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THE BELIEVER'S PEACE.

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.”—ISAIAH 26 : 3.

LIFE is in all cases a pilgrimage, and to the best of men it brings its seasons of sorrow, as well as of joy. From causes too numerous to mention, fear sometimes prevails over hope; and the soul, instead of enjoying those consolations which are neither few nor small, is cast down and disquieted. Such are the chequered scenes through which believers pass, that they often become discouraged because of the way.

These vicissitudes, though trying to the feelings, are nevertheless proof of real spirituality. A stone, every one knows, is the same in its properties and aspects all the year round; but not so the tree, at the foot of which it lies. Here we see perpetual changes, frequent revival and decay. If leafless branches and a naked top appear in the months of storm and frost, we expect to find buds, and blossoms, and fruit in the season of warmth and showers. The reason is: in the one case no principle of life exists, while in the other there is all along a real, abiding, energetic vitality. And this, let me say, marks the difference between a genuine, honest-hearted Christian, and the man that merely has a name to live, but is dead. Wherever the root of the matter is found, there will be a lamenting after the Lord, if there is no actual rejoicing in him.

These lights and shadows of the divine life add to the interest with which we contemplate a truly pious character. It is useful to follow such an one in days of darkness, as well as those of

light ; and the tears on his cheeks are no less instructive than the smiles which irradiate his countenance. If his path to a better world is rough and thorny, this only the more clearly evinces the riches of those resources that grace is able to supply.

But though sorrow may be evidence of spirituality as well as joy, we love to see men happy in God ; and what is more, there are good reasons for their being so. Light, we are told, is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. The language before us is still more explicit : " Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." These are precious words—replete with encouragement to such as are harassed with doubts, and beset with temptations. We may consider the text as an infallible remedy for that worst of all forms of human ills—a burdened and disconsolate spirit. There are three things here which invite and claim attention : the *Author* of the peace referred to, its elevated *nature*, and the *means* of its enjoyment. The subject addresses itself with special emphasis to such as walk in darkness, and see little or no light.

We begin with the *Author* of this peace, which we learn is none other than *God himself*.

The mind of man is too active in its essence, and too large in its capacity, even to find rest, unless it be in its Maker. Experience and observation teach this scarcely less clearly than the Bible itself. Were all the holy and happy beings in the universe to concentrate their powers upon the one object of giving peace to a single individual, they would find it a hopeless task. What can the kindest parent do towards making a beloved child truly and permanently happy ? How is the fondness of a brother's love, or the tenderness of a sister's affection, to displace the hidden anguish of the heart, and fill it with calmness ? The warmest earthly friendship fails here. This is work for an Almighty arm—an achievement for Divine grace.

If the thing is ever done, God must do it ; and he can do it only by leading the mind to repose in himself, as the supreme and unchanging good. None but the Creator, the Preserver, and the Redeemer of the soul can allay its apprehensions, soothe its restlessness, and impart to it an undisturbed tranquillity. There must be a combination here of that same power and mercy which once said to the waves of the sea, " Peace, be still." Mere external and sublunary good can avail nothing to ease the torment of the mind. Man, viewed either in the helplessness of his condition as a creature, or the alarm of his guilt as a sinner, must look to the Rock that is higher than himself. In vain is it that you fill his coffers, and encompass him with the pomps and luxuries of life. The possessions of the world, unhallowed by the blessing, and unsweetened by the smiles of a gracious God and a redeeming Saviour, can never contribute one iota towards his

real and enduring happiness. There will still be a void, which, if ever filled at all, must be filled with the fullness of God. Most certain is it, that that part of man which we call mind can never be effectually quieted, unless it be done by Him who has the skill to understand, and the ability to supply all its wants.

But here a question must be met and satisfactorily answered, before we are able to proceed a single step. Admit, as admit we must, that we are sinners, justly exposed to the Divine displeasure, how can God, the righteous Governor of the world, ever be at peace with us? This is a difficulty which no wisdom of the wise, nor understanding of the prudent, has power to solve. But blessed be God, there is One in human form, clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, who has prevailed to open the book of Divine mercy, and loose the seven seals thereof. To meet the consequences growing out of man's sinfulness on the one hand, and God's justice on the other, the glorious scheme of redemption was planned and executed. Jesus undertook to be a peacemaker between heaven and earth, and he has accomplished the work effectually.

As we turn over the leaves of the Inspired Volume, we find the features of a great plan of reconciliation standing out every where. Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles all unite in illustrating its character, and setting forth its glory. It is the one grand and gracious idea which runs through and distinguishes the entire book, from the promise to our first parents in Eden, to the last utterance of the beloved John in Patmos. The chief reason why God has spoken to man at all, is to make known the terms on which He can consistently be at peace with him again, and own him as His. To procure a blessing so necessary and so inestimable, Christ died on the cross; to announce it, a choir of angels came down over the plains of Bethlehem; and to awaken it in the bosom, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter is given. This is the blood-bought legacy which Jesus bequeathed to his disciples, when he was about to return to his Father and our Father, and his God and our God. Nor can any son or daughter of Adam ever enjoy true peace, who does not build his hopes of acceptance with his Maker on the atonement of the cross.

Think for a moment what it cost to purchase this rich blessing of peace for the mind agitated by guilt, and filled with apprehensions. That curse which the law denounces against every soul of man that doeth evil, had to be met and borne, before a single overture of reconciliation could be made, or a single word of friendship uttered. But who could so bring God and man together, that concord might again be established between them? The person to do it must be Divine, otherwise he could make no satisfaction to violated justice; and he must at the same time be human, otherwise he could not die as an expiation. To merit what was necessary, and to suffer what was necessary, a double

nature was required—that of Deity, and that of humanity. Infinite worthiness was indispensable; and as this could belong only to God, Jesus had to be God: and partaking of flesh and blood was indispensable; and as this could belong only to man, Jesus had to be man.

This doctrine of incarnate Divinity—immaculate God with us—one in human form, and yet the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace—is essential to every well-founded hope in the bosom of a sinner. It is Jehovah's method of bringing back to its ancient allegiance a revolted province of his empire, and leading a multitude which no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, to throw down their arms, and sue for pardon. God has set forth his only-begotten and well-beloved Son as a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins; and if offenders are received into favor at all, it must be in this way. As there is in the whole universe but one source of true peace, so there is but one channel through which it can come to men. In vain is it, as thousands have found by sad experience, that we run here and there, knocking at every door, and asking, Who will show us any good? "The depth saith, It is not in me; and the sea saith, It is not in me. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed as the price thereof."

This priceless blessing is in God, and of God, and can only be enjoyed by those who are humble and self-emptied enough to receive it as His gift, through Jesus Christ our Lord. The provision is, from beginning to end, of His making, and it must be embraced only in the way of His pointing out.

Who is there that, apart from God's favor as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, has ever tasted solid joy and satisfaction of spirit? You might as well talk of making the waters of the ocean fresh, by showers from the sky. The Most High has assured men that they can find peace only where they lost it, in conscious union with himself, and happy participation of his own blessedness.

Such, we are all aware, is the constitution of the human mind, that it can find real repose only in God. To essay to fill it with the riches, and satisfy it with the honors, of this poor world, is but to tantalize its hopes, and mock its disquietudes. It must have food adapted to its character, or it will prey upon itself, and eat away its own vitality. If any thing is plain, it is that the good which the soul craves comes from God alone; and equally plain is it, that it can come from him only through the channel of redeeming mercy. Here may peace be found, grounded upon promises, revealed in emblems, and secured by pledges which can never fail. It has a Divine authorship, and well may it strengthen those who possess it with all might in the inner man.

We now pass on to inquire, secondly, into the *nature* of this peace, denominated in the text *perfect*.

The blessing, coming as it does directly from God, will certainly bear the impress of its high and holy origin. By that sort of connection, which is sure to subsist between the effect and its cause, there must always be something in the inward repose of a truly good man to mark its source and reveal the hand which bestows it. His joy, though not at present all that it will be, or all that it might be, is still a joy, with which the stranger intermeddeth not. What if the stream does take up occasional particles of impurity as it pursues its way, and become somewhat discolored by the soil through which it flows? Less cannot be expected. But this does not prevent the existence of qualities in it which tell of its fountain and spring head. Thus too in every case will it be with the man who has felt the pangs of a guilty conscience, and has learned that healing and peace are to be found in God alone. His very defects are mingled with excellences, which show that they come from above.

This is a point which ought to be carefully considered. The laws of the human mind are such that a man's happiness will partake of the character of the object on which he rests. If, therefore, the peace which he feels is derived from an uncertain and unsatisfying world, the peace itself will be just as uncertain and unsatisfying as is the world that supplies it. Should he have no other basis of repose than the affections of kind and tender friends, when these friends die he must be left disconsolate. Should he gather wealth, and build mansions, and acquire fame, to make him happy, when these fail, he is wretched. But let him once put his trust in the immutable and eternal God, and his peace, so far as the source of it is concerned, will be no less immutable and eternal than God himself. Its nature, like his, will be abiding, and its duration, like his, will be everlasting. The cross, the blessed though shameful cross, opens a new and living way of confidence in God, and like the ladder in Jacob's vision, becomes a medium of intercourse between man and his Maker which nothing can interrupt.

Hence, as regards its *groundwork*, the believer's peace may be said to be perfect, for its resting-place is immovable. Whatever pangs of conviction may have preceded it, and whatever doubts and fears may still attend upon it, the foundation upon which it is built, being nothing less than the promise and oath of God, can never be overturned. Only let the sinner cast himself on the mercy provided for him, and offered to him, and urged upon him, and he need never be ashamed or confounded. This is doing precisely what he ought to do, and what he is encouraged to do; and doing it, he is as safe from eventual ruin, and may feel as secure in present peace, as the power and grace of God can possibly render him. No one, not even Satan, or the world,

or his conscience, can lay any thing to his charge, successfully God himself has engaged to be his justifier, and who is there in heaven, earth, or hell, to condemn ?

There is that in the plan of salvation, revealed in the Bible and embraced by faith, which is adapted to remove every doubt and silence every apprehension. God is now regarded as a Father, Christ as an elder brother, and the Holy Spirit as a Comforter ; and what reason is there why the greatest offender should give way to despondency ? In the great doctrines of the gospel every man on earth is authorized to take refuge, assured that here there is grace to pardon his sins, strength to hold up his steps, and joys to refresh his spirits. His Helper is omniscient and omnipresent, all-wise and all-merciful, and how can he come short at last ? Here he may take sanctuary, and in spite of the malice of the devil, the temptations of the world, and the corruptions of his own heart, find settled peace and consolation. Such an one is surrounded by munitions of rocks, and overthrow is impossible. A voice rising above all the tumult of inward and outward trouble says in his ears, "Fear not, for I am with thee ; be not dismayed, for I am thy God."

And as this peace is secure in its foundation, so is it also large in its *measure*. At one time it rises like a river, and swells and rolls onward, until it bears both sin and sorrow away into the land of forgetfulness. At another, it takes the tempted and careworn believer up, and carries him along as on the wings of an eagle, towards the celestial world. Water cannot quench the bright and buoyant flame, nor can floods drown it, nor can persecution dim its lustre. Most truly may we say of it, it is a peace which "the world cannot give nor take away."

This blessing is enhanced too by the fact that it comes in when all other joys go out, and erects its brightest monuments on the ruins of earthly hopes. It is when heart and flesh fail that its blessedness is generally most fully felt. There is no trial which it cannot endure ; no sorrow which it cannot remove ; no darkness which it cannot dispel ; no agonies which it cannot alleviate ! No wonder that Jesus calls it his peace, and bequeaths it to his disciples as the best legacy in his power to bestow. That very repose in God which so filled and cheered his own holy bosom, he delights to share with all who love him and wait for his appearing and his kingdom. Who can measure the height and depth, the length and breadth of such a gift as this ? Never does it loom up so largely as when it takes its position by the dying couch, and the opening grave, and speaks of joys which can never fade away. Here is something that can afford support even amidst the swellings of Jordan.

Can we turn aside and see what light this peace of God can diffuse through the chamber of disease ; how it can tranquillize the bosom of the poor widow surrounded with her helpless babes ;

what serenity it can shed around the tottering steps of some aged saint; and how it can irradiate the gloom even of the grave itself, and not feel that it is rightly called *perfect*? True, it might often be more fully possessed on earth, and it will be more fully possessed in heaven. But if we remember what it has actually done in ten thousand instances, when the dearest friends have died, and property has taken wings and flown away, and one pall of sadness has seemed to overspread the entire world, we shall feel that it is impossible to give it too good a name, or attach to it too high a value.

That this peace is not always as full in degree as it is sure in its foundation, is not the fault either of the Giver or the gift. It may be temporarily broken by sinful indulgences; it may be interrupted by a derangement of the mental or physical system; and it may be for a while withdrawn, to produce a deeper feeling of dependence. The privilege of the Christian is, in this respect, by far in advance of his actual and ascertained attainments. It is but uttering a well-known truth to say, that many good men are often in heaviness through manifold temptations, and their peace is more like the uncertain brook than the perpetual river, moving calmly on to the ocean. Too frequently do they hang down their heads in despondency and refuse to be comforted. Still there is a blessing for them rich and large beyond expression, and nothing is necessary but that they should embrace it, and rejoice in it as their own. This prepares the way to contemplate—

Thirdly, the *means* of enjoying this peace, called *staying the mind on God*, or *trusting in him*.

The provided mercy, in order that it may work out its appropriate results, must become an accepted and an embraced mercy. So far as it respects any real repose of heart, it matters not that there is a blessing, of which God is the author, and which is perfect in its nature, unless this blessing does, in fact, come into our possession, and become as it were part of ourselves. There must be a connecting link between the Benefactor and the recipient; and that connecting link is, a simple, earnest, child-like faith in Christ. Hear in what delightful language the blessing itself, as well as the medium of its conveyance, is spoken of: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Mark, it is the mind's resting in God, staying on him, and confiding in his Word, upon the terms of the gospel, that secures this peace. Nothing else will answer the purpose. Whatever was the strength of the ark built by Noah, or its fitness to float on the water, it could save from the deluge none, except such as entered it, and were inclosed by its doors. An anchor may be sufficiently heavy and firmly set to hold the vessel in the most violent storm, but it can never do this without a cable to connect

the two together. So the mere fact that Jesus died on the cross to procure peace is of itself, and by itself, nothing at all. In addition to what God has done, there is something for man to do, or actual, personal salvation is impossible. The language of the Bible is, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else."

Let this be done in the first instance, and be repeated as often as clouds overcast the mind and doubts arise in the heart, and there can be nothing to hinder the enjoyment of peace. A way is now opened, in which man can come into favor with God, without the least detriment to the claims of Divine justice, or the least injury to the interests of the Divine government. Whatever the sinfulness of believers, the atonement of Christ is underneath them as an eternal rock; and whatever their guilt, the righteousness of Christ is upon them as a spotless robe; and built on this rock, and clad in this robe, they have nothing to fear. In the single, grand, and precious truth, that Jesus has undertaken the work of Mediator, there is that which can convey peace to the conscience, and joy to the heart, let the winds blow ever so high, and the waves roar ever so loud. Nothing is surrendered in regard to the strictness and sanction of the law, and yet that law is so satisfied, that it has no more any curse to utter. Justice and mercy meet on this gracious platform, one securing all its demands in the sufferings of the Saviour, and the other displaying all its triumphs in the deliverance of the sinner.

Man's position in this whole matter is that of a mere pauper, a simple recipient. Instead of working out a righteousness of his own, he is to submit to a righteousness, or yield to the acceptance of a righteousness, which is unto all and upon all them that believe. Just to take what is brought to him, and laid down at his door, is all that is required. Calling the joys of heaven his own, depends on nothing as its antecedent but the embracing of the message which God gives of his Son.

To believe in Christ simply, truly, entirely, without a thought of any goodness to be looked for either in the feelings of the mind or the way of the life, is the true catholicism—the genuine panacea—the real heart's ease. Its power is almost omnipotent. All those dark wants and dim apprehensions which make the whole head sick, and the whole heart faint, are sure to give way before the influence of a cordial trust in Jesus, as the Son of God. Every thing turns on faith, and the man who can believe, and who does believe, is authorized to possess a settled and stable peace. This, be it remembered, is not a blessing which comes meritoriously, or by right of purchase, either from his own doings or from his own deservings. As his hope of the Divine favor rests exclusively on the atonement of Christ, neither personal merit nor personal demerit has any thing to do with a tranquil frame of mind. Trusting and not doing, relying on another and not confiding in him-

self, is the main point. So far as the question of acceptance is concerned, and hence so far as the question of peace is concerned, nothing is necessary but a bare staying of the mind on Christ. This done, all is done; this neglected, nothing is done.

It is a conclusion founded on the fullest experience, that upon the plan, Do and live, real and permanent peace of mind never has been attained, and never can be. This object is gained only when we really enter into the spirit of—Believe and be saved. Once let the feeling of a simple trust in the merits of the Saviour take possession of the bosom, and it will go further to produce abiding consolation than all the tears and vigils of the most perfect devotee. It is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to the mercy of God, that we are saved. Here is something complete in itself, and admitting of no addition from man's performances, however costly and splendid they may be. Bunyan had this idea of the matter, when he put the following beautiful language into the mouth of his pilgrim: "There are four things which give me peace. When I think on what I saw on the cross, that will do it; and when I look upon the embroidered coat, that will do it; and when I read the roll in my bosom, that will do it; and when my thoughts wax warm about the country whither I am going, that will do it." There is a volume of experimental theology in these few sentences. Wonderful man! Though not skilled in the science of the schools, he was taught by One from whose lips wisdom distils as the dew.

To the real child of God there can be no enigma in such a statement as this. It is but declaring in other and more impressive words that peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and hope of glory, are found only in connection with faith in Christ, as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Here, and here alone, can the soul find its needed and appropriate rest. The vine never falls and trails in the dust, so long as its tendrils adhere to the sturdy oak, and the believer is never disquieted so long as he leans on the arm of Jehovah Jesus. Here is firm footing; this is solid ground. The good man has a support, strong as the fastnesses of the everlasting mountains.

Whatever of richness and sublimity and glory there is in the gospel, it all belongs to the believer. Let him but stay himself on the Lord, and trust in the God of his salvation, and though he walk in darknes and see no light, he is just as safe for both worlds as the power and grace of God can make him. And when we say this, we say enough. "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him—in those that hope in his mercy."

Nothing now remains, my Christian friends, but that you *make this blessing more fully your own.*

It cannot be denied that many truly pious men are less happy than the principles which they adopt would seem to warrant, and

far less happy than their usefulness plainly requires. Owing to fightings without and fears within, they write bitter things against themselves and refuse to be comforted. This anxious, depressed state of mind brings up an evil report of the good land, and for the honor of the Saviour, as well as the benefit of others, ought if possible to be overcome. Nothing is more lovely in itself, and more creditable to religion, than the calm, even, settled peace of a true believer.

Never then forget that the great secret of reaching and retaining this priceless blessing, is a bare staying of the mind on God in his own way, and for the ends which he himself proposes. Nothing can be added to simple believing, nor must any thing be taken from it. We cannot, on the one hand, make too much of those works of righteousness, which the gospel both commands and implies as evidence of sincerity; nor can we, on the other, make too little of them as grounds of dependence. As it respects the basis of a good hope towards God, we must have something to lean upon, not done by us, but done for us—not meritorious in us, but beneficial to us. None of you would think of leaving the awakened sinner short of the point of looking entirely away from himself and exclusively to the Saviour for peace; and why should the troubled Christian any more be left short of the same point? Peace can be renewed and kept alive only by the instrumentality which produces it. It originates in faith and it lives by faith.

There is more, much more in this sort of direct application to Christ for help, than good men in general seem to be aware of. Let the cloud which often gathers over the mind from the stirrings of inward corruption, the cares of the world and the temptations of Satan, be as black as it may be, one single act of trust in the Saviour, one single looking to him as the Lord our righteousness, one single laying of the soul under the droppings of his blood, is sufficient to drive it all away. In vain is it to waste your time in self-exhausting efforts and self-recoiling struggles. It is the simple, quiet, entire trusting in Jesus, that breaks the power of sin, and fills the bosom with peace.

My dear brethren, you have a right to be happy, such as no other men in the world can have. Could you only rise to the steady and triumphant exercise of that faith which will enable you to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," you would have nothing to fear. What if created props be taken from under you? it is only that you may lean more implicitly on the arm of a sin-forgiving and a covenant-keeping God. Let the gourds wither, so long as the shadow of the tree of life is left. God promises to bless his people with peace, and it is but an ill return for the multitude of his loving-kindnesses towards you, to persist in yielding to alarm and agitation. "Will you thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?" To be for ever falling into despondency, after receiving so many tokens of the

Divine favor, and enjoying so many seasons of communion with God, is, to say the least of it, basely ungrateful. Christ deserves no such treatment at your hands. No matter how numerous your sins are, nor how many the struggles you may feel in your own bosoms, only believe, and you shall be made whole of whatsoever disease you have.

As for trials, internal and external, they must needs come. Life, even in its brightest and best aspect, is very much like a journey over a stormy sea. But the gospel provides a harbor, which stretches out its sheltering arms, and beckons you to enter that you may find repose on its placid waters. Oh, why remain out upon the ocean, exposed to storm and blast? Fear not to enter and cast anchor here, and you will then be just as safe as the power of God, the love of Christ, and the grace of the Spirit can possibly render you. I charge you, suffer no hidden grief to prey like a canker on your heart. Let come what will, you have only to enter the chambers provided for you in the gospel of Christ, and hide yourselves there for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.

Never dream of repose any where else. In vain did the dove fly to and fro, with panting breath and weary wing, over a deluged world. She found no rest till she approached the ark. But the moment she drew near to this sacred structure, a friendly hand was ready to open the window and take her in.

Come what may, the heart that reposes in God as a Father, in Christ as a Saviour, and in the Spirit as a Comforter, has a home and a dwelling-place. Many a sore trial may await you, and many a tedious scene lie before you, ere the heavenly mansions open for your reception, or the crown of glory be placed on your head. It may please Him, who understands your true interests better than you yourselves do, to permit the last enemy to come upon you in some terrific form. But notwithstanding all, be assured of this, that neither things present nor things to come shall ever separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Cheer up then, ye that hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. As sure as there is truth in the promises, and stability in the oath of Jehovah, Satan will be disappointed of his prey. Only stay your minds upon God, and you need never be ashamed nor confounded, world without end.