

warden and the guards! Once, when he learned a guard was very sick, he prayed for healing. When the guard returned to work he surprised the prison employee by letting this person and others know he'd prayed for healing. This man has been changed and has received true peace.

**Proof** – “Will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”

Many things serve to show one has received the peace of God by prayer. Freedom from anxiety is practically worked out in the life of a believer. There is *proof* of God's promise in His people as referenced in Scripture. Freedom from anxiety allows one to rest well and get a good night's sleep.<sup>14</sup> God gives sweet sleep. Communion with God, which leads to peace, results in an appreciation and enjoyment of nature.<sup>15</sup> God gives pleasure through His creation.

In fact, one who has relief from worry and stress can find satisfaction in the “simple things” of life. Everyday, commonplace things like singing a song,<sup>16</sup> reading a profitable book,<sup>17</sup> healthy conversation,<sup>18</sup> and a good meal<sup>19</sup> are sources of contentment. A prayerful believer regularly derives more happiness from simple daily pleasures than unbelievers because he is at peace with the Provider of all pleasures.

The rustling of the leaves in the wind is a pleasant sound to the one who has found peace in God. It is as if the trees are joyfully clapping their hands. To the fainthearted and guilty who have no peace from God, the rustling of the leaves in the wind can be disquieting. “The sound of the shaken leaf will cause them to flee.”<sup>20</sup> Without peace from God even the small enjoyments in life are empty or abused or misunderstood.

This brings us to the consideration of being “guarded through Christ Jesus”. When there is turmoil or distress all around, God's people can enjoy a calmness He sends. The Bible portrays this in vivid wording using the most extreme examples of woe which should crush and overwhelm. The Lord will strengthen when the crops fail and the livestock do not reproduce<sup>21</sup>; in a time of scarcity when there is little or no food, the Lord will move His chosen to take heart and be glad. The Lord will remove fear when the earth churns violently with massive earthquakes and the seas are stirred with terrific storms<sup>22</sup>; the Lord will move His children to feel comfort in His care and protection.

The peace of God helps us find healthy pleasure in the ordinary and shields us in the extraordinary days of serious troubles. The promise is powerfully conveyed that God will send such a peace into the lives of

believers that their “hearts” and “minds” will be guarded. The word- heart, refers to a man's innermost being (or feelings). The word- mind, refers to one's intellect (or thoughts). The peace of God guards one mentally and emotionally from anxiety. Now that is real peace!

### **In Conclusion**

There is a connection between sincere Christian prayer and peace. As a people we struggle with tension and stress as a normal part of life. No one is exempt nor is this surprising. This is self-evident. At times the pressures of life can feel overwhelming. Unbelievers have no spiritual protection while Christians have the surety of prayer.

Throwing up a quick prayer when we get scared is not proper prayer. God, in His *providence*, may choose to use stressful periods as a means to move people into prayer when it is neglected. Tense times may be used providentially to strengthen believers in their prayer lives. God is good. He even uses anxiety to teach His people to pray.

Don't misunderstand. Prayer is not a shot of whiskey to calm your nerves or a sleeping pill to knock you out or a prescription drug to ease the pain quickly. Prayer does not deaden, as these approaches do temporarily. Prayer awakens the spirit and gives victory, not cowardly escape. Prayer has real benefits – as it calms it strengthens. Prayer is a relationship not a pill. A prescription does not comfort but prayer does.

Robert Smith - March 2004

### **REFERENCES\***

- |                         |                              |
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| 3. I Corinthians 10:1-4 | 13. Isaiah 54:10;            |
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| 6. Psalm 73:28;         | 15. Isaiah 55:11-12          |
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| 8. Acts 16:25;          | 18. Proverbs 16:21           |
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| Romans 14:17, 8:6       | 21. Habakkuk 3:17-19         |
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\*All quotations cited in the text are from the New King James Version of the Bible.



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# RECEIVING PEACE THROUGH PRAYER ©

Philippians 4:6-7

*“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

Paul exhorts the people of God to not worry about anything; instead, he encourages believers to employ prayer as a replacement for worry. The result will be peace over the matter. This calmness comes from the Lord and is the result of proper prayer. Not only will the worrier be quieted, but God will afford protection to the one who prays from further distress. A disquieted disciple is called to prayer and is promised peace. It should be understood that peace may or may not be the object of prayer, but it is given as a consequence and as a benefit of praying aright.

**Anxiety** – “Be anxious for nothing”

In other words, “Do not worry about anything.” Anxiety can be vanquished. One who is distraught by nervousness or struggles with inward turmoil has the power of mastery over such distress. Help is available from the Father to His people. God's people are not to be hampered by anxiety or uneasiness in life.

We read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” (I John 4:18) It is here explained that love and fear are contrary to one another. Being anxious, which is a form of fearfulness, cannot coexist with love. Fear (anxiety) is tormenting while love is pleasurable. As love is being perfected, anxiety is more and more excluded.

Anxiety, which goes unchecked, can develop into a fear (dread) which stymies an individual and makes him unable to function normally or rationally. There are those who suffer with all sorts of irrational phobias and unresolved fears which do indeed “torment” them in life and make them ineffective. This is not to be so for God's people. God's people are to grow in confidence and boldness.<sup>1</sup> God's people are to experience God's love.

**Prayer** – “But in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God”

Instead of fritting away the time in foolish worry, which often causes our cares to be magnified and increases stress, we are called to prayer. Worry is unproductive, even destructive, while prayer is profitable. Prayer is the help we've been given to avoid anxiety and quiet our spirits when we feel anxious. Prayer is the Bible's answer to anxiety.

This counsel may sound too simplistic a solution to a problem which plagues mankind. To many it sounds something akin to a doctor dismissing a very serious medical problem with the words “take two aspirin and go to bed.” It may sound like flippant avoidance similar to the t-shirt slogan that reads: “Don't worry be happy.” Before dismissing prayer, after giving it a momentary chance and deciding it doesn't work, or doubting its claims outright, there are some questions to be asked. There are some answers to be clearly understood about prayer from this letter of Paul.

To whom is this letter addressed? True Christians.<sup>2</sup> Just as a blind man should not be told to draw inspiration from a beautiful painting, just as a deaf man should not be told to find pleasure in a harmonious piece of music, neither should an unbeliever be told to find solace in prayer. An unbeliever is given the gospel,<sup>3</sup> while a believer is called to prayer. Prayer, in this context, is being prescribed to those who have already embraced Jesus by believing the gospel.<sup>4</sup>

What is specifically meant by prayer? Three things. We are told to bring everything to God by prayer, and this prayer involves three distinct directives when making requests. We are told to pray by (1) prayer, (2) supplication and (3) thanksgiving.

The first word literally means “prayer as worship”. We are to pray as to honor God and hallow His name. This is a high purpose in lifting prayer to the Father. When requests are made, it is to be an acknowledgement of His superiority and worthiness. When a person seeks counsel from another, he is admitting his lack and recognizing the wisdom of the other. When a person seeks help from another, he is affirming his own insufficiency and the adequacy of the other. When a person humbly asks for material aid from another, he is acknowledging his neediness and affirming the ability of the other. So it is with prayer. When requests are properly submitted to the Father, it is a declaration of His high, exalted, and majestic personage. This is to be viewed as worship by the believer; God is worthy to be honored in prayer by His people.

The second word literally means “prayer as requests”. We are to pray in order to bring our needs

and concerns to the Father. Prayer is a way of petitioning our King. Since we have approached His throne worshipfully, we have His ear. He is attentive and gives us an audience. We have gained His favor and He hears us.

The third word literally means “prayer as gratitude”. We are confident that the Father will answer our requests and will do for us what is in our best interests. He may not answer in the way we expect, He may not give us what we desire. He may give us something unexpected, or something better than we had planned. We can be certain though of receiving, thus we are always to be thankful in our prayers. Even before we receive, we have such confidence<sup>5</sup> in our Father's faithfulness and goodness that we are thankful in advance. We are to pray in this way!

Is this an exclusive call to individual prayer? Not necessarily. Certainly individuals are to pray alone and pursue lives of secret prayer as a means of communing with the Father through Jesus Christ. Each believer is to grow in prayer as a means of drawing near to God.<sup>6</sup>

It is good, profitable, and commanded of believers to gather together for worship.<sup>7</sup> Just as believers worship together by singing to the Lord, so are they to pray together.<sup>8</sup>

**Peace** – “And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding”

We are exhorted to not be anxious, and we are taught how to pray aright. The result will be peace. Immediately we are told two things about the reception of this peace. (1) Man cannot produce this peace- it is a gift of God. (2) Man cannot understand this peace- it is not of this world. This peace is the fruit of fellowship with God.<sup>9</sup> We begin to understand why the gospel- the message conveying the message of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, is referred to by Paul as the “gospel of peace”.<sup>10</sup> One who is at peace with God through Jesus Christ can enjoy real peace on this earth as he lives the Christian life. Prayer is critical to the exercise of true faith in Christ and in obtaining this peace.<sup>11</sup>

Those who have no hope in Christ, and thus for their eternity, have no sure peace. Believing in Christ and having confidence in heaven allows the one with true faith to be filled with peace.<sup>12</sup> Having no faith in Christ is the same as having no hope and having no hope can lead to faintheartedness (anxiety). Also, having no faith in Christ (or pretended faith) causes people to place their faith in other things. People may typically place their trust in money, other people, or their own abilities. Dependence upon one's own skills does not give freedom from fear; self-reliance will only lead to

anxiety. Real relief from anxiety will not come from any source in this world, but solely from above- from God alone.<sup>13</sup>

One afternoon, while sitting in the home of an elderly widow, I found much in her conversation to bless my spirit. My interview with the infirmed old lady warmed my heart unexpectedly. This was my first time to meet this dear senior sister with whom I found a common bond in the Lord. With her walker before her as she sat in a comfortable chair, she told me of her experience. Several years before, she and her husband had been in a terrible car accident. The wreck caused much damage to her body and she awoke in the hospital in pain. She had suffered multiple injuries. In the midst of all this she was notified of her husband's death. The attending staff noticed her calmness and noted her state of contentment after receiving this news. Someone could not help but ask, in surprise, how it was that she was not upset by the news of her husband's death. The woman lay tranquil in this time of trial and explained, “I prayed and now I have peace. Jesus is always beside me. He never leaves me.”

This was a wonderful testimony to affirm “the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.” As my visit continued I was struck by the calmness of this woman who lived alone in the home she and her husband had bought years earlier. She continued to share with me how she communed with Christ in prayer throughout the day. Her desire, and prayer, was to die at home. She clearly expressed her wish to not become so debilitated that she would be placed in a nursing home or the hospital where she would die. She was confident the Lord had granted this request and she had thanked Him many times. I believed her when I left that peaceful place!

One evening, while talking to a prison inmate following a church service I'd conducted, my heart was touched by his attitude. The man had been in prison for a number of years and his parole had recently been denied. He was strangely content when he said, “It really doesn't matter if I'm free or in here; I've prayed about it. There are some fellows here who need me. Even though I'm locked up, I'm free in Christ.” I had visited the prison for over two years and had had many conversations with this man. I was convinced this man to be a genuine Christian who had put his faith completely in Christ. His circumstances have not robbed him of the “peace that surpasses all understanding.” In our church services I'd never heard him pray for release from prison but I had heard him pray for other prisoners and the families of other prisoners and his daughter. I'd heard him pray for the