

How to Know the Peace of God

By Dr. Manford George Gutzke

Be Careful For Nothing

Let us note the first words in this famous Scripture: "Be careful for nothing" (Philippians 4:6). Common usage has blurred the original meaning of this phrase: the words actually mean "be full of care about nothing:" do not fret, or have any anxiety about anything. Another translation reads: "Don't worry about anything: " while another is put in the words: "Have no anxiety about anything." Perhaps "Do not worry about anything" may be the best statement of what Paul had in mind. This does not, however, mean that a person should pay no attention to the future.

The words of Jesus of Nazareth are really quite clear:

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace" (Luke 14:28-32).

Here the Lord brings out clearly that any person who has a project of any kind which he intends to complete should estimate that project, that he might know what it will take to complete it. Any person confronted with a crisis should study the possibilities. He should learn what to expect if he looks ahead. Such forethought is not a matter of worrying. There is in this no fearsome dread of disaster, no foreboding of evil. When the dire possibilities of danger, of possible defeat, loom in the mind the believer can recall instruction from his Lord:

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (Matthew 6:34).

Actually in this guidance the mind of the believer is directed to consider the possibility of the evil involved. This whole idea is developed more fully in the Sermon on the Mount. I can remember how one sentence in that passage often troubled me as a new believer.

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they" (Matthew 6:26)?

That bothered me because it seemed to discount the responsibility to work. It seemed almost as though those words would make you feel that if you really put your trust in the Lord, all you had to do was to sit and wait. I grew up on a farm and I knew that if you were going to get any kind of results, you would have to work. If you wanted beans you would have to plant and hoe beans; I knew that. As time went on and I became more responsible in my interpretation, and continued to study the Scripture, it suddenly

dawned on me how much I had missed. No doubt you have heard the expression "getting up with the birds?" Matthew 6:26 does not mean that the birds sit on fence posts waiting for Almighty God to drop worms into their mouths. Birds are industrious: they get up early. And they are hopeful. When you see a robin going across your lawn looking to find a worm, he is expecting it to be there. This, it now seems to me, is what the Lord meant when He taught: "Do not worry." The believer should go out and look with confident expectation that what he needs will be there. The basic principle in all of this attitude toward the future seems to be expressed in these words, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and all other things will be added upon you."

To have the mind and heart free from concern about things is not a matter of will power. It is an exercise of faith. Such faith is not a matter of having certain expectation of the outcome of events. Someone may say, "I just have faith." Perhaps what they mean by that is they think everything will turn out all right. But the Bible means more when it tells the believer to be careful about nothing. The kind of faith involved is to be a certain confidence in Almighty God. Actually all things are in the hands of God, and He is Almighty: He is able to overrule. That being the case, what can give the believer his confidence? His confidence can be grounded in the conviction that God is kind and He is gracious; God is good and the goodness of the Lord endureth forever. The believer can know this because of Calvary. He can look into the face of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross, and know that He died for him. Then he can remember the words of Paul, "He that spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

The believer can be confident simply by looking up into the face of God, as seen in the person of Jesus Christ. He will not need to be worried or depressed; He will not need to be fearful about what the future holds in store. He can look up into the face of God who did not spare His own Son. If God gave His Son for the believer, need he think God will now stop caring for him? To some this line of argument will not matter much, since they are not now in trouble. Everything may be going along fine. They may feel fairly well physically; they may have good meals to eat. Their clothing may be adequate, they may have a job, so that for the present they are getting along all right.

Actually so far as I am concerned I can read this and be comfortable, "Do not be anxious about anything." But the fact is, I may not be anxious because I may feel that I have everything in hand. However, if I were to have trouble, if I were to have sorrow or grief, if I were in danger, and I were face to face with something that would make me trouble because I did not know how I was going to face it, then I would need these words in a special way: "Do not be overly anxious about that. Do not let it get you down with anxiety. Look up. Look into the face of God. God is and God is Almighty; and God is good and God is gracious; and God is on your side."

Let me keep in mind this world is not going to last all of the time. It may be rough now, it may be hard and mean just at present, but it is not going to last all of the time. But I will! and God is! He has everything in hand for me. I should look up into His face, and trust Him; then I would be worried about nothing.

Let Your Requests Be Made Known

If a person were not sure as to what would be the best thing that could happen, how should he pray about it?

"But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6).

Since all this is true, why don't we pray more? Is it true we do not know what to ask for? I am reminded of a person who may be sick and may not want to go to the doctor, because he says, "I don't know what is wrong with me. I would not know what to tell him or what medicine to ask for." I might smile and think to myself, "No one would be that foolish." But any one could wisely tell me, "Don't kid yourself."

Compare this Scripture: "In everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God," with Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." It seems clear that Paul recognized his own personal infirmities as such that he was hindered in knowing what he should pray for. And we know that Paul would have wanted to ask for what would be acceptable to God.

So let us examine these words more closely. "In everything" means that nothing is too small. Someone may say, "I don't know whether I should pray about that. It is too small." But is it bothering you? If so, it is big enough. The first time I ever realized clearly that nothing is ever too small was when I had a cinder in my eye. That speck of dust really hurt! I knew then that a thing does not have to be big to hurt. Paul says "in everything:" he means nothing is too small.

When Paul wrote "by prayer" he meant my prayer. What is prayer? Prayer begins as communion with God. I lift up my face and look into Heaven. God knows every thought of my heart. But I need to express it. If I want to think about God, and I ask: "I wonder what God is like;" I should think about Jesus Christ. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Christ is the express image of God. So I say to myself, pray according to the revelation of God that I find in the Bible, and as I am led by the Spirit of God; for after all, the Spirit of God is all around about me.

If I have a burden; if I have a problem; if I have something that is troubling me, I should lift up my eyes. I should lift up my face to God and tell Him what is on my heart. "By prayer and supplication." I need to ask for something. What if I have nothing to give? I need not worry, all of the cattle on a thousand hills are His. All of the silver and gold belong to God. But there is one thing I can give to God; because if I do not give it, He will never get it. *That is my thanks and my praise.* Apart from that He already has everything. So "in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving." I need to recall what he has done for me. I need to review today, yesterday; then go back over the past week, the past month, the past years. I need to look up, and I need to remember I have something for which to be thankful, whatever He has done in the past, He will not quit doing today. He will not cancel future activity, so "with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

Let us look at the word "request." I will not be telling God what to do. I will be asking Him for something. That will be my request. I will bring that before God. It may be that a cleansing operation will take place. It may be that something will be screened out so far as I am concerned. I need only tell the Lord about it, and then see what will happen. My own thoughts would probably just die in my own mind and heart. It is a marvelous thing to talk to God. Remember, it is my requests, not those of anyone else. Here is the wonderful benefit of united praying. The Scripture says, "If two of you shall agree on earth, I will do it." Have you ever wondered why "two?" Because this fellowship is part of the screening process. If John and Jim are going to pray, and John has something so selfish he will not mention it in the presence of Jim and if Jim has something so self-indulgent he will not mention it, those were not good things anyway, then what John and Jim can agree on, that will be good.

"But in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Philippians 4:6)

Peace of God

Do you realize there is a wonderful blessing guaranteed for any person who will ask God for what he really wants?

We are just now considering one of the most wonderful prayer promises in the Bible.

"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Those words are so sweeping they say almost more than one can grasp. They seem to cover all the concerns anyone could ever have. "Do not let anything worry you over much." No doubt there will be disturbing and annoying situations. There will be troublesome times. These things will come, but it is written: "Do not let them overwhelm you." This applies to any believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to remember the grace of God is open and free for everyone – anyone can come. This is particularly significant and will clearly be felt in heart and mind when I have committed myself to the Lord. Then here is the word to me. "Do not let anything worry you overmuch. In everything by prayer and supplication let your requests with thanksgiving be made known to God. Ask for what you want, praying to God, communing with Him, asking Him (actually supplicating), thanking Him for what He has done." "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

When I look at this in all honesty and straightforward integrity, I see this is no unconditional guarantee that I am going to get everything I ask for. I am promised: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." I can be sure that when I ask Him I will be heard: whatever I may ask, my request will be considered. But I can be quite sure that God will act according to His wise and holy and just will. He is not going to do anything for me that would not be good for me.

Consider the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth about prayer, and notice how a father will consider the request of his child:

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone" (Matthew 7:7-9)?

When the son asks for bread which is good, shall I think the father will give him anything that is evil? But now let me turn that around. Suppose this child foolishly asks for something that is evil. Shall I think the father will give it to him? For example, suppose there is a three year old child who asks for a razor blade, would his father give it to him? Suppose the child asks for something. I could see the father getting something else and giving it to the child but I would not expect the father to give him the razor

blade, just because the child asked for it. Now if I would do like that or you would do like that, we can be quite sure God would do like that.

"Or man what is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him" (Matthew 7:9-11)?

We may notice the father will give good things. When are things good? When they are helpful. And who would know? The father would know. We should always remember that in any earnest believing prayer, the last aspect of that prayer will be: "nevertheless not my will but thine be done." That is how the Lord Jesus prayed in Gethsemane and that is how His Spirit will pray in me and in you. "Not my will but thine be done."

We need always to remember Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." We do not know what to ask for; we are not that smart nor that good. We are not that wise, but the promise is clear. "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." The peace of God means that my heart will be comforted. My mind will be at rest. I can quietly and really trust in God. If I have turned things over to Him, I should take my hands off. When I ask Him, when I put my request before God, I should leave it there. God will take care of all things.

God will give me His peace which will guard my heart and mind. The English word "keep" is hardly rich enough in its meaning. The Greek word can be understood something like this: "will garrison your hearts and minds." This is as if the commander of the city were to send a garrison of soldiers to this particular castle or home to protect it. The peace of God will protect, will guard, will surround; and it passeth understanding. God will guard my heart and mind through Christ Jesus. Please notice "through Christ Jesus." I will not have this peace of God because I got what I asked for. I will have this peace of God which passeth all understanding "through Christ Jesus."

Recently I had a phone call from a woman who was in great need. She felt she wanted to know something more about God and the peace of God, because deep down in her heart she was frightened. She was facing surgery, and she felt very apprehensive. She sought some reason not to fear. I asked her if she believed in God, and she said, "Yes." I asked her did she believe God had her in His hands, and again she said, "Yes." I then asked her, "How long do you think God would keep you? Would He keep you to the end of your life?" She thought so. "Would He keep you through death?" "Yes." "Would He keep you after death?" "Yes." "How long?" And then it came out of her heart: "Into eternity." Then I asked: "Is that true right now?" She said, "Yes." Then I said, "Don't you see that God has you in hand and in mind? Remember, God has never promised to me or to you that we are going to stay here forever. God knows what He is doing and we are in His hands. In Christ Jesus we can look up into the presence of God and be comforted to remember God will take care of us. That is the comfort we have in Christ Jesus. Christ Jesus stands both in this world and in the world to come. He has bridged the gap. He has taken away the idea of a barrier between this world and the world to come, and we say when we think about Him, 'Oh grave, where is thy victory? Oh death, where is thy sting'? Because Christ Jesus has taken away the sting of death and the victory of the grave. Whatever the problem or request, even of life or death, we are in His hands." I am glad to remember this helped her.

Because I am in Christ Jesus, God will let His peace garrison me. He will surround me with His love

and mercy and power and I can remember the words we find in the New Testament, "nothing shall by any means hurt you." If I can bring this into my heart, my heart will be comforted in facing anything. People do pass from this world into the world to come; and if they are Christians they will not drop off the edge. They go straight to the arms of Jesus, straight to His gentle breast. This is a marvelous thing: "The peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus

Whatsoever Things Are True

Do you realize that God is concerned about what any person believing in Him thinks about?

The Apostle Paul was writing to the believers in the city of Philippi, and he laid out for them certain considerations which he intended should help them to be strong in their faith.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Here he gave them an agenda. There would be many other ideas that might come into their minds, but these were to be preferred.

How can I control my thinking? Have you ever considered that when you are thinking you are talking to yourself? Or perhaps you imagine yourself talking to someone else. And so you think things out while you are so talking. If I were to ask, "How could I start thinking about the poor?" I only need to start talking to myself about the poor. How could I stop thinking about something that is evil, or thinking about some wrong thing I would like to do? I only need to stop talking about that to myself; I need to stop thinking about it.

If something affects me, so that I want to think about it by sharing it with someone else, but I have the feeling it is not the right thing; what can I do? I should not say anything about it. Can you think what would happen? If I never mentioned it to anybody or to myself, very soon that would drop out of my memory. No matter what I hear, even if someone else comes and tells me, if I will not say it, if I will not repeat it, that thing will fade out of my mind.

Paul's agenda in this passage indicates the things that the believer should talk about and think about. "Whatsoever things are true." There are many things we hear about that are not true. We should let them go unreported. We should hush, not say anything about those things.

"Whatsoever things are honest." Some things could be true enough in themselves, but if I were to tell them, it would not be honest. Suppose I were to see a certain man, a local pastor, come out of a beer parlor. I actually saw him step through the door and come out into the street. This would be true. But do I know why he was there? Do I know why he went into that place? Do I have any idea what he did when he was in that place? Then if I tell people that I saw James Smith coming out of a beer parlor and thus leave the impression that that was his way of living, my statement would not be honest.

"Whatsoever things are just." The English word "just" means that my statement is just exactly as the event it is supposed to name. Another good word would be "whatsoever things are fair," meaning fair and square. There are things that could be true, and that could be honest enough, but they would not be fair. For instance, if I stopped a person on the street and asked him to help the poor, and he said, "No;" whereas that man might be very active in helping the poor in another situation. Then if I reported that in

this case he did not help the poor I would not be making a fair statement; I would be leaving the impression that he does not help the poor at all.

"Whatsoever things are pure." This is very simple. It does not make any difference whether the statement was true and even honest; it could just be plain dirty. In that case what I am about to say would be true, and might even be fair, but it would be dirty. I should hush my mouth. If I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, I should simply "shut up." I should not repeat anything that is unclean. Someone might say, "But it is true." Even so, I should not say it. "But it is honest." Even if it is, I should not say it. "But it is a fair thing to say it," I would not need to deny that. The statement could be fair, but if it is unclean, I should not say it. I should let it go.

There could be some things that might even meet all these criteria, so that they could be true and honest and fair, and even clean, but they are not lovely. It might be an ugly thing. I should not talk about it. Perhaps some concerned person may say, "But something should be done about it." Maybe so, but you are not going to do it. That would be in God's hands. Remember, in all this, I am talking to believers.

The Apostle Paul would say to you, "If it is not lovely, don't say it." In this world there are lovely things – roses, lilies, etc. In this world there are also dirty things – sewers, slime, muck. In every house there are pictures on the wall that are lovely, and there is furniture that is lovely. In that same home there may be a bathroom that has a commode in it, with a sewer going out from it. Decency will guide anyone as to what to display. I use the word "decency": this belongs to anything that is clean. We put our roses in the front yard for everybody to see: we put our sewers underground and hide them. We do this because we are civilized, we are decent. If I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ I will make this the rule of my life. Jesus of Nazareth knew all that was in the hearts of men; wouldn't He know some dirt? Some unclean things? But did He ever speak of these things?

One more thing, "Whatsoever things are of good report." Good report means a good reputation. The believer, the person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and witnesses for Him, will be careful to edit everything he says and thinks. Again, "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." Choose the things that are true and fair and lovely, and the Lord will bless you.

Those Things Do

Can you understand how it is that living the life of a believer in God in this world is really not hard to do?

Becoming a believer in Jesus Christ is not a complicated affair. Explaining it to people can be complicated, and of course that is because no human being can understand all of the things of the Spirit. A human being is out of his depth trying to explain what God is going to do, and such an attempt can lead him into all kinds of trouble. So far as the believer is concerned, the Gospel is simple: a wayfaring man need not err therein. Children can accept Christ and old people can accept Christ. Nobody needs to fear that he might be confused by what it means; it is not that difficult.

Everything we preach and teach in the Gospel is based upon the reality of God and man. God is in Heaven! Man is on earth. God is holy and of purer eyes than to behold evil. Man is sinful – "in sin did my mother conceive me." Because of sin man is condemned to destruction and is lost. But because of the grace of God, the condemned sinner can be saved to the glory of God. Some people would say "Hallelujah!" He can be saved! And we tell the whole wide world "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." We make it a matter of record, that "as many as received Him to them gave He the power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on His name."

Then what shall a sinner do? What is involved? This also is simple: believe the Gospel that he hears, accept Jesus Christ about whom he is told. When a man accepts the Lord Jesus Christ and commits himself to Him, it does not follow that he knows everything; it doesn't even mean that he knows always just what he should do next. It does mean that now he has the disposition so that he wants to do the will of God. But what would this actually be? The Apostle Paul knew that these believers in the city of Philippi were the same as any other believers and humanly speaking they would not know what to do. So he gives them very simple instructions and a wonderful promise:

"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9).

The Philippian believers would never have known about Jesus Christ if Paul had not told them. Nowhere in the world has any human being ever known the truth about Jesus Christ, unless some missionary, some apostle, some preacher, some witness told them. Perhaps they read about it, but in that case what they read was written by a witness.

If someone were to say to me, "But I don't know how to become a Christian," I would say to such a person very simply, "You should learn. It isn't difficult." Even a young child in the primary department of Sunday School could tell him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." He could not get it any simpler than that. The person might say, "But I don't know about Jesus Christ." I would ask, "Can you read? Then read the Bible. Can you listen? Then listen to someone who teaches. Can you talk? Then talk with someone who believes it." A person does not need to know about all the religions in the world, but he can learn about Jesus Christ. Someone will tell him the Gospel. When a person learns that God has offered to save him and he feels there is offered to him the possibility of his actually becoming a child of God – he knows all he needs to know.

The Bible will tell any person that God offers to make him His child. Is he willing to receive this? Will he take this promise to himself and actually rest in it? It is there in the Scriptures. Surely he knows a preacher who believes it, or a layman or a business man. Perhaps he knows a woman who believes it; maybe he knows some young people who believe it. I am sure there is someone right in any community who can tell anybody what to do. A person does not have to run the fastest mile, climb the highest mountain or swim the widest river. He needs only to open his heart to receive. All in the world he needs to do is to humble himself and be willing to take what is offered to him. God will save his soul. Now if any person has any trouble with what I have been saying he should not rest until he finds someone who does believe and can tell him about it. Just let him tell such a person: "I'd like to become a Christian and I don't know how." Then let him see what will happen. There are willing persons who would go anywhere and do anything to help another soul come to faith.

". . . whatsoever things you have learned and received and heard:" when the Bible uses the word "hear" it always includes the idea of understanding. When a person says he has listened and has "heard" the Word, this always means that he has understood what was said. If a person has listened and learned, received and heard, this means he now understands the Gospel; and he now knows out of the Bible that if he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ God will make him His child. The Bible will make clear to any believer that the Holy Spirit is given to him. He will not be able to see it on the outside. There will be nothing happening in the air, and nothing will happen in the room he is in when he receives the Holy Spirit. But will he open his heart and believe? If he will open his heart he will understand when God has given the Holy Spirit. By the time he has learned the Gospel, has received it and has understood it, he

will see it in other people. He will see the effect the Spirit has on mature believers, how they read the Bible, attend church, have family worship, and so on.

In all this that I have written I have intended to bring the reader to an understanding of what is involved in becoming a believer. Anyone can learn it, can receive it, and can understand it. Now Paul has one further word to say: "Do it." The person now sees how it is done, so he should put it into actual practice. He should give himself over to God; trust in Him. Then he can claim the wonderful end of this sentence: "And the God of peace shall be with you."

The believer will have Almighty God, and this particular aspect of Him. There will be quietness and peace in his own soul. There will not be any confusion or any conflict. His whole soul and spirit can be at rest. It is wonderful to believe in God, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to trust and give oneself over to Him. This will happen to anyone who will simply respond to the things that he has learned and the things he has received, the things he now understands, and the things he can see in other believers, who have given themselves over to the Lord Jesus Christ.

I hope all my readers have a church to go to. I hope that in that church they can recognize real believers and that they will join with them and pray for their pastor. If the minister is a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the believers should let him know that they want the same faith and blessing he has. And believe me, the God of peace shall be with all such and their hearts will be happy in the Lord.