

"Peace and Safety" vs. "Conflict and Danger"

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DeWitt's References

It may be observed in passing that St. Paul quoted the words Peace and Safety as catchwords of the Epicureans, to whom he refused the honor of mention by name.⁶⁹ In this collocation Peace signified harmonious relations with neighbors while Safety meant the security of the man as a citizen, the sort of safety that Paul himself enjoyed by virtue of Roman citizenship.

St. Paul in I Thessalonians 5 identified the Epicureans by their catchwords Peace and Safety. In this collocation Peace has reference to amicable relations with neighbors, while Safety refers to the security of person and property for the citizen. The best means of obtaining the latter, according to Epicurus, was to withdraw from the multitude and live a retired life, but he thought it equally important to put forward what he called the "false opinions" on the topic, as in Authorized Doctrine 7: "Some men have chosen to become celebrities and to be in the public eye, thinking thus to achieve security from the attacks of men." He does not explicitly label this a false opinion but leaves the inference to be drawn: "Consequently, if the lives of such men are safe, they have reaped the end of Nature, but if their lives are not safe, they lack that for the sake of which at the outset they reached out by the instinct of Nature." They are not free nor in control of their environment; they have placed their happiness at the mercy of a fickle populace.

It is also manifest that he looked chiefly to friendly diplomacy to keep the environment in control. Good will is a catchword of his creed no less than Peace and Safety. It is a precondition of Peace and Safety. He wrote, for instance: "A life of freedom cannot amass great wealth because of success in this being difficult apart from servitude to mobs or monarchs but it does enjoy all things in uninterrupted abundance; if, however, now and then great wealth does fall to its lot, it would gladly disburse this to win the good will of the neighbor."

The followers of Epicurus after his death, though diligent cultivators of peace and safety, continued to display the same belligerency as their founder. According to Lucian it was chiefly the Epicureans who summoned up courage to defy Alexander the False Prophet, and the only man to accuse him to his face on a specific charge was an Epicurean, who almost paid for his daring by his life.¹¹⁷ Upward of a century before the date of this alleged occurrence it was the Epicureans in Thessalonica who by their derision aroused the indignation of St. Paul, then

prophesying the second coming of Christ. In his retort he denied them the honor of mention by name but identified them adequately by those catchwords of their creed, "Peace and Safety."¹¹⁸ It may be added that the Epicureans, as usual, were in the right; the prophecy was not fulfilled.

Both Thessalonica and Corinth must have been strongholds of Epicureanism. We must learn to read between the lines. Paul had been preaching at Thessalonica about the second coming of Christ, and prophecy always aroused the scorn of the Epicureans, who denied all participation of the gods in the affairs of man. The answer of Paul to these scoffers is to condemn them to instant annihilation: "For when they shall say Peace and Safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."^{3e} The Epicureans were not accorded the honor of mention by name, but Peace and Safety were catchwords of their sect. It was part of their ethics to live a retired life apart from the turmoil of the courts and the market place and so to seek security from the malice and injury of other men. Paul follows up the quarrel and predicts the coming of Antichrist, the model for which was Antiochus Epiphanes, the archenemy of his race and the patron of the hated Epicureans.³⁷