



1/4 John Calvin

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Sermons from the Greats II



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The Method of Grace

George Whitefield – Jer. 6:13-16

Adapted by Pastor Paul Hudson

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Good morning, we're going through a short series, Sermons from the Greats. These are messages from the heart of great historical preachers. They are not word for word, these sermons have been shortened significantly, summarized in many parts, simplified, and re-written in modern English for you to more easily understand. Really, my heart in bringing these messages to you is to give you a taste of Christian history; to introduce you to some of the most powerful preachers of their own eras, whose influence is still felt today.

The message this morning is from the great 18th century revival preacher George Whitefield. So, George Whitefield was one of the most influential preachers and a central figure of the Great Awakening revival movement in the 18th century. He was a contemporary to Jonathan Edwards, and an Anglican evangelist who was too bold for most churches. So, he spent most of his ministry preaching in outdoor revivals. He was known for his dramatic voice, emotional delivery, and skill in communicating to both the poor and educated. Though he was not allowed in most churches of the time, tens of thousands would flock to hear him preach. He was a tireless missionary who not only preached thousands of sermons in Britain and the American colonies, but he also established orphanages and charitable works.

Theologically, he was Calvinistic, very heavy on God's sovereignty, and the total depravity of the human nature. His messages were filled with strong convictions and warnings to repent.

The message this morning is titled, "The Method of Grace," from Jeremiah 6:14. On the surface, this message might seem condemning and legalistic, but it is actually the complete opposite. Whitefield urges to not be ignorant of your own sinful self, to be aware of your own depraved nature that is far outside of God's standards, all for the purpose of falling under the sovereignty of God and into the righteousness of Christ through faith, where there is peace. At the beginning of this message, Whitefield speaks harshly about church leaders who smooth over or ignore sin, and speak only peace to blatant, willful sinners who are actually in need of repentance. Whitefield contends that in order to come to grace, there must be a recognition of one's own need for grace—there must be a recognition of one's helplessly sinful nature.

I've kept some of the more bold language for you to catch his strong conviction and also that you might hear what a lot of churches in the 18th century did not want to hear in their comforting walls.

With that background, let's begin. I invite you to open to Jeremiah 6:13-16.

13 "From the least to the greatest,
all are greedy for gain;
prophets and priests alike,
all practice deceit.

14 They dress the wound of my people

as though it were not serious.

‘Peace, peace,’ they say,
when there is no peace.

15 Are they ashamed of their detestable conduct?

No, they have no shame at all;
they do not even know how to blush.
So they will fall among the fallen;
they will be brought down when I punish them,”
says the LORD.

16 This is what the LORD says:

“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls...

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Je 6:13–16.

The word of God for the people of God.

Let’s pray.

There is no greater blessing God can give a nation than faithful, sincere, upright ministers who speak God’s truth clearly and lovingly. And there is hardly a greater curse than false, careless, lukewarm, or unfaithful spiritual leaders. Scripture shows this again and again. Throughout history, many have appeared outwardly religious but inwardly corrupt—wolves in sheep’s clothing—leaders who speak comforting lies rather than God’s truth.

This was especially true in the prophet Jeremiah’s day. Jeremiah was faithful to the Lord and refused to stay silent. He boldly warned the people about the corruption of their religious leaders. In the chapter from which our text comes, Jeremiah confronts the false prophets and priests. He accuses them of covetousness and dishonesty: “From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit” (Jer. 6:13).

Jeremiah then shows how they deceived God’s people: “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14).

While Jeremiah proclaimed God’s warnings of judgment, the false prophets soothed people with pleasant words. Jeremiah declared that God would pour out His wrath—that the land would face destruction, families would be torn apart, and houses would be taken. His message was meant to awaken the people to repentance. But the false prophets told everyone to relax. They dismissed Jeremiah as overly dramatic. They said, “Don’t worry—everything will be fine.” They told the people “Peace, peace,” even though there was no peace at all.

These words originally referred to outward, physical danger, but they also point to something deeper—the danger of false spiritual peace. There have always been teachers who quiet conviction, minimize sin, and offer comfort when people actually need repentance. And we too often prefer it this way. Our hearts naturally want to hear smooth words. Scripture says the

human heart is “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” Left to ourselves, we will convince our own souls that we are safe when we are not.

Many today confidently claim to have peace with God. Many assume they are Christians because they feel calm, attend church, or avoid the worst sins. But much of that peace can be false—a peace of our own making, not a peace given by God. True peace with God “surpasses understanding,” and it only comes through a work of the Holy Spirit. False peace is easy, shallow, and self-created.

So, the question before us today is deeply important: **How do we know whether we can truly speak peace to our own hearts?** Peace is a wonderful gift—who can live without it? Yet Scripture warns us that many say “peace” when there is no peace. Therefore, we must understand what God must do in us before we can confidently say our souls are reconciled to Him.

I want to speak plainly today for the sake of lost souls. I want to be innocent of their blood by declaring the full counsel of God. From this passage, I want to show what must happen in all of us before we can rightly say we have peace with God.

Before we begin, let me offer two important cautions.

Caution 1: True Religion Is an Inward Work

I am assuming that you believe true Christianity is an inward reality—a work of God in the heart by the Holy Spirit. If you do not, you may not understand this message. Scripture teaches again and again that the kingdom of God is within us; that a true Christian is one inwardly; and that new birth is a spiritual change. Christianity is not simply attending church, behaving morally, or believing historical facts. It is a supernatural work in the soul.

If you place religion only in outward acts, you will likely not agree with this sermon. You may think I’m speaking in a foreign language. But I urge you: believe what Scripture says—God works in the heart.

Caution 2: God Works in Many Different Ways

I am not saying that God brings every person to faith in exactly the same manner. Some come through deep, prolonged conviction; others through quieter, gentler means. The Holy Spirit is sovereign and free. But I will affirm this: **no matter how God deals with you, certain truths must become real in your heart before you can truly speak peace to yourself.** Whether your journey is long or short, sharp or subtle, the same foundational work must take place.

With these two cautions in mind, let us move to the main points.

1. Before You Can Speak Peace, You Must Be Convicted of Your Actual Sins

The first step toward true peace is facing your actual sins. Scripture is clear: “The soul that sins shall die.” According to God’s law, we must obey all His commands perfectly, continually, and from the heart. Even one sinful thought, word, or action deserves judgment.

If one sin deserves condemnation, what do we who have sinned thousands of times deserve? Our lives have been filled with rebellion, selfishness, and neglect of God. Before we can have peace, we must see clearly that we are guilty—deeply guilty—and that our guilt is against a holy God.

So let me ask you:^[1] Have you ever felt the weight of your sins?^[2] Have you ever been pierced with the realization that God's wrath is justly aimed at you because of your actions?^[3] Have you ever mourned over your sins—not simply felt bad about consequences, but grieved that you have sinned against God?

Has there ever been a moment when your sin felt like a burden too heavy to bear? When you sensed you needed mercy or you would perish?

If you have never experienced this conviction of sin in some real way—then do not deceive yourself: you may speak peace to your heart, but there is no peace. Oh, that the Lord would awaken sinners and grant true conviction and true peace!

2. You Must Also Be Convicted of Your Original Sin

But conviction must go deeper than your outward actions. You must also see the sinful nature within you—that is, **the corruption you inherited from Adam**. Many people deny original sin. They claim it is unjust for God to hold us accountable for Adam's fall. But look around the world—violence, pride, selfishness, anger. Is this the world God originally made? Everything in creation groans under the weight of sin.

Look inside your heart—can you see pride? envy? selfishness? lust? resentment? Do these come from God? No—they come from our fallen nature. When the Holy Spirit awakens a soul, He not only reveals our sinful actions but the root of them: a nature turned away from God.

Have you ever felt this? Have you ever sensed that fallen nature even when you have not sinned? Have you ever acknowledged that God would be right to judge you simply because you are a child of Adam?

True believers feel this deeply. Even after conversion, original sin remains the biggest burden. Paul cried, “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Every true Christian knows the frustration of indwelling sin. It grieves them. It makes them long for heaven.

If you have never been troubled by the sin within you—if original sin has never been a burden—then you may speak peace, but I fear it is false peace.

3. You Must Be Convicted of the Sin in Your Best Works

This point surprises many people. When God first awakens a person, they often respond by trying to fix themselves. They begin praying, reading the Bible, attending church, doing good works—hoping these things will make them acceptable to God. This is natural, because we are born under a covenant of works, where we assume we must earn God's favor.

Like Adam and Eve, who hid behind trees and made fig-leaf coverings, we try to hide behind our religious efforts. But before you can speak peace to your heart, you must see that even your best works cannot save you. God may condemn even in the best prayer you have ever prayed.

Why? Because in our natural state we cannot do anything that truly pleases God. Scripture says, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” We may do things that appear good outwardly, but our motives and hearts are still sinful. Even after conversion, our best works are imperfect. As one preacher said, “My repentance needs to be repented of, and my tears need to be washed in Christ’s blood.”

Our best duties are mixed with sin. They fall short of God’s perfect standard. Until you see that your righteousness is as filthy rags, you will not cling to Christ’s righteousness. Self-righteousness is the last idol to be torn down. Many talk about grace, but few have felt their need for it.

So, ask yourself: Have you ever felt the insufficiency of your best efforts? Have you ever seen that your prayers, your discipline, your charity, your morality—all of it—is stained with sin? Has God ever shown you that nothing in you can commend you to Him?

If not, you may speak peace, but God has not spoken peace.

4. You Must Be Convicted of the Sin of Unbelief

Here is the sin most people overlook—the sin of unbelief. It is the reigning sin of the church. Most people never consider that they may not truly believe in Christ.

You may say, “Of course I believe. I grew up in a Christian nation. I attend church. I take communion. I read the Bible.” But this is not saving faith. Even the devil believes Christ is the Son of God—and trembles. Many people in church believe far less than the devil does.

You may believe that Jesus lived and died, but that is no different than believing Julius Caesar lived. Historical belief is not saving faith. True faith is a supernatural gift from God. It is a heartfelt trust in Christ alone for salvation.

If I asked you how long you have believed, most would say, “As long as I can remember.” Ask yourself if you truly believe because true believers know there was a time when they were without faith, when the Spirit awakened them.

Likewise, if I asked when you began to love God with all your heart, many would say, “Always.” But unless God saved you in childhood, this cannot be true. Scripture says our hearts are naturally hostile to God.

Have you ever been convicted of your unbelief? Has the Holy Spirit ever shown you how unable you are to trust Christ apart from His grace? Have you ever cried out, “Lord, I believe—help my unbelief!” “Lord, give me faith!” “Lord, enable me to trust You!”

If not, you may be at peace, but it is not the peace of God.

5. You Must Lay Hold of Christ’s Righteousness by Faith

Finally, before you can speak peace to your heart, you must cling to Christ Himself. You must receive His righteousness as your own. You must come to Jesus as your only hope.

Jesus says, “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” But the rest is only for those who come—those who believe.

True peace comes only after we have been justified by faith—after God declares us righteous through faith in Christ. It is only when Christ’s righteousness is applied to our hearts, when Christ is brought home to our souls, when his righteousness becomes our righteousness, when his goodness is imputed to us, that true peace flows like a river.

So, let me ask you: Has Christ ever become precious to you? Have you ever come to Him, not in theory but in truth? Has He ever spoken peace to your soul? Have you ever known the sweetness of sins forgiven, the joy of being accepted in the Beloved?

If Christ has never given you peace, then you do not have peace.

Conclusion

I am speaking today of the invisible realities of the soul. These matters are eternal. Your comfort, your salvation, your eternity depends on them. Many are at peace because the devil has rocked them to sleep. He whispers, “You are fine,” and hopes to keep them asleep all the way to hell.

But God, in His mercy, gives us His Word to awaken us before it is too late. When the great gulf is fixed, it will be too late. When the door is shut, it will be too late. Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.

May God convict you, awaken you, humble you, and then give you true, lasting peace through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To repeat the five points for you,

1. Before peace can come to your soul, you must be convicted of your actual sins— your personal sin.
2. You must also be convicted of your original sin— that is, the fallen nature that you have inherited from Adam and Eve.
3. You must be convicted of the sin of your best works— meaning, you cannot work to earn God’s forgiveness or your salvation.
4. You must be convicted of the sin of unbelief— the inability to believe enough to trust fully in God and not yourself.
5. For true inner peace, you must lay hold of Christ’s righteousness by faith.

Amen, Let’s pray.

George Whitefield, “The Method of Grace,” in *The World’s Great Sermons: Massillon to Mason*, ed. Grenville Kleiser, vol. 3 (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908), 93–109.

Study Questions
Read Jer. 6:13-16

Observation Questions (What does the text *say*?)

1. In Jeremiah 6:13–14 what specific actions and words are attributed to the leaders ("from the least to the greatest")?
2. Verse 16 uses the images "stand at the crossroads," "ask for the ancient paths," and "you will find rest for your souls." What two realities does this pair of images (crossroads / ancient paths) put side by side?
3. According to the sermon, what five inward convictions must be present before someone can rightly say they have peace with God?

Interpretation Questions (What does the text *mean*?)

1. What does the phrase "they dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious" imply about the long-term spiritual effects when leaders and people accept easy comfort instead of repentance?
2. How does conviction of actual sins relate to conviction of original sin in the preacher's argument? In other words, why does the preacher insist the Spirit must reveal both the acts and the root?
3. What does the sermon mean when it says even "the best works are stained"? How would this understanding change a person's motives for prayer, service, or giving?

Application Questions (How should the truth *change* us?)

1. Think of a recent time you felt "at peace" about your standing before God. Be real with yourself and name one sin or inward bent that moment did not address. This week, what single concrete step will you take to test whether that peace is from God (for example: confess to a trusted believer, read a specific passage, or pray for conviction)?
2. Choose a spiritual practice you are inclined to trust in (prayer frequency, church attendance, serving, giving). How might you be tempted to lean on that practice for acceptance as opposed to leaning on the grace of Christ? Name one concrete thing you will do this week to reorient that practice toward dependence on the grace of Christ (for example: begin each time with a one-sentence confession or speak aloud a gospel sentence before serving).
3. When have you recently noticed unbelief — a time you could not or would not fully trust Christ? What short gospel truth or verse will you memorize or write down to use when unbelief rises?
4. Relating to the nature of the sermon, do you feel there is enough preaching in today's church about recognizing your sin and need for grace and repentance? How might you approach this subject with believers or non-believers alike?
5. The sermon urged people to "seek the Lord while he may be found." Name one person you will invite into a gospel conversation or one person you will ask to pray for your awakening this week.