

“The Enemy of Peace”
(1 John 1:5-10)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we began considering the peace of God: that it's a better peace than the world can give us for at least three reasons:
 - a. First, because it is a peace that comes from God through Jesus Christ: the peace of knowing that our warfare with God is over, our sins are forgiven, and that our future is secure.
 - b. Second, because it's a peace that is incomprehensible: like God, it is past our full understanding.
 - c. And third, because it's able to guard our hearts and minds from everything and anything that would cause us to despair.
2. We also saw two senses in which the Lord gives us peace.
 - a. We have an objective peace – one that is true no matter how we might feel.
 - (i) It's the peace of knowing we're no longer God's enemies, but now friends and children.
 - (ii) It's the peace that comes from our justification – from our being declared righteous in Jesus Christ – one that can never change.
 - b. And we have subjective peace – one that works its way into our consciousness, one we experience.
 - (i) This is the peace that grows out of our sanctification.
 - (ii) It's the realization that we are in fact justified and safe in Christ, as evidenced by our growth in holiness.
 - (iii) Unlike our peace with God, this peace varies according to how successful we are in overcoming our sins, including the sin of anxiety, which we saw may be conquered by casting all our cares on Him.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we're going to look at the enemy of this peace: fear.
 - a. This is what's at the other side of the continuum.
 - b. The more peace we have, the less we'll be afraid; but the more we're afraid, the less we'll have peace.
2. Let's consider two things:
 - a. That not all fear is bad: there is a necessary godly fear that will actually strengthen our peace.
 - b. But there is also a fear that will take it away, particularly the fear that our sins are not forgiven in Christ.

II. Sermon.

A. First, let's consider the godly fear that will strengthen our peace.

1. This is the fear that first rises in our conscience and convicts our hearts that we have sinned when we were still unbelievers.
 - a. It's the realization that we were under God's wrath for our sins and that there was nothing we could do to escape its consequences.
 - b. The Lord works this fear in everyone before He converts them.
 - (i) This is what He did in those converted on the day of Pentecost: "Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" (Acts 2:37).
 - (ii) This is what He did in Paul, "And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank" (Acts 9:9).
 - (iii) This is what He did in the heart of the Philippian jailer, "And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'" (16:29-30).
 - (iv) He first makes us afraid before He relieves that fear in Christ.
 - (v) This fear is good, because it leads us to salvation.

2. There's also a holy fear that follows salvation.

- a. It's not the fear of damnation, but a fear of offending God.
- b. It's the same kind of fear we had as children, when we were afraid to do something our parents didn't approve of and come under their discipline.
- c. It's the fear that, though our sins can't condemn us, they can still cause us to lose some or most of the precious grace we have, bring down God's discipline, and with it the lessening of our assurance that we are the Lord's.
- d. This is why Paul exhorts us to, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12), and Peter writes, "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:17-19).
- e. This fear helps us to pay closer attention to our lives so that we don't so easily fall into sin.
- f. It motivates us to repent of the sins we've already fallen into and to ask God's forgiveness and His grace to overcome them.
- g. This holy fear can *give us peace and strengthen it*, because it moves us to deal with our sins in the right way.

B. But there is another kind of fear that isn't good, one that destroys our peace: It's the fear that our sins aren't forgiven, that we're not saved, that if we were to die, we would perish forever in hell.

1. Sometimes we struggle with this fear because of our natural temperament.
 - a. Some of us can tend to be melancholy and introspective.

- (i) We tend to doubt the Lord's mercy toward us. We look at every sin or temptation as evidence that we are not His.
 - (ii) Those who struggle with this usually never find enough evidence that they're true believers, but always enough proof that they're not.
 - (iii) Of course, when Satan gets involved, matters get even worse.
- b. If your melancholy and overly sensitive conscience is robbing you of peace, what can you do?
 - (i) First, you need to stay away from the things that feed your depression:
 - (a) If it's certain kinds of food, or too much food or sugar.
 - (b) Or certain activities that are too demanding and rob you of strength.
 - (c) Or particular people you spend time with that feed your conviction and gloomy introspection.
 - (d) Or spending too much time thinking about your sins.
 - (e) Instead, you need to focus more on the evidence you see in your heart of your grace; look to God's promises that are made to those who have these graces; and *believe* what He says.
 - (ii) Don't spend too much time alone – this is when your sin or Satan will be more likely to attack. Instead, spend as much time as you can in Christian fellowship, prayer and worship.
 - (iii) Don't allow yourself to be idle; make sure you keep yourself busy doing useful things in the Lord's service.
 - (iv) If you've done everything you can and are still struggling with spiritual depression:
 - (a) First, make sure you don't have a chemical imbalance.
 - (b) If you're healthy and are still struggling, perhaps it's an attack of the enemy of your soul: If so, pray and ask others to pray for you as well.
- 2. On the other hand, sometimes this fear isn't due to being melancholy:
 - a. Sometimes it's because we just aren't convinced:
 - (i) That the Lord has forgiven us: we think our sins are just too serious.
 - (ii) Or that God loves us: we're just too sinful.
 - (iii) Or that our faith is real because we don't see ourselves growing in holiness.
 - (iv) Or that we will persevere to the end and be saved.
 - b. How can you overcome these fears?
 - (i) First, you need to make sure that you have turned from your sins to Christ.
 - (a) The only way not to fear judgment is to know that your sins are forgiven in Christ.
 - (b) To do this, you must first trust in Christ.
 - (c) But to trust in Christ, you must first hate your sins and turn from them to Christ.
 - (1) Ask the Lord to show you your sins very clearly.

- (2) Ask Him to give you a *holy hatred* of them, because you have offended such a gracious and merciful God.
 - (3) Ask Him to give you the grace to see Him as a forgiving God, who promises to forgive all your sins if you will come to Him through Christ.
 - (4) Pray that the Lord would forgive and pardon you in His name.
 - (5) Ask Him for the grace to serve Him. Ask as though your life depends on it (since it does).
 - (6) If you hate your sins and turn from them to Christ, then you can know your sins are forgiven and that you no longer need to fear punishment.
- (ii) Second, remember that Christ's death is enough to pay for all your sins. Your sins may be infinite and deserve infinite punishment because you've sinned against an infinitely holy God, but the price God paid is also infinite – it's enough to pay for all your sins, if you will trust Him.
- (iii) Third, remember that it's God's nature to be merciful: Remember what He said about Himself to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations" (Ex. 34:6-7).
- (a) Yes, He is just: He will punish the guilty.
 - (b) But He *delights* to show mercy.
 - (1) He is gracious – He is willing to forgive you if you will trust in His Son.
 - (2) He is patient, not willing that you should perish, but that you should come to repentance.
 - (3) He abounds in lovingkindness – He will never exhaust His resources in this area.
 - (4) He is true – He will not lie to you: He will take away your sins if you trust in His Son. If you have trusted in Him, He has already done so.
 - (5) He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin.
 - (I) Even when you struggle and commit the same sins over and over, He will still forgive you if you repent – His mercies endure forever (Ps. 118:1).
 - (II) If you sin seventy times seven, or 490 times a day against Him, He will forgive you if you confess and forsake your sins (Matt. 18:22).
- (iv) Do you think your sins are unpardonable?
- (a) God says to you, "Come now, and let us reason together. . . . Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool" (Isa. 1:18).

- (b) He will forgive the sins you committed before your conversion when you didn't know better: He forgave Abraham's idolatry; Rahab and Mary Magdalene's harlotry; and Paul's persecution of the church.
- (c) He will forgive the sins you commit after your conversion, as He did Noah's drunkenness; David's adultery and murder; and Peter's denial.
- (v) Look to God for His forgiveness through Christ and He will forgive you.
 - (a) Jesus came into the world to save sinners, not the righteous.
 - (b) He became a curse on the cross, to save you from the curse (Gal. 3:13).
 - (c) It might be impossible for you to enter into heaven, but all things are possible with God (Matt. 19:26).
 - (d) He can give you faith; He can give you repentance. He will remove your sins as far as the east is from the west and remember them no longer (Psalm 103:12). He will cast them into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:18-19).
 - (e) He can do this because of what He has done through Jesus Christ.
 - (f) If you want to be free from the fear of judgment this evening and experience the peace of God, then hate your sins and turn from them to Christ, and He will grant you peace.
 - (g) Isaiah writes, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (55:7).
 - (h) Let's look to Christ now as we prepare to come to the Table.

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