

Experiencing the Peace of God

By Jim Davis

Anxiety is an alarm clock for the Christian. The Apostle Paul gave a list of things for the Philippian believers to practice. These things that they were to practice, they had learned and received and seen the Apostle Paul do. Among the list was the command not to be anxious or troubled. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

The peace of God is a wonderful thing. I often wondered what Jesus meant when he said, "My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matthew 11:30). Life is hard. We become deluged with busyness and we find ourselves in a constant state of contention with our circumstances. From the day we were born we live under a shadow of death. Death, disease, and other afflictions are constantly in pursuit. Yet we are clearly commanded not to worry. Once a person truly experiences God's peace it becomes one of our most valuable possessions in Christ. It is to be guarded with prayer and supplication as we make our requests known to the God of peace.

The following is a quote adapted and paraphrased from John Calvin.

Innumerable are the evils that beset human life; innumerable too are the deaths that threaten it. Our body is the receptacle of a thousand diseases. A man cannot go about unburdened by many forms of his own destruction, and without drawing out a life enveloped, as it were with death. All things around you cannot be trusted. They are a menace and threaten immediate death. Any flight that you take is subject to mechanical failure, or hijackers, or hidden bombs. Take a ride in your car and you may become another statistic, many are killed and maimed each year. In our larger cities the elderly are fearful of leaving their house or apartment for fear of muggers. If there is a weapon in your hand, or a friend's hand, harm awaits. There are wild animals, snakes, deadly poisonous spiders and many other dangerous creatures that threaten harm to you or your loved ones. There is danger of fire, danger of disease, danger of every kind of affliction. There is no security in your livelihood. You can lose your job or your business your money or most anything you trust. Amid all these tribulations man in his miserable mortality languishes, but half-alive in life, he weakly draws his anxious and languid breath, as if he had a sword perpetually hanging over his neck.

You may think: these events rarely happen, or at least not all the time, nor to all men, and never all at once. Agreed, but since we are warned by the examples of others that these can also happen to ourselves, and that our life ought not to be excepted any more than theirs, we cannot but be frightened and terrified as if such events were about to happen to us. (Calvin's Institutes of Christian Religion, I XVII, 10)

It is an interesting fact to know that the command to "fear not" appears in the Bible exactly 365 times. It stands to reason that since it was repeated so many times in the Bible it must be a major obstacle for God's people. So if you are a worrier you are not alone. You have been preceded by and are now being accompanied by others who fight the same battle.

Prayer

The fear of death and the cares of this life would overwhelm us but there are several principles from Philippians 4:6-7 that will help us experience the peace of God. First, take note

that in contrast to worry we are to pray. This word for prayer means prayer in general and in the New Testament we were taught to address God the Father (Matthew 6:6; John 16:23) although sometimes Jesus Christ the Son is addressed (Acts 7:59). Communication with God is essential to experiencing the peace of God. Since God is the source of our peace we must continuously approach that fountain of peace in order to drink from it.

Prayer is offered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:13). We cannot approach God with our requests in any other way except through Jesus Christ. It is on the basis of His work on the cross for us that we are given the privilege of approaching the throne of grace to find mercy and find grace to help in times of need. That throne of grace is the fountainhead of the peace of God. His title is properly "God of Peace!" The experience of the peace of God is based upon the comfort of His presence. The Psalmist wrote, "Thou wilt make known to me the path of life; In Thy presence is fullness of joy; In Thy right hand there are pleasures forever." David longed to dwell in the Lord's house and behold His beauty and meditate upon His perfections. It is God's love and His character that provides security for us in the day of trouble. To be hidden in the secret place of His tent enables us to boldly ride the car or board the airplane. We can trust our children into His loving hands and we can sleep in His care while others worry. Our mortality and the cares of this life cannot disturb those who trust in God. Faith is the essential element in prayer.

Supplication

Second, it is with entreaty or supplication that we are to make our requests to God. You may ask the question, how often do I pray? We are told to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Let your personal anxiety be your alarm clock. When life begins to get out of control it is time to pray. If you are worrying about anything it is time to address God the Father. The word supplication stresses the sense of need or desire on the part of our request. When trouble comes you will certainly want to pray and receive help from the Lord. But just think of all the time and energy you will not waste worrying about the things that may or may not happen when you pray about it and then rest in faith.

Calvin was right about the threat death poses for us. If the law of the universe is *chance* then we should be miserable with worry. But resting in the God of peace is the unique benefit of those who believe He reigns the universe from heaven and the earth is His footstool. So take your petitions to the One who is able to help. Take them frequently and take them with persistence until you find the peace.

Thanksgiving

Third, we are told to bring our request to God with thanksgiving. Offering thanksgiving to God in place of worry is an expression of belief. It declares that God is in control and I will trust Him. Worry is the opposite. It states that, "I am not in control" and I don't like it. It is good to thank God for our blessings but when we thank God for the trouble in our lives it honors Him. The reason that fear is addressed so often in the Bible is because the root of fear is unbelief. Belief spawns thanksgiving. So we are instructed to "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; and in everything to give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

His yoke is easy and His burden is light. The experience of the peace of God surpasses human reason. The experience of God's peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.