

Peace with God- Sunday 20th December, 2015

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Beloved in The Lord,

The fourth candle on our Advent wreath is burning and that means that Christmas is very near. During this Advent Season, we have been reflecting upon the truth that each one of us is to be like a candle that shines brightly in a darkening world, and brings glory to God.

We have seen that we are ambassadors for Christ and that it is vital that we understand the times in which we live. We saw that we are rich in hope, and last week we learnt that we are to rejoice in the Lord always.

Today, on this final Advent Sunday our theme is "Peace with God". Peace, along with hope and joy are powerful witnesses for Christ. When we have peace with God, we have a powerful witness to the unbeliever, for an unbeliever does not have peace with God. An unbeliever's heart does not know true peace and is often full of unrest. This is because if we are not in a proper relationship with The Lord Jesus Christ, then we are at war with God. We are at enmity with Him.

Paul writes: "***Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (Romans 5:1.)*** It is only when we have been justified by faith in Christ, that we can have peace with God. If you have not been justified, then you are still in a state of unforgiven sin, and you cannot, and will not have peace with God.

Let's look at this on a very human level. For example, you are speeding along the highway, over the legal speed limit. You do not have peace, and there is a certain anxiety, because you know that at any moment you may get caught. Or another example: You have told a lie, you are hiding something. You always have a certain amount of unrest and fear of being discovered.

For as much as this is true in the natural realm of everyday life, it is true also of the spiritual realm and our relationship with Almighty God. David wrote:

***How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered!***

***² How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!***

***³ When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away
Through my groaning all day long.***

***⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.***

***⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I did not hide;***

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord";
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.
⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.
⁷ You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble;
You surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.
⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go;
I will counsel you with My eye upon you.
⁹ Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,
Otherwise they will not come near to you.
¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
But he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.
¹¹ Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones;
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.
(Psalm 32).*

The title of this Psalm is: ***Blessedness of Forgiveness and of Trust in God***

I have included the whole psalm, because it is so important.

Repentance and confession and peace with God go together. David is telling us that we should confess our sins immediately. As soon as we become aware of any sin we should go to the Father. We should never try to rationalise our sin or to cover it up. David tried that and found that God's hand was heavy upon him. He felt he was wasting away and he was groaning all the day.

But, when David confessed his sin and turned from it, then he experienced the richness and fullness of God's forgiveness. He experienced God's Hand of grace upon him.

Remember, we are to be that Advent candle that burns brightly. In order for it to do so, we must have peace with God. That means that we can't be harbouring unrepented sin, as that only weighs us down and ruins our testimony.

When you meet a person, it does not take long at all to ascertain whether he or she has peace with God. It is usually fairly evident.

Confession of sin is a vital part of our daily walk with God. We live in a dirty world and we get marred by sin. I like to say that confession is like a good cleansing shower. If you have been working in the garden in the heat, then at the end of the day the best thing is a nice shower. You wash away all the dirt and you come out clean and refreshed.

Confession is like that shower. You get dirty walking and working in the world, but then you come to Christ and he cleanses you with His own precious Blood, and you are white as snow.

There is peace in your heart. You have peace with God. Restlessness, unrest are often a sign something is not right. It is like a warning signal, much like the oil lamp in the car. If that comes on you stop and check what is happening.

When I do not have peace in my heart, I stop and ask God to show me why. More often than not the problem is unconfessed sin.

God desires for us to live with peace in our hearts. That is why we have Christmas. Jesus Christ came into this world in order to pay our sin debt in full with His Blood, He did it so that we could have peace with God. ***“Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:1-2)***

I would like to emphasise the phrase “through whom we also have obtained...” We can be justified by faith; we can have peace with God; we can be free of sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to understand this. It all originates with Him. It is His gift of grace and love. There is nothing that we do to obtain this peace or to earn forgiveness. It is all from and through Him.

God is the author and provider of our salvation:

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Who gave? God did! He is the one who provides the way. Our peace treaty begins and ends with Him. This is why I stress over and over again that Christianity is a relationship and not a religion. Religion tries to please God by doing things. Religion tries to appease God with sacrifices and rituals and activities and donations etc. True faith is a relationship based on trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. God has provided for our salvation. He has finished the work.

This is another aspect of peace with God. We do not need to strive or work to appease the wrath of God. Jesus Blood did that. A religious person never experiences true peace and rest in God. A religious person trying to appease God never knows whether he has done enough. This is why Catholic doctrine of works is so wrong. If we are saved by works how can we ever have assurance? How can we know if we have done enough? How can we know if God has accepted our “good works”? Please understand good works are important but they are a fruit of salvation not a means of attaining it.

Jesus said “It is finished”. He completed all that was necessary for our salvation by shedding His own precious and Holy Blood. If we are in a relationship with Him then we have peace with God.

Psalms 46 states: ***“Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Psalm 46:10)***

You see the way that God is exalted among the nations is not by our religious activity, but by our resting in Him.

In a few days we will be celebrating Christmas. We will give and receive gifts, enjoy times of fellowship with family and friends. This is all wonderful and good. May we realise though, that the most important and greatest gift we can give this Christmas is to be a positive witness, a living testimony for Jesus. May our lives exude the fact that we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

May our witness be crystal clear this year. May our actions and our words be like a beautiful candle that glows. May people receive God's love and peace through us. May the love of Jesus flow through us and bring glory to His Holy Name.

May God help us shine brightly.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.