

## Don't Settle for False Peace!

Barry O'Dell

**P**aceful is not a word that I would use to describe the current condition of our world. In fact, the world has not been in peace since Adam and Eve decided to violate God's revealed will. In Jeremiah's day there were those who were proclaiming "Peace, Peace" when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14). The nation of Israel had become a nation of backsliders and forsakers. They had forsaken the only One who could save them from the coming disaster at the hands of Babylon. God's solution was for the nation to seek the "old paths" (Jer. 6:16a). The nation's response? No (Jer. 6:16b)! Here is what would happen: "And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim" (Jer. 7:13-15). Israel was obstinate and willing to believe a lie in order to make themselves feel better (Jer. 5:30-31).

The sad reality is that things are not much different today than they were 2,600 years ago when Jeremiah wrote. Here are three lies that, in the name of God, are perpetrated throughout the religious world today...

**Salvation comes before being baptized into Christ.** Most of those who claim to be followers of God teach either "accept Jesus into your heart" or "say this prayer to be saved." While these are commonly held beliefs, they are completely unbiblical! Whether you're reading the words of Jesus (Mk. 16:16), Peter (Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21), or Paul (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:26-27), burial in water is an absolute mandate in order to be saved. *Accepting Jesus* and the *Sinner's Prayer* are foreign to God's word. Yet many, because of their religious heritage or having been misguided, believe those things. Think about this - Saul of Tarsus spent three days in prayer and fasting (Acts 9:7-9, 11). For many today, that would have been sufficient on being saved! Yet, the Bible says that when Ananias arrived, Saul was baptized (Acts

9:18; 22:16).

**It doesn't matter where you go to church - so long as you go.** This would be a very comforting thing to believe! We all have family and friends who are members of various religious groups. Would not it be nice if the Bible taught that it doesn't matter where you "went to church?" We would not have to confront different religious teachings with the Bible. We would not have to expose erroneous worship. We would not have to draw lines of fellowship. We would not have to expose false doctrine. It would be so easy! There would not have to be division because it doesn't matter - just be a good, honest person and God will be okay with the other stuff. However, just as in Jeremiah's day, we're not called to the easy paths. God's people are called to the *old paths*. The paths that have been established by God Himself. There is only one church for which Christ died (Eph. 5:23-27). There is only one church that has been paid for by the blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28). There is only one church over which Christ is Head (Eph. 1:22-23). There is only one body (Eph. 4:4). We cannot foster false peace by teaching and believing that the church doesn't matter.

**Once you're saved, you can never be lost.** As with the previous point, wouldn't this be so easy? The teaching is, essentially, that since God saves you, God keeps you and nothing you do can change that. Most of the time John 10:28-29 is used to teach this doctrine. However, verse 27 must also be considered: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." Man's being saved from sin and staying saved is contingent upon his hearing and following the voice of Jesus (Lk. 6:46)! *Hearing* and *following* are both present tense verbs in the Greek. The follower of Christ must continue listening to the Lord in order to stay safely in the Father's hand. We must abide in His teaching (Jn. 8:31-32).

God's people must never settle for false peace! They cannot be content to believe or practice something just because they have always practiced and believed it! The child of God must constantly seek the old paths - the Scriptures - wherein God's way is revealed. If we are going to speak, we must speak as the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).

**"Don't settle for false peace...Seek the old paths - the Scriptures"**

**A** most terrifying thought that one could ponder has to be that of standing before the Lord and facing the righteous indignation of His judgement. The Hebrews writer said it this way, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). On the contrary, the greatest and most comforting thought to ponder is that of full acceptance and pardon from God. Along that line, the Apostle Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). So, what then is the basis upon which one will either receive or be freed from the condemnation of the Almighty? Simply put, salvation by grace, through faith in the blessed Lord, Jesus Christ. In the Book of Ephesians, Paul wonderfully highlights the Church that belongs to Jesus and the tremendous blessings therein. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). How wonderful to know that there is not even one spiritual blessing held back from those who are in Christ! In the body/church of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), one has redemption, forgiveness, an inheritance, an enlightened understanding, and a risen and reigning Savior.

To truly highlight one of the blessings of being in Christ, Paul paints a picture of stark contrast. In chapter two, he begins by telling the reader of his dismal existence when he was outside of Christ. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (2:1-3). Later in the same chapter, Paul would say, "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (2:12). Notice the language employed to arrest the readers attention and give a sobering reminder of just how bad their previous situation had been, "dead," "separated," "alienated," "strangers," "having no hope," and finally "without God." There is no way to misunderstand the apostle's words. Outside of

Christ, one is in sin and there is nothing but utter hopelessness. Yet, there is a way of escape for those with good and honest hearts. For the grace of God makes it possible to be moved from outside of Christ, to being inside of Christ. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved" (2:4-5). There could be no sweeter news to hear than that. It is no wonder then, that the message of grace and salvation is called the "gospel of peace, and...glad tidings of good things" (Rom. 10:15). The hearers were made keenly aware that their sins had placed them at odds with their Creator. But now, they were able to have something that they previously lacked...Peace with God. There was no sum of money paid to secure that peace. It was not the result of a military victory nor of a long and arduous negotiation. It was ONLY because of God's grace as demonstrated through the sacrifice of Jesus Himself.

***"Outside of Christ, one is in sin and there is nothing but utter hopelessness."***

It is through Jesus that we have closeness with God. It is through Jesus that we have peace with God. It is not the case that He simply brokered a deal for peace. He IS our peace. Let these words from the Apostle Paul wash over you and notice the beautiful contrast of terms from the previous passage. "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Eph. 2:14-22). He is the peace between all men, and the Great God of Heaven. To God be the glory for ever and ever!

**T**he statement which serves as the title for this article was spoken by Jesus himself as recorded in Matthew 10:34: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.” In the gospel according to Luke it was recorded what Jesus said in this way, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division” (Lk. 12:51). If one were to read either one of these verses, they might ask themselves these questions, Did Jesus not come to bring “on earth peace, good will toward men” (Lk. 2:14)? Is He not the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6)? Is this a contradiction of what Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” (Jn. 14:27)?

As students of the Bible we need to understand what we are reading as it is in context. Anytime we pull a verse out of context it becomes invalid, as it might seem there is a contradiction. There is not one untruth or contradiction to be found in God’s word, because it is the product of God, who cannot lie (2 Tim. 3:16; Titus 1:2).

If you go back all the way to the beginning of the chapter (Matt. 10:1ff) you will notice that this chapter concerns the sending of the disciples on the limited commission. Our text comes in the middle of a

discourse in which Christ is sending His twelve apostles throughout Israel to preach the gospel of the kingdom and is telling them what to expect. He warned them that they will suffer severe persecution due to the preaching of His message...but to not fear because God is with them (vs. 16-33). It is in that context – the context of warning them about how sinful men will react to God’s message that they preach – that He tells them that He has come to bring a sword rather than peace to the earth. Thus, the lack of peace comes, not directly because of Jesus, but because sinful men reject His teachings of peace.

Now, the gospel is called the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15). It establishes peace between those who obey the gospel, who live faithfully to His will and God (Eph. 2:16-17). However, the gospel of peace becomes a stumbling block to those who reject it. With many of these, they are not content merely to neglect or refuse to obey it; they also oppose the gospel and those who follow it.

Jesus did bring peace, but not as the world thinks of it. “Being therefore justified by faith, we

have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). So Jesus made available to us peace with God. Now, people usually do not think of themselves as enemies of God, but anyone who is not His child, a Christian, is His enemy; not because God has made that one His enemy, but because that one has made himself God's enemy. The latter part of James 4:4 states, “. . .Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God.” But Christ reconciles us with God, so that we can have peace with Him.

Jesus’ great mission into the world was to “seek and save the lost” (Lk. 19:10). For those who just merely are crying “Peace! Peace!” that does not save souls, rather it can only be accomplished when the sword of the Spirit (the word of God, Eph. 6:17) is correctly wielded by courageous and fearless soldiers of Christ. So, when Jesus stated that “I came not to send peace, but a sword.” The sword is the word of God (Heb. 4:12).

***“Thus, the lack of peace comes, not directly because of Jesus, but because sinful men reject His teachings of peace.”***

Jesus then alluded to how even families will be divided because some will heed His message while others will not (vs. 35-39). Notice the context, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but

a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.” (Matt. 10:34-38). This teaches us that there is a cost to be paid in being a disciple of the Lord. The gospel demands a decision, but too often the decision is to reject that inspired Word. The wickedness of man, not the message of the gospel, causes this spiritual warfare. Religious differences can be a strong test to a disciple’s faith. One must decide whether he loves the Lord or his family member more. Christ will not take second place. He that loves father or mother more than he loves Christ is not worthy of the Lord. Jesus said that discipleship would cost you. But consider what you stand to gain: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 10:39).

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### The Churches of Christ

- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

#### Salvation

- Saved by grace, though faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Hear, belief, baptism (Acts 18:8)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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