

Real Peace

by J. W. Jepson

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This article was first published in the December 1, 1984 issue of *The War Cry*. It was reprinted in the December 7, 1986 issue of *The Pentecostal Evangel*. The full article is presented here.

Sleeping Bethlehem.

The muffled groan of a young woman in childbirth.

Drowsy shepherds out in the field, not knowing that they were right then in the countdown of their appointment with destiny, unaware of the momentous events about to break upon them.

Suddenly, an angel! Light from heaven—dazzling, glorious! Terrified shepherds! A startling announcement! Exploding praise! A ringing anthem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

The exciting record is all right there in Luke, chapter 2.

God invaded human history. Light has penetrated darkness. Peace has been declared. Peace on earth. Peace right here. Peace right now.

But for millions in this torn and tortured world, peace is only a wistful longing, a faint and fading hope. For some it is no longer even that. Hardly a Christmas passes without someone making a cynical reference to "peace on earth, good will toward men."

Many do not even want peace. To those whose hearts are controlled by passion and ambition peace is boring and frustrating. They want to get on with the conquest, the revolution. Strife and turmoil are much more exciting, much more gratifying, much more fun.

In James 4:1, 2 the Bible diagnoses the problem. "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and do not obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

In other words, selfishness destroys peace. Selfishness is the essence and nature of sin. It is the choice to please self above all and to use everything and everybody to that

supreme end. To sinners, peace means that nobody is getting in their way. But the moment that self is frustrated, inner and often outer conflict resumes.

We hear optimistic talk about "the way to peace." We must understand that peace is not a destination. It is a path. We should seek the way *of* peace, not just the way *to* peace.

There are conditions of peace. Jesus said to Jerusalem, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes" (Luke 19:42). While many were seeking the way to peace, the elements of peace—the Prince of Peace and the call to repent and believe the gospel—were among them, and they did not recognize it.

The angel announced to Joseph, "You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

There we have it! The angels sang not because some summit conference promised peace or some peace treaty had been signed but because God had given His Son to bring peace to us *by saving us from our sins*.

This essential fact is totally overlooked by the secular world. Thinking primarily of peace among nations and other forms of political and social peace, they ask cynically where is the peace that was promised by the angels. But all the while they themselves are stubbornly keeping the Prince of Peace out of their own hearts and lives. How inconsistent! People who continue to reject Jesus Christ and His peace for themselves have no right to demand or reason to expect peace on earth. Why insist that God impose the conditions of peace upon the world while we reject and resist those same conditions in our own personal lives?

The real issue is spiritual and moral, not political or merely emotional. The fundamental conflict is between the just and holy God and the unjust human heart that is in disobedience. People who are going their own way are alienated from God—lost. Their supreme commitment to self is directly and completely hostile to the well-being of a universe that is under the benevolent jurisdiction of an all-wise God, a universe whose well-being depends on the rule of love and therefore where selfishness (sin) is most destructive.

It is heart-breaking to see troubled, searching people trying to find inner peace in the escapism of the ego-centered mysticism and meditations of eastern religions and philosophies. One does not remove guilt by soothing the emotions. The emotions can be calm while the heart—the will—remains in a voluntary state of resistance to the truth and to the God of truth.

The same is true of people who use mind-altering drugs. Real peace is not a passive detachment from reality or a hallucinatory state. It is being in a right personal, moral relationship with God, the Holy One. Achieving inner emotional tranquility or a heightened psychological state is not synonymous with having one's sins forgiven. Neither soothing our mind nor agitating it removes our guilt.

As long as a person remains in disobedience to God, that person is a threat to the most vital interests of all he influences. That person is a rebel against the rule of God and a

fugitive from its justice. As long as he remains a spiritual and moral outlaw, God will give him no peace. A loving God is after him with a warrant for his arrest in one hand and the offer of reconciliation in the other. The penalty for his cosmic anarchy is everlasting misery. The conditions of reconciliation are surrender and faith. God's justice or God's mercy—the fugitive must choose between the two. Peace begins when the fugitive surrenders and is reconciled to God by faith in Jesus Christ.

The first place to stop war and injustice is in our own heart. Many people are protesting against social evils, while the host of heaven is protesting against their spiritual and moral rebellion.

"One sinner destroys much good" (Ecclesiastes 9:18).

There will be no peace where hostility against God's rightful and just authority continues in the human heart. Some who ask why God does not do something about other people's sins are themselves resisting the efforts of the Holy Spirit to turn them from their own. When they demand that God do something about evil, they always mean somebody else's.

If we honestly want God's kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, we will begin by submitting our own hearts to Him in love and obedience.

Obedience from the heart is essential to peace. "Great peace have those who love Your law" (Psalm 119:165). "Oh, that you had heeded My commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea" (Isaiah 48:18).

So whether or not we have peace depends on what we are living for. Romans 8:6 makes that clear: "For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." People will never have real peace so long as they live to gratify their own desires, whatever those desires might be.

To have peace we must be spiritually minded. We must love and obey God. We must love one another. We must live reasonably, yielding our will to the requirements of our intelligence enlightened by the word of God and the Spirit of God, not to the unreasonable demands of our own desires.

A sinning world will not have peace. A sinning nation will not have peace. A sinning family will not have peace. A sinning person will not have peace. *Sin and peace do not mix.* The beginning of self-will is the end of peace. The surrender of self is the beginning of peace.

Romans 3:10 - 18 describes a world in spiritual and moral revolt. It concludes by quoting from Isaiah 59:8, "And the way of peace they have not known."

Another description is found in Isaiah 57:20, 21: "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'" (Isaiah 57:20, 21).

Raised on the Pacific coast of the United States, I have witnessed the destructive force of the restless ocean. Huge jetties have been built, only to be pounded into rubble by

these devastating currents. Even so, unleashed passions wreck the soul in their relentless, despotic demand for gratification. As long as sin is fun, people will hold on to it. Only when the suffering caused by sin becomes intolerable does the longing for peace become irresistible.

Let us suppose that there were no conflict among nations, no threat of war. Still there would be no real peace as long as the war that was declared when self-will usurped the throne continues to rage within.

Remember, God's peace terms are always *unconditional surrender*.

Jesus Christ made peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20), and it is received by faith in Him. Romans 5:1 declares, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

To have peace we must have a right relationship with God. Psalm 29:11 says, "The LORD will bless His people with peace." To have a right relationship with God, we must be "in Christ." Jesus said that we have peace in Him (John 16:33).

To all who receive Him He says: "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27).

Oh the joy of being at peace with God and having His peace within! It means that all controversy with God has ceased. The war is over. Our sins are forgiven. The guilt is gone. The conscience is alive and smiling. We have found the Source of music, the meaning of life, the way of peace. Our hearts are in harmony with the truth and reason. We can look up into the starry heavens and know that there is nothing between our soul and our Savior. His presence is always with us, now and forever. We know that we have eternal life. We know who we are, why we are here, and where we are going. Willing submission and obedience to a loving heavenly Father is our delight. Others might wander through the confusing wastelands of self-will, but we will have none of it. The very thought is repugnant to us. Independence from Him who is the Source of life is as unthinkable as independence from the air we breathe. Our fellowship with God is our freedom. Release from bondage to our self-will and sin, emancipation from slavery to our pride and passions—*that* is real liberation, and it has happened to us.

Peace—spiritual and moral harmony and fellowship with God. A clean conscience. You need that. You *want* that. And it is yours right now by faith in Jesus Christ. Yes, there is "all joy and peace in believing" (Romans 15:13). Give It all up to Him. Surrender your heart. Trust Him as your Savior—*yours*. Love, follow and obey Him as the Lord of all of your life.

"Yield now and be at peace with Him; thereby good will come to you (Job 22:21 NASB).