

Peace Overcomes Our Conflicts

by John Piper

This sermon delves into the biblical reality of peace, emphasizing the comparison of peace to a river as depicted in the Bible. It explores the multifaceted nature of peace, encompassing relationships among people, harmony between man and nature, and inner peace within individuals. The root cause of all conflicts is traced back to man's conflict with God, leading to a discussion on how Jesus, the Prince of Peace, brought reconciliation through his sacrificial death. The sermon concludes with an invitation to embrace the gift of peace with God through faith in Jesus.

Scripture: Isaiah 48:18, Isaiah 60:12, Isaiah 26:3, Isaiah 53:4, Romans 5:1, Matthew 5:9

Topics: "Peace", "Reconciliation through Christ"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. Father, as we focus now for these minutes on the biblical reality of peace, would you work the miracle that passes all understanding in this church and through us in this city and by your redeeming will among the nations, we pray through Christ. Amen.

So if you're old enough to remember it, sing with me these lines. I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river in my soul. I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river in my soul.

Why like a river? Not a lake, not a pond, not an ocean, a river. We're going to end this service in a little while with another song about peace like a river. Not as many of you know this one, but we'll sing it anyway.

First verse, so join me if you know it. Like a river, glorious is God's perfect peace over all victorious in its bright increase. Perfect yet it floweth, freer every day.

Perfect yet it groweth, deeper all the way. Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blessed, finding as he promised, perfect peace and rest. So why do songwriters compare peace to a river? At one level the answer is this, because the Bible does.

Isaiah 48 18, O that you had paid attention to my commandments, then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea. Isaiah 60 verse 12, Thus says the Lord, behold, I will extend peace to Jerusalem like a river and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream. And the refrain of that song, stayed upon Jehovah, comes from Isaiah 6 26 3, You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts in you.

So that just moves the question back one step. Why does the Bible compare peace to a river? Now that's where we're going to end the service, my part of it. But first, what is it? What is the biblical reality called peace? And how did we lose it everywhere and in here? And how can we get it back? So first, what is it? Or to be more specific, what's the biblical reality of peace that the word is pointing to? That's the question.

And to answer that question, you know, don't you? You don't look in a dictionary. Peace. You don't.

All dictionaries do is give you options of meanings. To know what the Bible means by peace, you have to read the Bible. You have to read the verses where the word is used and then ask, according to the context, how's it being used to get across the reality? So let's do that.

It's richer than you might think. First, Deuteronomy 20 verse 10. When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it.

So what's peace? It's the alternative to the fight that's about to happen. Or Psalm 120 verse 7. I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war. So what's peace? It's the alternative to war.

Or Ecclesiastes chapter 3 verse 8. For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. So, definition so far of the reality of peace. A relationship among people that avoids conflict.

That's the first step in our explanation. A relationship among people that avoids fighting and war and conflict. There's more.

Let's go a step further. Mark chapter 4 verse 37. A great windstorm arose and the waves were breaking into the boat so that the boat was sinking.

And Jesus awoke and he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still. And the wind ceased. Oh, he's great.

And there was a great calm. So, what's peace? Peace is between natural forces and man and the removal of the conflict. This wind and these waves were about to kill these disciples.

And Jesus said, peace, and the conflict was over. A great calm between nature and man. So, my definition broadens out now.

Not only is peace a relationship among people where conflict has been avoided, but peace includes in its growing meaning a relationship between man and nature where conflict has been removed. Let me give you another example. Leviticus 26.6. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down.

None shall make you afraid, and I will remove harmful beasts from this land. Snakes, lions, bears, they kill your kids at night. When peace is complete, it's going to be freedom from conflict between man and nature.

So, whether it's a conflict with wind, hurricane, waves, wild beasts, viruses, snakebites, floods, famine, earthquake, cancer, heart disease, pneumonia, diabetes, Alzheimer's, the reality of peace in its fullest biblical sense is that conflict's going away. It will. Isaiah describes the final future to which we're heading.

Chapter 55, verse 12. You shall go out with joy in peace. You will be led forth in peace.

Instead of the thorn will come up the cypress. Instead of the briar will come up the myrtle. The conflict between thorns and my skin is going away.

The wolf will lie down with the lamb and graze together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. Dust shall be the serpent's food, not your heel.

They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain. When peace reaches its full biblical extent, there will be no more conflict between natural forces and my life or your life. There will be complete absence of conflict between nature and man.

There's more. You can imagine, just let yourself do it right now, you can imagine a situation in which the peace between people has settled on the world and peace between you and nature has settled on the world and inside you are in turmoil because there's not peace in here. You can imagine that anxiety, turmoil, racing thoughts, confusion, indecision, frustration, feelings of guilt and shame, regret.

If you can't take my word for it, the heart is capable of feeling all of that when everything's okay out here. It is because there's something else wrong. My mind and my heart is in conflict with itself, not because you don't like me or somebody wants to kill me or snake is about to bite me.

It's about me. Something's wrong in here. You know that.

You lay your head on the pillow at night. You know that. Is that peace included in the growing definition that we're working on? Peace between people, absence of conflict between us and nature? What about in here? What about in John Piper's turmoil? Here's what Jesus said in John 14, 27.

Peace, I leave with you. My peace, I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts, this is another level, let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. That's inner peace. Here's the way Paul put it.

You all know and love these words, I hope. If not, start now. Do not be anxious about anything.

Oh my soul, could you obey that? Have you had a day in your life where that's true? Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God that passes, surpasses all understanding will guard your heart and your mind, guard it in Christ Jesus. That's a precious phrase, surpasses understanding. Have you ever thought about that? What that means, I think, is with my understanding, I can read my Bible and I can look at the world and I can accumulate evidences that there's peace out there and peace with nature, and it doesn't work.

It doesn't work, because in here I still irrationally even, irrationally am tormented, right? You know that your panic attacks and your racing thoughts and your frustrations and the mental stuff that goes on here that makes you so unhappy isn't solved by just fixing things out here. You know that. So this text says it's beyond understanding.

That's why I prayed at the beginning for the miracle would happen in this service, that as I'm talking, you wouldn't just be able to use your minds and make computations about what's coming out of my mouth and say, well, that's a good reason for peace. Yes, that is the way we do it. And Paul is simply saying, do that, listen to the preacher, listen to all the verses, mount up the evidences, and then pray down the miracle.

God, I need peace. Summary. Peace, biblically in its fullness, is the freedom from conflict between man and man.

And I mean individually and in your family, in your neighborhood, in the city, in the nation, in the world. That would be peace. And secondly, freedom from conflict between man and nature, disease, catastrophe, disaster, death.

And thirdly, freedom from conflict within your own mind and heart so that you know sweet, guilt-free, shame-free, anxiety-free peace. Inward, outward peace. Now that is so big and so amazing.

It's global, it's universal, it's natural, it's human, it's like psychological, that is so big. Many people define peace, shalom, that's the Hebrew word for peace, right? Many people define shalom as human well-being, prosperity, welfare, and that's the translation in many texts. One of them you know quite well, Jeremiah 29 and 11.

I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord. Plans for welfare, it's translated, that's shalom, that's the word shalom. Plans for shalom and not for evil.

Now I want to say I'm okay with that big description, like well-being. Sometimes it's a modern, trendy word to say flourishing, human flourishing. Fine with that.

Fine with well-being, fine with prosperity, fine with welfare. However, I just want to make sure that you haven't missed what we've spent the last 15 minutes hearing from the Bible, namely the biblical reality of peace pervasively signals that this welfare, this prosperity, this tranquility, this calm, this flourishing, is owing to the avoidance of or the removal of conflict. Don't leave that out, because otherwise you'll just define peace as happiness.

You just lose all those verses that I read. Which brings us now to the most important thing. Where did all this human, natural, psychological conflict come from? Everything is so broken.

Where did that come from, and how will it be removed? That's the question. The reason there is a deadly conflict between man and man, individual, family, cultural, global, and the reason there's a deadly conflict between man and nature with diseases and disasters and death, and the reason there's this awful tormenting conflict in our minds with guilt and anxiety and shame is because of man's conflict with God. All conflict in the world came from conflict with God and remains in the world until the conflict with God is removed.

And you know the story that so amazingly and frighteningly and terribly describes this origin, right? It's Genesis chapter 3. You don't need to go there. You know the story well. I'll read you the key verses.

Adam and Eve fell from being satisfied in God into a blindness of preferring their own wisdom and their own way, and they chose conflict with God over peace with God. They chose it, and it ruined everything. It ruined everything.

Conflict with God has ruined everything. Everything in here and everything out there has created conflict everywhere, and if you wonder, am I just kind of laying that on this fall, or is it here? I'll just read you the steps of collapse. First, when conflict with God entered the world, everything in here was ruined.

What's the first thing they were aware of? They were aware of the conflict between what they had become and what they ought to be, and they covered themselves with fig leaves, desperately trying to fix it, and that's what we've been doing ever since. You can't fix it. You live with conflict in your soul while there's conflict with God.

It cannot be fixed. They sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. God says, how did you know you were naked? That's a weird question.

It's not a weird question. They were so gloriously free from conflict between what they were and what they were supposed to be. They didn't have any self-conscious conflict at all.

What a life that would be, and we're always now covering ourselves all over the place trying to fix ourselves. We're so out of sync with what we're supposed to be when we're in conflict with God. We'll do anything to fix it except deal with God.

Secondly, the relationship between the two people broke. Oh, it horribly broke. Have you ever thought about how immediately it broke, and conflict between the man and the woman entered immediately? Have you eaten of the tree that I told you not to eat? She gave it to me.

If you're going to kill somebody, kill her. It's over. Human life is over in its peace.

Men and women, men and men, nations and nations, families and families. Because of conflict with God. And third, next verses, the conflict with nature.

To the woman, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. To the man, curse it as the ground because of you. In pain, you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Everything's broken. It's broken in here. It's broken out there.

It's broken in nature. Everything broke into conflict because of one thing, conflict with God. I want it my way.

I'm gonna do it my way. I treasure creation more than creator. I want to be God.

And conflict spreads like a tidal wave everywhere. So what could be plainer, right, from Genesis 3 than the conflict with God is the root of conflict between man and man, the root of conflict between man and his own soul, the root of conflict between man and nature. There won't be any peace anywhere until we deal with that.

Not with nature, not with man, not with ourselves. All our misery is owing to conflict with God. All of it.

Romans 5, 12, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all because all sin. Death is the final conflict, right, between nature and man. It's over.

This is the greatest problem facing the world, folks. Don't be distracted by political conflict. It's not the main issue.

It's the main issue in the Twittersphere. It's the main issue on Facebook. It's the main issue in all the news outlets.

It's not the main issue, and Christians have come into the light to know this. The main issue is conflict with God, and we exist to spread the light, not join the folly of the darkness. Every human is born at odds with God, and under his just and holy wrath, we are by nature Adam and Eve, all of us.

We prefer our own way, not God's way. We find satisfaction in what he made, not him. Everything is broken because of us and God's response to it in justice.

Unless that conflict between us and God is removed, there'll be no peace, neither inner or outer. Isaiah 48, 12, or 22, there is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked. That's us, except for one thing, Christmas, and everything that flows from it.

To us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. The government will be upon his shoulders, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of, say it, His name is Jesus.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest and on earth, say it, Peace, among those with whom he's pleased. He came to do this.

He came to do this. He came to fix this. At the end of his life, do you remember, he came to Jerusalem and he wept.

This is Luke 19, 42. He wept and he said, Would that you, even you had known this day the things that make for peace, but they are hidden from your eyes. I have brought terms of peace.

I have brought terms of peace. And they killed him. Don't be among their number.

How did he do it? How did he become the Prince of Peace? How did he fix it? So that everything I've described is going to come true. It's going to come true. There'll be nothing but peace between people, nothing but peace between man and nature, nothing but peace in your heart someday.

If you know how he did it and join him in it. So how did he do it? 700 years before the first Christmas, God inspired Isaiah to tell us how he would do it, how God in Christ would do it. Now, I wish we had time to look at all these, but Matthew 8, 17, Luke 22, 37, John 12, 38, First Peter 2, 22, Romans 10, 15.

So Matthew, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, all of them quote Isaiah 53 as referring to Jesus. So as far as the New Testament goes, that's the chapter about Jesus. I've been looking at videos online from a ministry to Jewish people.

I love Jewish people, and I want Jewish people to know their Messiah, the Prince of Peace. And these videos are just beautiful in the way they show how many Jews are coming to their Messiah through Isaiah 53. You got a, you got a Jewish friend, sit him down and read it out loud and say, that's your Bible.

That's your Bible. We got the same Bible, two-thirds of it anyway. So turn to Isaiah 53, verse 4, and we're going to rivet here for the last few minutes and see how he did it.

Isaiah 53, verse 4, this is the center of the chapter. There's more, but this is the center. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. That's why I chose this text.

Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Drop down. I'm going to read the last part of verse 9. Although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth. Now, there are five crucial, glorious, beautiful acts of God in Christ that show in this text how God took the initiative to make peace with God.

First, number one, he lived. This servant, this son, lived without sin. I just read that at the end of verse 9. He had done no violence.

There was no deceit found in his mouth. These sufferings were not because of his own sin. Second, he suffered and he died.

Verse 4, stricken, smitten, afflicted. Verse 5, pierced, crushed, chastised, wounded. Verse 12, at the end of the verse, he poured out his soul to death.

He died, suffered, and died. Third, it was God who struck him and put him to death. Verse 4, smitten by God.

Verse 10, it was the will of the Lord to crush him. He has put him to grief. This is not a fluke.

The death of Jesus on the cross, the most horrible death, is not a fluke. It's not an accident of history. This is a plan.

This is God's plan. God and the Son put their heads together, so to speak, from eternity and said, we're going to do this. We're going to make peace between fallen, sinful man and ourselves.

We're going to do this and here's how we're going to do it. This is the work of God. If you're newer to Christianity, and maybe just visiting this morning, maybe online, this, whatever else you think about Christians, whatever issues you associate with Christianity, would you please realize this is the center.

This is the heart. This is the essence. God, substituting God to bear the punishment of God to make peace with sinners.

That's the essence. This number four, so number three was God was the one who struck him. Number four is the suffering of God's Son was for us.

Verse four, he bore our griefs. He carried our sorrows. Verse five, he was pierced for our transgressions.

Verse six, the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all. He didn't die. Jesus didn't die.

The Son of God didn't die because he had a conflict with his Father. He died because we had a conflict with his Father. He died for us to bear the punishment for us.

Finally, number five, the result of those four steps, those four glorious acts is peace. Verse five, near the end, verse five, upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. Peace with whom? First and most immediately in the context, it's clearly peace with God because that's the issue being solved.

These transgressions are against God. These iniquities are against God. This turning to our own way is against God.

The great conflict here that has to be solved is between us and God. God in this text is saving us from God. That's the essence of Christianity.

God is saving us from the wrath and the punishment of God by inserting God between us and God. He did it. You don't do it.

You don't make peace with God. God makes peace. You can't save yourself.

That's the glory in the heart of Christianity, God substituting the Son of God to bear the judgment of God on sinners like us. What must you do to enjoy this peace with God? Romans 5, 1, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. I love that verse.

Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. No accident that peace with God was Billy Graham's bestseller, right? Some of you don't even know who Billy Graham was. Peace with God by faith.

You can't earn it. You can't work for it. You can't be good enough to get it.

God in Christ at Christmas became man to do it for you, and he did it perfectly, perfectly. We're going to hear that word in the closing song in a few minutes. Perfectly.

And the way you enjoy it, and we're going to come to this table in just a moment. How, how will you eat this bread and drink this cup peacefully with God? Just enjoying God, enjoying his smile, enjoying his favor. How will you do that, sinners that you are, every one of you? You will do it by embracing the gift of the substitute punishment of Jesus.

Yes, yes, he is my treasured substitute. He is my prince of peace. Yes, no more conflict.

I'm laying down the arms. I'm not having my way anymore. I am yours.

Yes, to Isaiah 53. And you may eat. You may eat.

Why is peace like a river? I said we'd come back. Here we are. Why is peace like a river? The Mississippi River is just a couple blocks that way, right? I live a couple blocks that way.

I've walked by the Mississippi River countless times. I love rivers. And I've thought as I've walked by the Mississippi River, do you know what? This river has been flowing in that spot for thousands of years.

Just type it into Google. They'll say billions. God hasn't got an issue with that.

Thousands is good enough. Thousands of years, that river that you stand beside has been flowing just like that day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, century after century. The old man

river just keeps rolling along.

God's peace is not static. Your peace is not static. One of the things that drove this sermon, because I wrote it backwards, was I don't want to send you out like a pond, like a dead sea.

Do you know that the Chardon River runs into the Dead Sea and nothing lives there? Nothing lives in the Dead Sea because the river stops. It's not a river anymore, and I just so much don't want us to be that as a church. I love peace.

I love the God of peace. I love the Prince of Peace. I love this church.

I want us to be a people of peace. I want us to be a people who receive the flow, and then according to Matthew chapter 5, verse 9, blessed are the what? Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. I want us to make peace at home with our spouses, with each other, with the neighborhoods, with the world, in the truth, by the power of the Spirit, on the basis of this gospel.

It's a perfect gift, he wrought, perfect, yet it floweth. That's a paradox. It's an intentional paradox.

Perfect, yet it floweth fuller. How can it be perfect and you get fuller? Perfect, yet it groweth. How can it be perfect yet grow? He's not a nut, this guy who wrote this song.

He's not an idiot. He's really smart. He's really wise.

He really knows his Bible. He knows the human soul. It is a perfect peace, and you experience it a little bit, and bigger, I hope bigger, bigger, because of today.

I'm inviting you in. If you don't know this peace with God that he's made for you, I'm inviting you in. Let's pray.

Father, as we go to the table now, oh come and feed our souls on the living bread by which you bought peace. Pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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