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978-1-107-66855-3 - The Sermons of Thomas Adams: The Shakespeare of Puritan Theologians

A Selection Edited by John Brown

Excerpt

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THE CITY OF PEACE

Live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.—2 Cor. xiii. 11.

PEACE is the daughter of righteousness, and the mother of knowledge; the nurse of arts, and the improvement of all blessings. It is delectable to all that taste it, profitable to them that practise it; to them that look upon it, amiable; to them that enjoy it, a benefit invaluable. The building of Christianity knows no other materials. If we look upon the church itself, 'there is one body'; if upon the very soul of it, 'there is one Spirit'; if upon the endowment of it, 'there is one hope'; if upon the head of it, 'there is one Lord'; if upon the life of it, 'there is one faith'; if upon the door of it, 'there is one baptism'; if upon the Father of it, 'there is one God, and Father of all,' Eph. iv. 4.

Peace is a fair virgin, every one's love, the praise of all tongues, the object of all eyes, the wish of all hearts. She hath a smiling look, which never frowned with the least scowl of

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anger; snowy arms, soft as down, and whiter than the swan's feathers, always open to pious embracements. Her milken hand carries an olive branch, the symbol and emblem of quietness. She hath the face of a glorious angel, always looking towards righteousness, as the two cherubims looked one upon the other, and both unto the mercy-seat. Her court is the invincible fort of integrity; so guarded by the divine providence, that drums, trumpets, and thundering cannons, those loud instruments of war, (I mean blasphemy, contention, violence,) may affront her, but never affright her. She hath a bounteous hand, virtual like the garment of Christ; if a faithful soul can come to touch it, to kiss it, all her vexations are fled, her conscience is at rest. Her bowels are full of pity; she is always composing salves for all the wounds of a broken heart. Sedition and tumult her very soul hates; she tramples injuries and discords under her triumphant feet. She sits in a throne of joy, and wears a crown of eternity; and to all those that open the door of their heart to bid her welcome, she will open the door of heaven to bid them welcome, and repose their souls in everlasting peace. In these continual dog-days of ours, wherein love waxeth cold, and strife hot, we had need set our instruments to the tune of peace. This was the

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blessed legacy which Christ bequeathed to his church ; the Apostle from his Master sent it as a token to the Corinthians ; and I from the Apostle commend it as a jewel to all Christians : ‘ Live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.’ Which conclusion of the epistle contains the blessing of the Apostle ; a valediction, and a benediction. They are in part hortatory, in part consolatory ; the virtue to which he persuades them, and the reward which he promiseth them. There is a sweet symphony and respondent proportion between the counsel and the comfort, the active peace and the factive peace : for seeking peace on earth, we shall find peace in heaven ; for keeping the peace of God, we shall be kept by the God of peace. The one is the regular compass of our life on earth, the other is the glorious crown of our life in heaven.

Some have a good mind to peace, but they will be at no labour about it ; many are content to embrace it, but they are ashamed to seek it ; most men love it, few practise it. The use commends the virtue : the beauty and praise of peace consists not in motion, but in action ; nor is the benefit of it in a knowing discourse, but in a feeling sense. A speculative peace is like an historical knowledge, such as he that hath been always confined to his study may have

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of foreign countries. So we make a conquest of peace, as the byword says our fathers won Boulogne ; who never came within the report of the cannon. Or as the Grecians kept philosophy in their leaves, but kept it not in their lives. A jejune and empty speculation, like some subtle air in the head, only breaks out into crotchets : it is experience that brings the sweetness of peace home to the heart. Use breeds perfectness, and disuse loseth the most serviceable things. Gold loseth more of its weight by rusting in corners, than by continual running in commerces, the proper end it was coined for. The best land will yield small increase if it be not tilled ; though some have the most profitable trades, the want of industry hath made them the poorest men. The throne of peace is in the heart, not in the head.

To recover, therefore, the swooning life of this virtue, I will compare peace to a city : if you will, to this city ; which should be, like Jerusalem, a 'city of peace.' And so much we will pray for it : that it may preserve peace, and peace may preserve it, to the world's end.

I. Let the walls of this city be unity and concord. II. Let her have four gates : innocence and patience, benefaction and satisfaction. The first gate of peace is innocence ; she must do no wrong. The second is patience ; she must suffer

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wrong. The third is beneficence ; she must do good instead of wrong. The fourth is recompense ; she must make liberal and just satisfaction for any committed wrong. There is also a postern gate, and that is humility : a gate indeed, but a small and low one ; whosoever enters the city of peace that way, must stoop before he get in. III. The enemies of this city are many, divided into two bands—hostility and mutiny. IV. The government of it is magistracy. V. The law, religion. VI. The palace, the temple. VII. It is served by the river of prosperity. VIII. The life of the citizens is love. IX. The state of it is felicity. X. The inheritance, eternal glory.

I. The walls of peace are unity and concord. *Omnis societas est corpus politicum* ; and it is in a city as in a body : there are many members, one body ; many citizens, one city. The body is one of the most lively figures and examples of peace. ‘We are all one body,’ 1 Cor. xii. Not only one kingdom ; so disparity in religions makes many differences. Nor only one city ; so disparity of estates will breed quarrels. Nor only one house ; so we may have ‘enemies of our own household.’ But one body, here must be all love and peace. Where all are tied by bonds, joints, and ligaments to the head ; there also by the same nerves one to another.

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Some members are single : as the tongue is one, to speak one truth ; the heart one, to entertain one God. Other are *gemina, germana* ; their forces are doubled to supply mutual defects. Some are stronger, as the arms and legs, for the supportation of the weaker. Thus qualified are all the faithful citizens of peace ; preserving a unanimity in affection, a sympathy in affliction, a ready help to the most needful condition ; comforting the minds of those that are perplexed, supplying the wants of those that are distressed, rectifying the weakness of those that are unsettled, informing the ignorance of those that are seduced, and reforming the errors of those that are perverted : all endeavouring the deliverance of the oppressed.

The members provide one for another : the eye sees not for itself, but for the body ; the hand works not only for itself, but for the body ; the ear hearkens, the tongue talks, the foot walks, all parts exercise their functions for the good of the whole.

If one member suffer, the rest suffer with it. If there be a thorn in the foot, the eye sheds a tear, the heart aches, the head grieves, the hand is ready to pull it out.

The walls of the city must be whole, no breaches in them, lest this advantage the enemy's entrance.

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There must be no schism in a city, as no division in the body : one must not be for Paul, another for Apollos, another for Cephas ; but all for Christ, and all for peace. Many evil men may have one will in wickedness. It is said of Pilate, Luke xxiii. 25, *Tradidit Jesum voluntati eorum*,—‘ He delivered Jesus to their will,’ not wills ; many sinners, one will. Shall, then, the sons of grace jar ? the children of peace be mutinous ? Saith Christ,—‘ My dove is but one.’ The dove is a bird of peace : many of them can agree lovingly together in one house ; every one hath a little cottage by herself, wherein she sits content, without disquieting her neighbours. Thus *dum singulæ querunt unionem, omnes conservant unitatem*. We have them that rush into others’ tabernacles, swallowing a man and his heritages : would doves do thus ? Poor Naboth’s portion is many a rich Ahab’s eye-sore : would doves do thus ? Numbers are still on the wing to prey upon prostrate fortunes ; these be ravens, not doves. If the law cannot make work for their malice, their malice shall make work for the law. This is like cocks of the game, to peck out one another’s eyes to make the lawyers sport. When two friends are fallen out of love into blows, and are fighting, a third adversary hath a fair advantage to kill them both. We have an enemy

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that watcheth his time, and while we wound one another, he wounds us all.

II. So I come from the walls to the gates.

1. The first gate is innocence ; and this may be called *Bishopsgate*, the ministers of the gospel being both the preachers and precedents of innocence. If men would abstain from doing wrong, the peace could not be broken. St Bernard writes of the dove, that she hath no gall. Let us be such doves, to purge our hearts from all bitterness.

Now the first shelf that wrecks innocence is anger. It were rare if 'the wrath of man should fulfil the righteousness of God'; even a curst anger breaks the peace. It is an evidence whereby God will judge men guilty : now there is no malefactor going to the bar for his trial would willingly have that evidence found about him that should cast him. The wrathful man takes no notice of the law, but the law takes notice of the wrathful man. Let us take heed lest we carry our anger with us unto God.

2. The second gate is patience, which is not unlike to *Ludgate*; for that is a school of patience, the poor souls there learn to suffer. The first entrance of peace is to do no injury, the next is to suffer injury. It is one special commendation of charity, that it 'suffers all things.' For our brethren

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we must sustain some loss: he that suffers not an abatement of his own fulness to supply their emptiness, is no brother. Of our brethren we must put up some wrong, rather than make a flaw in the smooth passage of peace.

According to the Apostle's counsel, 'Let us bear the burden one of another,' and God shall bear the burden of us all. As in the arch of a building, one stone bears mutually, though not equally, the weight of the rest. Or as deer swimming over a great water do ease themselves in laying their heads one upon the back of another; the foremost having none to support him, changeth his place and rests his head upon the hindmost. Bear thou with his curiousness, he doth bear with thy furiousness; let me bear with his arrogance, he doth bear with my ignorance. The Italians have a proverb, 'Hard without soft, the wall is nought.' Stones cobbled up together, without mortar to combine them, make but a tottering wall. But if there be mortar to cement them, and with the tractable softness of the one to glue and fix the solid hardness of the other, this may fortify it against the shock of the ram or shot of the cannon. The society that consists of nothing but stones, intractable and refractory spirits, one as froward and perverse as another, soon dissolves. But when one is reeking

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with the fire of rage, and another shall bring the water of patience to cool and quench it, here is a duration of peace. When iron meets iron, there is a harsh and stubborn jar; let wool meet that rougher metal, and this yielding turns resistance into embracements.

3. The next gate is beneficence. Doing good is the fortification of peace. This may be called *Aldgate*; not only because there is the picture of Charity at the gate,—I do not say, as near going out, but at the gate, to keep goodness in,—but because that is called the *Old-gate*, and charity was a virtue of old times, not so much now in fashion. The gospel chargeth us, ‘while we have opportunity, to do good to all men’; albeit with some preferment of the best, ‘especially to the household of faith,’ Gal. vi. 10.

All men may be ranked under one of these combinations: rich and poor, home-born and strangers, friends and enemies.

First, for the rich and poor. The Pharisee will stand on good terms with the rich, invite them for a re-invitation; as men at tennis toss the ball to another, that he may toss it to them again. But who helps the poor? ‘Wealth maketh many friends, but the poor is separated from his neighbour,’ Prov. xix. 4. If he do well, he is not regarded; if ill, he is destroyed.