

4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,

*"Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles,
And I will sing to Your name."*

10 Again he says,

"Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people."

11 And again,

*"Praise the Lord all you Gentiles,
And let all the peoples praise Him."*

12 Again Isaiah says,

*"There shall come the root of Jesse,
And He who arises to rule over the Gentiles,
In Him shall the Gentiles hope."*

13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

World Peace

It's the most wonderful time of the year. Advent is a time of hope, joy, and peace. We look forward to Christmas, the time of year when we set aside our differences and celebrate, hope, joy, and peace. At least I thought it was the most wonderful time of the year. But over the years Thanksgiving has grown on me and Christmas has been in decline. That's because as a child Christmas' worth was based on what was under the tree. If I got what I wanted Christmas was the most wonderful time but as I grew up Christmas became more complicated and that world peace, and setting aside differences seems more like sentimental optimism rather than reality.

Just when I'm getting sick of hearing calls for peace, joy, and happiness, Paul chimes in and sounds like he's answering the final question for the Miss America Pageant. He provides a politically correct answer, "World peace." Not just peace but also unity and acceptance as well. It's a politically correct answer because no one is against world peace. It's something everyone wants and it's vague enough that anyone can rally

behind. Peace is what we all want and yet in such a chaotic world seems impossible to achieve.

Paul speaks of a peace that isn't just any peace but true peace, a real peace, a peace that comes about not in the removal of people from life but the addition of people walking together in harmony with one another and God. Is such peace possible? Paul says, "You have such peace."

The Romans must have thought that was wishful thinking. Can you imagine the elitist Jews getting along with the unclean Gentiles? That's not an easy thing for those who were accustomed to the Kosher laws. What the Gentiles ate was revolting. They were uncircumcised dogs, outside of God's people, foreigners and aliens to his promise. The early Christian church wasn't a harmonious group there was infighting. Some acted as members of an elitist country club open only to those who followed all their traditions.

There was no peace moreover there were many problems including life among those hostile to Christianity. There was no peace unless you were speaking of isolation and Christians separating themselves. Paul writes, *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up (Romans 15:2-3)* This isn't a matter of removing people or problems in order to find peace but rather adding to them through service to others and looking out for their good.

Peace is found in addition. *"Have the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.* That's complete unity and peace not by the subtraction of the people from the equation but by the addition of Christ for you. Find peace through the proper means because any other peace isn't true peace but rather isolation or ignorance. That doesn't sound much like peace.

Peace by adding people that are problems? That sounds like wishful thinking. We may be able to imagine a world without war but true peace is hard to imagine. We dream of peace among nations but we are far from united even as a country. Division is greater now than it ever has been as a result of the election, BLM - This generation, that generation (just think of how often the newest generation is criticized). If we are united it's only because many have chosen the lowest common denominator to unite around and pretend we all believe what I believe so long as we call the divine being, "God."

The reality is that we don't have peace with our neighbors, let alone those within our family or church. People fight over tea-cups, coffee mugs, color of carpet, what instruments should or shouldn't be used and many other minor misunderstandings. There are people who pervert God's word and persecute those who are faithful to it. Meanwhile, the popular thought of today is to remove toxic people from your life. Unfriend those who disagree with you and find inner peace or at least make peace with myself.

That inner peace is the happy little humanist who just wants to be left alone so we can find peace and quiet. But that peace only removes the problems from life that we control. It does nothing for those problems out of our control such as sickness and death. We can ignore our problems and pretend we have peace through isolation or ignorance. But that is not real peace. I have never known anyone to be at war with themselves. Instead it ignores our neighbor and our God who has rescued us from our selfish ways and warns, *"The ax is already at the root of the tree."* Repent.

Peace is possible through the Word of God. Through the Word the Holy Spirit works in us the desire and ability as well as the forgiveness for when we fail. People from every language, tribe, nation, and background can find peace in Christ alone. While we always describe peace as the absence of something; lack of war, fighting, conflict, pain, or noise, Paul adds to the definition. He has the Hebrew version of peace: shalom which is full of fulfillment and completeness. He doesn't see peace as the lack of anything but the addition of unity. Being united with God and one another. Go back to the scriptures which were written for our instruction so that we might have hope.

Paul reminds them, those who think they are an elite group to remember what Jesus did for them. Paul describes both Jew and Gentile as enemies of God, openly hostile to him and at war with him. Those toxic people that should have been cut off from God are the ones he served. Jesus placed himself under the law. He humbled himself to the point of death for his people. Paul reminds them, *"For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers,"* Jesus came for those who think they are above others. He also came for those outside of God's people.

The OT was written so that Jews might see this. Paul quotes from the Psalms, from Moses, and even Isaiah to show that Jesus had come not only for the Jews but for all people - Gentiles included. And Paul gave them hope. *Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praise to him, all you people."* and again, *"The root of Jesse will spring up, one*

who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." That was always God's plan. God always had the Gentiles in mind and they too are equal partners in the body of Christ. Paul finds a reason for hope in the way he sees God working through his own ministry bringing Jews and Gentiles together. God keeps his promises made in scripture.

Though the church was changing rapidly they were still united in Christ. The Root of Jesse sprung up and rules over the nations. The branch of Jesse bears fruit and brings peace. He unites a multitude of different people and they find peace knowing their sins are forgiven, salvation is secured, and work for the well being of their brothers and sisters.

The church is still changing. It's not a bad thing either. More are included in God's family. Just look how different we are. We are a gathering of people with different backgrounds, degrees, ages. We will disagree over how to get things done and what to do. We'll get angry because something has changed and it's not what we expect. The one thing we should expect is that we'll have different ideas.

Yet gathering around God's word we find peace in him. We don't have to fear the ax that is at the root of the tree because it fell on Jesus and we are part of a new branch. Jesus didn't cut the toxic people from his life rather he welcomed them, provided for them and clothed them with his righteousness. God doesn't leave you to your self-centered pride - sends a savior who endures insults, suffering, death to save you. He gives us confidence in the goodness of God even in the midst of tragedy. That's the peace of mind that God gives us in his word.

That fills us with peace and that peace flows to others. When we remember that Jesus accepted us when we were unacceptable and became a servant to save us. Next time if God can put up with my lack of unity. If he can forgive my sins. Then I can accept others. We come with one mind that we've all sinned and that we are all accepted and welcomed home.

Peace is like coming home. That's feeling that doesn't last long but you know the first few moments when everything is complete - there is nothing more for you to add other than a nap. We have a peace that is permanent. So this season of Advent - you may sound like the runner up to the Miss America Pageant but you're not and neither am I. Whether or not it is the most wonderful time of the year doesn't matter. Because no matter the problems you have - you have peace with God. No matter what time of year it is you have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.