

The Obvious Christian: Characteristics That Make A Christian Stand Out.
Message 3 – The Peace of an Obvious Christian, January 27, 2008
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I want to get started today by talking about the world we live in and what it is like. We have the war in Iraq. It is doing much better, but still there is no quick end in sight. There are talks of peace between Israel and the Palestinians but very few really expect it to happen. In our own country, although most experience a high quality of life there is much discontentment expressed. And here in our own area, homicides are at the highest rate they have been in years.

In our world, on every level, international, national, and local we find turmoil. In the midst of this, what do you think is the longing of people's hearts? They are longing for peace: peace of life, mind, and soul.

Unfortunately, people often look for it in the wrong places: programs, relationships, and activities that have already brought heartache into their lives.

As a teenager, I was looking for peace. Living in the late 60's, I grew my hair long, wore clothes deserving only of being thrown away, and could often be heard saying, "*Peace, man.*" But that lifestyle never brought peace. It brought emptiness, and death for some of my friends.

We have been learning about the fruit of the Holy Spirit, or the characteristics of those who are identified Christ enabling us to **stand out** as Obvious Christians. So far we have considered God's kind of love that looks out for others, and joy that keeps us encouraged in every circumstance. Another characteristic identified with Christ, which helps us to **stand out** as Obvious Christians, is peace. Open your Bibles again to Galatians 5: 22...

Peace refers to *a state of harmony or freedom from disorder.*
(Random House College Dictionary)

Because of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the life of Christians, we can expect to experience peace (*a state of harmony*) in the midst of these days of disorder that we live in.

Does that sound too good to be true? Well, it's not! Such peace is possible because of WHO God is, and WHAT He is able to do in our lives.

That must be our first realization: the peace we long for can only be found in a person. His name is JEHOVAH-SHALOM, which means, *the LORD is peace*. This is an official name for God. It is found in only one reference in the Bible.

Look with me at Judges 6:24...

Although this official title only occurs once, similar statements are often made in both the Old and New Testaments. Allow me to mention just a few from the New Testament:

Romans 15:33, *“the God of peace be with you”*

Romans 16:20, *“the God of peace shall bruise Satan”*

1 Corinthians 14:33, *“God is not the author of confusion, but of peace”*

2 Corinthians 13:11, *“the God of love and peace shall be with you”*

Without question, our God is Himself peace and provides His people with peace.

The background of Judges 6:24 is interesting, their world was not very different from our own time. Judges 21:25 says, *“In those days... every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”*

If everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes, what would you expect their time to look like? Just like ours, because that’s what people do today!

In Judges 6:1-24 we learn that God’s people were living in disobedience to Him. They were doing what was right in their own eyes and suffering the consequences. Their enemies, the Midianites, often raided the land, robbing them of their crops and cattle. The people lived in poverty and fear. It was a time of turmoil, and they longed for peace, so they cried out to God. In answer, God introduced Himself to Gideon as JEHOVAH-SHALOM. That’s exciting, because in the midst of the turmoil of our time, God is prepared to do the same with us!

One of the great Old Testament prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is found in Isaiah 9:6, *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, **the Prince of Peace.**”*

This is a familiar reference because of its use at Christmas time. It tells us WHO Jesus is. He *is* the Prince of Peace. Throughout His ministry, Jesus showed Himself to be the Prince of Peace.

For an excellent example, look with me at Mark 4:35-41...

Because of the storm, the disciples were filled with fear. Jesus brought peace to the turmoil of the sea and into the lives of His disciples. He can also bring peace into our lives.

Look at Romans 5:1...

Our greatest turmoil is the war within our own souls with God. Faith in Christ makes us right with God and gives us peace.

As a teenager in the late 60's, I was looking for peace. Like so many others at the time, I looked in a lot of the wrong places, but I never found it until I was introduced to Jesus Christ. He brought peace into my life.

Look with me at Philippians 4:4-9...

Though wrong, we often respond to our circumstances with fear, anxiety, discouragement, and disillusionment. But what does the Apostle Paul say would be a much better way to respond? He tells us to pray and submit our circumstances to God with thanksgiving. We pray with thanksgiving because He is there for us to turn to and has promised to help us.

When we respond in this way, God is prepared to give us peace. *A state of calm*, just as He did for the disciples caught in the storm.

How is this peace described? It is a peace which *passes all understanding*.

What will this peace do for those who enjoy it? ***Keep their hearts and minds.***

Instead of keeping our thoughts on the turmoil of our world and our own lives, what does the Apostle Paul encourage us to do? Look at verses 8-9...

If we will meditate on such things, what can we expect? ***The God of peace will be with us!***

When the God of peace is with us, His characteristic of peace will be manifested in our lives. Because of that our Christian faith will be obvious. It will **stand out** in a world filled with turmoil.

If you do not have the God of peace in your life, you can by receiving the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ into your life:

Admit that you are a sinner. (Romans 3:23)

Believe that Jesus came and died for sin. (Romans 5:8)

Call upon Jesus to save you from your sin and give you everlasting life. (Romans 6:23; 10:13)

Upon doing so, you **will be** at peace with God; and **will** experience a peace which passes all understanding.

If you are a Christian but lacking God's peace, why? Usually it is because of one of two reasons:

1. Sin. According to 1 John, un-confessed sin breaks our fellowship with God. While in that condition we will not enjoy God's peace. However, 1 John 1:9 provides the solution...
2. Lack of faith. In the storm, the disciples were filled with fear, while Jesus slept. Jesus said that their problem was not the storm but a lack of faith in Him. The answer provided in Philippians 4 is to simply entrust ourselves and our circumstances to God.

Whatever kind of decision you need to make today, in order to enjoy God's peace, will you make it?

I want to close with Numbers 6:24-26...