

HOW TO KEEP THE HEART

NO. 180

A SERMON
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“The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:7

IT is remarkable that when we find an exhortation given to God’s people in one part of Holy Scripture, we almost invariably find the very thing which they are exhorted to do guaranteed to them and provided for them in some other part of the same blessed volume. This morning my text was, “Keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.” Now, this evening we have the promise upon which we must rest if we desire to fulfill the precept—“The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

This evening we shall use another figure distinct from the one used in the morning of *the reservoir*. We shall use the figure of a *fortress* which is to be kept. And the promise says that it shall be kept—kept by “the peace of God which passeth all understanding through Christ Jesus.”

Inasmuch as the heart is the most important part of man—for out of it are the issues of life—it would be natural to expect that Satan, when he intended to do mischief to manhood, would be sure to make his strongest and most perpetual attacks upon the heart. What we might have guessed in wisdom is certainly true in experience.

For although Satan will tempt and try us in every way, though every gate of the town of Mansoul may be battered, though against every part of the walls thereof he will be sure to bring out his great guns—yet the place against which he levels his deadliest malice and his most furious strength is the *heart*.

Into the heart, already of itself evil enough, he thrusts the seeds of every evil thing and does his utmost to make it a den of unclean birds, a garden of poisonous trees, a river flowing with destructive water. Hence, again, arises the second necessity that we should be doubly cautious in keeping the heart with all diligence.

For if, on the one hand, it be the most important, and on the other hand, Satan, knowing this, makes his most furious and determined attacks against it, then with double force the exhortation comes, “Keep thy heart with all diligence.” And the promise also becomes doubly sweet from the very fact of the double danger—the promise which says, “The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

We shall notice, first of all, *that which keeps the heart and mind*. Secondly, we shall note *how to obtain it*—for we are to understand this promise as connected with certain precepts which come before it. And then, when we have noted this, we shall try to show *how it is true that the peace of God does keep the mind free from the attacks of Satan or delivers it from those attacks when they are made*.

I. First, then, beloved, the preservation which God in this promise confers upon the saints is, “THE PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING,” to keep us through Jesus Christ. It is called PEACE. And we are to understand this in a double sense.

There is a peace of God which exists between the child of God and God his Judge—a peace which may be truly said to pass all understanding. Jesus Christ has offered so all-sufficient a satisfaction for all the claims of injured justice that now God has no fault to find with His children. “He seeth no sin in Jacob, nor iniquity in Israel.” Nor is He angry with them on account of their sins—a peace unbroken and unspeakable being established by the atonement which Christ has made on their behalf.

Hence flows a peace experienced in the conscience, which is the second part of this peace of God. For when the conscience sees that God is satisfied and is no longer at war with it, then it also becomes satisfied with man. And conscience, which was wont to be a great disturber of the peace of the heart, now gives its verdict of acquittal, and the heart sleeps in the arms of conscience, and finds a quiet resting-place there.

Against the child of God, conscience brings no accusation—or if it brings the accusation, it is but a gentle one—a gentle chiding of a loving friend who hints that we have done amiss and that we had better change, but does not afterwards thunder in our ears the threat of a penalty. Conscience knows full well that peace is made between the soul and Go, and therefore, it does not hint that there is anything else but joy and peace to be looked forward to by the believer.

Do we understand anything of this double peace? Let us pause here and ask ourselves a question upon this doctrinal part of the matter—Let us make it an experimental question with our own hearts. Come, my soul, are you at peace with God? Have you seen your pardon signed and sealed with the Redeemer's blood?

Come, answer this, my heart—have you cast your sins upon the head of Christ and have you seen them all washed away in the crimson streams of His blood? Can you feel that now there is a lasting peace between yourself and God, so that come what may, God shall not be angry with you—shall not condemn you—shall not consume you in His wrath, nor crush you in His hot displeasure?

If it be so, then, my heart, you scarcely need to stop and ask the second question—Is my conscience at peace? For, if my heart condemns me not, God is greater than my heart and does know all things. If my conscience bears witness with me that I am a partaker of the precious grace of salvation, then happy am I! I am one of those to whom God has given the peace which passeth all understanding.

Now, why is this called “the peace of God”? We suppose it is because it comes from God—because it was planned by God—because God gave His Son to make the peace—because God gives His Spirit to give the peace in the conscience—because, indeed, it is God Himself in the soul, reconciled to man, whose is the peace.

And while it is true that this Man shall have the peace—even the Man-Christ, yet we know it is because He was the God-Christ that He was our peace. And hence we may clearly perceive how Godhead is mixed up with the peace which we enjoy with our Maker and with our conscience.

Then we are told that it is, “The peace of God which passeth all understanding.” What does He mean by this? He means such a peace that the understanding can never understand it, can never attain to. The understanding of mere carnal man can never comprehend this peace.

He who tries with a philosophical look to discover the secret of the Christian's peace, finds himself in a maze. “I know not how it is, nor why it is,” says he. “I see these men hunted through the earth. I turn the pages of history and I find them hunted to their graves. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and tormented. Yet I also see upon the Christian's brow a calm serenity.

“I cannot understand this. I do not know what it is. I know that I myself, even in my merriest moments, am disturbed—that when my enjoyments run the highest, still there are waves of doubt and fear across my mind. “Then why is this? How is it that the Christian can attain a rest so calm, so peaceful and so quiet?”

Understanding can never get to that peace which the Christian has attained. The philosopher may teach us much, but he can never give us rules whereby to reach the peace that Christians have in their conscience. Diogenes may tell us to do without everything, and may live in his tub, and then think himself happier than Alexander, and that he enjoys peace.

But we look upon the poor creature after all, and though we may be astonished at his courage, yet we are obliged to despise his folly. We do not believe that even when he had dispensed with everything, that he possessed a quiet of mind, a total and entire peace, such as the true believer can enjoy.

We find the greatest philosophers of old laying down maxims for life which they thought would certainly promote happiness. We find that they were not always able to practice them themselves. And

many of their disciples, when they labored hard to put them in execution, found themselves encumbered with impossible rules to accomplish impossible objects.

But the Christian man does with faith what a man can never do himself. While the poor understanding is climbing up the crags, faith stands on the summit. While the poor understanding is getting into a calm atmosphere, faith flies aloft and mounts higher than the storm, and then looks down on the valley and smiles while the tempest blows beneath its feet.

Faith goes further than understanding, and the peace which the Christian enjoys is one which the worldling cannot comprehend and cannot himself attain. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding."

And this peace is said to "keep the mind through Christ Jesus." Without Christ Jesus this peace would not exist. Without Christ Jesus this peace, even where it has existed, cannot be maintained. Daily visits from the Savior, continual lookings by the eye of faith to Him who bled upon the cross, continual drawings from His ever-flowing fountain, make this peace broad, and long, and enduring.

But take Christ Jesus, the channel of our peace, away, and it fades and dies, and droops, and comes to nought. A Christian has no peace with God except through the atonement of his Lord Jesus Christ.

I have thus gone over what some will call the dry doctrinal part of the subject—"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." I cannot show you what that peace is, if you have never felt it. But yet I think I could tell you where to look for it, for I have sometimes seen it.

I have seen the Christian man in the depths of poverty, when he lived from hand to mouth, and scarcely knew where he would find the next meal, still with his mind unruffled, calm, and quiet. If he had been as rich as an Indian prince, yet he could not have had less care. If he had been told that his bread should always come to his door, and the stream which ran hard by should never dry—if he had been quite sure that ravens would bring him bread and meat in the morning and again in the evening—he would not have been one whit more calm.

There is his neighbor on the other side of the street not half as poor, but wearied from morning to night—working his fingers to the bone—bringing himself to the grave with anxiety. But this poor good man, after having industriously labored, though he found he had gained little with all his toil, yet has sanctified his little by prayer and has thanked his Father for what he had. And though he does not know whether he will have more, still he trusted in God, and declared that his faith would not fail him, though providence should run to a lower ebb than he had ever seen.

There is "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." I have seen that peace, too, in the case of those who have lost their friends. There is a widow—her much-loved husband lies in the coffin. She is soon to part with him. Parted with him she has before, but now, of his poor clay-cold corpse—even of that she has to be bereaved.

She looks upon it for the last time and her heart is heavy. For herself and her children she wonders how they shall be provided for. That broad tree that once sheltered them from the sunbeam has been cut down. Now, she thinks, there is a broad heaven above her head and her Maker is her Husband. The fatherless children are left with God for their Father and the widow is trusting in Him.

With tears in her eyes she still looks up and she says, "Lord, Thou hast given and Thou hast taken away, blessed be Thy name." Her husband is carried to the tomb. She does not smile, but though she weeps, there is a calm composure on her brow, and she tells you she would not have it otherwise, even if she could—for JEHOVAH's will is right. There, again, is "the peace of God that passeth all understanding."

Picture another man. There is Martin Luther standing up in the midst of the Diet of Worms. There are the kings and the princes, and there are the bloodhounds of Rome with their tongues thirsting for his blood—there is Martin rising in the morning as comfortable as possible, and he goes to the Diet, and delivers himself of the truth, solemnly declares that the things which he has spoken are the things which he believes, and God helping him, he will stand by them till the last.

There is his life in his hands. They have him entirely in their power. The smell of John Huss' corpse has not yet passed away, and he recollects that princes before this have violated their words. But there he stands, calm and quiet. He fears no man, for he has nothing to fear. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps his heart and mind through Jesus Christ."

There is another scene. There is John Bradford in Newgate. He is to be burned the next morning in Smithfield and he swings himself on the bedpost in very glee, and delights, for tomorrow is his wedding day. And he says to another, "Fine shining we shall make tomorrow, when the flame is kindled." And he smiles and laughs, and enjoys the very thought that he is about to wear the bloodied crown of martyrdom. Is Bradford mad! Ah, no, but he has got the peace of God that passeth all understanding.

But perhaps the most beautiful, as well as the most common illustration of this great peace is the dying bed of the believer. Oh, brethren, you have seen this sometimes—that calm, quiet serenity. You have said, Lord, let us die with him. It has been so good to be in that solitary chamber where all was quiet and so still—all the world shut out and heaven shut in—and the poor heart nearing its God, and far away from all its past burdens and griefs—now nearing the portals of eternal bliss.

And you have said, "How is this? Is not death a black and grim thing? Are not the terrors of the grave things which make the strong man tremble?" Oh yes, they are, but then, this one has the "peace of God which passeth all understanding."

However, if you want to know about this, you must be a child of God and possess it yourselves. And when you have once felt it, when you can stand calm amid the bewildering cry, confident of victory, when you can sing in the midst of the storm, when you can smile when surrounded by adversity, and can trust your God, be your way ever so rough, ne'er so stormy—when you can always repose confidence in the wisdom and goodness of JEHOVAH—then it is you will have "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

II. Thus we have discussed the first point, what is this peace? Now the second thing was, HOW IS THIS PEACE TO BE OBTAINED?

You will note that although this is a promise, it has precepts preceding, and it is only by the practice of the precepts that we can get the promise. Turn now to the fourth verse, and you will see the first rule and regulation for getting peace. Christian, would you enjoy "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"?

The first thing you have to do is to "rejoice evermore." The man who never rejoices, but who is always sorrowing, and groaning, and crying, who forgets his God, who forgets the fullness of JEHOVAH, and is always murmuring concerning the trials of the road and the infirmities of the flesh, that man will lose the prospect of enjoying a peace that passeth all understanding.

Cultivate, my friends, a cheerful disposition. Endeavor, as much as lies in you, always to bear a smile about with you. Recollect that this is as much a command of God as that one which says, "Thou shalt love the LORD with all thy heart." "Rejoice evermore" is one of God's commands. And it is your duty, as well as your privilege, to try and practice it.

Not to rejoice, remember, is a sin. To rejoice is a duty, and such a duty that the richest fruits and the best rewards are appended to it. Rejoice always, and then the peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds. Many of us, by giving way to disastrous doubts, spoil our peace.

It is as I once remember to have heard a woman say, when I was passing down a lane. A child stood crying at the door and I heard her calling out, "Ah, you are crying for nothing. I will give you something to cry for." Brethren, it is often so with God's children—they get to crying for nothing. They have a miserable disposition, or a turn of mind always making miseries for themselves, and thus they have something to cry for.

Their peace is disturbed, some sad trouble comes, God hides His face, and then they lose their peace. But keep on singing, even when the sun does not keep on shining. Keep a song for all weathers. Get a joy that will stand clouds and storms. And then, when you know how always to rejoice, you shall have this peace.

The next precept is, “Let your moderation be known unto all men.” If you would have peace of mind, be moderate. Merchant, you cannot push that speculation too far and then have peace of mind. Young man, you cannot be so fast in trying to rise in the world and yet have the peace of God which passeth all understanding. You must be moderate, and when you have got a moderation in your desires, then you shall have peace.

Sir, you with the red cheek, you must be moderate in your anger. You must not be quite so fast in flying into a passion with your fellows and not quite so long in getting cool again—because the angry man cannot have peace in his conscience. Be moderate in that. Let your vengeance stay itself. For if you give way to wrath—if you are angry—“be ye angry and sin not.” Be moderate in this.

Be moderate in all things which you undertake, Christian—moderate in your expectations. Blessed is he who expects little, for he shall have but little disappointment. Remember, never to set your desires very high. He who has aspirations to the moon will be disappointed if he only reaches half as high. Whereas, if he had aspired lower, he would be agreeably disappointed when he found himself mounting higher than he first expected.

Keep moderation, whatever you do, in all things, but in your desires after God. And so shall you obey the second precept and get the glimpse of this promise—“The peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.”

The last precept that you have to obey is, “Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication make known your requests unto God.” You cannot have peace unless you turn your troubles up. You have no place in which to pour your troubles except the ear of God. If you tell them to your friends, you but put your troubles out a moment and they will return again.

If you tell them to God, you put your troubles into the grave. They will never rise again when you have committed them to Him. If you roll your burden anywhere else, it will roll back again, just like the stone of Sisyphus. But just roll your burden unto God and you have rolled it into a great deep, out of which it will never by any possibility rise.

Cast your troubles where you have cast your sins. You have cast your sins into the depth of the sea—there cast your troubles also. Never keep a trouble half an hour on your own mind before you tell it to God. As soon as the trouble comes—quick, the first thing—tell it to your Father. Remember, that the longer you take telling your trouble to God, the more your peace will be impaired. The longer the frost lasts, the more thickly the ponds will be frozen. Your frost will last till you go to the sun.

And when you go to God—the sun—then your frost will soon become a thaw and your troubles will melt away. But do not be long, because the longer you are in waiting, the longer will your trouble be in thawing afterwards. Wait a long while till your trouble gets frozen thick and firm, and it will take many a day of prayer to get your trouble thawed again.

Away to the throne as quick as ever you can. Do as the child did, when he ran and told his mother as soon as his little trouble happened to him. Run and tell your Father the first moment you are in affliction. Do this in everything, in every little thing—“In everything by prayer and supplication make known your wants unto God.”

Take your husband’s headache, take your children’s sicknesses, take all things, little family troubles as well as great commercial trials—take them all to God. Pour them all out at once. And so by an obedient practice of this command in everything making known your needs unto God, you shall preserve that peace “which shall keep your heart and mind through Jesus Christ.”

These, then, are the precepts. May God the Holy Spirit enable us to obey them and we shall then have the continual peace of God.

III. Now the third thing was to show HOW THE PEACE, which I attempted to describe in the first place, KEEPS THE HEART.

You will clearly see how this peace will keep the heart full. That man who has continued peace with God will not have an empty heart. He feels that God has done so much for him that he must love his God. The eternal basis of his peace lies in divine election—the solid pillars of his peace, the incarnation

of Christ, His righteousness, His death—the climax of his peace, the heaven hereafter where his joy and his peace shall be consummated. All these are subjects for grateful reflection and will, when meditated upon, cause more love. Now, where much love is, there is a large heart and a full one.

Keep, then, this peace with God and you will keep your heart full to the brim. And remember, that in proportion to the fullness of your heart will be the fullness of your life. Be empty-hearted and your life will be a meager, skeleton existence. Be full-hearted and your life will be full, fleshy, gigantic, strong—a thing that will tell upon the whole world. Keep, then, your peace with God firm within you.

Keep close to this—that Jesus Christ has made peace between you and God. And keep your conscience still. Then shall your heart be full and your soul strong to do your Master's work. Keep your peace with God. This will keep your heart pure.

You will say, if temptation comes, “What do you offer me? You offer me pleasure—lo! I have got it. You offer me gold—lo! I have got it. All things are mine, the gift of God. I have a city that hands have not made, ‘a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ I will not barter this for your poor gold.” “I will give you honor,” says Satan. “I have honor enough,” says the peaceful heart. “God will honor me in the last great day of His account.” “I will give you everything that you can desire,” says Satan. “I have everything that I can desire,” says the Christian.

*“I nothing want on earth;
Happy in my Savior's love,
I am at peace with God.*

Away, then, Satan! While I am at peace with God, I am a match for all your temptations. You offer me silver—I have gold. You bring before me the riches of the earth—I have something more substantial than these. Avaunt, tempter of human kind! Avaunt, you fiend! Your temptations and blandishments are lost on one who has peace with God.”

This peace, too, will keep the heart undivided. He who has peace with God will set his whole heart on God. “Oh!” says he, “why should I go to seek anything else on earth, now that I have found my rest in God? As the bird by wandering, so should I be if I went elsewhere. I have found a fountain. Why should I go and drink at the broken cistern that will hold no water? I lean on the arm of my Beloved. Why should I rest on the arm of another?”

“I know that religion is a thing worth my following. Why should I leave the pure snows of Lebanon to follow something else? I know and feel that religion is rich when it brings forth to me a hundredfold the fruits of peace. Why should I go and sow elsewhere? I will be like the maiden Ruth—I will stop in the fields of Boaz—here will I ever stay and never wander.”

Again, this peace keeps the heart rich. My hearers will notice that I am passing over the heads of the morning's discourse and showing how this peace fulfils the requisites that we thought necessary in the morning. Peace with God keeps the heart rich. The man who doubts and is distressed has got a poor heart—it is a heart that has nothing in it.

But when a man has peace with God, his heart is rich. If I am at peace with God, I am enabled to go where I can get riches. The throne is the place where God gives riches. If I am at peace with Him, then I can have access with boldness. Meditation is another and a great field of enrichment. When my heart is at peace with God, then I can enjoy meditation. But if I have not peace with God, then I cannot meditate profitably, for “the birds come down on the sacrifice,” and I cannot drive them away except my soul is at peace with God.

Hearing the Word is another way of getting rich. If my mind is disturbed, I cannot hear the Word with profit. If I have to bring my family into the chapel, if I have to bring my business, my ships, or my horses, I cannot hear. When I have cows, and dogs, and horses in the pew, I cannot hear the Gospel preached. When I have got a whole week's business and a ledger on my heart, I cannot hear then.

But when I have peace—peace concerning all things and rest in my Father’s will—then I can hear with pleasure, and every Word of the Gospel is profitable to me, for my mouth is empty and I can fill it with the heavenly treasures of His Word. So you see, the peace of God is a soul-enriching thing. And because it keeps the heart rich, thus it is it keeps the heart and mind through Jesus Christ our Lord.

I need hardly say that the peace of God fulfils the only other requisite which I did not mention, because it was unnecessary to do so. It keeps the heart always peaceable. Of course, peace makes it full of peace—peace like a river and righteousness like the waves of the sea.

Now, then, brother and sister, it is of the first importance that you keep your heart right. You cannot keep your heart right but by one way. That one way is by getting, maintaining, and enjoying peace of God to your own conscience. I beseech you then, you that are professors of religion, do not let this night pass over your heads till you have a confident assurance that you are now the possessor of the peace of God.

For let me tell you, if you go out to the world Monday morning, without first having peace with God in your own conscience, you will not be able to keep your heart during the week. If this night, ere you rest, you could say that with God as well as all the world you are at peace, you may go out tomorrow, and whatever your business, I am not afraid for you. You are more than a match for all the temptations to false doctrine, to false living, or to false speech that may meet you.

For he that has peace with God is armed *cap-a-pié*. He is covered from head to foot in a panoply. The arrow may fly against it, but it cannot pierce it, for peace with God is a mail so strong that the broad sword of Satan itself may be broken in twain ere it can pierce the flesh.

Oh! take care that you are at peace with God. For if you are not, you ride forth to tomorrow’s fight unarmed, naked—and God help the man who is unarmed when he has to fight with hell and earth. Oh, be not foolish, but “Put on the whole armour of God” and then be confident for you need not fear.

As for the rest of you, you cannot have peace with God, because “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” How shall I address you? As I said this morning, I cannot exhort you to keep your hearts. My best advice to you is to get rid of your hearts—and as soon as you can, to get new ones. Your prayer should be, “Lord, take away my stony heart and give me a heart of flesh.”

But though I cannot address you from this text, I may address you from another. Though your heart is bad, there is another heart that is good. And the goodness of that heart is a ground of exhortation to you. You remember Christ said, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.” And then His argument would come to this, “for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.”

Your heart is proud, and high, and black, and lustful. But look at Christ’s heart—it is meek and lowly. There is your encouragement. Do you feel your sin tonight? Christ is meek. If you come to Him He will not spurn you. Do you feel your insignificance and worthlessness? Christ is lowly. He will not despise you.

If Christ’s heart were like your heart, you would be damned to a certainty. But Christ’s heart is not as your heart, nor His ways like your ways. I can see no hope for you when I look into your hearts—but I can see plenty of hope when I look into Christ’s heart.

Oh, think of His blessed heart! And if you go home tonight sad and sorrowful, under a sense of sin—when you go to your chamber, shut to your door—you need not be afraid—and talk to that heart so meek and lowly. And though your words be ungrammatical and your sentences incoherent, He will hear and answer you from heaven, His dwelling place. And when He hears, He will forgive and accept, for His own name’s sake.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.