



Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Peace

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Colossians 3:15-17

THE FOURTH THURSDAY OF EVERY NOVEMBER, here in the United States, is a warm and precious holiday. Not yet despoiled by unbridled commerce and cynicism, our Thanksgiving celebrates not just (for some) a gratitude for God's blessings, but the essential character of this people. We always have been, and continue to be, people of the land, with boundless fields of plenty that feed not only our own, but countless millions around the world. Beyond the traditional feast, Thanksgiving celebrates the American spirit of generosity, the depth and richness of our culture, our "spacious skies, and amber waves of grain," our "purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain."

As with most secular remembrances, the follower of Christ enjoys the privilege of added depth and meaning behind the Thanksgiving holiday. For the believer, Thanksgiving is a time to remember that *God* is the one who has supplied the bounty, the richness of life, the filled belly, the roof over our heads. Americans may celebrate that indomitable, pioneer spirit of our forefathers, but Christians understand that none of the blessings of our land would have been those pioneers' reward without the gracious hand of Providence.

And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:19

If the now-300 million citizens of the United States have reasons to be thankful, believers draw blessings from an even deeper well. As bountiful and rich as the land may be, it is yet finite: it is capable of feeding only so many. More than that, drought, pestilence, economic or moral ruin remain very real possibilities. But the bounty and riches of Christ—available to all who have taken His name—are without limit, for they are drawn not from earth's finite resources, but from the bottomless springs of heaven itself.

The Essential First

The peace of God is like a multi-faceted diamond: One clear, exquisitely cut gem, yet afire with a rainbow of brilliant colors.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:1-2

The first peace we enjoy in Christ is that between the believer and his Maker. Through Christ, the wrath and enmity between God and man has been replaced with a permanent peace. We have been saved from that deserved wrath—we have been reconciled to Him, our debt of sin forever expunged.

This comes first; no other kind of peace Christ offers can be enjoyed by man before this fundamental peace is established. It is set in place not universally, but personally, individually. Christ's sacrificial death did not establish any sort of universal reconciliation between God and man. It established its *availability*, but for it to become a reality in any one life, that life must accept the free gift. Once accepted, the full panoply of Christ's peace becomes available to the believer.

No Barriers

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall...

Ephesians 2:13-14

At the cross, Jesus broke down the ancient wall that had separated Jew from Gentile. But in a broader sense, His peace breaks down contemporary barriers, as well. Black and white, German and French, rich and poor—all are brothers and sisters by the blood of Christ. This peace does not erase differences, but the indwelling Holy Spirit imbues all who know Him with a familial, spiritual connection that can overpower all earthly differences.

Consolation

Far more than simply an absence of earthly conflict or war, biblical peace denotes a sense of spiritual wholeness and well-being. The "peace of Christ" should not be confused with any sort of sixties-style, "Hey, man, that's cool," soporific disinterest in anything outside of oneself. Christ's peace is not the absence of conflict, but His consolation for the believer in the *midst* of earthly conflict.

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

Those who are in Christ Jesus experience just as much suffering and misfortune as anyone else—sometimes more. But through the trials they have the benefit of Christ's spirit of consolation. They have the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"—something which the world cannot understand. The constant goal of those outside of Christ is to avoid problems; the goal of those in Christ is to meet problems with Him by their side.

From Above

For the believer, the Thanksgiving holiday is, at its root, a time of praise, for whenever we remember that through Christ we have peace with God, peace with each other, and a sustaining peace about our circumstances, the heart can only express its overflowing gratitude.

This supernatural yet very real peace is difficult to describe—especially to those who do not share in it. But consider the following example.

Many years ago I was traveling by air between the West Coast and the Midwest. At a layover in a large city I was feeling lonely, tired, and forsaken. The milling crowds, the noise and smoke all pressed in on me, and combined to leave me panicked, desperate for a quiet place away from it all. Somehow I found a corner in the waiting area that, for the moment, was devoid of other travelers. But the smoke and noise continued to envelope me. My panic rose, and I struggled to remain calm in the cacophony of the huge room. But then, just as I felt my sanity slipping away, I noticed in the crowd a black man. Printed on the back of his jacket were the words "King Jesus." Instantly I felt a mysterious calm pass over me as I realized that I was not alone. There was a brother here, nearby. More than that, in his choice of apparel this anonymous brother reminded me that I was *never* alone—that Jesus, my King, was always beside me, no matter my circumstances.

This is the peace Christ brings. You cannot find this peace anywhere else. It is not of this world, but only comes down from above. dsj

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

John 14:27

*There is a place of quiet rest, Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest, Near to the heart of God.*

*There is a place of comfort sweet, Near to the heart of God,
A place where we our Saviour meet, Near to the heart of God.*

*There is a place of full release, Near to the heart of God,
A place where all is joy and peace, Near to the heart of God.*

*O Jesus, blest Redeemer, Sent from the heart of God,
Hold us, who wait before Thee, Near to the heart of God.*

Cleland B. McAfee