

The Call of God #4

There are many traditional practices that we do every day without even thinking one way or another about them. When I was getting ready to come to church this morning, I spend some time before a mirror knotting this long strip of patterned cloth around my neck. When I buttoned up my shirt I noticed that the buttons are on the right side while Sandy's blouses have their buttons on the left side. The bottoms of some of my pants have little cuffs folded up. The vest that I am wearing this morning is made with the bottom button meant to be left open. We usually don't even think about these and innumerable other traditions that we practice every day. Now there actually are reasons why these practices were originally started and historians have researched them. Neckties were originally brought into France from Croatia by soldiers who liked their style and thought that by wearing them they were warding off evil spirits in battle. The different buttoning patterns on male and female clothing go all the way back to the Renaissance when etiquette insisted that a man always walk on the right side of a woman. It was felt that the differing buttoning patterns promoted greater modesty. Cuffs on men's pants only go back about 75 years. In a desire to keep pants from getting muddy, many men began to roll up their trouser legs. Soon tailors were sewing cuffs into place for style. Although vests were introduced to men's apparel in 1666 by King Charles 2<sup>nd</sup>, it was the Prince of Wales who started the fashion of keeping the bottom button open at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Prince was actually so portly that he couldn't button the bottom of his vest. Leaving the bottom button caught on as the stylish practice and it has continued even to this day. We all carry on various traditions all the time without even thinking about why we are doing them.

One of the traditions that we almost instinctively do as Americans every day is the practice of shaking hands with each other. We shake hands to greet one another, we shake hands to seal a contract or promise, we shake hands when we are saying "good-bye". Actually the ritual of shaking hands is one of the oldest of our traditions going back thousands of years. The earliest handshakes were associated with treaties of non-aggression. Since most men were right-handed, the empty right hand was extended showing that no weapons were being held. The clasped handshake represented a desire to live in peace. It's interesting that when the pilgrims brought the tradition of the handshake to our country from Europe, they found Native Americans with a tradition that gave a similar message, raising their empty right hands in a form of greeting.

Since the inception of the human race, civilizations have lived in a state of tension. Being social creatures, there has been an innate desire to live together in community. And it was soon learned that it was much better to live in peace than conflict. Peace brought greater security and prosperity. But the sinful

nature of the human race also brought a competitiveness into community living resulting in conflict and war. So people have always lived with this tension – a propensity towards conflict with an innate desire for peace.

God is a God of peace. 1 Cor. 14:33 states this truth very clearly. *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.* Conflict brings disorder, chaos. God delights in bringing order out of chaos. He did this with the initial creation of the universe. The Bible tells us that in the first stage of creation the earth was formless and empty. But then progressively God made order out of the chaos and this beautiful world was created. God has also done this with the new creation. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and brought sin into the world, conflict began. Humans were alienated from their creator. Adam and Eve were blaming and accusing each other. Their son Cain killed his brother Abel. But then God began a program of redemption. God's redemption climaxed when the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth to die on the cross of Calvary so that sin could be atoned for. The angels announced the purpose of his coming to bring peace on earth, goodwill towards men. On the cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus Christ brought peace and order out of spiritual chaos.

Since God is a God of peace, and the Lord Jesus Christ came as the Prince of Peace to this earth to bring peace, it should not surprise us to find that as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to a life of peace. 1 Cor. 7:15 says that God has called us to live in peace. We have been looking at various callings that we have as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ as given in the Holy Scriptures. We have already looked at the call to Salvation, the call to Holiness, and the call to be God's Children. This morning we would like to briefly consider the call to live in peace. And we find 3 aspects to our call to peace given in the Bible. We are called to live in peace with our fellow man, we are called to be at peace with ourselves, and we are called to have a relationship of peace with God our Creator.

**Look first of all with me at our call to live in peace with our fellow man.**

\*How good and pleasant it is when brother live together in peace – Ps. 133:1

\*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God – Matt. 5:9

\*We are even called to attempt to be at peace with our enemies. "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone . . . even your enemies."

The Bible is realistic in its life expectations. God knows that it is just impossible to be at peace with some enemies. This is because it takes 2 to live a life of peace. And we cannot control the response of another person. So there might be situations where others will choose to be at enmity with us no matter what we do. But as much as is possible, we are to be at peace with everyone. In other words, continuing conflict should not be on going because of what we are doing. We should be willing to live in peace with everyone.

Now how do we manifest this desire for peace with others? We manifest this desire by not repaying evil for evil, but by living a life characterized by acts of kindness to everyone – even our enemies. The Apostle Paul gives a clear illustration of this principle in Romans 12:17-21:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

RO 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The practice that Paul is speaking of here is foreign to us because we don't cook on wood burning stoves anymore. All of us have gas or electric stoves where we turn a knob and have instant heat. But back in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, homemakers had to use wood stoves to bake their bread. Because it was quite a hassle to get fires started, towns soon learned that it was a benefit to everybody to have a central fire with a hired fire-keeper whose job it was to always have a fire going. When a homemaker wanted to bake some bread, as she did usually on a daily basis, she would carry her clay pot to the common fire center and get a couple of coals to start her wood fire in her stove back at home. It was the common practice in the middle east to carry the clay pots on top of the head. Now suppose someone had already baked her bread and saw a neighbor walking down the road to the central fire center. A kind, courteous practice would be to call the neighbor inside and give her the embers that no longer needed to be used. It saved the neighbor the long walk to the common fire center. And it gave her enough hot coals that were ready to be used so that she could save valuable wood fuel. So heaping burning coals on one's head was a kind, neighborly thing to do. Now if someone saw a neighbor who was an enemy walk by, she might be tempted to just keep quiet about her treasure of coals and let the enemy fend for herself. But Paul said that the Christian thing to do is to help the neighbor out, even if that neighbor is an enemy. So if our enemy is hungry, give him something to eat. If our enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in doing so we are demonstrating God's love in acts of kindness. Heaping coals of fire on his or her head, as it were.

In the mid 30's Mayor LaGuardia of New York City was faced with a very difficult dilemma. A high ranking German diplomat was scheduled for a state visit to his city that had a large Jewish population. The Mayor was in charge of providing protection for this diplomat. The anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime was already well-known and the citizens of New York City were threatening to protest and riot. In spite of his opposition to the Nazi regime and all that it stood for, Mayor LaGuardia solved this seemingly impossible

problem in a most innovative way. The Mayor gathered all of the Jewish members of his police force and commissioned them to be bodyguards for this Nazi diplomat. The irony of the situation immediately struck everyone in the city. A potentially dangerous situation was diffused. And the Nazi diplomat left his mission rather embarrassed for those he considered to be his enemies had been the ones who had protected his life.

**Well we must move to a 2<sup>nd</sup> consideration of being at peace with ourselves.**

God lived for all eternity past in perfect harmony and peace. The 3 members of the triune godhead all being equally God have always lived in a continuous state of perfect peace. And when God created Adam and Eve in His own likeness and image, they knew inner peace and contentment. But then sin entered the world. And one of the first things that sin did in the lives of Adam and Eve was to disrupt their inner peace and contentment. Adam and Eve experienced guilt as they ran and hid from the presence of God. Adam and Eve began to have inner conflict as they blamed and accused each other when God confronted them with their transgressions. And ever since that day, every person born has experienced an inner battle. A few of the symptoms of this inner battle are anxiety, guilt, frustration, anger, worry, discontentedness, poor self-esteem, and the list could go on and on.

God desires for His children to be at peace with themselves. The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:6,7:

<sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Later in this same chapter, Paul would give this personal testimony of how God's peace had come to rule in his own life. READ Phil. 4:12,13:

<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Most Americans today live stressed-filled lives. Sadly, many Christians live lives like those in the world, filled with anxiety and guilt and frustrations and anger and discontentedness. God has not called his children to live such a life. God has called His children to a life of inner peace. We can know this peace through the daily disciplines of prayer and allowing God to guard our hearts and mind.

**Finally, let's look at the aspect of having peace with God.** In Romans 5:1,2 we find these words:

RO 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Now the way that we come into peace with God is through being justified by faith. To be justified means to be declared “Not Guilty” by God. The Bible tells us that God sent His one and only Son into this world to become the sacrifice for sin. As the Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily gave his life on the cross of Calvary, He did so as the sacrificial lamb for sin. To those who believe on His name and accept the provision that Christ has made by faith, God offers forgiveness of sin resulting in peace with Him. So then, the Apostle Paul could write, Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.

What a blessing it is to know peace with our Creator! To have the confidence that all is right between ourselves and God, to have the assurance that to be absent from this body is to be present in the sight of our Lord because there is no barrier now separating us from fellowship with Him, this is the greatest gift that any person can have in life.

Walter Baxendale tells of a trip that he took to visit the famous battlefield at Waterloo in Belgium. Waterloo, of course, was the place where Napoleon was defeated by the British Duke of Wellington leading the allied forces against the French Empire in 1815. Even to this day when somebody has a devastating defeat, we often say that he has met his Waterloo. Near the battlefield there stands a large, impressive, bronze lion. As Walter was appreciating the artistry of this great lion, his focus was drawn to the open, gaping mouth that was crowned with sharp, fierce fangs. Within that mouth, protected behind the fangs, a bird had built a nest and was sitting peacefully on some eggs. As Walter reflected on that bird nest and later wrote about it, he would refer to it as the “audacity of hope.”

The Lord Jesus Christ has completely defeated Depravity, the Devil and Death on the cross of Calvary. At Calvary, Satan met his Waterloo. His empire has been overthrown. The head of the serpent has been crushed. Because of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, we can be at peace with God. We can rest in the shelter of the Lion of Judah. We can have complete confidence that death is not the end of life. For all walls have been broken down that once separated us from our Creator. Having been justified through faith, we have peace with God.

Now let me conclude by just adding that we experience these 3 aspects of peace in the opposite order that I gave them.

As we know peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, we can find the inner contentment and peace that we are looking for within. And as we are at peace with ourselves, we then can be in a position to really find peace with others, even being at peace with those who would be our enemies.

The world has never been able to find a lasting peace because they try to approach it from the opposite direction. The world system tries to throw off the yoke of any allegiance to a creator. Remove God from every aspect of life is the goal of many in the world around us. Then those who are at enmity with God spend their lives trying to find inner peace through material gain or climbing corporate ladders or substance abuse or sexual pleasures. But they can't find true inner peace because they are looking in all the wrong places for it. It's no wonder that the world has always been filled with wars and conflict. Nations don't coexist peacefully because there is not the foundation of personal inner peace that comes from a relationship with God. People often don't get along with each other because they don't first have inner peace within.

But as we are justified through faith and find peace with God, we then can experience inner peace and contentment even in the most trying and distressing circumstances of life. And we can also as much as is possible live at peace with others around us, even those who would be our enemies.

Have you found this peace that only God can give?