

The Peace of God Ruling in the Christian's Heart

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney emphasizes the importance of understanding and attaining the peace of God in the hearts of Christians through faith and internal harmony.

Scripture: Psalm 29:11, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 11:28-30, John 14:27, John 16:33, Romans 15:13, Philippians 4:7, Colossians 3:15, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Trust in God's Plan", "Peace Of God"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of allowing the peace of God to govern our hearts, explaining that this peace is derived from God and reflects His own tranquility. He outlines the conditions necessary for both God and Christians to experience peace, highlighting the importance of internal harmony, faith, and submission to God's will. Finney encourages believers to trust in God's wisdom and providence, asserting that true peace comes from faith in His perfect plan, even amidst life's uncertainties. He calls Christians to recognize their calling to enjoy this divine peace and to actively seek it in their lives. Ultimately, Finney illustrates that the peace of God can rule in our hearts when we align our desires with His will and trust in His goodness.

Transcript

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." --Col. 3:15

In speaking from this verse, I propose to show,

I. WHAT IS INTENDED BY "THE PEACE OF GOD."

II. WHAT WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND BY ITS "RULING IN THE HEART."

III. THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH GOD ENJOYS PEACE.

IV. THE CONDITIONS OF OUR ENJOYING A SIMILAR PEACE.

I. The peace, called in our text the "peace of God" is obviously so called for two reasons: (1.) Because it is the same in kind which God Himself enjoys; and (2.) Because He imparts it. It comes to the Christian from

God through the work of his Spirit on the heart. It is God's peace because it is like his in character, and from Him as to its origin.

II. Peace may be said to "rule in the heart," when it prevails over all disturbing influences; when it becomes stable, abiding and all-controlling. There are ever wont to be more or less causes in operation either external or internal to disturb our peace. Hence it can be said to "rule" in the heart only when it triumphs over all opposing influences, and abides, firmly established in the soul.

III. It is not improper for us to enquire reverently after the conditions under which God enjoys peace of mind. In the outset of our enquiry we have the fact that God is a moral agent, and in this respect is like ourselves. Or rather in this respect we are made in his image, and hence knowing ourselves, we learn the attributes requisite for moral agency, the laws of their action, and consequently the conditions under which a moral agent can enjoy peace of mind. Pursuing this course of enquiry in respect to God it is easy to see,

1. That his powers of mind must be at peace with each other. All within the depths of the infinite mind must be in harmony. For example, his will must be in entire agreement with his reason. He must evermore choose that which his reason affirms to wisest and best.

Again, his sensibility, must be in harmony with his reason. He must be in such a state of mind as not to feel either more or less intensely than reason dictates, and such moreover as not to have feelings other in kind than his reason affirms they should be. For obviously, if his sensibilities were not in harmony with his reason they would necessarily disturb the repose of his mind because they would disturb its harmonious action.

In the same manner, if his will were not in harmony with his reason and his conscience, the most terrific discord would supplant the peace of the divine mind.

It must be therefore that God has no desires that are unreasonable, or impossible, or wrong; for if He had, He could not be at peace with Himself. There would be a deep and fearful struggle within--the energies of his infinite mind reaching after something that could not be attained, or aspiring after objects which reason or conscience forbids.

Again, it is essential to his peace that God should desire nothing inconsistent with the highest good. If He has any desires whatever, inconsistent with the highest good, He has no right to gratify them; and hence a struggle within must ensue--a struggle, too, of a fearful and terrible character--one whose energy must utterly destroy the internal peace of his mind. Hence if God has peace, it must follow that He has no desires inconsistent with the highest good.

Again, it is an essential condition of the peace of God that He should have no selfish desires. For if He had any selfish desires whatever, his benevolent heart must utterly disapprove them, and hence a conflict must ensue, and God must be at once at war with Himself.

Again, the peace which God enjoys must be conditioned upon the fact that He is conscious of doing as well as He can in all cases and evermore. For if otherwise, then He must know it, and knowing it, He can not be happy. God can no more be happy than we can, while He is conscious of not doing the very best He can. It is essential to his peace of mind that He should be fully conscious of having done the very best He could during the whole eternity of his existence.

Again, his peace must be conditioned upon the fact that He is satisfied with Himself. For if He is not, He can not have internal peace.

Moreover, He must be satisfied on the whole with the results of all He has done or has purposed to do. He must have in his own mind the assurance that He shall secure the great end upon which his heart is set. He must see that He has chosen the best possible end, and the wisest means for attaining that end. Seeing as He does the end from the beginning,--his infinite mind sweeping in its vast survey all events and their causes and results, He must see that on the whole the system of his choice is the best possible, and that therefore nothing more or other remains to be desired. Viewed therefore as a whole, He must be satisfied both with the ends to be secured, with all the means, and with all the modes of using those means.

It should be considered that there are many things that result incidentally, and it may be, unavoidably, from the best possible system of means--things which may be in themselves most distressing. Such, for example, is all the sin that exists in our world. It exists, as I suppose, unavoidably, in a system of moral government. Under such a system agents must be left so free that they can sin if they choose to do so; hence there must of necessity be a liability to the evils of sin. God must have foreseen from the beginning that in the progress of his moral government over men a great many evils would spring up which in themselves would be very trying, and which if viewed apart from their relations and bearings, would greatly disturb his peace. Yet on the whole, taking into view all the results, He has no regrets, for He sees that this system, even with all its incidental evils, is yet the best possible.

Again, it is another condition of his peace that there shall be nothing in all the universe which is to Him a cause of regret. He must know nothing of those regrets to which we are exposed, for He sees every thing resulting as He foresaw it would. His mind, therefore, can rest peacefully in all this, just as He foresaw it would rest.

It is essential to the peaceful attitude of the divine mind that He should view all things in their relations and results as developed under his over-ruling providence and not separate and isolated from them, as our finite minds usually do, and often are compelled to. We often see only one link of a chain at a time, and hence we may not even dream that there is a chain; or if we do, we can not tell what points the extreme ends connect. We are quite incapable of seeing the end from the beginning even if we would--except by faith--except as we confide in the certainty of those ends which God has revealed as the result of his moral government.

In fine, God has purposed an end worthy of Himself--an end which He is certain of securing. Nothing can occur to surprise him--nothing that He will on the whole have cause to regret. He may indeed see many things in moral agents which in themselves are to be regretted; but He sees that He can restrain them within such limits as He judges most wise--can say to sin and pain--Hitherto mayest thou go, but no farther. Being able to oppose limits to the reign of sin, and also to over-rule all permitted evil to secure from it results of good, He has ample reason to be satisfied with the system as He has devised it. When therefore He sees it all spread out before Him as it were on a map, He finds nothing which disturbs the deep, eternal peace of his mind.

IV. The conditions of our enjoying a peace similar to that which God enjoys.

I have said that our peace is called the peace of God, because it is like his. We too are moral agents, and are therefore in this respect like Him. Hence the conditions of peace of mind must be substantially the

same in our case as in his.

1. It is essential that there should be internal harmony among the powers of our mind. Our sensibilities must be so subdued that all shall be in their proper place, and of the appropriate character. No one must be allowed to act in a manner inconsistent with reason. No one must be allowed to be unreasonably excessive in degree, or be misdirected as to its object. Reason and conscience must regulate the sensibility, for if the sensibility has no regulator, the mind can hope for no internal peace. Not let it be forgotten, that the divine will, if revealed, and so far as revealed, must be paramount law to us. Then our sweet and cheerful obedience to it will secure internal rest and peace.

2. Our peace is conditioned not only upon the fact that we are at peace with ourselves, with conscience, and with God's revealed will, but also, and especially, upon our having faith in the place which sight holds in the mind of God. God sees all things with infinitely clear and perfect vision, and therefore rests; let us believe in his wisdom and love with implicit faith, and therefore rest. He sees the end from the beginning, and of course fearing no change--secure against all vicissitudes, He rests in peace;--our faith should do for us what sight does for Him, and in it we too may rest. It is naturally impossible for any creature to walk by sight as God does, for the good reason that none can see as He does. Hence arises a natural necessity that faith supply in the case of all creatures what God enjoys in the omniscient grasp of his infinite mind.

Substantially the peace of all moral agents must depend upon the same conditions. But God knows by seeing; we must know by believing. If God were left in doubt as to the issues and results of things, He could not have peace of mind. Neither could we. God's mind is at rest as to the issues of all events, because He sees through all, and knows all issues with infallible certainty; we may have a similar peace, if we have such faith in his wisdom, love and power as will equally assure us of the best possible ultimate results.

Suppose you are leading a blind man. You say to him, Now we are ascending the plank walk--we are in the right way; you need not fear. In this case you walk along confidently and fearlessly because you can see. He can not see; but he can believe, and this may answer the same purpose. If he has faith he can move along with as much confidence, holding the hand of his trusty guide, as though he had sight itself.

God has thus put it in our power to have the same peace substantially that He has. He can not make us see as He sees. This would imply the gift of omniscience, an attribute which we do not need--an attribute which would be no blessing to us unless we had with it all other divine attributes--that is, unless we were ourselves to become the infinite God. It were vain therefore for us to wish for omniscience. But we may wisely pray for faith. Faith is the very thing we need to supply for us the place which omniscience supplies to the Deity. Let God possess all the attributes of divinity,--omniscience, omnipotence, boundless wisdom, infinite love; these attributes are all needed in the Godhead; let them exist there, and let the Infinite Mind repose in the exercise of these attributes, assured that all is infinitely well which He does, and that all will result well in the end. Thus He will have perfect peace. How can we have a similar peace? Obviously not by aspiring to have Jehovah's natural attributes, but by simple faith in Him. We do not need his attributes; they would not befit us; but we need faith; for faith befits us and our relations to God above us and to a dark and trying world around us. It is enough that one great Being should possess divine attributes; He has them; He will use them; and He has told us how he will use them. He assures us that He wields all his natural attributes in infinite love and wisdom. What could we ask more?

Since therefore his attributes create a certainty that all shall be well as He can make it, and since this certainly gives him a deep and unalloyed peace, it follows most clearly that faith on our part should give us the same certainty and the same sort of peace. If we believe that God has framed the best possible plan and will certainly execute it in the best possible way, we shall not feel anxious for the final result. Then let us have faith in his universal providence. Let us confide in the wisdom of all He does and of all He suffers to be done. It becomes us to acquiesce in all God does whether for its own sake, or as unavoidably incidental to his best possible system; whether occurring to us or to others; whether done so that we can understand its objects and end, or done in a manner inscrutable to our imperfect vision. It is easy for us to understand that in a universe of moral agents many things will result which can not be avoided without defeating the end. Hence we should acquiesce in the wisdom, love and resources of God. Suppose a man takes some great and important journey, for some worthy and remunerative end. He accomplishes his journey and happily secures the end he sought, but here are various incidental evils accruing. He has blistered his feet by walking, or has worn out his shoes, or he has missed his dinner once or twice on the road, or has caught a shower; but shall these light and incidental evils destroy his peace or make him regret his journey?

In like manner the incidental evils in the government of God should be patiently borne and the more so since they are not only light compared with the resulting value of the ends gained, but because infinite wisdom can over-rule even these for much important good.

It is essential to our peace that we should be sure that under God all things are working out the utmost good, possible to God, and indeed, great and infinite good, absolutely. Here before you is a blind man who lives happily with his son. But suppose he had no confidence in his son at all. He is afraid as he takes his hand on a Sabbath morning to come to the house of God, that his son will pitch him off the steps. He can not trust his wife or his daughter to prepare his food lest they should take advantage of his blindness and give him poison. How wretched he must be!

But if he has proper confidence, he may be as quiet as to these fears, and as placid, as the best eyes could make him. How natural that he should enjoy other people's eyes, and not only be happy that they can see, but also himself enjoy the advantages of their perfect vision. He can enjoy his breakfast as well as they do. Faith makes up in many respects the place of sight.

Suppose now that we have confidence that nothing can happen which shall disturb God in any wise, or shall frustrate his plans. Suppose God has assured us that He is working all things according to the counsel of his own will; shall we not confide in his management? True He apprises us that there are some things done by moral agents, which taken by themselves and considered as their voluntary acts, He utterly abhors, as for example, their sin; yet he assures us that He can over-rule it for so much good that on the whole its incidental evils in the system of a moral government do not disturb his deep, eternal peace. As in a machine there will be friction, and yet its action and results are excellent and no man need be troubled because of the incidental evil of its friction, so in the government of God. Suppose the man who invented steam engines had foreseen all their friction--every case of bursting boilers, and all their consequences, and withal, every instance in which they should be used for evil purposes; if he should foresee these evil results and nothing else, he might be deeply troubled; but if he sees also all the resulting and far-overbalancing good, he may set his mind at rest. Much more still might he repose in peace if he had resources enough to convert even the friction to some useful end;--if he could overrule every explosion of an engine to work out important good. How reasonable in this case that he should say--"All is well; I can make all things work together for good."

So deep and blessed is the calm, eternal repose of the Infinite Mind, despite of the presence of some sin in his moral universe. His eternal gaze pierces all that can occur, or ever shall, surveying all relations and bearings and all possible results. In view of all, his peace is unalloyed. Why? Because He understands all He is doing and all the possible results. But how can his peace become available to us? We must consider what He has told us; and what is this? That all things are wrought out according to the counsel of his own will. That whatsoever He has purposed, He will assuredly perform. That not one sparrow can fall to the ground without him. That we may confide in Him to govern all things with infinite wisdom and love. Then let us receive all He has said, and trust Him for all He is doing, and ever shall do.

But we are finite beings and are liable to get exceedingly bewildered and confounded if we lose our faith in God. You take a child into an engine room amid the noise, the crash, the dreadful displays of power, and he screams with fright; you must take him out or he will go into fits. So we are often troubled when we see a world in commotion, rocking with tempests, bleeding in war, filled with the groans occasioned by sin and by death. But why so? Does not God reign on high? Has He not told us what He is doing, and why He has framed a system of machinery to us apparently so vast and complicated, and so fraught with evil? Indeed He has told us enough for us to know. He has assured us that nothing can occur, without his intelligent and wise permission;--that He is working all things according to his own most wise and benevolent plans.

How broad and glorious is the ground laid for peace, if we will only sympathize with God and fully trust Him! What more could we possibly have?

Again, as a condition of peace we need a perfectly rectified sensibility. The fact is, that our sensibilities have been suffered so long to run riot, and have become so enormous and so unreasonable, it is impossible that we should be at peace till they are subdued. The satisfaction of perfect peace can be had in no other way.

Our will, also must be subdued till there shall be no lusting after unreasonable and forbidden objects. Its stubbornness must all give place to a deep and unresisting submission to God's will. Then our souls will be at peace.

REMARKS.

1. God says in this text that He has called us to enjoy this state of mind. Indeed, can this be so? Has called us to enjoy what? His own eternal blessedness. He calls us to come and drink at the same eternal fountain whence flow the streams of his exhaustless felicity. Spreading out before us the infinite calm and repose of his own mind, He cries--Ho! come, ye troubled and anxious ones;--come and partake of this blessed peace. Let it rule forevermore in your hearts.

2. If God has called us to this, it is of the utmost importance that we should understand our calling. What is this to which He has called us? To let the peace of God rule in our hearts. Then let us understand what this peace of God is, and on what conditions we can secure its permanent reign in our own hearts.

3. If we are not enjoying this peace now, it is high time we should enquire why we do not. If God has called us to it, and we have not come, why have we not? Is it because we do not choose to fall in with the natural and necessary conditions? The very fact that God leaves it with our choice may occasion our loss of it. It puts it in our power to lose the blessing if we will.

If you can not be satisfied with what God must do, you can not be satisfied at all. God has no right to satisfy you and you have no reason to expect that He will. If you are so unreasonable as to be unwilling God should pursue his own ends by his own means, He will leave you to take care of your own peace. He will by no means turn aside from his plan for your sake. He will not make himself unhappy because you can not be persuaded to believe in Him, to confide in his wisdom and love, and submit yourself to his will. It would indeed please Him to make you happy; but if you will not be happy in Him, you must go your own way and provide for your own miserable happiness according to your own foolish wisdom.

4. Our peace can not be perfect unless we ourselves are perfect.

5. To have unbroken peace, we must be physically perfect in this sense, namely, that our sensibility must be subdued so as not to be thinking and craving after impossible things, for obviously, so long as this is our physical state, it is vain for us to hope for uninterrupted peace.

6. We can see in this subject what constitutes the peace of saints on their death-bed. How often standing by the bedside of dying saints, have I philosophized on their case as I have marked their perfect peace of mind and have asked them questions to draw [out]o their real feelings and views. I know not how often my former wife said to me on her death-bed, "My peace is perfect." She said this too with an emphasis very unusual--an emphasis which showed me that she meant all her words implied. This led me to look at the question,--What can be the elements of this peace?

It is plain that this peace is of no ordinary character. No desire remains unsatisfied. There is no anxiety to live and no fear to die. No passions or appetites remain to lust and crave and disquiet the mind. The soul has no unbelief; its faith is perfect. It rests in God with inexpressible composure and satisfaction. Grasping his universal providence, the mind is satisfied that God will evermore do all things well. Suppose the dying saint has children to leave behind. They are left confidingly with God, in the most perfect confidence that He will take care of them and of all their interests. There remains in the mind no anxiety about the great object of the conversion of the world. This too is felt reposing on the everlasting promises, and the soul feels happy to rest the case with God.

How wonderfully deep this peace often becomes on the dying bed of God's people! It seems as if nothing could disturb it. It beams forth from their eye; it rests in placid repose on every feature; their very pulse testifies that not an anxious thought intrudes. How wonderful and how calm! Said Dr. Burritt, a pious physician, to Dr. Robbins, an infidel student of his--"I am dying; please come and feel my pulse." The young man took his hand. Dr. Burritt said, "Can you die like that? You see all is calm and peaceful--not one troubled thought or fear ruffles my mind or my body. Could you die so? When you shall come to die I hope you may have pulse as calm as that."

The scene affected the young doctor greatly, and became the means of his conversion. He saw that the gospel was doing for a dying saint what his infidelity could never do for him. He knew very well by the pulse of the dying Christian that there was not one agitated thought in his mind. He could not but see that the peace of God ruled in his heart, and spread its soothing influence over every object that could reach the mind.

7. With this subject before us we can understand the secret of the peace of heaven. There the mind is subdued into unalloyed and perfect peace--a peace which rules in the heart forever. Faith in God supplies the place of omniscience, so that though they can not know all, they can trust all in the hands of Him who does. Let come what will, therefore their peace remains undisturbed, for they believe implicitly in God, and

they know that his hand is in every event that does or possibly can occur.

Suppose a mother has gone to heaven, and she does not know that her children are yet converted, or will be. But this does not disturb her perfect peace. Why can that Christian look at death approaching and not so much as wink or twinge a particle? She fears not death's bony arm; dreads not his posed and quivering dart; sees her children around her and yet is calm and undisturbed. Her calmness is not the stupor of mental imbecility, for she manifests a most wakeful concern in all that passes. Her mind was never more active and full of interest than it now is. Draw near and ask her the state of her mind. Hold your ear close down to her parched and stiffened lips, for she can scarcely articulate a word. Catch her gentle whisper--"peace, peace" she says, "all is perfect peace." But your children; how is it with them? Are they converted? She replies, "I have left them all with God. He has the care of my children."

Now if you can tell me the secret of the peace of the death-bed, I will tell you the secret of the peace of heaven. Or if you can tell me the secret of the peace of heaven, I can tell you the secret of the peace of the saint's dying bed. Or if you can tell me either, I can tell you the secret of all spiritual peace.

8. To those of us who have lost near and dear friends, these thoughts must be peculiarly precious. We have seen them peaceful and calm, their minds smooth as the unruffled lake--their faith perfect and universal--their will sunk into the will of God, and the whole mind chastened and purified. O how such a mind looks out upon the foaming ocean of events! It sees the air filled with spray, hears the thunder of the roaring billows; it sees in the distance the fearful storm, but looks out calmly from the little cleft of the rock, securely, as if there never was a storm or a billow and never could be. Not so much as the wing of the storm can touch him--not a ripple of a wave can reach him. His soul has peace in God.

9. Many do not realize the conditions of peace of mind. They may have heard of them by the hearing of the ear, but no just impression of what they are has been made upon their minds.

10. The absence of peace of mind in any one Christian is often a great stumbling-block to others. When parents fail of possessing it, their state is often a great stumbling-block to their children. And yet they are not aware of the evil influence of their uneasy temper. In fact some seem to make a virtue of being eternally uneasy. They seem to think it becomes them to be anxious and troubled about many things. Mother, you may do more good in one single day by letting the peace of God rule in your heart, than by every thing else you can do. Ah yes; let your children see your brow placid and calm; then they will see one thing in your religion attractive and not repulsive. But you may go on, bustling and fretting and talking of the wickedness of your children from morning till night, and you will only ruin them. Such influences have no natural tendency to save them. So long as your brow wears upon it storms and not sunshine, you can not hope to win your children to embrace the gospel you profess.

11. Many seem to have so many wishes, they are likely to be damned unless God takes some strong measures with them to break up their uneasy and lusting spirit. This having an everlasting craving is entirely aside from the order of God. These lustings and cravings must be all put away, and you must learn to settle down into your own niche and be satisfied in all respects with what God does. But you cry out, "O I must have this thing, or I must have that!" You must learn to be satisfied with what God gives you and be quiet. No longer insult God by assuming that He is making mistakes in his disposal of your affairs.

12. The peace of God will rule in us in proportion to the strength of our confidence in God. It requires strong faith to see God in every thing, to believe that under his hand all things are working together for good--to know and realize that all events are pushed forward with one divine, eternal energy, and so

controlled by infinite wisdom that all the wickedness of moral agents is made to work out moral good. To believe all this and live daily in the full and quiet assurance of it is no small thing.

Why does not God make himself uneasy with the trouble and mischiefs of this crazy world? He rests in his own eternal knowledge and power. The Christian says--"Ah me, I don't know what is before me." But I do, says God to him--I know all most perfectly. But says the Christian, "I can not see anything how these matters will turn out." I can, says the Omniscient One, and you need not be anxious. Faith therefore--faith in God is the great remedy for all this disturbance of mind. "Said I not unto thee, said Christ, that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?" Then why, O Christian, wilt thou fret thyself down to the depths of hell!

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