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# The Bible Student

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## 'THE GOD OF PEACE'

A. MCD. REDWOOD

'Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Great Shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the eternal covenant, even our Lord Jesus, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen' (Hebrews 13:20-21; R.V.\*).

The prayers of the great apostle to the Gentiles are a study by themselves, so characteristic are they in style, content, and fervour. This one in the Hebrews epistle, however, is different in some respects from most of the others, and calls for more special study.

It is preceded by a special appeal on his own behalf for the prayers of those to whom he is writing. He appears to be conscious of some special burden, for he finds it necessary, first, to assert his sincerity of conscience in desiring to live well-pleasing to his Lord and Master. He also longs to see those whom he addresses so earnestly, and be amongst them again after a time of separation. (cf. his appeal in Col. 4:2-4 also).

In this portion also is illustrated a further feature characteristic of the apostle's writings, namely, the way he often mingles the *doctrinal* and the more *experimental* aspects of Christian truth. In verse 20, for example, he begins by invoking the blessing and help of the 'God of peace', whose almighty power was displayed so gloriously in the Resurrection of Christ; which forms one of the

\* All the references in this article are from the R.V., but it would also be helpful to compare with the A.V.

cardinal doctrines of the Christian church (cf. Eph. 1:20, 21). But note how it is introduced here merely in order to focus attention, in passing, on the *almighty power and glory* of the One whose aid he is desirous of invoking on behalf of his readers. Having done so, he passes on to the equally glorious truth that the Christ, who was raised from the dead is now the '*Great Shepherd of the sheep*', and all His unbounded wealth of spiritual power and blessing are ceaselessly at the disposal of His redeemed people.

So much for the doctrinal portion, but without pausing the apostle passes on to the experimental and subjective aspect of his prayer (verse 21). Its central theme is that the saints might be enabled to *fulfill the perfect will of God*, in the doing of which they themselves would be perfected in every good work and walk before God and before the world. The measure in which each individual member of His Body fulfills that great ideal so much the more effective will be the saving power of the Gospel in a rapidly deteriorating world today.

For our present study we shall confine attention to the divine name by which the apostle addresses God, as

### **The God of Peace**

We cannot think he uses it without some deep understanding of its meaning and relevance to the various subjects he deals with in each of the contexts in which it is found. Obviously it must imply, to begin with, that God has made definite provision for the removal of all that separates man from Himself through sin: 'Having made peace through the blood of His cross . . . And you, being alienated in time past and enemies in your mind in your evil works, yet NOW hath He reconciled. . . .' (Col. 1:20-22). This being true of *all* believers, the title would seem to have a special reference to God's people in their *corporate* standing in His sight, and not merely as separate units. Hence it is that which binds together all true believers, the one to the other, as well as to the Lord Himself, in a true unity and fellowship in which God Himself is all in all. Thus the apostle prays: 'Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen' (Rom. 15:33, and the preceding verses).

Carrying on the thought of the 'believing brotherhood', the church, the apostle exhorts the church in Corinth: '*Be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind, live in peace: and the God of love and peace shall be with you*' (2 Cor. 13:11, 12). With this we may couple 1 Cor. 14:33; '*for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace; as in all the churches of the saints*'. In both passages the appeal is for a truly spiritual order and harmony within the body of believers as a whole, because of the supreme fact that 'God is not a God of confusion, but of peace and love'. That being so He would have all His people share with Himself such heavenly blessings and be perfected, comforted, and filled with His peace in mind and soul.

How greatly we who profess the name of Christ as Lord and Master forget that anything in the nature of disharmony or schism, in regard to the vital principles and doctrines of the faith are not merely inimical to the true unity of assembly life but are dishonouring to God. Paul exhorts Titus to 'speak (teach) the things which befit sound doctrine', so that the 'Word of God be not blasphemed', and that believers may '*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*' (Tit. 2:1-10). Belief and behaviour are the 'root and fruit' of Christian testimony in the world, and the God of Peace has made ample provision for the 'perfecting of the saints . . . till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of *the* Christ' (Eph. 4:13). The article bears the significance of the union of the Head in the Body. The whole passage in vv. 11-16 focuses attention on the 'building up of the body of Christ', and holds out a challenge to all true believers who compose that body, specially in this day of ecclesiastical confusions in doctrines and practices. But the God of Peace is still at the Head of His church! Hence 'be perfected; be comforted; be of the same mind; live in peace—and the *God of love and peace shall be with you*'.

The next reference is 1 Thess. 5:23; '*The God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly . . .*' The God of peace is the Sanctifier: He has sanctified and is continually sanctifying us; that is, bringing us into ever increasing conformity to His nature and character

as the Holy One: 'For by one offering He hath perfected for ever *them that are being sanctified*' (Heb. 10:14)—such is the true sense of the verb tense. In its simplest analysis it means that the more truly we conform to the character of the Sanctifier, the more shall we become like unto Him. Therefore, '*let Him sanctify wholly*', in all the experiences of our daily life.

It is well to remind ourselves that sanctification is most fully expressed in our relationships with others; that is, it is not an individual matter merely; as can be understood by reference to Heb. 10:15, 16, where we get the witness of the Spirit to our fellowship of obedience to 'the law of God *written in the heart and upon our minds*'.

Passing on now to Philippians 4:9, the subject is given an even stronger practical emphasis: 'The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, *these things do, and the God of peace shall be with you*'. To say the least it is a challenging statement, and so personal! Few, if any, of us would venture such a personal reference! But there is no hesitancy in the apostle's phraseology or style of address. Of course it is easy to see by reading verses 12 and 13, that the secret of his boldness was that *he had first 'learned by experience and practice'* in the School of Christ—for such is the true meaning of the verb *manthanō*. The same verb occurs again in 2 Timothy 3:14—a passage apposite to our subject. It iterates the same truth that the practice of obedience to the word of God brings its own reward in an ever deepening experience of the abiding fellowship with the God of peace Himself. Verse 12 gives us the practical effect in daily life of such obedience, which is something worth pondering over.

Yet another reference, uplifting and assuring in these difficult times, is in 2 Thess. 3:16; reading the whole verse: '*Now the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you all.*' To begin with, there would appear to be some significance in the substitution of 'Lord', the Head of the Body, the Church, for 'God', as in all other passages. But in chapter 2:16 the full titles of *both* the Father and the Son are given; also in chapter 3:5. In the former passage the apostle prays that the believers may experience God's gift of 'eternal comfort

and good hope through grace', so that they may be 'established in every good work and word.' It is because of such divine bestowments of blessing that we become possessed of 'peace at all times in all ways'; which in turn is the sure evidence of the Lord's own presence in the midst of His people, the perpetual Source of divine power for every possible contingency, whatever its nature.

The next and last passage provides us with a short but profoundly significant promise: '*The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*'. It is no mere 'wishful thinking' on the apostle's part, but a divinely-inspired message of comfort and encouragement. In a world of enemies God is pledged to bruise the Chief of Enemies for us and put him in a place of subjection—*under us*, because first of all he is put under Christ, who conquered for us that we might be delivered from his power. Not that we are even yet immune, as one day we shall be, from trials and tribulations in a world of sin; but the Lord's own promise still stands, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world' (Jn. 16:33). Hence Paul can exhort believers to be not slothful but '*fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing steadfastly in prayer . . .*' (Rom. 12:11-15).

Here then we may summarise the main lesson of these several passages: but first recall what was said at the beginning, namely, that the usage of the phrase 'the GOD of PEACE' is intentionally to emphasise God's place, power, and plenitude as displayed—not in creation as a whole but—in the whole company of the redeemed saints; that is, His Body of which He is THE HEAD. The innumerable differences, national, racial, temperamental, linguistic, social, etc., are the diverse material upon which His sovereign grace works in unspeakable ways so that, not merely an 'external harmony' is possible, but that the DIVINE PEACE in its profoundest reality can be enjoyed, even in this warring, distracted world.

Ideally it is the *peace of order and orderliness* which each and every member can enjoy, but only in the measure in which individually we yield obedience to Him as Lord and Master. Our whole life and service, in whatever sphere, must express this at all times.

But it is even more the *peace of harmony of will, mind and heart*. This has already been touched upon, but it is worth emphasising. The great apostle gives the true secret of this in his letter to the Colossians chapter 3; specially verses 5 to 17, addressed to the church; specially in the *local aspect*; and then in the home and family life in verses 18 to 25. The key-verse of the whole is verse 15, 'Let the *peace of Christ rule*, or, as margin and better, *arbitrate*, i.e., '*have the final decision*'. But make sure of verses 12 and 13 also!

Then there is the *peace of trustful restfulness*, based upon the certitude of the Lord's ability to fulfil every promise—yes, *every promise*! We may not follow all His doings, or understand all His providences, but the heart which has tasted of His peace is kept in perfect peace. So shall we learn, according to the degree of our full heart-response, to live the life of greatest influence in the fellowship of His people—in confidence, compassion and composure of mind.

## AN EXPOSITORY STUDY OF ST JOHN'S GOSPEL

PROF. F. F. BRUCE, M.A.

### II. Jesus Reveals Himself to the World (John 1: 19—12: 50)

#### (b) MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE, JERUSALEM AND SAMARIA

(John 2: 1—4: 42)

#### V. *Jesus and the Samaritans* (4: 1-42)

Ch. 4, v. 1—*When therefore the Lord knew how that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John*—The 'questioning' about purification which sprang from the concurrent baptismal ministries of John and Jesus (Ch. 3:25) had wider implications than appear on the surface. The Pharisees (cf. Ch. 1:24) viewed both John and Jesus with critical reserve, and if the increasing number of those who came to receive Jesus' baptism produced feelings of resentment in the hearts of John's disciples, and a tendency to estrangement between them and Jesus'