

Colossians 3:12–17 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.(19.10.08pm)

There are virtues in this world that I would say most people would value in themselves and in those around them. Virtues like love, compassion, self-control, forgiveness. The Bible says that these virtues are only fully available to Christians, to those who believe in and have a close relationship with God through Jesus Christ. These virtues, the Bible says, can only be found fully and find their perfect expression in and through Jesus.

This evening I'm going to base what I want to say on two short passages in Paul's letters to the early churches, but I want to concentrate on one particular virtue, one particular aspect of Christian life, an aspect which the world is just **aching** to know more of.

Let's read from Colossians, chapter 3 verses 12 - 17. [Page of blue Bibles]

I want to concentrate on verse 15, "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.*" [repeat] Peace. As members of the church of God, Christians are called to peace.

Well, there are different types of peace – there's the peace that is opposite to war and conflict, and then there's peace as in peace and quiet, and there's also inner peace, a calmness inside – and I think the world is just crying out at this moment to experience more of **all** of them. Look around – all over the world there is conflict, countries so quick to pick up arms against their neighbours. Look around – so many individuals with no peace in their lives, running around from one stressful situation to another to do with work, the family, finance. So much worry and anxiety, so little peace.

I was reading in the Guardian the other day – no I haven't gone posh, it was just wrapped round my fish and chips! Anyway, I noticed that this week just gone was Quaker Week, and in between all the pages describing the fear of all governments about the state of the world economy, there was an advert from the Quakers which said, "No one telling you what to believe, just the peace and quiet to work it out for yourself." People want peace and quiet to work out what they really believe, and the world doesn't often give them that. A time to be peaceful, a time to be calm, a time to think. Peace.

There's so many things that can rob us of peace, isn't there?

When I was in Liverpool at university I shared a house with some other students. We lived in a normal terraced street, rubbing shoulders with normal people (if there is such a thing!). This particular year we lived next to a family who had 9 (yes 9) children. Peace? You're joking!

It was the time when the musical 'Grease' had just come out, with John Travolta and Olivia Newton John in it (before your time ...). Well there was this line in one of the songs that went "*You're the one that I want, You're the one I really want, ooh ooh ooh, honey*". (remember?) If I heard it once I heard it a hundred times a day, for days on end. And then of course they'd sing along to it, need I say more? Peace? No chance!

You travel on the bus or train. You hear that jingle. And what seemed like a pleasant journey just takes on a different character all together. "*Hello? Yeah – I'm on a bus.*" Have you noticed – no-one can speak quietly when they're on the phone, can they? There's no peace – you can't think straight.

You hear children and teenagers in the street – they don't talk to each other, they shout and scream. Whereas a little clapping would have been enough to say 'Well done' a few years ago, now it has to be accompanied by screaming. There's no escape from the noise – there's no peace and quiet.

At home – is it just me, or has the volume on our tellies been increased? We have it on the lowest possible volume, it's just too noisy. Peace? Where can we find peace nowadays?

Some people fly abroad – the flight company goes bust; they go on holiday – they're in a hotel room next to stay out late drinkers; they go to the country to escape the hustle and bustle – in recent years they've had to put up with storms and floods. There's just no peace.

Some people resort to drink or drugs to try and escape the 'noise' of their lives. They only find a different kind of 'noise' – there's still no peace.

And all these add to our feeling that we just can't **find** peace in this world. It all adds to the stress and anxiety inside us. We're never at peace – there's always some 'noise' which disturbs our peace; always some stress or concern which takes away any feeling of peace inside.

I think **everyone** yearns for a feeling of peace inside. Everyone needs peace inside, don't you think? Surely we should be able to experience peace in our hearts.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, ...”

Peace in our times? When will there ever be peace in the world? When will wars cease? Unfortunately we seem to hear of conflicts day after day, in all parts of the world. People killing each other constantly – why?

Colman McCarthy (an American journalist and peace activist last century) said, *“Everyone's a pacifist between wars – it's like being a vegetarian between meals.”* He's right – it seems that certain people all over the world have a real and insatiable appetite for war – they don't **want** peace. In the same Guardian newspaper I mentioned earlier, I read of a peace meeting in Pakistan, 600 people come together to talk about how to establish peace in the area. A suicide bomber killed dozens when he blew himself up.

In the 60s and 70s we had people with long hair and pink-coloured glasses going round saying “peace man” to everyone, and having their peace demonstrations. But nowadays even those who demonstrate to protest against arms and war end up in violence themselves – look at the demonstration on the sea-front earlier this week. Clashes with police. Peace?

Some people just don't **want** peace. They prefer war. Why?

I'll tell you why - they love power. They love to think that they're in control. They believe that while they have the power to destroy, they have total power in their hands. They love power.

British Prime Minister in the 19th century, William Gladstone said, *“We look forward to the time when the power of love will replace the love of power. Then will our world know the blessings of peace.”*

Now we're getting to the point, I think. [repeat the above quotation.]

The power of love. I'm not talking about the lovey-dovey sentiments of the peace and love people of the 60s and 70s. I'm talking about something much more powerful than that.

The ultimate expression of the power of love was when Jesus died for the sins of the world – **that** was when the power of love was **really** shown. God **is** love, and God **showed** his love for the world in making it possible for us to have a relationship with him, through Jesus’ death and resurrection. This is the power of love. When people recognise **this** and understand that **they** don’t have ultimate power but **God** does, **that’s** when peace will come. Not until then. *“When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.”*

I’m afraid this will never happen in this world, though, because there will always be selfish, power-seeking people. People who deny the existence of God, and so can’t accept his ultimate power. What a damning statement on mankind – there will **never** be peace on earth while man refuses to accept the being, authority and power of God. How can there be? How can there be peace while the creation – man – is at war with its Creator – God?

There **is** good news. There can’t be peace for **all** in this life, but the good news is that there can be peace for **some** – for those who **do** recognise the being, authority and power of God.

How can we have peace? I said just now that there can be no peace while man is at war with God – God created man to enjoy a relationship with him, a life of loving, worshipping and serving God. While we rebel against that, we will not find peace. While we refuse to acknowledge God’s rightful authority over us, we will not know peace. While we demand the position of power, we cannot enjoy the peace promised by him who is God, by him who really does have the power.

We read in Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians, *“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”* Romans 5:1. Christians have **peace with God** – how? Because we believe that Jesus took upon himself the punishment we deserve for our sins. Because he did, we are justified – that means that when God now looks at us, he sees that Jesus has brought us forgiveness through his sacrifice on the cross, and it is as if we never sinned. We are free of the guilt of our sins, and so we have peace with God. We *“have been justified by faith in Christ, we have peace with God.”*

Isn’t this what the world needs to know? Peace with God is desirable, but it is also possible through Jesus Christ.

In Isaiah where he talks about the coming of the Saviour, one of the titles he gives him is the Prince of Peace. When the angels announced Jesus' arrival, they sang, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.*" Luke 2:14. Jesus is the one who brought peace to the storm and waves as they battered the boat his disciples were in. Jesus brings peace.

As we read recently in our series in John's gospel, when Jesus was preparing his disciples for the time after he had died, been raised and had ascended into heaven, he promised the Holy Spirit, to remind them of all that Jesus had said to them. Jesus said, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" John 14:27.

The **peace of God** is a gift from God. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would bring the peace of God to his followers. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever; his Spirit is the same; the promise is the same. Jesus promises his followers the peace of God. A little later in the same gospel, Jesus says, "*I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" John 16:33.

Jesus has made peace with God possible, we find it in Jesus through his Holy Spirit. The difference between those who have found true peace and those who haven't, is that some are still facing punishment for their sins, while others are not. Where do you stand? Do you know forgiveness for your sins? Or are you still in your sins? Remember – "*The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit [God's Spirit] is life and peace.*" (Romans 8:6). If you know your sins are forgiven, you have peace with God – this is true peace. But let's pray continually for those who haven't yet found that peace.

We can only know true peace, the peace **of** God, if we have peace **with** God.

Let's come back to our verse in Colossians: "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.*"

There's a wonderful quote by the Bible commentator William Hendriksen which says "*Peace is the smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer.*" That's lovely, isn't it? [repeat]. Peace is like the smile of God on the world, and we can know that favour warming our hearts and souls, through his Spirit in us. We are right with God, we have peace with God, and that does us good. The peace of God, the peace of Christ can rule in our hearts, if we are Christians. 5

Do you know anything of that smile of God reflected in your heart and soul? It's so precious, it's so mysterious, it passes all understanding.

Well, **how do we know this peace** in our day to day lives? Because as we've already seen, there are so many things, which would take away our peace.

Please turn with me to Philippians (letter before Colossians) chapter 4, verses 4 - 7 we read, *“Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

The peace of God is mysterious, it passes all understanding.

We will never understand the peace of God fully. We will never understand in our earthly life how we can have peace with God. We can **enjoy** the peace of God in our lives, but we will never understand it. Insignificant men and women like us, with all our weaknesses, having wanted nothing to do with God until **he** broke into our lives, can be right with God – the God who knows everything, who made everything, who can do anything, who is for ever. How can our limited minds take this in? How can we understand it? We can't.

That we have peace with God passes understanding, but the peace **of** God passes understanding too. We've just read, *“Do not be anxious about anything”* implying that we can have peace in every situation. ‘What?’ I hear you cry, ‘You're telling me that in every stressful situation, every time things go wrong, every time we or those near to us are in trouble – at all these times we can know the peace of God? That's a bit **too** hard to take, isn't it?’

“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” – that's what we read. We won't understand it – God's peace **passes** understanding – but we must see that if we have peace with God, we can know the peace of God in **every** situation. What's your experience?

I think, if we went round the congregation here this evening, we would be able to tell of many times when we knew a strange peace, a strange calmness, where we least expected it. We thought we would be fearful, anxious, worried, but miraculously we weren't. We didn't understand why we were so peaceful at the time. God was near to us. God gave us peace.

“The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” Our hearts and minds were being guarded in Christ Jesus by the peace of God.

I want to ask you, do you know anything of this peace in your heart and mind? Even when the world seems to be turned upside down, do you know the peace of God, which passes all understanding? Do you go through turmoil, are you often fearful? You don't need to. Peace is promised to those who have found peace with God through Jesus.

I'm not saying we'll always find peace in every experience, because we're still human, we're still living in a sin filled world, we still like to go about solving our problems ourselves rather than turning to God. But as we get to know God better, when we see his love and mercy more and more, as we understand more about the riches that can be found in Jesus, then we will learn to walk closer with him, our trust in him will increase, we **will** know more of his peace in our lives.

Someone once said, *“The peace of God means being grateful for his past mercies, being conscious of his present mercies, and being certain of his future mercies.”* [repeat] If you have known God's loving dealings with you in the past, if you know his presence with you now, if you have the hope of eternal life in you through Jesus Christ, then you will **know** the peace of God. *“Trusting in the Father, hearts are fully blessed, finding as he promised perfect peace and rest.”* (Francis Ridley Havergal).

To be practical, let's look back at our passage in Philippians. What do we find to help us with how to know more of this peace? Well, it's about the way we **are** – verse 4 says 'Rejoice'. We are to be a joyful and praising people – we can rejoice because we were lost, but now we're found. Verse 5 – we are to 'let our gentleness be evident' – we can love those around us with the love that we have found in Jesus who is near to us at all times. Verse 6 tells us we are to be a praying people – don't worry, pray, God answers prayer. *“Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”*

And we are to be thankful people – God has done so much for each one of us, we should be continually thanking him for all his goodness and mercy towards sinners such as us.

Do these things characterise our lives? Are we joyful? Loving and gentle? Prayerful? Thankful? We can know the peace of God that transcends all understanding because there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Where do you stand this evening? Do you have peace with God through having your sins forgiven because Jesus died for you? Are you there yet? I would urge you not to delay – it is a gift from God, receive it from him today.

Do you know peace with God, but somehow don't seem to know the peace of God in your daily life. Pray. Because God has promised this peace to all who believe in him – he wants you to be thankful and rejoicing. He wants you to know he is near. You can know that peace in your heart and mind. We can all know a greater measure of this peace as we go through our lives –

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.”