

"Terms of Peace"

By Allan Pole



Theme: Peace is yours if you do your part.

Text: Isaiah 26:3

Here's a thought: J. Oswald Sanders observed, "Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God."

Herbert Hoover served as President of the United States from 1929 to 1933, during the onset of the Great Depression. A reporter asked him, "Mr. President, how do you handle criticism? Do you ever get agitated or tense?"

"No," Mr. Hoover replied, seemingly surprised at the question, "of course not."

"But," the reporter went on, "when I was a boy you were one of the most popular men in the world. Then, for a while you became one of the most *unpopular*, with nearly everyone against you. Didn't any of this meanness and criticism ever get under your skin?"

"No, I knew when I went into politics what I might expect, so when it came I wasn't disappointed or upset," the President commented. He lowered his familiar bushy eyebrows and looked directly into the reporter's eyes and added, "Besides, I have 'peace at the centre,' you know."

Wouldn't you like to have peace at the centre? A prophet of God declares in Isaiah 26:3:

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. NIV

Peace comes when two parties cooperate:

God
and
You

God



The God of the universe offers you perfect peace. Peace is the result of grace. It literally means, "To bind together." In other words, the peace which comes from unmerited, unearned love can weave and bind your fragmented life into wholeness. And the civil war of conflicting drives within you, which makes you feel like a rubber band stretched in all directions, is ended. The Lord is in control. He has forgiven the past, He is in charge of now, and shows the way for each new day.

This is the age of the pill - pills to perk you up, pills to calm you down. You could ask someone how they feel and they might not know because they can't remember which pill they have taken.

Jesus contrasts two kinds of peace in John 14:27:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. NIV

Our society teaches you and me to be consumers. Consumerism is "the notion that life consists in having and getting and spending and controlling and using and eating". Digital marketing experts estimate that most of us are exposed to around 4,000 to 10,000 ads each day

(www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/08/25/finding-brand-success-in-the-digital-world/#495c0255626e)! Each message is intended to provoke you to be discontent with what you have and to pursue the advertiser's product or service. This facet of our Canadian way of living directly contradicts the way of Jesus Christ. Jesus promises peace and contentment while consumerism offers anxiety and *discontentment*.

Satan is a master at counterfeits. One of his best is to fabricate peace. Leisure and luxury are not peace. Compromise and conformity to the world's values and philosophies is not peace. True peace is a gift of God, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:22), to those who obediently trust Him. The clearest picture of peace is Jesus, even as He hung on the cross. He had peace in his soul as He went about disturbing the peace of the world.

Look at the places on our planet where there is division and unrest and you

will find selfish leaders and rebellious followers. The kingdom of heaven has incomparable leadership. Still, Satan tried to undermine God's leadership with the angels before the earth was created and with humanity in the Garden of Eden. Satan and his demons continue to lure people from the King of kings today.

Beware of trusting "inner peace" as an accurate guide to right and wrong. I have heard people justify disobedience to God by claiming, "I have such a peace about my decision." Behavioral scientists talk about the "theory of dissonance" which explains that what one thinks and what one does must agree, otherwise dissonance or disharmony results. For most, that dissonance appears as a feeling of uneasiness, a lack of peace. The human response to dissonance is to get rid of it.

One way or another, peace must be restored. That may mean getting your actions to jibe with your thinking, or it may mean revising your thinking to fit your actions. The brain's incredible ability to justify and rationalize can cause us to disobey and drift away from Jesus. Thinking slips to agree with action, or action slips to agree with an error of mind. For this reason, it is dangerous to rely heavily on inner peace as a guide to right or wrong. There is only one reliable guide for moral decisions - the Word of God.

While religion tends to focus on externals, the Apostle Paul reminds us to live from the core in Romans 14:17-18:

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved [deemed genuine and sincere] by men. NIV

The kingdom of God comes to us when His kingship is established in our lives. If you want peace on God's terms, you must think and act the way *He* wants. If you are not doing so, then He calls you to repent, to change your mind and to turn to Him. For you to know right but to do wrong will result in either repentance or backsliding. One way or another, you *will* find peace - God's peace or the peace of the world. It may come through compromise and a decision to live with sin or it may come through adjusting your thinking and behaviour to bring it in line with God's Word. These are two routes to inner peace with two very different results.

Much of the world we live in rotates on Satan's standards, which are the opposite of Christ's standards. It's a challenge to think and live biblically in this world. Biblical success involves servanthood. Biblical power comes from being yielded to what God has given you. Biblical pleasure comes from doing right, and brings peace and joy.

The world's peace hinges upon circumstances and our fickle emotions. God's peace is much deeper than that. J. Oswald Sanders (1902-1992) observed, "Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of God."

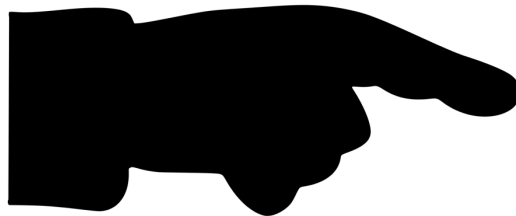
To what or to whom do you look for your peace? Relationships? Money? Career? Possessions? A trouble-free life?

When you look to God He will keep you. God and His peace are what you can build your life upon. He is unmoveable and unshakeable.

Peace comes when two parties cooperate:

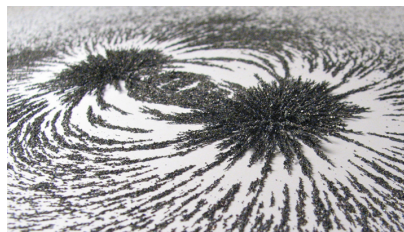
God
and

You



Your greatest battle is right between your ears:

- Your mind is a garden that could be cultivated to produce the harvest that you desire.
- Your mind is a workshop where the important decisions of life and eternity are made.
- Your mind is an armoury where you forge the weapons for your victory or your destruction.
- Your mind is a battlefield where all the decisive battles of life are won or lost.



When I was in grade six, our science class did an experiment with iron filings on a piece of paper. When we poured the filings on the paper they fell into a disorganized pile. Then we put a bar magnet under the paper and, as if by magic, the iron filings lined up - and followed the magnet's shape and force of direction.

All your anxieties are like so many iron filings poured out on the surface of your life. Jesus says, "Put My presence and My kingdom underneath your life, seek Me as a habit, and you'll find that your worries will line up and take My shape." The greater gift is given, and the lesser ones will be taken care of. That's *His promise*, and *your choice*.

Contrast the person whose mind is steadfast with the one who is double-minded in James 1:5-8:

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. 6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. 7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does. NIV

Do you find yourself in "moral dilemmas" because you have not truly decided if you will go the way of the world or the way of Christ? Do you struggle each Sunday with whether or not to get together with other followers of Jesus or whether or not you can afford to tithe? These are signs of double-mindedness. Once you make basic decisions like these and others you make room for God's peace in your mind.

Some people are as jumpy and squirmy as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs.

The Apostle Paul reveals some secrets to his peace of mind in Philippians 4:4-13:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. 10 I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. 11 I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. 12 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry,

whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength. NIV

Contentment is a state of the heart, not a state of affairs. Is frustration just an inevitable part of life? Must you always struggle with discontentment over your circumstances? The Apostle Paul recognized that contentment is not a natural state. Just as you cannot expect to jump on a snowboard and master the slopes like an Olympic champion, so you cannot expect to wake up one morning and be a master of contentment. What, then, did Paul learn about contentment?

It's internal. Paul was content even in chains, so outward circumstances clearly need not threaten your ease of mind. Some people have the "gift of worry". A key to peace is acceptance - an internal conclusion that the way things are is the way things are. It's not the same as condoning or even liking a situation, but it is trusting God to look after circumstances that you cannot control.

It's surrender. Consider the bucking broncs and the trained horses at a rodeo. Which horses have peace? To discover contentment, you must relinquish control. You must move from "my timing, my way, my outcome" to "Your timing, Lord, Your way, Your outcome."

It's about the cross. The cross is enough. Grace is enough. Paul could look at loss, opposition and near-death experiences, and say, "So what? I've got the cross. The big stuff is taken care of."

It's about today. You must let go of the past - the way you've failed and the way others have failed you. You must gladly receive God's forgiveness and freely extend it to others. Having done that, you need to live one day at a time instead of worrying about the future.

After buying a \$1,000,000 insurance policy before a plane trip, a traveller received the following message in a fortune cookie, "A recent investment may pay big dividends."

It's about Christ. "I can do everything [including being content] through Him who gives me strength," declared Paul. None of the other elements work without Christ. His power is what lets you rise above your cranky, worried, grasping humanity and say, "It is well with my soul."

Have you firmly decided to follow Jesus Christ no matter what the cost? What do you feed your mind and to what do you expose your eyes and ears? He is offering peace, but *He* draws up the terms of peace.

A submarine was being tested and had to remain submerged for many hours. When it returned to the harbour, the captain was asked, "How did the terrible storm last night affect you?"

The officer looked at him in surprise and exclaimed, "Storm? We didn't even know there was one!" The sub had been so far beneath the surface that it had reached the area known to sailors as "the cushion of the sea." Although the ocean may be whipped into huge waves by high winds, the waters below are never stirred.

Your mind can be protected against the distracting waves of worry if you rest completely in the good providence of God. Sheltered by His grace and encouraged by His Holy Spirit, you can find the perfect tranquility that only Jesus Christ can provide.

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