

## Peace Like a River

by the Rev. Walter E. Orthwein

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

The world needs peacemakers. As disciples of the Lord we should be instruments of His peace; and insofar as we truly serve His church, this is what we are, for His kingdom is a kingdom of peace. The first thing, of course, is at least not to sow seeds of strife; and how easy it is to sow such seeds! It often takes effort not to sow them—not to be an Ishmael, whose hand was against all, looking for trouble, not a peacemaker (see Genesis 16:12).

It stands to reason that before we can make any positive contribution to the peace of the world around us we must overcome this natural tendency within ourselves. In this endeavor, the Ten Commandments are our strongest support. Just imagine what a much more peaceful world it would be if everyone kept the commandments—if there were no killing, stealing, adultery, lying, or coveting. “Oh that you had heeded My commandments!” the Lord said to Israel. “Then your peace would have been like a river...” (Isaiah 48:18).

And in the New Church, we know the importance of observing these laws in the spiritual sense as well as the natural. We know how universally they apply in this sense. We want to refrain from gossip, for instance, lest we bear false witness, or steal others’ good names, or even so harm their reputation as to make them wish they were dead!

Then add to the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament the new commandment which the Lord gave during His life on earth—that we love one another as He has loved us—and what great peace there would be among men! (see Matthew 7:12). Certainly this would increase the peace in our homes. If husbands and wives, and parents and children, would seriously reflect upon how they could better love one another, and seek the Lord’s help in this, how peaceful and happy our homes would be!

If there is little peace in the world, it is because there is little peace in the hearts of men. Only the Lord can command peace, and He is present in human society insofar as He is present in the hearts and minds of those individuals who make up human society. So any consideration of how we might promote world peace must begin with how peace can be established in our own lives.

How can we make peace with ourselves? First, we must recognize the only source of peace, that it is from the Lord through heaven. Perhaps we expect too much of this world. The world does not give peace—not the real, lasting peace of the soul that we most need. No change in worldly circumstances can bring us into a state of genuine peace. The essential thing is to acquire a treasure of peace in heaven—inner peace.

Perhaps when the all-too-real problems of the world are pressing in on you, it seems like “pie in the sky” to talk about spiritual peace. But it is in times of trouble that the question of attaining spiritual peace is most crucial. This is because the answer to worldly problems is not worldly but

spiritual. The worldly cares that disturb the mind from without or below can be counteracted only by the peace of heaven coming into the mind from within or above.

It appears that the answer to natural problems must be found on that same plane, in some change in our natural condition; but this is only partly true. If you are having money problems, then more money will help, of course; or if you are having health problems, then a physical cure will certainly help. But in every problem there is a deeper aspect to consider, namely, the spiritual state associated with the natural circumstances.

Financial problems are not just financial; the anxiety and negative emotions associated with that circumstance are what hurt the most. Similarly, the worst part of a physical ailment is often the despair and mental torment associated with it. Someone may be depressed over various circumstances, but the depression itself is a spiritual condition. And when people fight, there are always “reasons,” but there are deeper, spiritual causes behind the external ones.

In short, the cure for natural problems is not just natural. When the spirit is well, natural things tend to fall into place too; and in any case, they no longer matter so much. In this connection, consider this striking statement from the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church. “That which acts inwardly prevails immeasurably over that which acts outwardly” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6724:2). There is a wealth of wisdom in those few words! It is a very practical teaching. No external problem can destroy the peace of a mind which is acted upon from within by heaven.

We don’t want to underestimate the natural problems people face. They are real. We do undergo tribulation in this world. Upsets come. But although these things may disturb our minds from without, if we listen perhaps we will hear a still, small voice from within—the Lord’s voice—bidding us to be calm. The Lord’s disciples were very afraid when the storm came up while they were out in their boat. But the Lord simply spoke to the sea: “‘Peace, be still!’ And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.” It says He was asleep in the boat and they had to wake Him up, but they were the ones asleep. That is, they were unconscious of how great His power was, and how constant His love for them was. Really the storm helped them in that it led them to seek the Lord’s help and to gain a new experience of His power.

Surely there are times in our lives too when we need to hear the Lord say to us, as it were: “Peace, be still! Why are you so afraid? Have faith! Everything will be all right.” Whether we are conscious of it or not, the Lord is present with us and speaking such words of peace and encouragement to us all the time. As it says in the Psalm: He never slumbers or sleeps (Psalm 121:4). But it may be that we have been spiritually asleep and need to awaken to a new awareness of the Lord’s presence and power. This is one of the uses the troubles of this world can serve—to lead us to seek and discover a new source of help and peace from within.

The Lord’s Word comes to us from within and from without. The written Word, which comes into our minds from without, has the power to open the mind to inspiration from within, from heaven. So the help the Word gives is not just in the words written on its pages, but in the new influx from heaven it opens up in our minds. That goodness and truth from heaven, or from the Lord through heaven, is what stills the storm. “For that which acts inwardly prevails immeasurably over that which acts outwardly.”

Peace is a gift from heaven. But for it to be received on the outer plane of life, the inner and outer parts of our being must be brought into harmony. This is what regeneration accomplishes. The Lord is the supreme Peacemaker. He makes peace between the spiritual and natural parts of our being, and through regeneration makes the natural willingly and gladly serve the spiritual.

You can see what a fundamental change this brings about in a person's life. If the spiritual is most important, and the natural is looked upon only as the servant of the spiritual, then worldly problems are far less worrisome than if the natural is the most important thing.

This order of things is accomplished by the Lord through regeneration by means of His Word. And since every teaching of the Word is an aid in regeneration, they all promote inner peace, and are thus "peacemakers," whether or not the letter of the Word seems to address the particular problem bothering us at the time.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." They are called "the children of God" because they have been regenerated, or born anew of God. To be a peacemaker is to be born again and made new by the truth the Lord has revealed from heaven.

Truth in the Word appears under many images: a rock, a sword, a seed, and others. But surely one of the most beautiful emblems of truth is the dew that sparkles on the grass at the dawn of a new day—pure, sweet, and shining in the morning light. The kind of truth signified by dew is called "the truth of peace" (*Arcana Coelestia* 8455).

One who is affected by this truth trusts the Lord, keeps the commandments, forgives, nurtures good will toward others, and practices charity. That person is a peacemaker. Everything he says and does is transformed by the truth residing in his mind; or we might say that that truth is "distilled" into everything he says and does, as the gentle dew blesses every blade of grass in the morning.

But all of us, even though we are not fully regenerate yet, can be peacemakers, or engaged in the process of making peace. Here are three practical ideas on how we can work on this: First, focus your mind on the Lord and heaven, and the truths of the Word, and this will give a new direction to thoughts which may have been too bound up with the world and its cares. As the Lord says in Luke: "...men ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1).

We can direct our thoughts, can direct them away from self and the world and toward the Lord and heaven. If we will seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, everything else will be added unto us, including the peace of heaven. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3).

Second, practice trustfulness, or trusting the Lord. "One who trusts the Lord," the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church says, "unconsciously receives all things necessary" (*Spiritual Experiences* 2536). We may not receive all the things we think are necessary; we may not be conscious of having received what we need, at least not immediately, but if we place our trust in the Lord, we will receive everything we really need, when and as we are prepared to receive it.

But how do you practice trustfulness? For one thing, of course, it is helpful to reflect upon the teachings of the Word concerning the Lord's Divine Providence. Then try to make every experience a kind of experiment in trust. You might even say to yourself: "I feel that I am at sea in a storm, but I am not just in a storm, I am in a boat, and the Lord is in the boat with me," the "boat" being especially the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Jerusalem, in which the Lord is with us. And we need to remind ourselves, or let the Lord remind us, to live in the present rather than lament the past or be anxious for the morrow. We do not and cannot know what might happen. What we can know is that the Lord is "in the boat" with us, no matter what happens.

But here is the real secret of trust (and this is the third key to peace): it is love. In the *True Christian Religion* we read: "...love is not love without trust" (*True Christian Religion* 727e). Trust is a property of love, an essential ingredient of love. As love grows, trust grows and peace grows. If we learn to love the Lord our God above all things, the problem of trust will take care of itself, and we will know peace.

Now it is true that we cannot make ourselves into more loving persons, any more than we can command ourselves to be more trusting; these things come to us as gifts. But we can turn to the Lord and ask for these gifts, confident that those who ask will receive, as He promised (see Matthew 21:22; Luke 11:9; John 14:24).

Love and trust and peace will come to us as we are prepared to receive them. And again, if the question arises as to how we can be prepared to receive them, the Lord has given us the answer: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). Here is the most basic, down-to-earth thing we can do to get on the path to peace: keep the commandments. Then the promise given in the Psalms will be fulfilled in us: "Great peace have those who love Your law" (Psalm 119:165).

All the truths which the Lord has revealed are for the sake of establishing peace on earth. In every commandment of the Word the Lord is saying to the storms of life, "Peace, be still!" We, His children, who hearken to His Word and receive the gift of peace in our hearts, may then share this gift with others, and so help increase the Lord's kingdom of peace on earth. For the Lord to have made peace with us is a great blessing, and it is a blessing that is multiplied again and again whenever we make peace with others.

There goes forth from those in whom the peace of heaven has been established a sphere of peace which prevails immeasurably over any disturbance in the world—"peace that flows as a river..." And, because "influx is according to efflux," the more peace that flows from us to others, the deeper that river becomes. Thus there is no end to the truth contained in the Lord's words: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Amen.

Lessons: I Samuel 19:1-7; Mark 4:35-41; *Arcana Coelestia* 8455