

Peace on Earth *by Gene McCoy*

The cartoon that appeared in our local newspaper expresses popular sentiment. But its theology provoked skepticism in my mind. It pictures the wise men with gifts in hand and stunned looks on their faces as the baby Jesus in the manger says, “Gold, frankincense, and myrrh are all well and good...but what I’d really like for my birthday is peace on earth and good will toward all.”

Elsewhere in the paper was evidence that the birth of Jesus has not yet produced peace throughout the world — at least, not the peace politicians and social scientists talk about. Yet the angels announcing His birth proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” (KJV) So what is the problem?

The KJV translation has influenced many to adopt a humanistic philosophy of peace that has blinded them to the truth and caused disillusionment among unbelievers. According to linguistic scholars, a more accurate rendering of the angelic announcement would be, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” The basis for peace is God’s pleasure or favor, not man’s.



Is it true that Jesus came to blanket the earth with peace? Not according to Jesus, Who said He did not come to bring peace, but a sword and division (Matt. 10:34, 35; Lk. 12:51-53). We are painfully aware that the mere mention of His name can produce tension and even violence. The peace and accompanying goodwill among men that Jesus brought, then, is obviously not a political or national peace; not a physical or material peace relating to geography and government. No, the peace He authors is spiritual in nature and is seated, not in a world capital, but in the human heart.

This peace is reached, then, not by military strength, but by complete and unconditional surrender. It was accomplished at Calvary, where God made peace through Jesus’ blood (Col. 1:20). It is, then, initiated by God, not man. It results not from shrewd negotiations and diplomacy. Neither is it founded upon the mindset

popularly expressed in the question, “Can’t we all just get along?” The answer is categorically, “No!” And the sole reason for

that is our sin.

Yet sinners have salved their conscience and soothed their guilt by persuading themselves that they have “made peace with God.” As already stated, man is not the one who makes peace. That is God’s work through Jesus’ blood (Col. 1:20). The issue is not that we are at peace with God, but that God is at peace with us — or not.

Does God’s favor rest on you?

The issue is not that we are at peace with God, but that God is at peace with us.

The answer to that question is what determines your peace.

The apostle Paul says this peace with God through Jesus results from being justified by faith (Rom. 5:1). Its substance is the removal of God’s wrath from the sinner. There will not be political peace and the cessation of hostilities until all individuals submit to Jesus Christ and the cause for our alienation is removed.

Being at peace with God necessitates the extension of peace to man

— Jew with Gentile (Eph. 2:14), white with black, etc. This peace begins with God and is for His good pleasure, but it is up to us to extend it to others. “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men” (Rom. 12:18).

The peace Jesus left to His disciples (Jn. 14:27) is to permeate the nature of the new man and govern his motives, thoughts, and actions. This is to be most evident in our relationships within the church, as Paul exhorts in Col 3:15, thusly: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” (NIV)

The popular lyric from the song by Sy Miller and Bill Jackson says, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.” If there is ever to be political peace on earth, complete with the cessation of hostilities and the removal of the cause for conflict, it will necessarily begin with Christians under the rule of the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6) as they allow His peace to rule in their hearts. In that context, it must begin with me . . . and you.