

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 (end of the letter)

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

When I was a kid, that song “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart”, it was one of my favourites. And the fun of that song, was being able to sing it without getting tongue-tied...

And there were a couple of verses there, that I would sing with ‘gusto’, but I had no idea what they meant...

- *“For there is therefore now no condemnation down in my heart...”*

How could a 6-year-old possibly understand that???

- *“I’ve got the peace that passes understanding down in my heart.”*

I didn’t know what that meant either...

Today’s Bible reading, is pretty-much a benediction in the form of a prayer of blessing, and a signing-off of the letter. And he does sign-off in his own handwriting, the same as we would sign the bottom of a letter today.

And I'm going to take the opportunity today, to focus on "*the peace that passes understanding down in my heart*"...

Peace. It's something we long for; It's something we crave, but do we really know what it is? Or is it just fashionable to put yourself out there as a 'peace-lover'...

A movie I found quite funny, was Sandra Bullock (playing an under-cover FBI agent) in "Miss Congeniality" ... Where she enters this congeniality contest, and in one scene:

contestant; after contestant; after contestant, answer a question with "World peace" ...

And then they ask Sandra Bullock (who is playing an undercover FBI agent) the question:

- *"What is the one most important thing our society needs?"*
- *"That would be harsher punishment for parole violators, Stan."*

and everybody just looks "Huh" ...

- *...there's a pregnant pause ...*
- *"And, World peace" ...*

And everybody cheers ...

Peace.

Can you imagine, how the people in the Ukraine would be feeling at the moment. As I wrote this on Tuesday morning, the last European diplomat to leave Mariupol (Greek), said that "*Mariupol will become part of a list of*

cities, that were completely destroyed by war”ⁱ. And it was well on its way by that stage... By Wednesday morning, 90% of all buildings had been destroyed by artillery and bombing in that city. Can you imagine, the untold death-toll...

Ordinary citizens, living an ordinary life, and Vladimir Putin, the leader of a totalitarian regime next-door, an evil man craving conquest, brings one of the world’s largest militaries to bare, on your home...

Peace blasted with indiscriminate ordinance... Peace shattered/gone... How would you feel??? It makes the fears and anxieties that pervade **our** culture/lives, seem all very **petty**...

V¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

Peace. What is peace? As I searched the Scriptures on “Peace”, I found that most of what the Scriptures have to say about “Peace”, isn’t really what most of **us** want to concentrate on.

And to follow along here, we’re going to have to understand the difference between these 2 ideas of peace:

There’s Peace that we ‘feel’ (inner-calm), and there’s peace that actually ‘is’... So, one is merely a feeling, and the other is **existential** (which means it actually exists).

You see, a person can ‘feel’ peace, when peace doesn’t really exist. And likewise, a person may feel ‘no peace’, and be terribly anxious, even when peace **does** exist...

Something I’ve had to learn, in my journey as a Christian, is:

- “Feelings are often wrong”...
- “Feelings can be very mis-leading/deceitful”.
The Lord said (through the prophet Jeremiah)
Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately sick;
who can understand it?

- “Feelings are often (very often) the cravings of the flesh, that we dress up to look more ‘spiritual’...

Biblical peace, is existential; it actually exists; it’s real...

BTW, when I use that word “existential”. Please don’t confuse it with the philosophical idea of “existentialism” – 2 very different things. The word that I’m using is simply an adjective – it describes something that really exists, and the other is often a rather godless philosophical framework...

Alright, so: Biblical peace, is existential; it actually exists; it’s real...

Sometimes the Scriptures reveal to us a peace in the present – it’s **here now**... Sometimes the peace we read about, is a future peace; the eternal peace – peace that **we will**

experience in the Glory of Jesus Christ when He returns, in His eternal glorious kingdom...

Now, “World peace” may be the dream of every pageant queen, but **true** world peace, will not be, until all the evil rulers of the world, bent on conquest, are permanently assigned to the fires of Hell. World peace will not be, until the Lord Jesus, our righteous judge, makes His judgment on the whole world, and rewards those who eagerly await His coming, and sends to destruction, those who have rejected the Prince of Peace...

That’s when true world peace will come.

So, what peace, is Paul praying for, for this Thessalonian church? And what peace would he pray for us?

He’s requesting that we have **peace at all times in every way**

- that there would not be a time, where we **don’t** have peace.
- That there would not be a circumstance, where we **do not** have peace
- That no matter what happens in life, (and remember, this is a suffering and persecuted church he’s writing to), That no matter what happens in life, that we would continue always to have a very real, existing peace....

Even if you don’t feel at peace,,, are you with me???

How can we have “real peace”? Why does this peace exist? It’s because of the presence of The Lord... The peace we have, isn’t based on ‘wishful thinking’... It is based on the hope we have in our Lord, and His presence with us... And that no matter what we go through in life, The Lord is **with** us.

... may the Lord of peace himself give you peace [How can Jesus do that?] How can He give us **peace at all times in every way** ?

The Lord be with you all.

BTW, throughout the letter, it’s become obvious that some of ‘the brothers’ in Thessalonica needed a bit of correction... Now, because they were in need of correction, did that mean that God wasn’t with them??? Not at all... **The Lord be with you all.**

Our Lord will never forsake those whose trust is in Him...
And so peace, whether you feel it or not, it **exists**. It’s **real**...

The only thing that destroys peace between us and God, is deliberate, unrepentant sin... And in our Lord Jesus Christ, we repent of sin, and by His grace, we are forgiven of sin. The very last verse of this letter says: ¹⁸ **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.**

Not only is the Lord Jesus Christ with us – His **grace** is with us. As we repent of sin, and confess our sin, He forgives us... And so, in Him (by His grace) we have peace, whether you feel it or not...

The feeling bit – feeling peace, comes by **faith**... When you truly **believe** (that's what faith is) that The Lord is with You, and you know this, because He is **Your** Lord... That's when we feel the peace – experience the peace that certainly already exists.

Romans (ESV) **5**: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

[but then he goes on to say]

³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Even in sufferings, we **have** "Peace". Why? Because we have been justified by faith.

Jesus said: John 16:33 (ESV) ³³ **I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."**

Even in tribulation, we **have** “Peace” because we are in Christ Jesus.

What about if I don't feel peace? Well, my feelings are wrong.

Feelings can be wrong both ways...

In Isaiah, God said, “There is no peace for the wickedⁱⁱ” but they felt peace...

In Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Israel had sinned greatly against God – they'd forsaken God and turned to idols and false gods, and God's prophets were saying, “The time of destruction is coming – that God would send 2 world super-powers (Assyria & Babylon), to utterly destroy Judah and Israel”... But the false prophets had visions of peace: Peace, Peace, but there was no peace...

And the people of Israel and Judah felt peace and security – after all, “We're the people of God, aren't we? – We live in the promised land, don't we? We'll be right!”... Their feelings were wrong.

Think of the unsaved today, they have no fear of God, and yet, they are at peace within themselves. “If there is a God, I'll be right. I'm a good bloke.” not realising (of course) that the rejection of God is the worst possible sin, and thus they are enemies of God... They feel “peace”, but their feelings are wrong...

And sometimes **disciples of Jesus** feel no peace. This happens when we set our minds on things of the flesh. It's when we care for the things of this world: health; wealth; long life... It's when we care more for this life, than the new life He's saved us to...

If as a Christian, I don't feel peace – that's a faith problem...

Anxiety – People of the world have every reason to suffer anxiety. But when a disciple of Jesus feels anxious, that indicates a faith problem. Either my concern is too great for the things of this world, or I don't really trust that God holds me in the palm of His hand.

Romans 8:5 (ESV) ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

And so, if I don't "feel" peace, it's either a faith problem (I'm not trusting God), or my heart's concerns are for things of the flesh...

....

Within the Christian church, there is a very common, unbiblical mis-understanding of peace. I'm sure you'll be familiar with it. And it's not about 'existential' peace, it's about 'feeling' peace.

And it goes like this:

A person may be facing a decision. It **could** be a decision that's being forced upon them, or more often, a person may be seeking 'a change', to help them fulfil their life hopes and dreams.

And so, they look at their options, and they set their heart on a particular option. They may pray about it before they choose that option, or they may pray about it after they've selected their preferred option...

And the prayer is seeking God's stamp of approval, God, is this Your will for my life?; or "What is Your will for my life?"...

- And it all seems 'good' to me,
- and I feel good about it,
- I'm not anxious about it (inner-calm)...

And then we say those magic spiritual-sounding words, "I prayed about it, and I have a peace about it, therefore I believe it is God's will."...

We've all heard this, haven't we? Most of us have probably said it (I have). We've definitely all heard another Christian say it at some point...

I've prayed about it. I have a peace about it. Therefore, I believe it is God's will.

That is very much the practice of many Christians today. What do we base it on??? Let me put up on the screen there, a few examples of this method of determining God's will. These are the examples of Godly men and women (in the Scriptures), who have felt a peace, and therefore knew that what they were praying about, was God's will...

For those listening to the recording, the screen is blankⁱⁱⁱ...

In fact, in the Scriptures, the will of God may leave us feeling very reluctant and very anxious about things.

Think of when The Lord revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush... I'm going to send you to Egypt... Did Moses have a real peace about this??? NO!!! Not for me. Send someone else...

But God answered all his questions until Moses finally did feel at peace about it, didn't He... NO!!!. He just obeyed and went there (that's what faith is). But even so, after he'd seen Pharoah, things got worse for the Israelites:

Exodus 5:22 (ESV) 22 Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?"

Did Moses have a peace about it??? No... He followed God's command, in faith.

What about the perfect example? Jesus... Surely Jesus had a peace about it, to know it was God's will... You think????

Let Jesus take us to the Garden of Gethsemane.

He said to His disciples, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death."

And He prayed, Abba Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from me....^{iv}

And Luke tells us being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

And of course, despite his angst and inner lack of feelings of peace, He said, Not as I will, but as You will... My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done."

Was it "feeling a peace about it" that confirmed for Jesus, His path to the cross... No. It wasn't a feeling of peace. It was an existential peace – He already had peace... In fact, He is the Prince of Peace... Now if the Prince of Peace didn't equate with feelings of "Oh yes, I feel good about this (inner-calm) – I feel a peace about this"... Why do we spiritualise **our** feelings of "inner-calm" as being a peace from God????

You see, for both Moses and Jesus, knowing the will of God wasn't about trying alternatives until they felt comfort instead of sorrow or feeling an "inner-calm" instead of anxiety. Jesus continued to feel sorrow. Their decision making, was based on the Word of God, not on some abstract feeling, because feelings are deceitful...

As I look back over my life, the only times when I have made major life decisions based on some kind of perceived feeling of peace, those decisions have been wrong...

In hindsight, what it was, was me, having a fleshly desire for a new direction, or a different type of satisfaction in life (worldly satisfaction),,, and I prayed about it, I felt an inner-calm,,, and then I was arrogant enough to come to the conclusion, "I'm such a spiritual person, if I feel a peace about this thing that appeals to me (even after I've prayed about it), this must be a peace from God..."

Now of course, I did not think that at the time... At the time I felt very spiritually satisfied...

But now as I look back, it was the cravings of the flesh, and the inner-calm, was contentment of the flesh, and there I was, trying to 'spiritualise' my fleshly decision.

And as I look back over my life, the most spiritual, **Godly** decisions I've made, didn't leave me feeling easy/inner-calm. I had to step out against things that I wanted to do. But despite anxiety, and no **feelings** of peace, in faith, I've

followed the calling of God, and over the years, God has confirmed “that was the right call”.

In the Scriptures, “peace” is about “external relationships”, rather than about “inner feelings/calm”. Peace can be:

- the absence of war;
- about harmonious relationships within the church;
- living, free of the judgment of God;
- relationship with God

And this is where Peace begins. Real peace – not a fleeting deceitful feeling – but real, existing peace, begins at the cross.

Our last series was Colossians. And in the 1st chapter of Colossians, Paul says of our Lord Jesus Christ: **Colossians 1:19–20 (ESV)** ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

We may at times feel peace, but true peace is non-existent, **except by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ**, who died on the cross, to reconcile us to Himself... V 18 says: ¹⁸ **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be the source of our true existing peace... And let’s not be distracted by feelings that can be so deceitful.

Let's pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, Prince of Peace,
we praise You, that You gave Yourself on the cross.
By Your blood, You reconciled us to Yourself.
Our hearts are filled with thanks and joy.

Give us Faith Lord,
That we would not base our lives
on deceitful feelings,
driven by cravings of the flesh.
But that we would know You;
That our ears would be open to Your Word;
And that we could empty ourselves of all cravings of the
flesh,
that lead us to many sorrows...

Lord, we pray for real peace.
The peace that we receive by Your grace.
May this be enough for us Lord,
That no matter what trouble arises in our lives,
that we would be free;
that we would have peace,
because we are in Your hands.

Lord, we pray for the citizens of Ukraine.
May they find their peace in You.

And Lord, we pray for world peace.
We pray for Your eternal peace to come.
Come Lord Jesus;
Come as judge;
Come as saviour;

Lord, don't delay;
Prince of Peace, come.
Amen.

ⁱ <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/world/russiaukraine-war-live-updates-eight-killed-as-russia-bombs-shopping-centre/live-coverage/238ad9043cff08e9ffd6333b1244f69c>

ⁱⁱ Isaiah 57:21 (ESV)

²¹ There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

ⁱⁱⁱ Colossians 3:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

doesn't relate to making decisions based on feeling peace, but letting the peace of Christ rule us – our peace in every circumstance means it isn't dependent on feelings.

^{iv} Mark 14:36