A PEACE THAT HOLDS TOGETHER

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE

PHILIPPIANS

WHEN CHRIST SHAPES OUR RELATIONSHIPS, OUR EMOTIONS, AND OUR MINDS, THE GOD OF PEACE HOLDS HIS PEOPLE TOGETHER.

HERE'S THE TENSION:

WE WANT PEACE FROM GOD, BUT WE OFTEN RESIST THE PRACTICES THAT MAKE PEACE POSSIBLE.

So the question becomes:

How do God's people actually live as a community marked by peace in a fractured world?

"We are to be a community of love, not because we agree about everything, but because we belong to Christ."

~ John Stott

1. Peace Begins With _____ Relationships.

Philippians 4:1-3 NLT

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work.

Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they

worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

Notes:

Christian unity matters more than personal vindication.

2. Peace Grows Through _____ - _____ Living.

Philippians 4:4-7 NLT

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Notes:

Peace isn't found by controlling life—

it's found by entrusting life to God.

3. Peace Is Sustained by a _____ Mind.

Philippians 4:8-9 NLT

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Notes:

What fills your mind eventually shapes your life.

Personal Application

So, let's get specific:

- Is there a relationship where pride, silence, or resentment has replaced unity?
- Are anxiety and worry shaping your reactions more than prayer?

- What patterns of thought are quietly robbing you of peace?

Ask yourself:

- What would change this week if I chose unity, prayer, and intentional thinking—on purpose?

Peace doesn't drift into our lives.

It's practiced.

A Shared Commitment

Imagine a church where:

- Conflict is addressed with humility
- Anxiety is met with prayer
- Minds are shaped by what honors Christ

That kind of church becomes a living testimony to the gospel.

Life Group Discussion

1. Get to Know You

When your mind feels overloaded or life feels stressful, what's your go-to "reset"? For example: going for a drive, scrolling your phone, working out, cleaning, binge-watching a show, getting outside, or grabbing comfort food.

Why do you think that activity helps you feel more settled (even if just for a moment)?

2. Digging Deeper

Paul addresses relational conflict (Philippians 4:1–3), emotional anxiety (4:4–7), and mental focus (4:8–9) as deeply spiritual matters.

- How does Paul's call for reconciliation between Euodia and Syntyche challenge how we often handle conflict in the church?

- Why is it significant that Paul connects peace to *prayerful dependence* rather than problem-free circumstances (Philippians 4:6–7)?

- How do Paul's instructions about our thought life (Philippians 4:8–9) connect with passages like Romans 12:1–2 or Colossians 3:1–3 in shaping a transformed mind?

3. Living It Out

Paul teaches that peace grows through reconciliation, prayer, and intentional thinking.

Is there one relationship you may need to move toward with humility, one anxiety you need to bring honestly to God, or one pattern of thinking you need to intentionally replace with what is true and honorable?

Expanded Notes:

Book of Life

The mundane task of bookkeeping in the ancient Near East often found a parallel in the divine realm. The idea of divine scribal activity appears several times throughout both the **OT** and **NT** and is frequently mentioned in pseudepigraphal writings (cf. Exod. 32:32–33; Ps. 139:16; Isa. 65:6; Mal. 3:16; Jub. 30:19–23; 1 En. 47:3; Rev. 13:8). The Book of Life appears to be a heavenly book in which the names of the righteous are inscribed. The psalmist prays that his adversaries be blotted out of the book of life and that they not be written with the names of the righteous (Ps. 69:28 [MT 29]; cf. Rev. 3:5; 21:27).

In addition to the Book of Life, other books appear in the literature. A book of destruction corresponds to the book of life (cf. 1 En. 81:1–4; Jub. 30:22; T. Levi 5:4), and other books record the deeds or events of life. These seem to be the basis for the last judgment, where "the court sat in judgment and the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10) and "the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:12). Similar usages are found also in the pseudepigraphal and apocryphal writings (cf. 2 Esdr. 6:20; 2 Apoc. Bar. 24:1; Asc. Isa. 9:22; 1 Clem. 45:8).[1]

Peace

The Hebrew term for peace *(šālôm)* is derived from the verb "to complete, make sound." This verb is often used to express the finish of major buildings (e.g., the temple, 1 Kgs. 7:51 = 2 Chr. 5:1; or walls of Jerusalem, Neh. 6:15). The term is used in

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[1] W. Dennis Jr. Tucker, "Book of Life," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 195–196.

the sense of restoration in Lev. 6:5ff. (MT 5:24ff.) or repaying debts in Jer. 16:18; Lev. 24:18–21. The noun has an even broader use. As a greeting, the root *šlm* is used to inquire of the welfare of individuals or groups (Gen. 29:6; 43:27; Exod. 18:7; 1 Sam. 17:18; cf. Ezek. 13:16, "visions of peace"; similarly Isa. 38:17). There is further the sense of *šālôm* as state of being, as in contentment or tranquility. Isa. 32:17 draws a parallel between "peace" and "quietness and trust forever" as the results of righteousness. The idea of peacefulness at death is a common theme (Gen. 15:15; 1 Kgs. 2:6). The sense of friendship, or even a contractually arranged "friendship" (implied in "covenants of peace," Num. 25:12), can also be noted (Isa. 54:10; Ps. 28:3; Prov. 12:20). Justice is frequently combined with "peace" (Isa. 32:16–17, cf. Jas. 3:18).

In the Bible "peace" is quintessentially the absence of war. Judg. 4:17; 1 Sam. 7:14; 1 Kgs. 5:12(26) imply treaty relations as times of peace as opposed to warfare. Times of *šālôm* are contrasted with war in 1 Kgs. 2:5–6; Josh. 9:15. The term is also used of a desired state of permanent *šālôm* (cf. Lev. 26:6, where peace is a part of tranquility, absence of war and enemies). In the prophets (esp. later prophets, Deutero-Isaiah, Zechariah) peace becomes an ethical standard and characteristic of the messianic age (cf. Mic. 5:4–5 [3–4]). In Isa. 2:2–4; 9:2–7, and profoundly in 19:24–25 these postexilic insertions contain themes of peace that are interwoven with the theme of destruction of weapons and reconciliation of former enemies (cf. Zech. 9:9–10; Jonah). Although there is often debate as to whether some forms of "peace" result from God's annihilation of enemies (an Israelite version of Pax Romana), this is not universally the case in all texts that deal with release from enemies. Indeed, not only are Israel's own weapons included in an envisioned destruction (Isa. 2), enemies are as often converted rather than annihilated (Jonah; Isa. 19:24–25).

NT use of forms of Gk. *eirḗnē*, as well as in the intertestamental literature (cf. Tob. 7:11–12; 10:12), is only somewhat more limited in its range of meaning than *šālôm*. The typical use of "peace" is a reference to a personal state of being (1 Tim. 2:2), thus equivalent to the use of "well-being" or "welfare." An individual can be told to "Go in peace" (e.g., Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; 8:48; Acts 16:36) or to "be at peace" (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). Paul frequently enjoins "peace" in opening greetings (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2). "Peace" can also refer to an attribute of a relationship with God (Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1; 8:6; 15:13; Phil. 4:7; cf. Eph. 6:15). The Greek terms also include the absence of, or contrast with, war and interpersonal violence (Matt. 5:9; Luke 14:32; Rom. 12:18; Jas. 3:18). If the proclamation of "peace" in early Christian preaching is taken, on occasion, to refer to the messianic age of peacefulness as opposed to present realities of warfare and suffering, then the connection to Hebraic notions of peace as "absence of war" is even clearer (Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:15; Col. 3:15). Thus, the somewhat limited meaning of the Greek terms should not suggest that the late Hebrew notion of nonviolence is absent from NT

ethical discourse. NT conceptions must also take into consideration the entire ethical context of peacefulness and peacemaking in the teachings of Jesus and the practice of the early Church. For this reason, any discussion of peace that is exclusively based on a lexical analysis, particularly in the NT, is inadequate to a full appreciation of either the biblical concept or the ethic of peace.

Whether resulting from the impossibility of a Hebrew military presence in the sociopolitical circumstance of subordination under the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenistic rulers, or whether to be attributed to the increasingly ironic visions of the messianic age, late biblical teaching tends toward the praise of a wise restraint (Sir. 41:14; 44:6) and nonviolent piety (Daniel, esp. 11:33–34, against the Maccabean uprising; Joseph in Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs; Taxo in T. Moses 9, cf. antiwar ethos in classical Greek sources) in studied contrast to the period of the Monarchy. Early Christianity thus combines the Davidic royal themes with the equally messianic expectations of an age of peace where swords are made into plowshares. The resulting image in Matthew and Luke, particularly, is a "militant nonviolent" Messiah— both Davidic and unarmed, and thus consistent with Jesus' teaching to "love enemies" (Matt. 5:44) and "put away swords" (26:52). This ironic combination results further in Pauline imagery of "weapons" of the spirit, where the "war" is "not against blood and flesh" (Eph. 6:10–17; drawing on Isa. 59:17; cf. spiritual battle in Rev. 19, etc.). The apocalyptic context of early Christian nonviolence is unmistakable, and clearly relates to themes such as the angelic battles in Dan. 7–12 and at Qumran. Prohibitions against even killing in the military are widely documented in the first three centuries of Christianity, and these prohibitions also draw from this Hebraic and early Christian interpretive tradition. Such Hebraic traditions of peacefulness and nonviolence are also discernible in early rabbinic teaching as well, most notably in the teachings of the 1st-century c.e. rabbinic teacher Yohanan ben Zakkai.

Bibliography. S. S. Schwarzschild, "Shalom," in *The Challenge of Shalom*, ed. M. Polner and N. Goodman (Philadelphia, 1994), 16–25; J. H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 1994).[2]

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[2] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Peace," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1021–1022.