

LET IT BURN!

Perhaps it was a dream... perhaps not. The 'sense' of peace and security was truly beyond words. Nothing on this earth could compare – filled with an infinite security that was completely unpolluted by any sense of danger, death, disease...no tension, turmoil or trouble of any kind...only a perfectly pleasant sense of peace and the understanding of unlimited possibilities. Words just won't do...

The peace Jesus promised to His disciples – what does it 'look' like? What does it feel like? How is it different than the peace this world offers? Is it worth the pursuit? Is it even obtainable?

Fundamentally, the gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel of peace. (Eph 6:15) In fact, seventeen epistles of the New Testament begin with a pronouncement of grace and peace. For many centuries the Jewish people had greeted one another with the word, "Shalom" meaning peace or peace to you. However, what the Holy Spirit is emphasizing in the New Testament is that we cannot have peace unless we first have received grace.

As part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:21, 22), it is unique in that we are told to seek it, to pursue it (Psa 34:14, 1 Pet 3:11, Rom 14:19, 2 Tim 2:22 and Heb 12:14). Apart from a single reference to meekness, this is a fundamental distinction for although the Word says that God gives peace (John 14:27), we are also to literally "chase it down."

Now, clearly there is a peace in this world – that is, peaceful coexistence with other people, but the gospel proclaims a far superior peace. That is peace with God. Strong's puts it like this – peace is "the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation

through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is."

Jesus who is called the Prince of Peace said of the former – "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*" (Matt 10:34) Of course, He is no war monger; He is simply laying out the truth that the gospel of peace WITH GOD will inevitably bring war in this world. That's because this world is run by Satan who is in a continual conflict with God.

Strong really hit the nail on the head pertaining to the peace of salvation, and that is the peace which is a free gift (Rom 5:1, Col 1:20) It is the peace that bypasses all understanding of the human mind and thus guards it as well as your heart through Christ (Phil 4:7). But if peace pursuant to salvation is a free gift, why are we instructed to seek and chase it down? I'm not trying to pose a theological question that only echoes somewhere in the halls of 'higher learning', but I suggest that the answer has wonderful application and offers a glorious promise.

Perhaps the answer lies in the symbolism of the Old Testament peace offering. "*The peace offerings, unlike other sacrifices, were not ordained to be offered in fixed and regular course. The only constantly-recurring peace offering appears to have been that of the two firstling lambs at Pentecost. (Leviticus 23:19) The general principle of the peace offering seems to have been that it should be entirely spontaneous, offered as occasion should arise, from the feeling of the sacrificer himself.*" (Smith's Bible Dictionary)

"The peace offering differed from the [other] oblations ... in this respect: while the burnt offering was wholly consumed on the altar, and the

freewill offering was partly consumed and partly assigned to the priests; in this offering the fat alone was burnt; only a small part was allotted to the priests while the rest was granted to the offerer and his friends, thus forming a sacred feast of which the Lord, His priests, and people conjointly partook, and which was symbolical of the spiritual feast, the sacred communion which, through Christ, the great peace offering, believers enjoy." (Jamieson, Faussett and Brown)

Therefore, as the above indicates, the peace offering was a spontaneous, free-will gesture and clearly spoke of fellowship with both our Great High Priest and our God. It should also be noted that it included unleavened and leavened bread -- leaven being a type or symbol of sin (Lev 7:13). This stands in stark contrast to the animal offering which was to be without blemish and is quite instructive for although the animal sacrifice which portrays Christ was to be flawless, the two types of bread picture the reborn inner being and our own flawed sin nature – the Christian condition (Rom 7:7-25).

You see, you don't have peace with God, fellowship with the Creator, based upon your ability to be without 'leaven' – sinless. Rather, the sacrifice was acceptable to God, inclusive of the leaven because of the perfect or spotless animal sacrifice. None of us establishes peace with God on any other basis. You can't qualify yourself, purge yourself, make yourself holy enough to obtain that peace. You can't do enough good works to somehow grasp it. That's the fundamental doctrine of grace, isn't it?

OK, but why the pursuit of peace?

Well, there remains another unique peace offering and it has to do with the Nazarite. In Numbers 6, we find the law concerning this one who made a

vow concerning a period of time to be set apart totally unto God. Although his conduct during this time included the abstention from wine and from touching any corpse, his peace offering differed in two ways from the standard – first, there was no leaven allowed in the bread of the offering and second, he let his hair grow during the period of the vow. At the conclusion of his vow when the peace offering was made, he cropped his hair and burned it in the fire under the peace offering sacrifice.

Now, the Nazarite was in pursuit of God so to speak. Going beyond the standard sacrifice, he had a heart to utterly devote himself to the Lord. This was reflected in his diet, his cleanliness and his sacrifice. Clearly, he is a picture of the Lord Jesus who was called a Nazarene (the name means the same thing – separated -- Mat 2:23). The absence of leaven speaks of the purity of the devotion while the burning of the hair could typify the consuming of that which the flesh produces which might otherwise give beauty and/or a covering.

Pictured in the standard peace offering, we who believe in Christ benefit from His sacrifice on the cross. By the laying down of His precious life, our Lord made peace for us with the Father. That peace is the gracious gift of God to all who will receive it. Jesus said, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you...*" (John 14:27) There is a peace, however, that is not only with the Father but in the Father.

At the completion of the law on the Nazarite in Numbers, Moses recorded the priest's blessing:

"The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine upon you,

And be gracious to you;

*The LORD lift up His
countenance upon you,
And give you peace."*
(Num 6:24-26)

Notice that the end result is all about peace, the peace of beholding the LORD's countenance. Notice also that it follows His grace just as in the New Testament epistles. Now look at the first part of the blessing – can I suggest that God has blessed us graciously with salvation – the peace with Him; we can now come into His presence with confidence. In addition, He is keeping us by the peace that is in Him, that is, in the personal intimacy of a deeper and deeper relationship with Him. The more we pursue that intimacy, that closeness, the greater that peace. "...the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."
(Phi 4:7)

Oh, there's a 'peace' of compromise with this world too but the Lord says, "You shall not seek their peace nor their prosperity all your days for ever."
(Deut 23:6) On the contrary, along with the psalmist, our hearts should echo, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple." and, "When thou said, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, LORD, will I seek."
(Psa 27:4,8)

It is when we drift away that we miss out on the peace of intimacy with God. As born anew Christians, we still indeed have the peace of atonement, Christ's satisfactory payment for sin. You can confidently rest in that. No pursuit is necessary. But there's more for the true 'seeker' – "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things

which are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God." (Col 3:1)

Also, if you decide like the Nazarite to seek and pursue, you'll burn your hair if you would, your 'covering' – the covering of the attractions of the flesh -- in the process. You see, that covering won't matter because you know what God has is infinitely better.

We'll wrap up with the New Testament story to illustrate this point: "Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, "Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you." And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus.

So Jesus answered and said to him, "What do you want Me to do for you?"

The blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight."

*Then Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your faith has made you well." And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road."
(Mark 10:46-52)*

Casting aside his once important covering, blind Bart received his sight, and then he also followed, he pursued Christ. In like manner, God calls us to pursue His peace – to pursue HIM. The Bible speaks of seeking or pursuing Him more than 70 times. You see, in His presence is fullness of joy. In His presence is perfect peace (Isa 26:3) and indescribable security. And don't you know that He desires

your pursuit – draw near to God and He will draw near to you! (James 4:8)