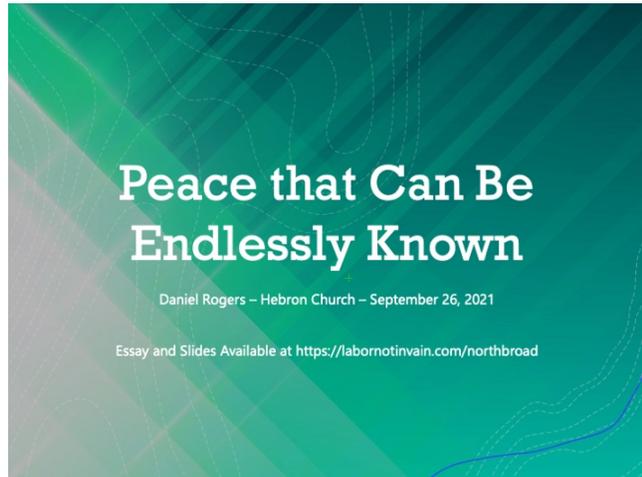


Peace that Can Be Endlessly Known

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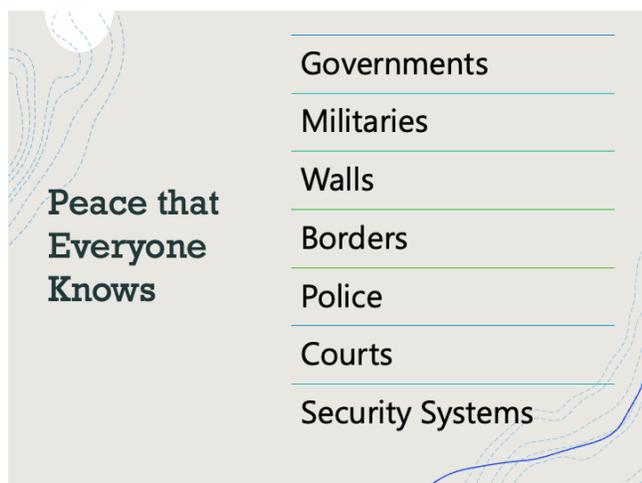
Peace that Everyone Knows

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America. (Preamble to the U.S. Constitution)



The word “tranquility” is another word for peace. The founding fathers wanted to create a world in which the God ordained equality of every individual was secured. Our constitution is one of our major founding documents which sought to make this a reality. Our country, since then, has a lot to say about peace. During the various wars, anti-war protesters called for peace while those conducting the war believed that peace comes through strength, an idea that has existed throughout history but was popularized in our time by President Ronald Reagan.¹

Trillions upon trillions of dollars have been spent to keep, maintain, and spread our version of peace. Other countries have invested similar percentages of tax dollars into pursuing their ideas concerning peace. Governments have been created, militaries formed, walls built, borders enforced, and weapons manufactured and purchased all in the name of peace.



¹ The “peace of God” stood in contrast to the *pax Romana*, an expression referring to the relatively peaceful conditions of the empire. The first known use of this expression was in AD 55, a little over five years before Philippians was written.

After thousands of years of human history involving battles, genocide, land theft, etc. there are still so many accounts of war, crime, hatred, and death... all in the name of peace. Perhaps the reason why these things persist is because mankind's version of peace *depends upon* war, death, and even hatred of others. Perhaps, then, our concept of peace is flawed.

One major talking point of those who seek this kind of worldly peace is, "Well if we could just get rid of *that* politician!" or "If *those people* would just disappear!" And so, rallies are formed, propaganda posters made, and marches held to get rid of the one person or group of people that are the source of all the problems in the world. Yet, despite doing this since the beginning of history, there is still no worldwide peace.

Again, our concept of peace must be flawed.

Unfortunately, these same stories of spilt blood, hatred, and division that characterize the world's search for peace can be found within the pages of church history. Many alleged heretics died at the hands of people wearing the name Christian. When we think about persecution, we may focus on those who died in the Bible because of Jewish and Roman opposition. But many who have died for their faith since then did so because of the intolerance of other believers. Church leaders like Constantine, for instance, threatened anyone with death who dare keep a copy of the writings of Arius. The last person to be burned at the stake for heresy was in 1612. Seventy years later, the Salem Witch Trials took place in Massachusetts. All of this was done in the name of God.

Why Do We Still Have So Much War, Crime, Hatred, and Death?

This Concept of Peace Plagues the Church.

Constantine banned any writings of a bishop named Arius. Anyone unwilling to burn his literature would be put to death.

Edward Wightman was the last person to be burned at the stake for heresy (1612).

If We Could Just Get Rid of Him/ Her/ Them!!

People were burned, wars were waged, and many lost jobs, relationships, and their lives all while those doing the persecution claimed to be servants of God.

This philosophy that has plagued the governments and tribes of the world has also plagued the church: “If we could just get rid of *his* writings!” “If *that* school would just close down!” “If *she* would stop publishing *her* paper!” On and on we go yet there are still divisions, alleged heresies, and power struggles after 2000 years. If burning people at the stake, starting a new denomination, or writing a new creed to banish certain groups worked, then why are we still divided? **Our concept of peace is flawed!**



True Peace Surpasses Comprehension

True peace, that is, peace that comes from God surpasses comprehension (Philippians 4:7). Paul uses the word translated “surpasses” (*hyperechō*) two other times in Philippians. The first one is in relation to how we treat each other. The second instance is connected to the value of knowing Jesus.

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as **more** important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3–4)*



*More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the **surpassing** value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ... (Philippians 3:8)*

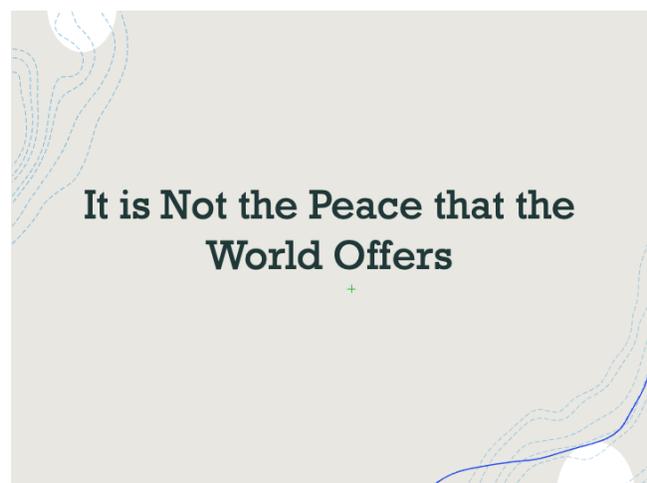
Both passages circumvent conventional wisdom. The passage from chapter two tells us that unity and true fellowship comes from going out of your way to care for one another, even if it means overlooking your own needs in the moment. Of course, if

everyone is doing this, then your needs will always be met. When we fully give ourselves in this way, as in the example of Jesus given in chapter two, we can trust that God will lift us up if no one else will. Although we pour ourselves out as a drink offering (Philippians 2:17), we never have to worry about being empty because our fellow Christians and the Lord are constantly refilling our cups with love.

In chapter three, Paul uses this word in connection with the value of knowing Christ. He says that to know Christ is far more important than trusting in fame, riches, prestige, earthly honor, etc. To him, the greatest treasure of all is to have a relationship with the One who died for him. In both texts, Paul shows us the path to true wisdom and peace, not the superficial, temporary peace that some man or woman in power can offer, but the peace that comes from God which is far better than anything we can imagine. As Paul prayed in Ephesians 3, so we should pray for each other:

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints **what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge**, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do **far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think**, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*
(Ephesians 3:14–21)

The source of this peace, comfort, and security is not something that man can offer. As Jesus told His disciples, “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:27). The peace that the world offers requires division and, in many cases, death. But the peace that Jesus provides requires a different kind of death, a death of self, a death of our egos and pride. While conventional peace promises, “If we could just **exclude** those people, then we could have some peace,” the gospel of Jesus proclaims, “If we could just **include** those people, then we could have



some peace.” Because the peace of God is not a peace that divides but a peace that unites! Therefore, Paul says that unity belongs to the Spirit and provides peace:

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***
(Ephesians 4:1–3)

Unity and peace go hand in hand. When we try to do away with unity in order to maintain peace, we no longer have the peace of the Spirit which passes understanding. Notice in the passage above, as well as the one from Philippians 2, that Paul calls for the Christians to have humility, gentleness, patience, and tolerance for one another. This unity does not come through the perfection of each individual but from the members being willing to forgive one another and to receive one another as Christ has received them, to the glory of God (Romans 15:7). And how has Christ received us? While we were yet sinners, He died for us (Romans 5:8). Someone may say, “Does this mean you will fellowship brethren who are in error?” I answer, “There are no other kind.” If we were perfect, there would be no need for patience, tolerance, and gentleness as the apostle commanded.

In Philippians 1 and 2, Paul talks about some principles that are necessary for unity:

*Only conduct yourselves in a manner **worthy of the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit**, with **one mind** striving together for **the faith of the gospel.*** (Philippians 1:27)

*Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of **the same mind**, maintaining the **same love**, **united in spirit**, **intent on one purpose.*** (Philippians 2:1–2)



He goes on to talk about what we addressed earlier: the importance of looking out for each other's interests.

Again, worldly peace may unite people within the same tribe, sect, or nation at the cost of the death of thousands or even millions, but the peace which comes from God is able to overcome all barriers that we have set up. It can comfort us whether we are free or imprisoned, impoverished or wealthy, and even in sickness and in health. In this way, we can learn to be content (Philippians 4:11-12).

This peace passes understanding. This does not mean that it can't be known but that it can be endlessly known. As we have fellowship with each other and with God, this peace becomes more and more obvious to us. And as we grow in Christ, the better we will be able to share and communicate this gospel of peace to those around us. We can bring peace through a different kind of strength: the weapons of toleration, gentleness, and patience which can tear down barriers which have been standing for years, barriers which conventional peace can never permanently abolish.

