Follow Peace and Holiness

In the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verse 27, we read: *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* Amen. This verse tells us about a kind of peace that the Lord Jesus offers, different from the one the world can offer. If we look up the word *peace* in the dictionary, we find that it means the absence of disturbance. Anxious depression is a disorder marked by restlessness of soul and an agitated heart, so we have to ask whether those who suffer from depression can have the peace of Christ. Depression does not come from God, but He allows trials in the lives of believers to strengthen them and draw them closer to Himself.

To understand how the Lord Jesus gives us peace, we must see His promise as a gift: *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."* This peace is a divine gift, part of God's faithfulness toward us. Yet for the promise to become reality in our lives, we need the Holy Spirit present in our lives, and we receive Him if we obey Him. Without obedience, God's promises will not be fulfilled in our lives.

In the epistle to the Galatians, chapter 5, verse 22, we find a description of the fruit of the Spirit: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace."* This peace is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in us, and it shows itself when we make decisions in keeping with God's will, including the decision to turn back to Him.

The Lord Jesus said, *"My peace I give unto you."* This peace is given in a way that is different from the world, which can also offer a kind of peace. True peace should come from God, a peace that passes all understanding. This divine peace should fill us. According to Scripture, *"the fruit of the Spirit is... peace,"* and to reach this peace it is essential that we let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit, as the verse urges us: *"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."* Fulfilling the lusts of the flesh will not bring us God's peace.

Many people look for peace and quiet on their holidays, wanting to rest both body and soul. In these times of rest, they long for a break that will refresh their whole being. But the Word of God shows us that the wicked do not know peace, as we read in Isaiah 48:22: *"There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked."*

Even if we rely on the Lord Jesus' promise that He will give us peace in a miraculous way, it will not come about without the work of His Spirit in us. Romans 3:12 tells us: *"They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."* Further on, verse 17 says: *"And the way of peace have they not known."* If we have turned away from God and do not do good, we will not know the way of peace. Then it tells us: *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

If we have the fear of God before our eyes, then we will know peace; otherwise we will not receive the peace of the Lord Jesus. To round out the teaching of Romans 3, let us also turn to Isaiah 59, so that we have a view from both the Old and the New Testament. Isaiah chapter 59

makes it plain that without the Lord Jesus, reaching peace is an impossible task. In verses 7 and 8, that chapter describes the conduct of those who turn away from righteousness: *"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace."*

This morning I was talking with Dan about various things in life, and he told me a story about the people who supply him with cheese and curd in his area. Dan mentioned two people who use crooked scales and mislead their customers about the weight of their goods. One customer, for instance, was told the curd weighed so many kilograms, but when it was checked, it turned out to be 600 grams lighter. In cases like this, you can say that those people do not know the way of peace, whether or not they attend a church. As Isaiah 59:9 says, *"Therefore is judgment far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind,"* and so on, *"we are in desolate places as dead men."*

Years ago, as I was reflecting on the fruit of the Spirit, I felt a certain dissatisfaction in my heart, and I wondered why the apostle Paul had not included righteousness in that fruit. It seemed to me that righteousness ought to be part of the fruit of the Spirit, because without the Spirit working righteousness in us, we would not strive for it either. Still, it is clear that those who follow wrong ways do not know the way of peace, and the fruit of the Spirit is peace. So we must follow certain principles, among them the way of righteousness, which leads us to peace as we work together with the Spirit.

In Luke 19, verse 38, the Lord Jesus urges us to recognise how important peace is: *"Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest."* These words stress the recognition of the King who brings peace and glory in heaven, a message that urges us to seek peace in our own lives.

Those who have read the Word of God will remember that Luke 2:14 also says: *"and on earth peace, good will toward men."* It speaks of peace in heaven and peace on earth among the people God is pleased with. So it is essential that we live in peace and cultivate peace. In Luke 19, verse 41, it is written: *"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes."* These words show us that there are things that can bring us peace. But where do these things come from? Are they earthly or heavenly? I choose to believe they are the things from above, not the things of the earth.

It is important that we know the things that can bring us peace. The apostle Paul guides us in this in his epistle to the Romans, chapter 14. Reading verses 17 and 19, we learn: *"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."* Amen.

The Word of God teaches us that certain things make for peace. The kingdom of God is marked by righteousness and peace. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, we are told that the Lord Jesus came to guide our feet into the way of peace. This is a path we must follow: the way of peace.

May the Lord help us to discern and to follow the things that make for our peace and edification. One of the things that bring us peace is righteousness.

The word *edify* may be unclear to many, but it refers to the process of being built up, of growing and developing until we reach the maturity needed to be set into the wall of the spiritual Temple. Isaiah chapter 32 reminds us of this. From verse 17 we read: *"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places."* This is because the work of righteousness brings peace, and the effect of righteousness is everlasting rest and quietness, like a permanent holiday.

Many years ago something happened to me that is not necessarily to my credit, but I will mention it. Because of the nature of my job, I could not go on holiday. Some people would ask me, *"Aren't you going on holiday?"* I would answer, *"What holiday would I go on?"* They would insist, *"Well, on holiday you rest. You should get some rest too."* I would reply, *"What holiday? What rest? I'm at rest every day."* Should we be like that or not? The effect of righteousness is rest. Whoever finds it no longer looks for any other rest the world has to offer.

Many have asked me, *"So what has Peter got against holidays? Has he got something against them?"* My answer is that I have absolutely nothing against holidays. The work of righteousness will be our holiday. Let us also look at chapter 33, verse 15: *"He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off."*

What can we say? The people will dwell in a peaceable habitation, but only if they live in righteousness. Can we say that the fruit of the Spirit includes righteousness too? If we do not live in righteousness, we have no peace. There is no peace for the wicked. I can tell you I felt great joy when the Lord showed me that righteousness is part of the fruit of the Spirit and that no one can take it out, because it matters so much.

The kingdom of God has two great components: righteousness and peace. Righteousness is not missing from it. It is not some unimportant appendix. Some people top up their income by dishonest means. But do they still know the way of peace? *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake*: the righteousness they live, not just the righteousness they preach. For several years now I have practised this righteousness. I have been through many situations where I was persecuted for doing what was right.

You may ask, how is it possible to be persecuted? In what way? Don't we have rights in this country, in this world? Of course we do. But what happens when you live righteously?

Scripture says of the Hebrews that they *"took joyfully the spoiling of your goods."* Spoiling means being stripped of them by force. Humanly speaking, something has to be done. Let's go and get justice right away! But whose justice? *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*

I have been through a lot, and I have tasted persecution. How can you be persecuted? Even when someone takes your parking space. When you have nowhere to leave your car and have to park it somewhere else because someone has taken your spot.

I often saw him park his car there, and I did not rise up against him. But blessed are we. Small things, insignificant things. Some would say they are not that important. But when you are mistreated at the hospital, when you are not given the medicine you need, when you are cheated, lied to or tricked, these are forms of persecution, if you do not rise up against them.

There are many things to consider when we talk about seeking peace. In the epistle to the Romans, chapter 8, we are shown that we must seek the things that lead us to peace. It is essential that we attain the righteousness of God, as it is written: *"Seek ye first… his righteousness."* This means hungering and thirsting after righteousness, which is purity, spotlessness, being without blemish. Scripture describes God's eyes as pure, free of injustice, guile, deceit or anything evil, so pure that they cannot look on iniquity.

According to Romans 8:5, *"they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh,"* and they let themselves be ruled by its desires, which include anger. The works of the flesh are not only riches or sins like drunkenness, smoking and debauchery. Envyings, variance and strife between factions are also things of the flesh.

A pastor from Braila, a city in eastern Romania, told us something that happened to them. During a visit, he told us how they had set up a mission outpost in a village near Lanurile. To be able to open it, they decided to buy a house, which they registered in the name of a member of the congregation.

But after a while that person changed his mind and refused to let them have the house. The irony of it: we paid, and now we might end up without the house. What should someone do who wants to live righteously? Give up? Accept the loss? Or fight for justice? The pastor told us they had a lawyer in the church, they took the case to court, and they had a fifty-fifty chance of winning. They chose not to submit to the law of Christ, refusing to let themselves be wronged.

If we live by the law of Christ, then we will be persecuted.

Scripture warns us that pursuing these earthly things leads to death, while pursuing the things of the Spirit leads to life and peace. This is because the carnal mind is enmity against God and cannot be subject to His law, so they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Holy Spirit teaches us all things, as we have been promised: *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things."* Once He has taught us, the Spirit urges us to walk led by Him; He guides us and promises us eternal life. Minding the things of the Spirit is life and peace. We must focus on the things that bring peace to the heart, and these are righteousness and not resisting.

Living by these two essentials, we will be led into peace and life. The peace given to us as the fruit of God's Spirit is essential in our lives. It is not only a gift received as a result of our achievements or our labour; it is a trait of character, like that of the Lord Jesus, and we absolutely need it.

In the epistle to the Philippians, peace is presented to us not as a gift but as a trait of character. In Philippians 4:5-7 it is written: *"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."* Amen.

It is interesting how peace is described as having the power to keep our hearts and minds. This protection that peace gives makes us ask how it works and what it guards us against. Clearly we must be on our guard, but how exactly does peace help us with this? Why do we need peace, and what do we lose if we do not have it? It is obvious that the wicked have no share in peace, and those who have tasted it do not want to lose it. The value of peace is beyond dispute, which is why we must treasure it.

People spend money to enjoy rest and peace on holiday, but the peace we receive from God, the peace *which passeth all understanding*, is worth far more. Even so, many often struggle with turmoil. We have to ask ourselves whether we like being troubled, or whether we prefer to stay in that state. If we have known peace, we do not want to go back to turmoil, yet some seem to settle comfortably into it.

It is important to reflect on these things and on how peace shapes our lives. People often say, *"How can I not be upset after what he did to me?"* to express their resentment and annoyance. Clearly, people who talk like this are not enjoying peace.

If we live in righteousness, our conscience will no longer condemn us, and the apostle Paul refers to this state when he says, *"I know nothing by myself,"* that is, *"nothing against me that would bring me turmoil and the fear of punishment."* Fear comes hand in hand with punishment, and when we fear punishment, our heart is troubled. To avoid this turmoil, we must have peace in our hearts and not let ourselves be gripped by fear. *"Perfect love casteth out fear,"* which lets us have boldness in the day of judgment, as 1 John 4 tells us.

When we are at peace and nothing condemns us, we have full confidence. This peace keeps our hearts and minds, protecting us from every thought that comes from Satan and could trouble us. Sin committed brings death and turmoil, and every stain or defilement does us harm. In such moments we tend to look for peace, but to find it again, we must pursue the things that can give

it to us.

In the epistle to the Hebrews, we are reminded not to harden our hearts when we hear His voice, which means staying open and responsive to His teaching and His urging. What must we do to enter into the Lord's rest? Hebrews chapter 3 shows us what happened to those who *"do alway err"* and did not receive *the gospel of peace*.

In this epistle the Lord Jesus is called *King of righteousness* and *King of peace*. We are invited to draw near to Him, as He says: *"Come unto me."* In Hebrews chapter 3, from verse 7, we read: *"Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)"*

There is a rest the Lord invites us to share in. *"The effect of righteousness is… rest,"* a state in which we no longer work to obtain it but gather it, the way we gather in fruit. This rest is described as everlasting. In Hebrews chapter 4, verse 1, we are reminded: *"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."*

God has promised us that we can enter into His rest, but there are certain conditions for this. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, verse 16, we find another promise: *"Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all."* Amen. We are urged to have peace within us and around us, to live peaceably with all men. *"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."*

It is essential that we seek God's righteousness. In Colossians 3 we are told again about the peace of Christ, who is the Lord of peace, the God of peace, King of righteousness and King of peace. Chapter 3, verse 15 teaches us: *"the peace of God… to the which also ye are called."* As we search the Scriptures for what God calls us to, we remember that it says: *"many are called, but few are chosen."*

We are called to several essential things: to holiness, to blessing, to the peace of Christ, and also to suffering. The apostle Peter says, *"For even hereunto were ye called,"* and elsewhere we read of *"the peace… to the which also ye are called."* This peace must rule in our hearts, and we must be thankful.

So we can understand it like this: *"Let the peace of Christ, to which we have been called, rule in our hearts."* It is peace that should keep our hearts and minds. We ask whether peace can really do this. We are assured that it can, because it is the power of God. The peace of God, which is the fruit of the Spirit, is itself a power. If this peace rules in our hearts, it will keep us. But to come to peace, we must live in righteousness and without resisting, as the Lord Jesus did.

Think of the time when those who collected the temple tax came to the Lord Jesus to collect it. The Lord Jesus did not resist; He chose not to give them occasion to stumble, showing that He

was pursuing peace. Peace is defined as the absence of conflict and turbulence. The Lord Jesus sought to keep the peace, saying in effect, *"Then are the children free. Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them..."*, that is, so as not to give them cause to become angry. This is in keeping with His teaching: *"woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"*

The tax collectors of that time, like tax collectors today, were sent to do their job, to collect taxes. That was their work, just as each of us has our own responsibilities. As human beings, we tend to get angry and worked up when we face those who seem to wish us harm, whether through fines, taxes or other forms of pressure.

But we must ask ourselves: should we become a cause of stumbling for these people? Think of the Lord Jesus' example: did He live in a way that stirred up anger and conflict, or did He seek peace? His teaching, *"Resist not evil"* and *"Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's,"* urges us to seek harmony and avoid conflict, as far as it depends on us. Even though we cannot control what others do, and they may have their own interests and motives, we are called to live peaceably with all men.

In the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, verse 47, we see a picture of the Lord Jesus' attitude in the face of betrayal and violence: *"And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come?"* This is an example of not resisting and of keeping inner peace in the face of imminent harm.

When we face situations where someone does us harm, it is natural to feel troubled. We have all been through moments like this, for example when a boss at work treats us with disrespect or speaks to us rudely. In those moments, it is important to remember the Lord Jesus' example and seek to keep peace in our hearts, not resisting and not getting needlessly upset.

I remember, many years ago, before I knew God, that when I was insulted or spoken to rudely (not because I had done anything in particular, but because that was simply how that person behaved, how they insulted me), my face would turn red. Why did that happen? Some inner mechanism kicked in that made my blood rush faster, and I felt my cheeks burning. Have you ever felt that? Not everyone has. It is the natural defensive reaction, the instinct to resist. Did the Lord Jesus have this instinct or not? He urges us to seek peace, not to oppose, because that is what He wants: that we live in peace, have a reconciled heart, and live peaceably alongside all men. That is how He lived.

When He calls him *"friend"* and not *"my mortal enemy,"* it is because that is right. *"Friend, wherefore art thou come?"* urges us to reflect on our own attitude and how to handle it. *"Resist not evil"* teaches us not to oppose, just as He did not oppose. Otherwise we are relying on something merely human. It is human to react, and when a situation becomes unbearable, it is hard not to react. What is divine is to live as the Lord Jesus lived. *"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."* If we follow His Word, we will find

peace. The fruit of the Spirit will bring us this peace, along with righteousness and not resisting.

But think of the disciple of the Lord Jesus who had no peace. *"And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword."* What feelings gripped him before he drew his sword? Anger or turmoil? Why resort to violence? Was the Lord Jesus' disciple at peace when he did this? No, he was not. Even though he had boasted that he would stand by Him to the death, at that moment he had no peace. Did he have the fruit of the Spirit? He did not. He stretched out his hand, drew his sword, struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Then the Lord Jesus said to him: *"Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."*

Many people only think about swords, pistols, rifles and weapons. And if we have no weapons, we'll die sooner. But what does the Lord Jesus say here? What is He teaching us? *"Put your resistance back in its place, for all who resist will perish by resistance."* It doesn't have to be a sword. Don't many people today use words as a sword? Yes, words can be a sword. It can be words from the evil one, anger, evil words. We are murderers; we can kill with words.

What does the Lord want to teach us? To be like Him. He wants to take the instinct to resist out of us. Why? What does resistance bring? Turmoil. And He has to take it out. I was saying the other day: imagine we are in God's eternal kingdom. He has moved us there and we are there. But the instinct to resist has not been taken out, let's say. It has not been removed from our lives. What would happen there, if that were the case?

Will our faces turn red when God makes a decision we don't like? Does God need to work on us today, or not? Follow the things that make for peace. Follow them. Seek them.

Let's read from 1 Peter, chapter 2. What are we called to? I said there are not that many callings. Many are called, few are chosen. We have been called to remarkable things, and He has to stamp them into us, or else we will not be chosen. We read from verse 18 to verse 20: *"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God."* Amen.

Patience must have its perfect work, so that we gain longsuffering. What does longsuffering mean for us? It means not opposing. We must be longsuffering toward those who do us harm, including difficult masters who are harsh with us and oppress us. When Scripture speaks of masters, it can refer both to the relationship between masters and servants or slaves, and to the relationship between employers and employees today.

In Bible times a slave could not simply walk away, the way an employee can hand in his notice today. Peter urges us to get rid of the instinct to oppose. *"If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently,"* if you do not resist, *"this is acceptable with God."* God wants to cultivate peace in us. *For even hereunto were ye called.*

We are not called only to rejoice at the wedding of the King's Son, but to find joy even in suffering, as the Lord Jesus says in Matthew 5: *"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad,"* in the times when we are persecuted. Christ suffered for us and did not resist, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps and learn not to oppose, so that we may come to peace.

As long as we have an instinct to resist, peace will not rule in our hearts. I speak from my own experience: when we resent someone taking our parking space, we do not have complete peace. Even if I don't confront the person, if I am resentful in my heart, I have no peace. There is no peace for the wicked. What should I pursue?

To be content, so that I come to peace. We must follow peace and the things that lead to it, even the small and insignificant ones. Anything that troubles me must be removed so that I can come to peace. Through the Word of God we understand that He, *"who did no sin,"* lived in righteousness, *"neither was guile found in his mouth."*

The Lord Jesus lived in peace and had peace with God. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return, and when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. We have His example. He allowed us to go through trials, and we ask, why? Because He works *by all means*. The God of peace gives us peace *"always by all means,"* and all things work together for our good, giving us rest for our souls.

By committing Himself to the righteous Judge, He left us an example; we know from the Gospels that He prayed for His murderers. This shows that a person who is at peace can pray even in the hardest moments, unlike someone who is not at peace and cannot pray in those moments.

We are called to live in peace, so that we can pray for our enemies. *"Lord, forgive my enemies"* is a call to pray for them, but if we have no peace and are troubled, we cannot love people as we are called to, committing ourselves to the righteous Judge.

May the Lord help us to follow the things that lead to the fruit of the Spirit and to grow in the character of the Lord Jesus, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

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