

שָׁלוֹם  
Shalom

## **SHALOM**

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If you've ever watched a Miss America or Miss Universe pageant, you've heard contestants say, "I just pray for world peace."

"Let there be peace on the earth" is a popular theme, as it should be.

Didn't the angels sing as they announced Jesus' birth in Bethlehem: "*Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those who please Him!*" (Luke 2:14)?

However, "peace" doesn't look the same to everyone.

"Peace" to a tyrannical leader... looks like the silent compliance of his people.

"Peace" to a beneficent leader... looks like the joyous comfort of her people.

"Peace" to a wealthy people... looks like the security of their holdings.

"Peace" to an oppressed and impoverished people... looks like the freedom to flourish.

"Peace" on the battlefield... looks like a ceasefire or a truce.

"Peace" to the competitor... only looks like victory.

"Peace" to the plaintiffs in a court of law... looks like judgment in their favor.

"Peace" to the accused... looks like acquittal.

"Peace" to the afflicted... looks like healing and restoration.

"Peace" to the comfortable... looks more like "Leave me alone!"

And "peace" to the greedy... well, there is NO peace to the greedy.

Still the angels announced: "*Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those who please Him!*" (Luke 2:14)

What did they mean?

The Bible speaks of many kinds of false or temporary peace, as just listed above, but only two kinds of REAL peace.

## **Peace WITH God**

First of the two is “peace with God.”

*Acts 36* *This is the message of Good News for the people of Israel—that there is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

This is the cessation of animosity or hostility between a human and his or her Creator. More than that, it includes their reconciliation. And it only can come “*THROUGH Jesus Christ.*”

Not through anyone else, whether prophet or teacher.

Nor by any other way (religion can’t do it).

Jesus alone is the bridge of peace between man and God. How is that so?

*Romans 5:1* *Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.*

Through the sacrifice of His own life on our behalf, Jesus broke down the wall of hostility. He tore the veil in two. Jesus built the bridge between man and God by what He did for us. He has reconciled us with God.

*It’s “because of what Jesus Christ has done.”*

That refers to the cross on which He died. He took the weight and shame and judgment for our sins upon Himself. He gave up His life in the place of ours. By His death we are saved. By His wounds we are healed.

It also refers to the resurrection. Had He only died, I suppose our sins would be canceled out, and we would be forgiven, but still have just one life to live. But when He arose, He rose up for us, too. Because He lives, we will live also. His eternal life is also ours.

Unfortunately, what many accounts omit is the ascension. Forgiven for all our transgressions is amazing! Back to life that never ends is astounding! But it was His ascension that crowned Him King of kings and Lord of lords! That is when He took His place at the right hand of the Father to reign as Lord of all, and to intercede for us every day.

Because of what Jesus Christ (and only He) has done for us.

This message counteracts our inclination to legalism—putting rules and rule-keeping above a faithful relationship with God. We like rules; they make us feel sure, secure, in charge, adequate. But they separate us from one another, and, in the end, they separate us from God also, because we cannot keep them completely. Legalism always leads us to rely on self-effort. But the more we try to prove ourselves worthy to God, the more unworthy we become. Pride is not pretty. God is not impressed.

For the rest of us, who aren't driven by rules (all the heathen world), we still suffer many anxieties. We have worries about yesterday—past events, past traumas, past deeds that haunt us, and drag us down like a ball and chain. Or, we have worries about today—the expectations, the demands, the deadlines, the delays. As if that wasn't enough, we have worries about tomorrow—all the unknowns that threaten to cripple our dreams, derail our plans, and steal our delights. Anxious thoughts...

## **Peace OF God**

For us, there is... the peace of (or from) God.

*Philippians 4:6* Do not be anxious about anything. Instead, in every situation, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, tell your requests to God. *4:7* And the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

*The peace that comes to us from God "surpasses all understanding."* Sometimes, we think we get it, but our understanding is limited. As a result, many times we find ourselves thinking, "I thought (past tense) I understood what You were up to, but now I'm shaking my head." Yet, even when we don't understand after all, we can still have this peace from God, as an anchor for our soul.

The peace from God also surpasses our misunderstanding—when we got it completely wrong. When we totally blew it, His peace can come to us to stabilize us and help us find our way forward.

The peace from God even surpasses our lack of understanding. When we haven't got a clue, but we pray for wisdom, and we set our eyes on Him, His peace will hold us, and make us ready to act.

*Colossians 3:15* Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart (for you were in fact called as one body to this peace), and be thankful.

The awesome mystery of our salvation is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." His presence within us gives us a peace that is unearned. We must LET it control our hearts. This is a partnership, in

which you have a role to play. Peace won't always fall on you like ripe fruit from a tree. Sometimes you need to reach up and pluck it, take it from God's generous hand—invite Him to take control, and ALLOW His peace to rule OVER your heart's waves.

What controls your heart and mind? Is it fear? Fear is a monster, and a harsh taskmaster. We're all familiar with it, and sometimes it seems beyond control. Well, yours maybe, but not beyond HIS control. So give your fears to Jesus. Ask Jesus to deal with them, and let His peace resume control of your heart and mind.

Is it anxiety? Worries are like stones in your pathway, threatening to trip you, make you stumble, or twist your ankle on the way. They are a constant distraction, even when you know they are unreasonable. What could be, what might be, what it seems surely will be... turning me to the left and to the right, making it difficult to walk straight ahead. Tell it to Jesus. Ask Him to manage them for you, and let His peace take control where you could not.

Perhaps it's desire? Insatiable cravings, addictions of heart, mind, or body—whether for joy or sorrow, pleasure or pain. What are you to do? What can break the hold they seem to have over you? Jesus can. Give them to Jesus, and tell Him you want, instead, that His peace should guard your heart and mind.

How about PEACE? What if peace controlled your heart and mind? *What would that look like?*

I think it would look like trusting Jesus, no matter what comes. Always turning to Him for help, relying on His superior wisdom and strength. It would look like praying a lot, even silent or whispered prayers. Looking in His direction often, just as you might turn to look at a friend sitting beside you.

Trusting in Jesus like that, receiving His peace like that, would produce in you a readiness for anything. You can train yourself to recognize His presence, always with you, whatever the circumstance, and let the peace from Christ govern your thoughts and feelings.

### ***Shalom***

The peace of God that He offers to us—to all who put their trust in Him—is *shalom*. That's not just a nice Hebrew word, which, if you speak it, will show others how Biblically informed and centered you are. (Which is more important: That you know the word and speak it? Or, that you possess the goods, of which it speaks?)

*Shalom* is a traditional Hebrew greeting, used when you meet someone, and also when you depart from them. It recognizes and offers a peace in coming together, and also a peace when leaving. But the word has a deeper meaning than "peace." It doesn't just mean "no hostility here."

*Shalom* is what we have when everything is as it should be. It represents that “wholeness” that was intended from the start. It is “completeness” and “fullness.” And from wholeness we get “holiness,” which is so much more than moral behavior.

God said, *“You will be holy, for I am holy.”* He didn’t say in a threatening tone, *“You’d better be holy!”* It was a promise, a prediction—*“You WILL be holy, because I am holy. You will be like Me, because You’re My child.”*

Our salvation is about restoring us to wholeness, and the holiness God made us to display. It’s a process, for sure, but that’s what He’s up to in you, and in me.

*Shalom* is also rest (not the kind you need to recover from exhaustion, but the kind you may have in the midst of a storm of uncertain outcome). Jesus said, *“Come to Me, all of you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest... rest down to your soul”* (Matthew 11:28). That’s REAL rest. Even when the winds are blowing and the waves are rolling. *“Come.”*

*Shalom* is what we have IN Christ.

*Hebrews 4:9* *So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For all who have entered into God’s rest have rested from their labors, just as God did after creating the world. <sup>11</sup> So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.*

We’ll never know such rest until we cease trying to do it all on our own, trying to have it our way, trying to define what is right for ourselves. We have to cease striving, and rest from our “labors.” You can only do what you can do—and that varies from one situation to the next. You can’t determine what comes next and you can’t bring it all with you into each new setting. If you rely only on yourself, rest will elude you.

What can prevent us from failing and falling like the children of Israel did? Relying on God, taking our cues from Him, and obeying what He tells us. They couldn’t do that? What makes us any better? What can secure our obedience, in spite of our undying self-will?

The answer is: the Bible. (Read the very next verse after the quote above:)

*Hebrews 4:12* *For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before His eyes, and He is the one to whom we are accountable.*

*Shalom* is not the result of any momentary experience, no matter how powerful it may seem. It is the culmination of soaking in the words of God, day after day after day.

I believe in brining a turkey before cooking it—whether in the oven or on a rotisserie over hot coals. Brining is the process of soaking the bird overnight in salted and seasoned water. It lightly flavors the meat throughout and insures that it is “oh so moist” after cooking (even long and slow cooking).

A lifetime of troubles and losses is kind of like slow cooking.

But soaking in the Word of God everyday and mixing what you read with faith in everyday living will give your heart the flavor and moistness you need to remain obedient to God.

And that will give you joy in Christ in this life, no matter how difficult or bitter it may be, and everlasting joy with Christ in the life that is yet to come.

Start now, in the first month of the year, to find your *shalom* in the Word of God. If you need a plan to follow, just ask me! There are plenty of them available. If this is your first commitment to read through the entire Bible in a year, I always like to recommend The Bible Project ([bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com)), because they also offer very helpful illustrative videos to summarize each book and many important themes from the Scriptures. You can download their one-year reading plan [here](#), and print it out for daily use (the videos you will find [here](#)).