

Peace with God

Romans 5.1-5

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The Nobel Peace Prize was given in 1969 to the International Labour Organization. You would think, how would the ILO contribute to world peace, and the Nobel Committee explained their choice. It referred to the motto enshrined in the foundations of the original building of the ILO in Geneva. That motto -written in Latin, but let us use English - that motto says: "If you desire peace, cultivate justice."

If we desire for peace, lasting peace, justice must be done first. Because if injustice is done to people, to nations, they may submit for a while to a stronger Other, but the feeling of injustice being done simmers like a boil under the skin. It may erupt at any time and create problem, hatred, violence, war.



We all need peace. In our world, peace is an extremely valuable commodity, because it seems that relationships always tend to gravitate to troubles. Fights. Disunity. No harmony. Peace is precious.

1. Past: We have been justified so we have peace with God

The Gospel that St Paul preached was about peace with God. We have all, by our words and actions, humiliated our Creator. We, as humanity, have dishonored him, we have been unjust.

But now we have peace with God, because justice has been done. We have been justified and that is why we have peace with God. In line with the motto of the International Labour Organisation, "If you desire peace, cultivate justice."

In the first four chapters of his Letter to the Romans, Paul described that as humanity we totally missed the mark in regard to God. No-one acted in accordance with the laws of God; no one was righteous. So in a way, mankind was at war with God.

But through the sacrificial love of God, Jesus Christ has made us right. He lived a righteous life; he was absolutely just; He satisfied God's desire for a just, loving, righteous humanity. And if we have faith in Jesus Christ, if we hold on to him in faith, God sees you - as just as righteous. You have been justified by faith.

You may be a nasty specimen of creation - but if you are inside God's Ark, in Jesus Christ, you are safe. You are justified.

Paul argued all this in his first four chapters of his letter, and now in chapter five, he is jubilant. Because we - and he speaks here to all Christians, to all animals that entered into God's Ark - we have been justified by faith. We now have peace with God.

Peace with God is the most precious peace. To be good with your Creator, that is a miracle that has been donated to us by God himself. He sent his Son to be our Saviour.

This peace with God is an objective fact. He offered us a peace-treaty, and we have with gladness accepted his terms. We believe in Jesus Christ and we live for him.

We have peace with God.

Yes, but one moment, many good Christian scholars argue, that we should understand Paul's words also as a commandment. "As we have been justified, let us now have peace with God." It is something to strive for.

This different understanding of the text is the result of a minute variation in some of the oldest Greek texts of Romans 5.1. And in a way, this is a happy confusion. It leads us to some valuable thoughts.

Yes, we are at peace with God. We are eternally secure because we have been justified. That was the work of Jesus Christ, and faith like a mustardseed will do. You have entered into the Ark of God.

The focus of this peace with God, is mostly historical. We have been justified by faith, by Christ's actions in the past. Our peace with God is anchored in history. That should make you relax and feel secure. Yes, we do dumb things, but God's love never changes. We are at peace with him.

But God does want you and I to also live within his realm, every day, as pacified people. We live in a peaceful kingdom, but we must now, in this kingdom, also behave as peacemakers. As people who love others. As good servants of our King.

2. Present: We have access to this grace in which we stand

And Paul moves on, and focusses on our 'now', in verse 2: "Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand."

We have been justified and we have peace with God, because of what Christ has done, and therefore today we stand in this grace.



This grace here, is about us living in that realm of peace with God.

We have access to this grace, to all these blessings, because we have been introduced by someone into the presence of the gracious God, the God of peace.



The one who introduced us was Jesus Christ of course, who has taken us by the hand and he has taken us into God's royal thronehall. With no fear, because we are at peace with God.

The word 'access' is really a word used in those days for introducing or ushering someone into the presence of royalty; and it is the regular word for the approach of the worshipper to God.

It is as if Paul was saying, 'Jesus ushers you into the very presence of God. He opens the door for you to the presence of the King of Kings; and when that door is opened what you find is grace; not condemnation, not judgment, not vengeance, but the sheer, undeserved, incredible kindness of God.'

The word 'access' that Paul uses was also used in antiquity for the place where ships would come in, a harbour. If Paul had this usage of the word in mind, it means that so long as we tried to depend on our own efforts we were tempest-tossed, like sailors fighting with a sea that threatened to overwhelm them completely.

But now that we have heard the word of Christ, we have reached at last the haven of God's grace, and we know the calm of depending, not on what we can do for ourselves, but on what God has done for us.

Because of Jesus we have access to the presence of the King of Kings and entry to the haven of God's grace.

Faith makes us enjoy peace with God, and faith now makes us stand in his realm of grace.

By the way, we stand. Do not become too comfortable. We do not lay down, we do not sit. We stand. That is rather active posture.

Someone who stands is always ready to move, to act, to run. Grace does not make us lazy but it makes us active servants of our Lord.

3. Future: we rejoice in hope of the glory of God

And Paul does, in this short passage, not only focus on the past in which God made peace with us, and on the present in which we stand in the grace of God.

He also focuses on the future. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

Hope in the New Testament is not an uncertain yearning or wishful thinking. It is the assurance that comes from knowing the certainty of our future salvation.

And this hope of the glory of God is really our expectation that one day we shall be fully joined with God, our Father, and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. The glory of God in the Bible always points at the very presence of God in his fulness.

That is our hope. That keeps us going, even when life is sometimes hard. We hope for God's glory in the future, even if today life may be hard.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome. It was hard to be a Christian in Rome. There was persecution. And beside this, the believers were facing all the normal stress of life. They lived in a multicultural society; they struggled to make ends meet. They got sick, and doctors were expensive and useless.

Remembering all these problems of the people he wrote to, Paul produced a great climax.

"Trouble," he said, "produces endurance, or fortitude." All kinds of things may press in upon us, sorrow, persecution, unpopularity and loneliness.

All that pressure, says Paul, produces endurance. Endurance is more than just allowing bad things to happen and you just hope the storm blows over. It is much more what we nowadays call resilience.

Adversity is a fact of life. Resilience is that quality that allows some people to be knocked down by life and come back at least as strong as before.

On a website, Psychology Today, I read:

Psychologists have identified some of the factors that make a person resilient, among them a positive attitude, [optimism](#), the ability to regulate emotions, and the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback.

Resilience is not some magical quality; it takes real mental work to transcend hardship. But even after misfortune, resilient people are able to change course and move toward achieving their [goals](#). There's growing evidence that the elements of resilience can be cultivated.

Problems can make us stronger. But not if we endure them in the sense that we just wait for the storm to pass and we keep our heads low. They work good in us if we see them as part of God's mysterious plan for us and if we keep the hope of the glory of God before us.



Basil the Great, in one of his homilies, said that tribulations “are like certain foods and exercises for athletes which lead the contestant on to the inheritance of glory.”

When Beethoven was threatened with deafness, that most terrible of troubles for a musician, he said: "I will take life by the throat." That is endurance.

When the writer, Sir Walter Scott was involved in ruin because of the bankruptcy of his publishers, he said: "No man will say 'Poor fellow!' to me; my own right hand will pay the debt." That is endurance.

"Endurance," Paul goes on, "produces character." Stamina. When affliction is met with endurance, out of the battle a man emerges stronger, and purer, and better, and nearer to God.

"Character," Paul goes on, "produces hope." The person who has endured the test always emerges in hope. It produces hope because if we face problems and we respond with resilience and it builds our character, we see God at work in us today. We experience the love of God in the midst of our daily problems.

That is why Paul makes one last great statement: The Christian hope never proves an illusion for it is founded on the love of God. God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power.

Have you noticed that in this short passage, Paul spoke of faith, hope and love, his popular wordgroup.

And that other Trinity of words, so often used in the New Testament, is also here:

We have peace with God, through Jesus Christ, and this is attested to by the Holy Spirit.

We know that we have this hope because God's Spirit was poured out in us, assuring us of God's love for us.

Conclusion

Our past, our present and our future are marked by the presence of God. A loving God. A God of grace. A God who makes us live in his realm of peace.

And this God in his fullness - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - is present in our life. Today. He justified us; he gave us peace; he makes us look forward to enjoying his glorious presence.

And today our life is marked by faith, hope, and love.

We should be the happiest people on earth!

+ Amen