

## **Having Peace in Every Circumstance, Part 2**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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**by John MacArthur**

It's only through God's grace that believers can face every circumstance with calm, assured peace. Anxiety does not have to reign in our hearts—we can hold fast to God's peace and provision through any of life's storms.

We've been looking at the nature of the peace God grants to believers, as explained in Paul's prayer from the church at Thessalonica in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, 18.

Not only is that peace divine in origin, but it is also a gift. When Paul prayed, "Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace," the word translated "grant" is the verb meaning "to give." It speaks of a gift. God's peace is a sovereign, gracious gift bestowed on those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Psalm 85:8, a verse you may have never noticed before, the psalmist stated, "I will hear what God the Lord will say; for He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones." God grants peace to those who belong to Him. Jesus said, "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27). There's no greater gift for the anxious than God's peace.

Some, however, will seek relief for their anxieties through a false peace. God is generous to whom He grants His peace, but there is a limit. Isaiah wrote, "'Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near,' says the Lord, 'and I will heal him.' But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its waters toss up refuse and mud. 'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Isaiah 57:19-21). He will grant peace to those who come to Him from near and far—those who grew up hearing much about Him and those who heard little to nothing—but those who don't come to Him, the wicked, enjoy no real peace.

Thomas Watson explains further:

Peace flows from sanctification, but they being unregenerate, have nothing to do with peace. . . . They may have a truce, but no peace. God may forbear the wicked a while, and stop the roaring of His cannon; but though there be a truce, yet there is no peace. The wicked may have something which looks like peace, but it is not. They may be fearless and stupid; but there is a great difference

between stupefied conscience, and a pacified conscience. . . . This is the devil's peace; he rocks men in the cradle of security; he cries, Peace, peace, when men are on the precipice of hell. The seeming peace a sinner has, is not from the knowledge of his happiness, but the ignorance of his danger (*A Body of Divinity* [Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986 reprint], p.262).

The peace of the wicked is born out of delusion. True peace is the child of saving grace. In a prayer similar to the one that closes 2 Thessalonians, Paul said, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing" (Romans 15:13). Peace is a gift to those who believe.

And God's peace is the gift that keeps on giving. A less commercial way to express that truth is how Paul said it: "May the Lord of peace . . . continually grant you peace" (2 Thessalonians 3:16). By adding "continually," Paul was emphasizing that it is constantly available. The implication is, however, that it can be interrupted.

It isn't God who interrupts our spiritual peace, but us. We can suspend the flow of peace in our lives by succumbing to our flesh, which is still part of this world. Unless we "walk by the Spirit," our means of controlling the flesh (Galatians 5:16), we are open season to all kinds of anxieties: the dread of the unknown, the fear of death, the loss of a loved one—and we all can list a string of others.

How does this unfortunate process begin? When we stop focusing on our permanent condition in Christ, who will certainly bring us to glory. And when we start basing our happiness on the fleeting things of the world. Those things by definition will change. Thus, if we get upset when they do, we will spend our lives in distress.

People who can ride through the toughest issues of life and remain calm are not indifferent; they're just trusting God. What if our ride is a little bumpy? What if we're feeling troubled, anxious, and fearful? How can we restore the peace? How can it remain uninterrupted?

The psalmist said to himself, "Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God" (Psalm 42:11). He reminded himself that God was there to help him. We can trust Him because He is trustworthy. He genuinely cares for us.

Long ago, God made it perfectly clear to Israel that peace comes from obeying His Word (Leviticus 26:1-6). The same truth applies today. Peace is restored through obedience. The first step is to turn from sin. Sometimes the sin is the doubt, fear, and anxiety itself, but also it can be an underlying sin that has produced those feelings. Probe your heart and isolate the cause of unrest. Forsake the sin that has been revealed to you and obey God by applying the opposite virtue. In the case of anxiety, that means having faith in God to help you manage life's details.

Something else that will restore your peace is to accept whatever stresses or challenges God has seen fit to bring into your life. In the book of Job we read:

Behold, how happy is the man whom God reprove, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For He inflicts pain, and gives relief; He wounds, and His hands also heal. . . . In famine He will redeem you from death, And in war from the power of the sword. You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and you will not be afraid of violence when it comes. You will laugh at violence and famine, and you will not be afraid of wild beasts. For you will be in league with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field will be at peace with you. You will know that your tent is secure, for you will visit your abode and fear no loss (Job 5:17-18, 20-24).

If you understand that God is using all the difficulties you face to perfect you, you'll be at peace. It is not all for nothing. You may not always know why you're going through this or that, but be encouraged that there is a good reason. Turning to the New Testament, Paul said if you want peace, do good (Romans 2:10). All who do good will enjoy peace. To be more specific, "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable. . . . And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17-18). Living according to the Word—according to heavenly wisdom, to God's revealed standard of righteousness—brings peace.

If you've lost God's peace in your life, you can find it again. Retrace your steps by trusting God in everything, turning from sin and walking in obedience, enduring His refining work in your life, doing what is good, and living by His Word in a righteous way. As Paul said, God's peace is continually available to you. Avail yourself of it.

(Adapted from *Anxious for Nothing*.)

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