"Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace."
—Amelia Earhart

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Spirit of Peace

We live in a world that is always changing. One day things are chaotic, the next day things seem peaceful. Sometimes people are cordial, saying nice things, and the next day, they are angry and hostile.

Animosity and contentions arise seemingly out of nowhere. The spirit in the world inspires chaos and hatred toward everyone. But to the Christian, it seems even to be more intense.

How are we as Christians supposed to act or react to these things? As people being called from this world's ways, we are to be different. Some scriptures will help to remind us of the direction we are to be traveling, one that will end with entrance into the Kingdom of God.

Speaking to the Romans, the apostle Paul admonishes them to live in peace with everyone: "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). God's standards are high and should become part of our character. We are to be ethical, humble, gentle, and loving with our family, friends, associates, and strangers—and even around those who despise God's laws. This is a tremendously difficult standard for most of us to attain.

Sometimes law-abiding people become discouraged when they see how those in high places, like the President, on down to the average Joe on the street can treat God's law with impunity and seemingly get away with it. They wonder why they should expend the effort to be ethical and good people while a neighbor, boss, or public official does evil and behaves corruptly, appearing to profit from it.

Even some Christians wonder if they should not adopt a kind of situation ethics: one set of standards for church brethren and another for the world. This, of course, is a double-standard. Paul reprimands Peter for such a double-standard concerning how he acted when Jews were present as opposed only Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-21).

English writer and philosopher William Hazlett wrote, "Those who are at war with others are not at peace with themselves." Contention of any kind boomerangs onto the self, causing all sorts of internal dysfunction. It also produces the curse of disunity. When Adam and Eve sinned, both unity and peace were shattered, and God sentenced them to death and expulsion from His presence. Regardless of the justification, it is impossible for sin to produce either godly peace or unity.

In Ephesians 4:1-3, the apostle Paul gives us a good reason for making peace and thus encouraging unity: the value of our calling:

> I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

If we consider our calling and present relationship with God of small value, our conduct, especially toward our brethren, will show it and produce contention and disunity. It also shows how little we respect God, as the apostle John writes in I John 4:20, "If someone says, ‘I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"

Unfortunately, we have difficulty avoiding absorbing some of the characteristics of society. We can become frantic, stressful, anxious, and highly irritated people. In this state, we are likely to strike out at people—often our family and friends—out of a short or bad temper, offending and hurting them in our pique. And so contentions develop.

We often desire speedy resolutions to the irritations and problems between us, which is understandable, since we want to return to good relations and put the problems behind us quickly. However, we must understand that swift solutions are not always possible. Some issues or contentions are deeply buried within both sides of the conflict.

Because of this, Paul admonishes us to "[bear] with one another in love." He is essentially saying to Christians to "put up with it" or endure it, doing nothing to bring the other party down in the eyes of others and vainly elevate the self. We will sometimes be required to bear with our brethren for long stretches of time as they overcome their faults. This is an aspect of peacemaking through living by godly character with patience.

In this vein, an anonymous author wrote:

> Peace comes from living in the moment and looking for the good in others. Peacefulness comes from facing our fears and letting them go—trusting that things will turn out all right. Peacefulness is also a way of approaching conflict with others so no one is made wrong. Everyone wins because we then work to find a peaceful solution.

We are to cultivate peace in our lives, conducting ourselves humbly by choice. Humility is pride's opposite. If pride only produces contention (Proverbs 13:10), it follows that humility will work to soothe, calm, heal, and unify. We need to work on expressing meekness and gentleness toward everyone, displaying the opposite of the self-assertion, the competitive determination to press one's will at all costs, that our culture promotes so strongly. This way of behaving may "win" an argument over others, but it would be better to remember God's counsel in Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

If all Christians would imitate the example of Christ and follow His instructions, there would be more peace and fewer contentions among us. He earnestly sought their—and our—unity and peace in His parting prayer:

> . . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (John 17:21-23)

A change in attitude, a refocusing, must occur among us. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "It isn't enough to talk about peace, one must believe it. And it isn't enough to believe in it, one must work for it." The spirit of peace needs to be cultivated and worked on vigorously. As David writes in Psalm 34:14, "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it."

- Gary Montgomery

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

From the Archives: Featured Article

A Portable Peace
by David F. Maas

Peace is less of an external situation than an internal state. As such, we can have peace wherever we happen to be. We can help ourselves create this state by occasionally getting away from the hustle and bustle of modern life.

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