

**Marc Roby:** We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine God's communicable attributes. Today we are going to look at the peace of God. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to begin?

Dr. Spencer: By noting that God's peace is not often listed as an attribute, but it is an important part of a complete description of God's being. Wayne Grudem does list it separately and justifies that, I think quite reasonably, by citing 1 Corinthians 14:33 where the apostle Paul wrote that "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace."<sup>1</sup>

**Marc Roby:** And, of course, the context for that statement is that Paul was discussing proper order in church worship. The Corinthian congregation had evidently developed some serious problems in terms of over emphasizing certain gifts, in particular, speaking in tongues, and their worship services were not as orderly as they should be.

Dr. Spencer: And the result of this disorder was that the church as a whole, the body of Christ, was not being built up. This chapter follows the famous chapter on love, 1 Corinthians 13, and Paul is laboring to instruct the church in Corinth how to use all of their gifts in love for the edification of the body of Christ.

One interesting thing about 1 Corinthians 14:33 is that peace is contrasted with disorder, or confusion, not with conflict or war. The peace being spoken of here is much more comprehensive than just an absence of conflict. It is a positive statement about well-being.

**Marc Roby:** Certainly the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*, also signifies much more than the absence of conflict. Jewish people still use the word as their standard greeting to one another. Vine's Expository Dictionary says that shalom means "peace; completeness; welfare; [and] health" and that the "root meaning" is to be whole.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Spencer: Vines also points out that the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, often translates shalom with the Greek word σωτηρία (*sōtēria*), which means salvation.<sup>3</sup> The theologian John Frame says that "Theologically, [peace] represents the fullness of the blessings of salvation: peace as opposed to war, but also completeness, wholeness, and prosperity."<sup>4</sup>

**Marc Roby:** I can't think of anything that even comes close to bringing the peace that salvation brings.

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<sup>2</sup> Vine, W.E., Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson, 1996, pg. 173

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pg. 464

<sup>4</sup> John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, P&R Publishing Company, 2002, pg. 443

Dr. Spencer: Neither can I. And the theme of peace is very common throughout the Bible. In fact, the famous Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6:24-26 is, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Marc Roby: And, of course, God is the only one who can give us peace in the ultimate sense of that term, that of salvation.

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. As we discussed in Session 79, the defining problem of the human race is that God is holy and we are not, we are guilty sinners. And since, as it says in Hebrews 9:27, “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”, salvation is the one thing we truly need. Without it, we will spend eternity in hell being justly judged for our sins. But with salvation, we have peace in the greatest possible sense.

In Romans 5:10 we are told that prior to coming to Christ in faith we were God’s enemies. In Romans 1:18 we read that we were under his wrath. And in Romans 8:17 we read that “the sinful mind is hostile to God.” So how wonderful it is when we read in Romans 5:1, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”.

Marc Roby: That is great news. And we should note that you must have peace *with* God, that is you must repent, believe and be saved, before you can have the peace *of* God in your heart. If we have done that, then God is no longer our enemy. We are reconciled to him and he even adopts us as his children and gives us the privilege of calling him “Abba”, Father, as we read in Romans 8:15.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is amazing. And sin doesn’t only bring separation between us and God, it brings problems into the relationships we have with other human beings. All anger, malice, hatred, strife and wars are caused, ultimately, by sin. When God brings peace to us in the ultimate sense, these will all disappear.

Marc Roby: That’s a wonderful thing to look forward to.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is. But getting back to my statement that this theme of peace is very common throughout the Bible, let me illustrate. In the book of Judges we read about Gideon, who was the fifth recorded judge of Israel during the period of the judges, from around 1400 B.C. to 1050 B.C. God used him to deliver his people from the oppression of the Midianites, and in Judges 6:24 we read, “So Gideon built an altar to the LORD there and called it The LORD is Peace.” That phrase, “The LORD is Peace” is Yahweh shalom in Hebrew and is one of many phrases helping to define who God is. We also read a wonderful and well-known prophecy about the coming Savior in Isaiah 9:6; “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Marc Roby: That is a glorious prophecy about the coming of Christ, the Prince of Peace. Written, I might add, around 700 years before Jesus’ birth! And in the very next verse, Isaiah 9:7, we read that “Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”

Dr. Spencer: And the Hebrew word used in both of those verses is again, shalom. We are told the same thing in the New Testament. There are five places where God is referred to as the “God of peace.” For example, in Romans 15:33 the apostle gives the benediction, “The God of peace be with you all. Amen.” Then, in the next chapter, we read a very interesting verse. Paul wrote, in Romans 16:20, that “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”

**Marc Roby: That is interesting. You wouldn't normally think of a “God of peace” crushing anyone. That doesn't sound so peaceful.**

Dr. Spencer: Well, it isn't in the normal sense of that word. But it is the same Greek word in both of these verses. This gives us a great illustration of the breadth of meaning to the word peace in the Bible. While it certainly can refer to a cessation of hostilities and an absence of conflict, the deeper meaning is, as we saw for the Hebrew word shalom, an inner peace and wholeness and being reconciled to God. It is not all inconsistent to say that you can be at peace while you are simultaneously vigorously opposing Satan's attacks. The peace that God gives to us is not a peace that is dependent on our momentary circumstances because it is founded on our having the most important relationship of all, our relationship to God, fully restored by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That is why the prophet Habakkuk could exclaim, in Habakkuk 3:17-18, “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

**Marc Roby: That verse shows that there is a close connection between peace and joy. We are told in Romans 14:17 that “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit”. Only the peace and joy provided by God can explain Paul and Silas being able to pray and sing hymns to God in the middle of the night while sitting in a Philippian jail, with their feet in stocks, having been severely beaten as we read in Acts 16:25.**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that's true. And in Philippians 4:6-7 Paul commands us, “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.” In that verse, the phrase “the peace of God” is a genitive of possession, it means the peace that belongs to God, but is given to his people. And when you look at situations like Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail, or the great Christian martyrs who sang while being burned at the stake, like John Huss,<sup>5</sup> you realize that the peace of God truly does transcend all understanding.

**Marc Roby: And at the end of that passage in Philippians 4 we see another of the places where God is called the “God of peace.” In Philippians 4:9 Paul wrote, “Whatever you have learned or**

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., see D. Kleyn & J. Beeke, *Reformation Heroes*, Reformation Heritage Books, 2009, pg. 24

received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is an important verse. God gives his peace to us, but we must put into practice the things he has commanded. The life of a Christian is one of constant change. We will never be perfect in this life, but we are called to live holy lives and we should be striving to do so more and more all through life. We are being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

**Marc Roby: Which is the process of being sanctified.**

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. And the final two places where God is referred to as the “God of peace” in the New Testament both occur in the context of sanctification. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 Paul wrote, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.”

**Marc Roby: Now of course, we must work as well, we can’t just sit back and expect God to do the work of making us holy.**

Dr. Spencer: No, we can’t. The classic passage to deal with that is Philippians 2:12-13 where after speaking about the humble obedience of Christ and his great glory to come Paul wrote, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

**Marc Roby: That’s a marvelous passage for showing that. God works in us, but we must work out. And he goes on to say what the goal is, in Verse 15 it says, “so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe”.**

Dr. Spencer: What a wonderful purpose that is! And the final passage where God is called the “God of peace” also deals with this topic of sanctification. In Hebrews 13:20-21 we read, “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

**Marc Roby: It is wonderful to realize that in spite of our great weakness, God is able to equip us with everything we need to do his will.**

Dr. Spencer: That is a wonderful realization, but it is something that we are told over and over again in the Bible. I don’t want to wander way off our topic of peace, but just for example, in 2 Corinthians 9:8 we read that “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.” And in Philippians 4:13 Paul wrote, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

**Marc Roby: And we are clearly told that God has prepared good works for each of us to do. In Ephesians 2:10 we read that “we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

Dr. Spencer: That is a very good thing for us to keep in mind at all times. God has work that he has planned for us to do and we should be busy doing that work. But it is not a work of drudgery. Because God is peace, he is also working to produce peace in us. With the exception of Jesus' time on the cross, where by mutual agreement the Father poured out his wrath on his own Son while he bore our sins, there has always been perfect fellowship within the persons of the godhead. And even in Christ's sacrifice on the cross there was perfect agreement within the godhead. And God is working to produce that same mind-boggling unity and peace within his people. It begins when we are saved and therefore have peace with God, but it doesn't end there. We still sin, and we still have internal struggles and strife with one another, but God is working to deal with all of our problems. It is interesting that the great 17<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan, Stephen Charnock, briefly discussed the peace God gives to his people under the heading of God's power.

**Marc Roby: That is an interesting place to put it.**

Dr. Spencer: It is. But it makes perfect sense because only God is able to produce real peace in his people. Charnock writes, "As none but infinite power can remove the guilt of sin, so none but infinite power can remove the despairing sense of it."<sup>6</sup>

**Marc Roby: That's an interesting point. And it reminds me of Christ appearing to his disciples after his resurrection, which is the most amazing demonstration of God's power imaginable. In John Chapter 20 we see three times, in Verses 19, 21 and 26, Jesus saying to them, "Peace be with you!"**

Dr. Spencer: That's true. In Ephesians 6:15 the gospel is called "the gospel of peace". I remember very well how I was before I was saved at the age of 38. There were occasional times of feeling desperately alone, afraid and anxious. Knowing that there was something missing from my life and that was critically important, in fact necessary. And I praise God for mercifully opening my eyes to my need for Jesus Christ. I think one of the most poignant passages in all of Scripture is Luke 19. Jesus Christ is making his triumphal entry to Jerusalem at the beginning of passion week and we read, in Verses 41-42, "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.'"

**Marc Roby: That is a frightening thought, to reach the point where there is no more opportunity to find peace with God.**

Dr. Spencer: It is an absolutely terrifying prospect. And it is my sincere prayer that God will grant everyone who listens to this podcast a broken heart to see their need for Jesus Christ. That they may come to know this peace that passes all human understanding, both now and eternally.

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, Two Volumes in one, Baker Books, 1996, Vol. II, pg. 79

Marc Roby: I think that is a wonderful place to end for today. So let me remind our listeners that can email their questions and comments to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org) and we will do our best to answer.