit, not as an independent character trait. It grows from the common root of love and bears fruit only along with other spiritual fruit.

Love takes precedence in this list of gifts of the Spirit and carries the attribute that it suffers long. Longsuffering is extended and patient endurance of offense. Since patience is an aspect of longsuffering, they are very close in intent. Patience is cheerful or hopeful endurance, patient waiting. Therefore, longsuffering is the quality of patiently tolerating the actions of others against us, even when we are severely tried.