

ISAIAH 40:1, 2

COMFORT MY PEOPLE!

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.¹

Contemporary Christians often exhibit a flaccid faith. They appear to believe the primary job of the preacher they have hired is to make them comfortable. Perhaps they would even appeal to the words of our text to support a distorted view of the preacher's role. Isaiah, speaking on behalf of God, is commanded to comfort the LORD's people. However, there is nothing to make those receiving the message *feel* comfortable, though there is great comfort in what he writes. Let's examine the text to discover real comfort for God's people.

COMFORT ARISES FROM PEACE — “her warfare is ended.” Let's get a little perspective of Isaiah's reference. He is writing to the remnant of God's people in Babylonian captivity. Though at the time he was writing, the fall of Jerusalem had not yet occurred, it was certain. Therefore, what Isaiah wrote in this text would at a point in the future be read and understood as a reference to God's eternal love. God knew that the captives would be discouraged and dejected. They would be defeated in battle and humbled by a ferocious enemy. Under such conditions, it would be nearly impossible for the survivors not to focus on their sad situation; and focused on what was happening, they would be depressed, dismayed, disheartened.

It is not enough to say to those who are disciplined that they brought judgement upon themselves. Though discipline is the result of our own foolish choices, we seldom need to inform those who are undergoing discipline of the reason for their particular situation. Christians may moan and whine, plaintively bleating out a familiar refrain, “Why did this happen to me?” However, it is unfailingly true that when we are disciplined, we know the reason for our distress. Unlike some strange situations that may be evident in our fallen world, our Father does not injure us capriciously. If we are disciplined, we know why it is happening. Those who whine and moan are either deliberately ignorant of their sin or they have no relationship to the Father of life.

If we belong to the Lord God, we can anticipate His discipline. God does not discipline the devil's children. Moreover, when He disciplines His own child, that child will know the reason for the discipline. Perhaps we need to review again the words of the author to the Hebrew Letter, who writes, “Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?”

‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.’

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” [HEBREWS 12:5-11].

The people of God had racked up an incredible list of charges brought by God’s prophets. Throughout the land was evidence of the guilt of the people—idolatry, injustice, immorality and insensitivity to God’s messengers. The people of Israel not only engaged in these grave offences against Holy God, but they also justified their actions and minimised their guilt by appealing to the fact that they continued to maintain the religious practises instituted by Moses.

Though this rampant wickedness was addressed repeatedly by numerous prophets, Jeremiah especially brings the evil to the fore. On one particular day, Jeremiah received a command from the LORD. “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

“For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever” [JEREMIAH 7:2-7].

The message was offensive precisely because it stripped away the façade of goodness, exposing the sin that permeated the entire society. God commanded Jeremiah to charge, “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.

“As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. Is it I whom they provoke? declares the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own shame? Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.”

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: “Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.” But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.’

“So you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you. You shall call to them, but they will not answer you. And you shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God, and did not accept discipline; truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips’” [JEREMIAH 7:8-28].

Throughout the entire society, sin was rampant. The people were unrepentant, though they presented offerings, recited prayers, listened to the reading of the Scriptures and kept kosher. The rituals were icily precise; but there was no evidence of righteousness in daily life. Because of the wickedness permeating society, God would judge them, sending them into exile. One thing is evident as I review life in ancient Israel as Jeremiah described it—the people lived much like people in modern western society. Generally, the populace was religious, though the rituals were performed in a mindless fashion. They routinely went to the Temple, certain that all was well because they had mindlessly performed the requisite rites prescribed in the Law.

Can you imagine a pastor speaking so bluntly in this day of heightened sensitivities and inflated egos? Church boards are hypersensitive in the fear that some sinner may take umbrage at the sermon the pastor may deliver. These timid saints seem somehow to imagine that sinners will make a painless transition from unbelief to faith through hints and suggestions coyly dropped in casual conversation. Because the churches are filled with half-converted people that are actually inoculated against the Faith, these religious tyrants tremble at any word that makes them uncomfortable.

Underscore in your mind that an uncomfortable person is not an individual experiencing peace—either with God or with herself. Thus, when judgement comes, and judgement must come ultimately to all who bear the Name of the Risen Saviour, it will be extremely painful. This was the situation prophesied for Israel when Isaiah wrote the words of our text. They would be exiled, suffering because of their own sin, though the Lord would still be watching over them, even in captivity. The captivity was “hard service,” which is the actual meaning of the word “warfare” in our text. So, God instructs Isaiah to tell the people that one would “speak tenderly” (literally, “speak to the heart”) of the people to tell them that their exile was ended.

We have a message of peace—peace with God and peace with oneself. God presents Himself as “the God of peace” [ROMANS 15:13, 33; 16:20; 1 THESSALONIANS 5:23; HEBREWS 13:20]. As believers in the Living Son of God, we have received a rich heritage of peace. We are taught, “God is a God ... of peace” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33]. As a community of faith, we are urged to “Let the peace of Christ rule in [your] hearts, to which indeed [we] were called in one body” [COLOSSIANS 3:15]. More than this, we are taught that one of the fruits of the Spirit—perhaps the premier fruit of the Spirit—is peace. Paul writes, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” [GALATIANS 5:22]. Therefore, it is entirely appropriate that the standard greeting of the apostolic church was “grace and peace.”

Again, we are taught, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” [PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7]. Peace is the heritage of the saints.

In the world, there is no peace. Though the world increasingly seeks peace, what they actually seek is to be undisturbed. This becomes especially evident when the Apostle prophesies of the last days, “Concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘There is peace and security,’ then sudden destruction will come upon them as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-3]. People will seek peace, but it is to be left alone that is more important than serenity.

These words call to mind the words of Isaiah, who wrote:

“‘Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,’ says the LORD,
‘and I will heal him.
But the wicked are like the tossing sea;
for it cannot be quiet,
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.
There is no peace,’ says my God, ‘for the wicked.’”

[ISAIAH 57:19-21]

God offers peace, but the wicked cannot know peace. An old adage that was once heard commonly among the saints perceptively states, “Know God, know peace. No God, no peace.” It is not that the lost do not know peace; they cannot know peace.

It is commonly said that faith is a leap in the dark. That is simply not true. Saving faith is faith in God who is there. Faith is seizing with confidence the knowledge of the presence of the True and Living God. Listen once more to the familiar statement of faith that is provided for the people of God. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible” [HEBREWS 11:1-3]. Did you catch that opening affirmation: Faith is the assurance ... faith is the conviction... Faith is the foundation for peace. The child of God lives with confidence. With the Apostle, each believer can say, “I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me” [2 TIMOTHY 1:12].

When I was lost, I had no peace. I was restless. I feared God, knowing about Him but not knowing Him. I thought I could be religious, but there was no peace in all my efforts. I was under sentence of death, and I knew I deserved that sentence. However, in the court of divine justice, I found one who was willing to take my place. This One took my place—assumed my guilt and took my penalty upon Himself. I learned that He was Jesus, the Son of God, and that He died because of my sinful condition and that He conquered death, rising from the dead to authenticate His power and the right to represent me in the divine court. I believed Him, accepting His sacrifice because of my sin. Now, having been justified by faith, I have peace with God through my Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, I have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which I now stand, and I rejoice in the hope of the glory of God [see ROMANS 5:1, 2].

COMFORT ARISES FROM PARDON — “her iniquity is pardoned.” Undoubtedly, Israel was a sinful nation. They had lived fast and loose with respect to the revealed will of God. Then, when God at last said, “That is enough!” they were delivered into the hand of their enemies. Seventy years of captivity would pass before they would return to the land. Do you not imagine that when they were held captive that they pined for what they had once enjoyed? In fact, they grieved daily, just as God had warned.

Among the warnings God had delivered through Moses was this one, which details the horrors that would come upon the people if they rebelled against the mercies of God and pursued their own desires. “Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless. A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labours, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see. The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

“The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away” [DEUTERONOMY 28:32-37].

Among the Psalms is one that speaks of the grief of the people in their captivity.

“By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.
For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’”

[PSALM 137:1-3]

I cannot imagine the horror of being deported from familiar homes and forced into captivity. Neither can I imagine the terror of their children torn from their arms and forced into slavery. The horror of seeing their wealth stolen and witnessing the rape of the wives and daughters of the nation raped as they were forced into the harems of crude and cruel strangers is unimaginable. The horrors their eyes would witness would drive them mad, just as God had warned [see DEUTERONOMY 28:34]. However, above all this, their captors taunted them, mocking them by demanding that they be happy and demanding that they sing the songs of Zion.

The comforting word God delivered through Isaiah would be spoken when the people were at their nadir. So it is that the comfort of salvation does not come until we know that we are sinners. Let me speak somewhat pointedly to this issue. Whenever an individual says, “I have always been a Christian,” I confess that I grow somewhat concerned that they do not understand what it means to be lost. If they have never been conscious of their estrangement from God, there is no compunction to seek Him. The Good News of salvation is always presented against the black backdrop of sin throughout the New Testament.

Listen to Peter at Pentecost. “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” [ACTS 2:36]. Those listening to his message would need to be aware of the magnitude of their sin before they would realise their need to turn to Him. Thus, the Word continues by noting, “When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” [ACTS 2:37]. Only then did Peter utter the words that presented hope in the midst of their awful sin: “Repent and be baptised every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself” [ACTS 2:38, 39].

On another day when God had given healing to a lame man in Solomon’s Portico, Peter pointedly exposed the sin of those listening. “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses” [ACTS 3:12-15].

Haled before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John boldly confronted the wickedness of the religious leaders when Peter spoke, saying, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and 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. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 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” [ACTS 4:8b-12].

It is the same approach adopted by Stephen when he was compelled to give a defence for his message. His words undoubtedly stung the proud religionists. “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 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, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it” [ACTS 7:51-53].

Exposure of sin was the first part of the message that Paul preached from the earliest days of his missionary labours. In Pisidian Antioch, he declared, “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this He has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus” [ACTS 13:26-33a].

At considerable peril to his life and health, Paul confronted the wickedness of those who heard him in Lystra, “We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a Living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them” [ACTS 14:15b]. In fact, he would be stoned and left for dead in Lystra because of the message he delivered. There was no way to soften the words; otherwise, they would have lost their force.

When we realise how horrendous our sin is, we are astonished; we are incapable of speaking; there is no defence. We see God's mercy and His grace extended to us as sinners, and we realise that our sin is "sinful beyond measure" [see **ROMANS 7:13b**]. Because of the magnitude of our sin, it is impossible to hope that we can be forgiven. However, it is precisely at that time that we are pardoned. God is rich in mercy toward all who respond to His call; thus, that which we could not hope to receive is freely given. How very sweet is that promise of God, who has said, "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" [**ROMANS 6:23**].

God does not overlook sin; He dealt with sin. Therefore, through the sacrifice of His Son, God is able to set aside sin for anyone who receives the offer of freedom extended through faith in the Son of God. Isaiah foresaw this grace when he wrote:

"Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all."

[**ISAIAH 53:4-6**]

For any who fear that their sin is too great, I have comforting news. The sacrifice offered at Calvary is infinite. Jesus is very God in human flesh. He presented His life as a sacrifice because of our sin. The sacrifice He offered is infinite because He is infinite. Thus, provision has been made to forgive all sin. There is no reason for an individual to continue in sin, for there is forgiveness for all. However, we must receive the mercy offered.

God has provided wonderful comforting words in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. "Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" [**HEBREWS 9:24-28**]. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Now, all who have received that sacrifice await His return, for He is coming again.

"Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" [**HEBREWS 10:11-14**].

There is comfort in the knowledge of God's pardon, for anyone who has been pardoned cannot be judged again for the same sin. They are forgiven. When Christ presented His life as a sacrifice, all your sin was included for you had not yet sinned. This is the reason it was necessary that the sacrifice for sin be infinite, so that provision could be made for all people. Christ Jesus "is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe" [1 TIMOTHY 4:10]. Thus, it is not enough to know about His salvation; we must receive that salvation. Believers know the truth that teaches, "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" [1 PETER 1:18-21]. There is comfort in God's pardon.

COMFORT ARISES FROM PROVIDENCE — "she has received ... double for all her sins." Superficially, this statement appears vindictive, harsh and perhaps even somewhat arbitrary. It sounds as if God is intent on inflicting excessive pain because of sin. We must see the comfort in these words, for there is a dual aspect to this divine statement of comfort. When God deals with sin, it is fully addressed; there will be no need to address it again. However, the other side of God's dealing with our sin is that divine blessing attends the one who has received forgiveness. That is the intent of Isaiah's word here; this is the comfort in Isaiah's message.²

Biblical theology does not merely present sin as an act or a thing that can be dealt with objectively; sin is a state or a condition. Thus, people can never atone for sin, for we are utterly contaminated. Ultimately, God alone is able to deal with sin, for the state sets the individual at enmity with Him and debars the one so contaminated from the presence of God. Thus, if sin will be forgiven it is necessary that God both confront the sinner and remove the state of sinfulness. The comfort in Isaiah's message is that God does indeed make provision for the sinner and blesses those who have received the forgiveness He offers.

God was saying to Israel that the punishment they would receive through the long captivity suffered would be sufficient, and that at the end of the judgement would be blessing. Similarly, God says to us that the captivity we suffered through the long period of sinful estrangement is now ended, and we will receive blessing because we are received as His own beloved people. God replies to Israel's sin with a double pardon—the pardon of grace. Just so, God replies to our sin with a double pardon—the pardon of grace. Something of this insight is provided elsewhere in Isaiah's prophecy when he writes:

"Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion;
instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot;
therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion;
they shall have everlasting joy."

[ISAIAH 61:7]

Blessing follows receipt of pardon is the message of grace.

² For further exploration of this point, see: J. A. Motyer, **The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary** (InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL 1993) Is 40:2; Gary Smith, **New American Commentary: Isaiah 40-66, Vol. 15B** (Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 2009) 95; Edward Young, **The Book of Isaiah: Volume 3, Chapters 40-66** (Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI 1972) 23-24

On the authority of God's Word, I assure anyone who listens that not only does God forgive sin, but also He receives the penitent as His own child. Born from above and into the Family of God, the redeemed individual is set free from fear, given peace with God, assured access to the throne of God and promised joy as he or she walks in the path of the Spirit of God. The True and Living God offers not merely a way to avoid deserved punishment, but He offers life. This salvation offered in the Son of God is a life that can be fully realised.

There are individuals who seem to offer a fire insurance policy. They speak of deliverance from punishment and freedom to live according to one's own wishes. Essentially, this unbiblical philosophy appears to offer an attractive situation that says you are free to live as you wish without any further involvement with God. Unfortunately, for those who buy into this weird religious philosophy, they discover too late that it is a fool's dream. They are restless, without peace, without joy, without hope and without God in the world.

We witness the contrast between the two lives in something Paul wrote in the Ephesian Letter. "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" [EPHESIANS 4:17-24].

He continues by instructing those who walk with Christ to speak the truth, to turn from anger, to live honestly, to endeavour always to work productively and to avoid corrupting speech, choosing rather to build others up with what is said. He continues by teaching that those who walk in the Spirit are to set aside bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour and slander. Instead, those who follow Christ are to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving toward one another. All this is done to ensure that the peace and joy we have received in Christ the Lord will not be compromised by the corruption of our former style of life.

This is but an iteration of the delightful promise given in the Letter to Galatian Christians. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" [GALATIANS 5:22, 23]. Let me unpack this blessed promise; it is the heritage of each Christian. Love is not an emotion, but a condition. A change of punctuation would lead us to understand that love is the fruit of the Spirit, and the expressions that follow are defining the love of God. Perhaps that is accurate; however, what is certain is that joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, reliability, gentleness and self-control are blessings that are given to those who walk with Christ the Lord.

This is the message of the Advent Season—a message of comfort for all who will receive it. There is comfort in the knowledge that God removes the bondage of the past to permit His people to enter into the joy of present grace. There is comfort in knowing that we are set free from condemnation and guilt; we need never be burdened by fear of judgement again. There is comfort in anticipating the blessing that attends salvation—blessing that is the heritage of all who receive the gift of life in Christ the Lord. Do you have this promise? Have you received the life that is found in Jesus the Lord? If not, let this be the day you come to life in the Son of God who gave His life as a sacrifice because of your sin. Do it today; do it now. Amen.