

JULY 19, 2020

LESSON 7

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

THE PEACE OF GOD (PHILIPPIANS 4:7)

“Peace” is typically considered to be the opposite of war or conflict. But it’s really more than that. The Hebrew term *shālôm* (pronounced shaw-LOAM) speaks to a person’s “health, prosperity, and peace with God, i.e., salvation.”⁷ The OT sacrifices include the “peace offering” (Lev 7:11–36). These might accompany sacrifices for sin (e.g., 1 Sam 13:9; 1 Kgs 9:25), but the peace offering’s purpose was to acknowledge and celebrate the sacrificer’s relationship with God (**Figure 1**). In fact, often the term “peace offering” is translated as “fellowship offering” instead. We are celebrating our fellowship with God.

Levitical Peace Offerings (Lev 7:11–36)⁸

Type	Purpose
1. Praise	To give thanks for specific acts that the Lord had done on the offerer’s behalf
2. Vow	To fulfill a vow in response to answered prayer
3. Freewill	Voluntary offering to the Lord

Figure 1.

The Peace of God (Phil 4:7)

The opening salutations of most NT letters include a greeting of grace and peace. And many of them contain words of peace in the closing salutations as well. “Peace” was the typical Jewish greeting, doing double duty for both greetings and farewells.

Take the letter to the Philippians, for example. It starts with Paul’s typical greeting of “grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:2). Near the end of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, Paul brings up the peace of God by making two claims about it (Phil 4:7). God’s peace 1) transcends human understanding and 2) “will guard [our] hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 77.

⁸ Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale OT Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 133.

God's Peace Transcends Human Understanding

During turbulent times, we are prone to worry. Even though we are told not to in Phil 4:6, we still do anyway. But if we take *everything* to God in prayer, then—and only then—will we experience God's peace.

Imagine being like God and never getting rattled or nervous. That is incomprehensible and therefore “surpasses all understanding.” But verse 7 is contingent upon verse 6: You can only experience God's peace by “letting go and letting God.”

God's Peace Guards Our Hearts and Minds in Christ

The peace of God will, like a garrison of soldiers, patrol and guard your heart against attack from the cares and concerns of the world. As Christians, we need to focus on “things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Phil 4:8, NLT). When we give our hearts and minds over to our Creator, we see the world from his perspective; and this allows us to find joy in everything, including trials and tribulations (cf. Phil 4:6; Isa 26:3; John 14:27; James 1:2-3). This experience of love, joy, and peace is only possible because of our forgiveness of sins and our restored relationship with God (Rom 5:1).

The God of Peace (Phil 4:9)

In Phil 4:9, Paul tells us that if we put our Christian faith into practice, “the God of peace will be with you.” And so, within three verses, we have heard about “the peace of God” and “the God of peace.” This latter expression isn't used very often, but it occurs a handful of times near the end of Paul's letters.⁹ We have God on our side to help us and support us every moment of every day (cf. Heb 4:14-16).

Although we live in a chaotic world, God wanted it to be perfect. Sin has forever marred it. The remedy is justification by faith through Jesus. And this doesn't simply remove enmity between us and God. It gives us “the peace of God” from “the God of peace.”

The beautiful verse, Jeremiah 29:11, was spoken to God's rebellious covenant people in order to comfort them during their captivity.

I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

The word translated “welfare” is the word for “peace.” And it was used three times in Jer 29:7, where God instructed Judah to pray for the “peace” (often translated as “welfare” or “peace and prosperity”) of whatever pagan city they found themselves in. (That's kind of like us today!) In vv. 12-13, he says we should always reach out to him in prayer. While we may not always like the circumstances we find ourselves in, we will be able to experience “the peace of God” that surpasses all comprehension—because we serve “the God of peace.”

⁹ Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23; see also 2 Thess 3:16, which has “the Lord of peace”; Heb 13:20).

Romans 5:1

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ..