

DR. JAMES B. RICHARDS

NO MORE BROKEN HEARTS
NO MORE FEAR
NO MORE GUILT
NO MORE REFLECTION
NO MORE LONELINESS
NO MORE BROWN SKIN

THE

GOSPEL
and
PEACE

no more shame...no more fear!

The Gospel of Peace

The Message of the Cross

by: **Dr. James B. Richards**

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Bobby C. Goode, my uncle. Thank you for being a role model, a friend, an example and the only real father I ever knew.

Because you believed in me, I was able to believe in myself and come out of what would have been a disastrous lifestyle. In you, I saw high standards without rejection. You helped me to see God as a Father.

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Tradition comes from things that were good; things that worked at one time. The church is like the children of Israel who didn't want to worship in the temple because they still clung to the tabernacle. That was good, but its time had past. God's life, presence and power was no longer there, it was time to move on.

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EXPERIENCING THE PEACE OF GOD

Hundreds of times in the Old Covenant God tells man not to fear. When Jesus appeared to his disciples after His crucifixion He said, "Fear not!" There should be no fear of God in the heart of a believer. There should only be a deep and powerful realization of being loved and accepted by God the Father, the creator of the universe.

When fear is in a person's heart toward God it is clear that the person in question does not really believe that God loves him with a perfect love. If there is fear, it is because that person is afraid of what God will do to him. He is afraid he will be hurt or rejected by God.

1 John 4:18 is best expressed in the Living Bible. *"We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; His perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what He might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what He might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that He really loves us."*

The earmark of the Christian who believes what Jesus did through His death burial and resurrection should be a life of confident acceptance that is permeated with peace. There should be no torment. There should be no nagging sense of guilt and rejection. There should only be peace.

Every religion in the world offers peace to man. Christianity is the only one, however, that delivers. For we are not a people who are attempting to achieve a state or status which will give us peace, we are a people who have been made right with God through the finished work of one man, Christ Jesus. And, because of His finished work, we have been granted peace with God.

Because every Christian does not know or believe this wonderful reality, not every Christian lives in a continual state of peace. Quite the contrary! Far too many Christians live in torment and turmoil, always fearful that things are not right between them and God.

My involvement in ministering to people in mental wards has proven this time and time again. I have repeatedly seen the emotionally unstable and the mentally tormented struggle with the fear of not being able to please God. The world is right when it says, "Religion will drive you crazy!"

Religion is man's attempt to find peace with God. Christianity, on the other hand, is man accepting peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

A great percentage of people in mental hospitals feel they have done something that is beyond God's ability to forgive. They are awaiting judgment from an angry God. Many times they have no idea what they could have done, they just have a sense of fear and impending judgment. This is what the Bible calls condemnation, i.e., the expectation of damnation and judgment. In Christ we are free from condemnation.

What is so sad, is this portrait of fearful people also describes many of the faithful who sit in church every Sunday. Fear seems to be the motivating factor in the lives of many Christians. But where would these people get such an idea about God? How could someone become so afraid of God that they would end up in a mental institution or chronically fearful and depressed? Who represented God so negatively that an entire world is turned off? It has not been some force outside the church that has so destroyed the reputation of God. It has not been some evil demonic group. It has been the voices of well meaning people within the church.

Fear has been passed down from generation to generation in the church. From the earliest of times the church has struggled with believing the truth about the finished work of Jesus. This failure to believe the truth has been the root of the fear, anxiety and out right meanness of the church down through the ages.

When Isaiah prophesied about the great work of the cross, he also prophesied in advance, *"Who has believed our report?"* There is a report about God that is so good, so freeing, so loving, so kind, so merciful and so generous that man refuses to believe it.

Those who reject this wonderful report either spend a life time trying to please God or ultimately walk away from God. In my years of ministering on the streets more people were angry at God because of the unbelieving report they heard in church than any other reason.

Eugene H. Peterson says, in his introduction to the Book of Galatians, "When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others, either putting or keeping them in their place." This seems to have become the goal of the church. Rather than setting people free with "Good News" about Jesus, they used this as a way to bring people under their control.

Early in Christian history there arose those who would pervert the Gospel. There were those who followed Paul around and proclaimed, *"Believe on Jesus! He is the Messiah. He is the way of salvation. But, the way of righteousness is works of the law."* The deceit in this message is so subtle. It is obvious that God has us called to live a righteous life. It is obvious that righteousness should be the fruit of being a Christian. So, it would only seem logical to accept this message. However, what you believe about righteousness is what you really believe about relating to God.

If keeping the law is our basis for righteousness, then it is the basis for receiving the promises of God. It is the basis of getting our prayers answered. It is the basis of God's protection. If keeping the law is the basis of righteousness then our ability to have peace is determined by our ability to keep the law. Ultimately, keeping the law becomes our basis for salvation.

While proclaiming belief in Jesus as the way of salvation in one breath, we have totally excluded Jesus in another breath. No one denies Jesus as Lord. In experience, however, we are looking to our performance to provide everything that Jesus died to provide. Intellectually and theologically Jesus is still the center of our faith, but emotionally and functionally WE have become the center of our faith.

Romans 8:5-8 in The Message says it this way, *“Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God’s action for them find that God’s Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what He is doing. And God isn’t pleased at being ignored.”*

This self obsession is not the product of a person who desires to reject God. This is the person who is trying to please God by his own efforts. This is the person who has ignorantly rejected the finished work of Jesus and has become obsessed with earning righteousness by his performance; thus an obsession with self.

Every letter that Paul wrote was aimed at bringing believers back to the finished work of Jesus. One by one, church by church, city after city, believers were seduced into returning to their own performance as their source of righteousness and ultimately their source of peace with God. They just would not believe the report about Jesus.

In the book of Galatians, Paul points out the motivation of those who pervert the gospel...control! A leader who doesn't trust Jesus doesn't believe the Gospel will work by its own power. Because they themselves do not believe in the power of the Gospel, they feel that it is their job to control you, to “put you in your place.”

What makes this so undetectable is the motive. Many of the most destructive forces in the church are people with good motives. The most dangerous person is the one who has a deep passion to help people, but does not believe in the power of the Gospel to produce change. Instead of proclaiming the finished work of the Lord Jesus, and intrusting the people to the work of the Holy Spirit, that person will resort to carnal methods of control. When people are controlled, it appears that they have changed. So the deep motive to help people justifies the desire to control.

The main tool for control is fear. If you are not confident in your relationship with God you will have fear. Fear will rob you of confidence. It

will restrict you. It will make you angry. It will make you emotionally unstable. Fear will strip you of the new identity you have in Jesus. It will leave you stripped of the God ordained dignity and worth that belongs to you as a priest and a king. It will make you feel the need for an intercessor.

The intercessor that will come between you and God will not be the Lord Jesus. After all, you have rejected the peace He gives for the peace that someone else is offering. It will be a person. It will be someone who offers to show you the way, the formula. It will be someone who will know all the rules and requirements for staying right with God. You will be saved, but never secure. Your sin will be forgiven, but never forgotten. You will have the promises, but never the qualification to receive them. You will be given the family name, but never the family inheritance. You will forever strive to attain what Jesus has freely given. You will be given peace, but never be peaceful.

This is not the plan of God for you. God desires for you to know and experience His great love, acceptance and peace. But you must believe the report that God gives about the finished work of Jesus. It is a good report. It is a report of **peace!**

A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The ultimate goal of the Gospel is a loving, meaningful relationship with God. Until the goal is understood, the process will be perverted. Because we fail to realize what God desires, we spend much of our time and efforts pursuing an entirely different goal than that which God is desiring.

Jesus did not come to build an army. He came to recover a family. Through His work we are adopted, not inducted. Adoption is acceptance into a family. Induction is enlistment into an army. God is our Father, not our general. While Jesus is our Lord, He is also our Elder Brother. The ultimate goal of God is not a labor force or a warring force, it is a family.

God wants us as His sons and daughters. He wanted us to be a part of His family. He wanted our involvement. He wanted a relationship with us. Therefore, He initiated the plan that could bring all of this about. He had to deal with the one thing that stood between us and Him. Sin!

Sin had separated man from God. Sin had created a bridge that we could not cross. Sin introduced the one thing that would always keep us from loving, trusting or being involved with God. It began to reign with Adam and it has continued until this very day.

Genesis gives us some insight into the way sin affected man's relationship with God. Genesis 3:8 is one of the saddest verses in all the Bible. *"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."*

Just as God had initiated this whole plan of man, just as He had initiated every aspect of creation, just as He had initiated a relationship with man to start with, this day He initiated a visit with Adam. For the first time, man didn't respond. He hid from God. From that day until the present, man has continued to run from the invitation of God. Man has refused to draw near and experience God.

In Genesis 3:9 it says, *"And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?"* There is every indication from the original language that when God called, it means "He called to make peace." God wanted peace. Adam assumed God called for judgment. That assumption is perpetuated in fearful men unto this day.

Unfortunately, this fear of God is not experienced exclusively among the lost. Even after people are saved, there is a reserve about intimacy with God. Among believers, there is a lack of confidence concerning God's desire to

be intimate with us. There is a “low level” nagging fear in most people. They do not really believe they are acceptable to God.

We have the illusion that we are trying to get holy enough to have involvement with God. But our attempt to be made acceptable is like Adam’s. Adam had always been naked before God. But now Adam, through his new found abilities, determined that God should not see him naked. So Adam made aprons out of fig leaves. God was looking for Adam in the garden. Adam didn’t think he could stand before God. Then he does what he thinks will make him acceptable. Adam, like us, missed the point. If God did not want to fellowship with Adam, He would not have come to the garden looking for him.

Our fears, like Adam’s, effect our behavior so dramatically that we cannot have meaningful involvement with God. We do not accept the reality that God pursued us, in Jesus. He made us acceptable. He wants a relationship. He has done everything to make this relationship possible.

Meaningful relationships are the product of love, trust and personal involvement. Relationships grow to the extent that each of these factors are present. When there is not love, trust and personal involvement, it is not a relationship. At best, it might be considered an arrangement or a “working relationship.” But it is not a personal, family relationship.

We need time with God so as to develop and experience these factors. When you spend time with someone who is kind to you, you grow in your trust for them. All positive involvement is a part of developing the relationship. But you will not spend time with someone if you do not realize they accept you. You will never have the opportunity to experience God until the issue of peace is resolved.

The one element that will hinder a real relationship more than anything else is fear. Fear breeds all sorts of negative emotions and actions. It is the root of deceit. You can never be honest with someone when you fear what they will do to you or how they will respond. You can never be real. You are too busy trying to cover your faults to develop a relationship.

This all began at the Garden. Man started running and has never stopped because we are afraid of God. We don’t really believe how God feels about us. We have not allowed love to deliver us from the power of fear.

There is a real possibility that the sin nature is not necessarily a nature that just craves sin. There is every indication that the essence of the sin nature is fear. Fear was the first emotion that was displayed after Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was fear that made Adam hide from God. It is fear that makes us turn to sinful actions instead of trusting God.

Fear and unbelief go hand in hand. Where there is one, there is always the other. Because we are afraid of God, we do not trust Him. Because we do not trust Him, we do not come to Him to receive strength and

help in our time of need. We do not believe He will really give us the promises He has made, because we are afraid.

What is it that man is afraid of? We are afraid that we are unacceptable to God, that He does not approve of us. We are afraid that we do not measure up, and that He will find fault in us and punish us. We are afraid, because we do not believe we are righteous.

This fear prevents us from having an open, honest relationship with God. It keeps us from all honest and open communication. It destroys all possibility of knowing God. It makes us emotionally unstable. It brings all matter of torment into our lives. There is an endless list of the negative effects of fear.

Some might say, "I thought you were supposed to fear God." In the King James Version, there are numerous scriptures that tell us the value of having the fear of God. Let's take a closer look at the admonition to fear God.

On the one hand, you have scriptures that tell you to fear God. On the other, every time God speaks, He opens with the words, "Fear not." When there are obvious contradictions like this, I have found that there is usually something I am misunderstanding.

1 John 4:18 tells us that, "*Perfect love casts out fear.*" This means that fear and love cannot co-exist. If I grow in the love of God, the fear of God will diminish in my life. I know God is love. I know God wants me to experience His love. But what about the fear of God?

When Jesus was tempted, He quoted an Old Testament scripture. "*Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*" (Matthew 4:10) Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 6:13, where it says, "*Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.*" Jesus translated the word "fear" as worship.

Actually, the word for fear in the Old Testament is better understood as awe, respect and love that produces worship. We should have an awe of God that produces worship, not fear. God does not want you to be afraid of Him.

To be afraid of God would contradict all we know about Jesus, His life and His ministry. It makes an honest relationship impossible. It prevents everything that Jesus came to establish. He came to restore us to the Father. He brought about our adoption into the family.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had completely misrepresented God. They had God portrayed as hard and judgmental. They perverted the meaning and purpose of the law. They had put God completely out of reach of the people.

Jesus came and properly represented God to the world. He said, "*If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.*" Hebrews 1:3, in the New International Version says Jesus was the exact representation of God. Jesus was approachable. He was merciful. He was open. He was relationship

oriented. This was the complete opposite of the God resented by the Jewish leaders and is somewhat contrary to the God the church has presented.

Jesus showed us God so we could have boldness to enter into a meaningful relationship with Him. God desires our presence. He desires our hearts. He wants a relationship with us.

Sample

THE GOOD NEWS OF CHRIST

Jesus appeared on the scene, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. The word “Gospel” simply means good news! It is not so complicated. Everything Jesus preached was good news. When the masses were healed, it was because they had heard good news. When there were miracles, it was because they heard good news. When people turned from their sins, it was because they had heard good news.

The religious leaders of the day preached to the people. But they never brought them good news about God, they always brought bad news. They didn't set people free, they loaded them down with more rules and regulations. They made the people fear God. They caused the people to view God as mean, hard and judgmental. Because they never preached good news, they never saw good results.

When people are afraid of God, they not only fail to establish a relationship, likewise they never have real productivity in their life. Jesus put forth a parable about a man that only had one talent. He refused to utilize that talent because he was afraid of God. Fear binds, destroys and restricts.

Despite the best attempts of the religious leaders of that day, what they had was not working. It did not set people free; it bound them. They all knew about God, but they did not know the GOOD NEWS about God. The Pharisees had laden the people with negatives, law and works, but they did not lift one finger to lighten their load.

Jesus came reading the same Bible, praying to the same God, but proclaiming good things and good news. It rang in my heart like a bell of freedom; Jesus always preached GOOD NEWS to the people. By preaching the good news, their faith was established, their hunger for God was heightened and their trust for the One who had once seemed so far away and unconcerned was revived. When they found out God was a good God, miracles happened.

Galatians 1:8 says, *“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed”* We have departed from the good news. Our religious system of today is built on the premise of an angry God. When people go to church, they are often “beaten” instead of fed. I was as guilty as anyone. While reading these words in Galatians, it exploded in my heart, *“If it is not good news, it is not gospel.”*

At one time, I was winning a few hundred people per year to the Lord. God spoke to me and said, “When you start preaching the gospel, you will

really do something for me.” I was insulted. What do you mean, when I start preaching the gospel? I thought I was preaching the gospel. I began to look at what I was telling people; it was mostly bad news. When people presented their problems to me, I was not mean or condemning, but I did not have a sure word that was always good. I did not have a word that always gave freedom. I did not have good news. Paul said in Romans 1:16, *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel (GOOD NEWS) of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth...”* The good news of Jesus is the power of God. Without good news, there is no power.

The word “salvation” comes from the Greek word “sozo.” Sozo is more than the new birth. It means healing, protection, deliverance, safety and a host of other good things. If I do not preach the good news, the power of God cannot come and bring salvation (sozo) into the lives of hurting people.

The good news is not life for everyone, only for those who believe it. When Jesus began His public ministry, He proclaimed the purpose for which the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him - to preach good news (Luke 4:18). He had good news for the poor, the brokenhearted, the captives, the blind and the bruised. The good news is found in Luke 4:19, *“To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”* What could He have possibly meant by that?

The acceptable year of the Lord is the year of jubilee. Every fifty years all debts were canceled. Regardless of how legitimate a debt might be, it was canceled. The individual was free from the debt without any effort or merit on his part. The debt was canceled. By the debt being canceled, the penalty of the debt was also canceled. Every good Jew knew the penalty for breaking the law was the curse, as described in the Old Covenant. When those curses came, he knew he deserved it. He could, in no way, hold God responsible for the curse of the law. But to all those curses: poverty, broken-heartedness, captivity, blindness and bruising, Jesus was saying *“The debt is now canceled.”* That is the good news to those in need. The debt of the law is canceled. I can now be free from the penalty of my sin.

Jesus repeatedly proved this applied to the forgiveness of sins, as well as to the curse of the law. The Pharisees never believed that and they never partook of it. They may have loved God, but they were offended at the good news. Despite what we might think, those Pharisees had something in their heart for God. It may have been twisted and perverted, but they must have wanted God pretty bad to live the strict lifestyle they lived.

In the Archko Volume, the Pharisees revealed some of their fears concerning Jesus’ message. They were afraid that when the people believed in the good news, they would fall into sin. They failed to understand that law affects the outer man, while mercy and love affect the inner man. Jesus’ message of forgiveness was accused of promoting a loose and lascivious lifestyle.

Contrary to this unfounded belief, the Good News that Jesus preached caused people to fall in love with God. It caused people to trust the God they

had grown to dread. It caused them to draw near to the One they had been hiding from. It caused them to come out of the stronghold of sin by entering into intimacy with God.

Jesus' preaching of the good news succeeded where law failed. By preaching and demonstrating the goodness of God, the people were able to respond properly. The natural response to goodness is appreciation, thanksgiving, commitment and relationship. Thus, we see the reality that the Gospel (good news) is the power of God unto salvation, healing, deliverance and every other promise that God made.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:2-5)

These words haunted me for years. What did this really mean? Did Paul only preach a salvation (born again experience) message? Did he only preach about the cross and nothing else? I had to know what this meant.

Sometimes the simple and the obvious is the most difficult to grasp. As I developed my understanding of the Word of God, I came to realize that all understanding, all revelation, all that God has done for us could only be understood in the finished work of the cross. I realized the Gospel was only understood in the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

All the rest of the New Testament teaching simply explains and points back to what happened on the cross. The cross is the basis of the entire New Covenant. It is the basis of my relationship with God. It is the basis of all of Christianity. All truth has its basis in the cross. Any message that is not consistent with what Jesus accomplished at the cross is simply not true.

Hebrews 1:1-2 says, *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...”* Prior to the cross, God had spoken in many different ways, through many different people, in many different situations. Now, however, He has said all He has to say in the Son. Specifically, in the death, burial and resurrection. God doesn’t speak through any other means. He has no other message. What happened at the cross is the basis of the good news that God has for the world.

The cross must become my focal point for understanding, interpreting and judging truth. In other words, anything I find in the entire Bible must pass the test of the cross. Is it consistent with what Jesus accomplished on the cross? Or, does it contradict the cross? A failure to interpret doctrine in light of the finished work of the cross has been the major cause for confusion and contradictory teachings.

It is the failure to base our entire belief system on the cross that we have erroneously looked back to the Old Covenant to relate to God. Because

the message of the cross is too good to be true we have, in our unbelief, looked other places to know and experience God.

At the cross, Jesus paid the price for sin and delivered us from the curse of the law. Yet, we still look to the law and assume that our standard of conduct will protect us from the curse. At the cross, Jesus was chastened so we could have peace. In our unbelief, we live in expectancy of God chastening us. At the cross, Jesus was bruised with sickness so we could have healing. But we look again to some stipulation of the law to give us healing. At the cross, Jesus conquered sin. But we try to conquer it in our own strength. At the cross, Jesus conquered death by the resurrection and obtained righteousness and we still try to obtain righteousness by our own works. We have abandoned the cross.

Although the cross is the central message of the Gospel, we have failed to embrace it as Paul and the early church did. We have verbally acknowledged it as the apex of Christianity, but in reality, our doctrine and practical application totally deny the cross. Rather than our Christianity revolving around and depending on the finished work of the cross, it depends on us. We are more aware of our works than we are of His work. We erroneously place ourselves at the center of our relationship with God, instead of Jesus and His finished work.

In short, we will never experience the power of God until our faith stands in the cross instead of the wisdom of men. The simple realities of the cross are the basis for real Bible faith. To live by faith is to live dependent on, trusting in, adhering to and deriving power from what Jesus did at the cross. All else is simply vain imaginations.

Our faith as Christians is obviously in the person of Jesus. Yet, there is no separating who Jesus is from what He has done. There is no operation of faith apart from faith in His finished work. This is the basis for faith. Faith (trust) based on anything else is vanity. It is a denial of the cross of Christ.

This causes us to ask some hard questions of ourselves. Do I really even know what Jesus accomplished at the cross? If so, do I really believe it? Has the cross of Christ become the pivotal point around which my life revolves or is it just an addendum to the Old Testament?

Paul said this in 1 Corinthians 1:17, *“For Christ sent me..., to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.”* We preach Christ. But we don't preach the cross of Christ, not the way Paul and the early church understood it. For that reason, we don't see the same results he saw.

Some of the most profound, deep, challenging sermons I have ever heard were not based on the cross. They had a show of wisdom. They were logical. They were about Jesus. They were about loyalty and commitment to Jesus as a person. Yet, in the maze of man's wisdom, those messages never

brought one to the place where his confidence before God was based on what Jesus accomplished in His death, burial and resurrection.

On the other hand, I have heard many heart moving messages of the cross. I have wept because I was so stirred. Yet, when I walked away and reflected on what I had heard, I realized it never acknowledged the provisions that God made through the cross.

I have so committed myself to the message of the cross, that I can only understand anything in the Bible when I understand it in light of the cross. If what I believe is not consistent with the cross, I must realize that I do not yet understand it. I am only beginning to understand why Paul preached nothing but Jesus and Him crucified.

PEACE ON EARTH

Jesus is the Prince of Peace. God the Father is identified as the God of Peace. The fruit of the Spirit is peace. We are told that we should allow the peace of God to rule in our hearts. Yet, peace is not what many Christians are experiencing.

Quite the contrary, for too many the Christian life is brimming with fear, guilt and condemnation. According to one survey, Evangelical Christians have the lowest sense of self-worth among the majority of religious beliefs. Hindus have a better sense of self-worth than Evangelicals. Catholics have a better sense of self-worth than Evangelicals.

Low self-worth among Christians is the product of fear in our relationship with God. Instead of accepting and believing the truth about our new identity in Jesus; instead of believing what God has made us to be, we are trying to become what we think God would have us to be.

We are like Adam. Adam was created in the likeness and image of God. Satan said, "If you'll do this, you will be like God." He already was like God, he simply did not believe it. We have been made righteous in Jesus. The tempter says to us, "If you will do this, it will make you become like Jesus." We are like Jesus; we just don't believe. So instead of our doing being the product of who we are, we try to make who we are become the product of our doing.

If I think I must become something to be acceptable to God, then I must also believe that I am not acceptable to God in my present state. Hence; low self-worth, rejection and fear rule in my heart instead of peace. I find myself striving instead of resting. Doubting, instead of believing.

Colossians 3:15 tells us, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*" My heart should always be ruled by peace. There should never be a time that another emotion is allowed to dominate my thoughts, feelings and actions.

But the truth is, if I believe what mainstream Christianity teaches about God, I will never be at peace. I will never have an abiding peace that dominates my every decision and thought. I will, instead, live in a dread and fear of what God might do to me. I will forever be striving to measure up to the standards of behavior imposed on me by the religious system.

Jesus came to establish peace. As He was preparing to leave planet earth He said, "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*" (John 14:27) I must allow that peace to rule in my heart. I must allow His peace to protect me from fear and a troubled heart.

Like all my beliefs, I must look back to the cross to find the basis for my peace with God. I do not want a false peace that is not based on reality. I do not want to look to myself and my performance to determine my level of peace. I want to look to the work of Jesus. I want a peace that has its foundation in what He has done for me.

When Jesus was born, the angels appeared to the shepherds in the countryside around Bethlehem. Their announcement of the birth of our Savior and Lord was magnificent. There was joy in heaven that could not be contained as the angels broke forth. *“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”* (Luke 2:10,11,13,14)

This announcement was so glorious it could not be contained in Heaven. There was good news coming to man from God. This would be the most valuable announcement God had ever made to fallen man. For the first time since Adam ran out of God’s presence in the garden, there was going to be peace between God and man.

Man had already experienced miracles. He had seen healings. Actually, every miracle of the New Testament had been seen in the Old. It was not the message of miracles, signs or wonders that was too good to be contained, it was the message of peace between God and man.

All of my life I saw the Christmas banners that proclaimed, “Peace on earth and good will toward men.” Those words were always placed in a setting of men having peace and good will for one another. While that is a noble admonition, it is not the true message that was being sent to earth.

For the first time, there would be peace between man and God. Because of the arrival of the Savior, something was going to happen that would make peace between God and man possible. There was going to be a reconciliation. Man was going to be restored to God.

God always wanted peace between Him and man. He put man here in a garden called Paradise. There was perfect harmony between God and man. When man sinned, he did more than disobey God. He acquired a new capability. He gained the ability to determine good and evil for himself. Along with that ability came a self imposed standard of righteousness and unrighteousness. Through that self imposed standard, man became fearful of God. He stopped trusting in God’s standards of truth and began to develop his own standards. When we failed to meet up to our self imposed standards, there was self imposed fear. We assumed that fear to be from God and related to God accordingly. Thus, there was no peace between God and man. This terrible syndrome has continued in the hearts of men until this very day.

With the arrival of the Savior, that fear problem was going to be resolved and for the first time since the garden, there would be peace between God and man. This fear problem was so powerful that man could not be delivered from sin unless he was delivered from fear. Hebrews 2:15 says that Jesus delivered us from the power of evil by delivering us from the fear of death. *“And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”*

After man sinned, God still wanted man to have the very best. The law was not given to make man righteous. There has never been a law that could make man righteous. The law was given by a loving Father so man would have a way to avoid falling under the curse of sin. Likewise, it was given so a sinful, undeserving man could receive the blessing of God. Even when we were dead in sin and enemies of God, He loved us so much He wanted us to experience the best.

Righteousness demands that sin be paid for in the flesh of the one who commits the sin. Under the law, at best, man could divert the curses. Yet, there was never peace under the law. Man was always fearful of judgment. Man was always struggling to measure up. Because man’s nature was sinful, there was always the consciousness of sin. There was always fear. There was always enmity between God and man.

Under the law, man feared and therefore did not trust God. All the imaginations of his heart were continually wicked. Thus, under the law, God was angry. As it says in Psalms 7:11, *“God...is angry with the wicked every day.”* When sin reigned, God was angry. God was required by righteousness to judge sin in the flesh of man.

With the coming of the Messiah, there would be a new day for man and God. God’s plan for man had not changed. God did not change from the Old Covenant to the New. He had worked everyday for four thousand years to bring man into a place to experience His love. Through Jesus, it would happen. Finally, a loving relationship between God and man would be possible. There would be peace.

Today, we have what no generation prior to the cross has ever had. We have peace with God. He has dealt with sin. He has made us righteous. He finds no fault with us because we have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

In this environment of peace and acceptance, we can come to God without fear. We can establish a real relationship with Him. We have no need to be afraid that He will reject or hurt us. We are at peace.

We hope you've enjoyed this free sample of *The Gospel of Peace*. For more information on purchasing *The Gospel of Peace*, please visit

<http://www.truepotentialmedia.com/product/the-gospel-of-peace/>

Sample

Every day you struggle to measure up. Your ugly past haunts you, and you certainly don't feel very holy or righteous. God is angry with you— isn't He? God wants to punish you— doesn't He? No...

GOD IS THE VERY DEFINITION OF LOVE, AND HE LOVES YOU,

NO MATTER WHAT YOU HAVE DONE!

Many suffer from broken hearts, rejection, loneliness, and fear. Guilt, condemnation, and low self-worth plague us until we have become unable to give or receive love. Most believers live in a state of constant "mental inventory" to make sure they have done all they could to be worthy of God's love. This barrage of legalism is tormenting. Dr. James B. Richards explains how you can be set free from this torment.

Jesus came to set us free from the law and fill our lives with peace. He went to the cross, became our sin, took all of our punishment, and gave us the gift of righteousness so we could have peace with God. Christ satisfied the wrath of God for the sins of the world.

You don't have to fear God's judgment. You don't have to live with the feeling that you'll never live up to God's standards. You don't have to view God as an unapproachable being who is waiting to reject you and hurt you. You can experience an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe! You can experience a sense of peace in your life that you've never known before. Enter into the peace that is based not on performance, but on the righteousness of Christ in you. Allow your spirit to be transformed by *The Gospel of Peace!*

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