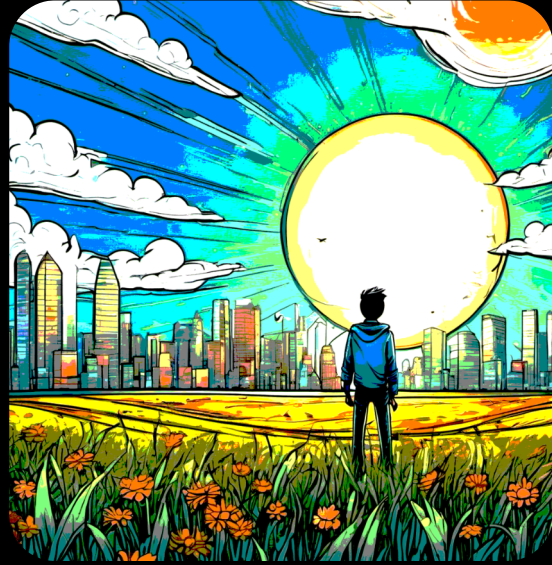


LIVING IN THE PRESENCE OF THE GOD OF PEACE

(WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? AND HOW DO WE DO THAT?)



HCF #7: HEALTHY CHURCHES STAND FIRM IN THE LORD AND LIVE IN THE PRESENCE OF THE GOD OF PEACE

1) What does that mean?

What does it mean to live in the presence of the God of peace? It seems that we could summarize Paul's thoughts in Philippians 4:1-9 in this way. He expresses his great love for the Philippians, exhorts them to stand firm and then gives them practical instructions which if they learn and receive and do these things, then the God of peace will be with them.

- (Philippians 4:1 ESV) Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.
- (Philippians 4:9 ESV) What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

We need to know what Paul means when he says that the God of peace will be with them.

1. He does not mean only that God is there.

God is omnipresent which means he is present everywhere all the time. So we know that is not what Paul is saying.

2. Paul also does not mean only that God will be with them since we know that God will never leave or forsake those who truly believe and are saved.

- (Hebrews 13:5 ESV) Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
- (John 14:16 ESV) And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.

3. Since God is the God of peace and God does not change, then it seems that the issue has to be one of perception on the part of the human involved.

4. Living in the presence of the God of peace is living with a perception—the conscious reality of who God is, what he does and has done and our relationship with him as stated in his holy word.

Conscious in the most general terms means being awake and aware; deeply aware of or concerned about; giving value or emphasis to a particular fact or phenomenon.

Reality is the sum or aggregate of all that is real or existent within the universe, as opposed to that which is only imaginary, nonexistent or non-actual. Reality is the

world or the state of things as they actually exist, as opposed to an idealistic or notional idea of them; the state of things as they actually are, rather than as they are imagined to be or you might want them to be.

5. Here are some Scriptures to help clarify our perception of living in the presence of the God of peace in the context of God, salvation and eternity.

A. God is the Lord—the beginning and the end in any trustworthy view of reality in our universe.

- (Genesis 1:1 ESV) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
- (Revelation 1:8 ESV) "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."
- (Revelation 22:13 ESV) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. [Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Ge). NavPress.]

- (Isaiah 43:11–13 ESV) I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior.
- (Isaiah 45:6b–7 ESV) I am the Lord, and there is no other. 7 I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity; I am the Lord, who does all these things.
- (Jeremiah 32:27 ESV) Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?

B. Jesus as God conflicted with their perception of reality ... and people will kill for that.

- (John 8:57–59a ESV) So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him.

C. REALITY CHECK: Peter gives the rulers, elders and scribes a reality check as to what actually happened at the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

- (Acts 4:10–12 ESV) **Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel** that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, **whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead**—by him this man is standing before you well. 11 **This Jesus** is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12 **And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**

6. Being called to an awareness of living in the presence of and before Almighty God is well-documented throughout Scripture.

- (2 Timothy 4:1–2 ESV) **I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:** 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.
- (2 Timothy 2:14 ESV) Remind them of these things, **and charge them before God** not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.
- (1 Timothy 5:20–21 ESV) As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 21 **In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality.**
- (1 Timothy 6:13–14 ESV) **I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, 14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- (Acts 23:1 ESV) And looking intently at the council, Paul said, **“Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”**

2) How do we do that?

We come to live in the presence of the God of peace when we daily, faithfully, obediently live true to who God is, what he has done and what he calls us to do as revealed to us in his holy Scriptures. In short, we live in the presence of the God of peace when we stand firm in the Lord and practice the truth we learn and receive in our fellowship among Christ’s body.

1. General Exhortation: The Apostle Paul expresses his love for the Philippians and exhorts them to stand firm in the Lord, 4:1.

- (Philippians 4:1 ESV) Therefore, **my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.**
- A. As the beloved of the Lord we are to stand firm in our love and joy in the fellowship of the Lord’s body.
- B. We stand firm in the Lord when we live with an awareness of the reality of our citizenship in heaven and the coming of our Savior.
 - (Philippians 3:20 ESV) But **our citizenship is in heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- C. It is a clear sign of our salvation when we live worthy of the gospel, stand firm in unity and are not frightened by the enemy.
 - (Philippians 1:27–28 ESV) **Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ**, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, **I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, 28 and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign** to them of their destruction, but **of your salvation**, and that from God.

2. We stand firm and live in the presence of the God of peace when we come alongside one another to achieve unity and harmony in the Lord in our fellowship, 4:2-3.

- (Philippians 4:2–3 ESV) **I entreat Euodia** and **I entreat Syntyche** to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, **help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel** together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
- A. Paul comes alongside Euodia and Syntyche to exhort them to submit their minds to agree in the Lord to settle their disagreement.
- B. Helping these women work through their differences would present everyone involved with an opportunity to express their love for Jesus Christ and his Body—the Church.
- C. Not helping these women reveals a lack of love for Christ and his Church and exposes a common sin in our churches today of noninvolvement in regard to conflicts in the church.

- D. This sinful attitude is reflected when people dismiss the cause of disunity and disharmony in the fellowship as personality conflicts.
- E. This sinful attitude is reflected when people refuse to love Christ and his Church by pursuing and helping others pursue purity and healing in relationships.
- F. The two women needed to be directed to resolve their disagreement by submitting their minds to common agreement through the Scriptures.
- G. This would involve seeking and submitting to the fundamental principles of the word of God in regard to contentions in relationships.

3) CONCLUSION: Examples of David and Stephen

David and Stephen are two of the many examples in Scripture of men and women standing firm and living in the presence of the God of peace.

1. David exemplified living in the presence of the God of peace as evidenced by his powerful testimony in Psalm 23.

- (Psalm 23:1–4 ESV) **The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.** 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 **Even though** I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, **I will fear no evil, for you are with me;** your rod and your staff, **they comfort me.**

2. Stephen exemplified standing firm and living in the presence of the God of peace when he was brought before the high priest and the Jewish council.

- A. Stephen suffered the great injustice of false witnesses being brought in to attack his character because they could not withstand his wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.
 - (Acts 6:10–13 ESV) **But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking.** 11 Then they secretly instigated men who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.” 12 And **they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes,** and they came upon him and

seized him and brought him before the council, 13 **and they set up false witnesses** who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law.”

B. But in the midst of their rage he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God—he was living in the presence of the God of peace.

- (Acts 7:51–60 ESV) You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.” 54 **Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.** 55 **But he,** full of the Holy Spirit, **gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.** 56 And he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” 57 **But they** cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 **Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him.** And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 **And as they were stoning Stephen,** he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 **And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”** And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

4) Questions we hope to answer next week ...

How exactly would they go about helping these women? What advice and direction might Paul give them? How certain is it that we can experience this peace that passes all understanding? Is this too good to be true?