

December 24, 2006

“The Peace He Brings: Peace with God”
Romans 5:1-2

FCF: Longing for peace with God

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Because Jesus has brought the peace for which we long,
(anchor) we must respond with praise to God and an end to our striving.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

(**READ Luke 2:14**) “Peace” – the angels proclaimed. And given all the strife, all the turmoil, all the unrest all around us and within us, whose pulse would not quicken at the possibility of such a thing? Peace within, peace with one another – our hearts cry out for these things for we were made for them. How can we lay hold of them? Only by the third element to the peace the angels sung of – peace with God. Ultimately, peace within and peace between are rooted and can only flow from our deepest need – peace with God.

His grace reaches far – far as the curse is found. This is what Christmas is all about. Yes, we need peace within and between. But we need peace with God as well.

SCRIPTURE READING: **Romans 5:1-2**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

C. S. Lewis, in his essay entitled “The Inner Ring,” wrote of the desire we all have in some way to be on the inside, accepted by the group, and the terror we all feel in some way of being left out. It comes in all sorts of packaging, can take us down many an ill-advised path, and is far more subtle than we realize. So it needs to be taken seriously.

As I was reading that essay, I was struck by the fact that the desire to be accepted by the Inner Ring can really be traced back to a deeper desire for acceptance by our Creator. Not a bad thing in itself, just a good thing poorly expressed. And this longing for our Creator is deep, traced to the beginning of history. We’ve been longing for Him for quite some time. And yet running from Him all the while. Think of Adam in the Garden. There was a time when Adam was able to walk with God in the cool of the day. But after the Fall, that came to an end. The very One whose company Adam yearned for he also fled – ashamed of what he’d done and become, hiding with his wife behind fig leaves among the trees of the Garden. This was not how things were meant to be.

But with the coming of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, “shalom” has broken in – things being made right, whole, complete, and full. Peace with God would be possible again – an ability to stand naked before Him, unashamed and hiding no more.

How? Peace made with Him by Him – “justification.” The quote in your bulletin from the Heidelberg Catechism gets at this. Let me read you another (**READ WSC:33**):

What is justification? Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Now the need for peace with God coming through justification presupposes some things – that reparations are due but we cannot repay them and that reconciliation is needed but we are unable to make amends. And that’s exactly what Paul has been saying for the last four chapters. Mankind has a universal need. And the solution has come in this Child! Jesus has brought peace! He has brought the peace which we need, for which we long. Peace with God! Which then should bring praise to Him and an end to our striving.

I. JUSTIFICATION – THROUGH CHRIST

How, after all, are we justified? How are we made right with God? How does this peace come about? The catechisms address it. Let’s look at what Paul says (**READ**

Romans 5:1-2). Did you catch it? Twice in these two verses we read “through Christ.” What does Paul mean? How are we justified, made right with God, through Christ?

A) His Active Obedience

In terms of what Paul has said thus far in Romans, this is simply shorthand for Christ’s obedience on our behalf. First, what theologians call His “active obedience.”

1. Explanation

That is to say that, over the course of His days on this earth, Jesus lived a fully obedient life, perfectly pleasing to His Father. No sins of omission. No sins of commission. No errant thoughts. No hateful words. No spiteful deeds. All motives pure.

2. Implication

He perfectly obeyed the whole law in every way for us, in our stead. He is our substitute, standing in our place. He obeyed where we did not and His righteousness has been imputed, credited, to us as though we ourselves had done it – “an alien righteousness.”

B) His Passive Obedience

That’s the first half – Christ’s active obedience on our behalf. We’ll unpack that a little more in a few minutes. The second half is what is called His “passive obedience.”

1. Explanation

That is to say that, having lived a perfectly obedient life, He presented Himself as an unblemished sacrifice in our place to God. In our place on the cross. And so God then poured out the judgment and punishment due to us in full upon Him. All of it.

2. Implication

The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Just as He perfectly obeyed the whole law in every way for us, in our stead, as our substitute, so too He hung in our place on the cross, enduring all that we deserved. His righteousness imputed to us as though we ourselves had done it, our sin and guilt imputed to Him as though He had done it.

All that said, there is one more thing. The verbs Paul uses are in the past tense. We “have been justified” and “have obtained” and so we “have peace” and “rejoice” now. These things have occurred in time and space and have an ongoing present effect.

Illustration:

It’s something like an inheritance. Think of J. R. R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. The story recounts how one hobbit named Bilbo Baggins was enticed into an adventure over mountains and into confrontations with trolls, goblins, and werewolves, hunger, self-doubt, and a dragon in order to reclaim the treasure of a group of dwarves. The trip would mark the hobbit forever. Bilbo comes into possession of a mysterious ring that begins to exert its influence over him. Yet finds courage on the long journey and proves his value to the dwarves who had initially doubted his usefulness. Ultimately, he makes a fortune for himself and lives to enjoy it for many years.

On his “eleventy-first” birthday, Bilbo throws a great party for himself and announces his young nephew Frodo as his heir. All that belongs to Bilbo would be his. Everything that Bilbo paid so dearly for in time, sacrifice, and hardship would now pass to the younger hobbit. The affection, the esteem, the name, the fortunes, and the privileges that the elder hobbit had bought at a great price became the prize of Frodo. It was all his – his new possessions, his new status. And nothing could change that.

Application:

Well, it’s something like that with us. All that is Jesus’ is ours. Not only are we forgiven because of what He has done. We are now right with God. We have peace with

Him through Christ. It's not contingent on any circumstances – on how bad your day has gone, on how poorly your family is getting along, on what you don't get for Christmas, or on how you feel. We have peace with God – period. Which means what? We can rest!

Look at what Paul says. We have “access” now to God! He speaks of “this grace” (this new status we have before God) “in which we stand.” This is not something that bends and twists in the wind. Paul is speaking of something in which we can and must stand. Which means what? Merry Christmas! Praise God, our striving is over!

II. JUSTIFICATION – BY FAITH

For we have been justified, made right with God, through Christ! Now, one question. How do we lay hold of this? How does it become ours? (READ Romans 5:1-2) Again, just like before, twice in these two verses – just so we don't miss the point – Paul says it. It is “by faith.” What does that mean? This faith entails three things.

A) *Acknowledge*

1. The state you're in

First, acknowledge the state you're in. Admit you're a sinner. Agree with the Lord's assessment of you. Read yourself into Romans 3 (READ Romans 3:10b-20).

2. The need you have

“Nothing in my hands I bring” – that must be our cry. Boast in nothing of yourself. Declare spiritual bankruptcy. Acknowledge the state you're in and the need you have.

B) *Believing*

Acknowledge and believe. Believe what Paul is saying here in Romans as to how our sin and our guilt are dealt with – through Christ. By faith alone in Christ alone.

1. Not a reward

Without falling into the trap of thinking that the faith is then somehow a good work deserving of some reward, as though we somehow merited something in our believing.

2. But simple reliance

No! Faith in Christ has nothing to do with rewards. It is simply relying upon Him.

C) *Confessing*

That is all. Acknowledging, then believing, then confessing.

1. With our lips

Confessing Him before others as Savior and Lord. Telling of what He has done.

2. With our lives

Telling of how he has set you free, of how He has given you rest. Telling of these things with your lips and with your life. Making it your joy, your life, your passion.

Application:

Acknowledge, believe, and confess – this is faith in Christ. This is how we lay hold of what He has done for us – a full resting in His finished work. Now I stress these things because of the realities of false signals. Some here may well be suffering from “false negatives.” You know the Prince of Peace but you are not experiencing anything of His peace. You still worry about “doing enough” to please Him. You need to rest in the finished work of Christ for you. Trust and rest in Him and let that peace come.

That said, there are also others possibly suffering from “false positives.” You say you have peace – on your terms. But you have none at all. You say you know God and He knows you. But there's no truth to it. To know Him you must know His Son. You too need to trust and rest in Him – not yourself – and let the true peace of Christ come.

CONCLUSION:

(**READ Romans 5:1-2**) To have peace with God, we must be justified by God. And that comes only through Christ, laid hold by faith. He is our hope. He is our peace.

Let me share a story with you to press the point. In the early 1960's, Don and Carol Richardson went as missionaries to a tribe of headhunters. This tribe knew nothing of iron. Their tools were made of stone. They believed that treachery was man's highest virtue and the best feast was to eat your enemies. This was a tough people to love.

The Richardsons worked hard to learn the language and customs of the tribe but were frustrated they couldn't get them to understand the story of Jesus coming to earth to die for their sins. The tribe loved the story of the crucifixion of Jesus, especially His betrayal. They hung on every word, waiting with anticipation of Judas' kiss. They shouted with glee and clapped for Judas. Don and Carol prayed that God would show them a way to convey the true message of Christmas in a form these people would understand. Then one day the opportunity came in a manner they didn't expect.

The tribe up the river attacked the tribe they were living with. For weeks they fought and killed each other. Finally Don said to the leaders of the tribe, "If you don't stop fighting we will leave your tribe." That was a serious threat to them. They liked Carol's medical care and Don's steel tools. Plus, the presence of the white family gave them status. The chief of Don's tribe realized that he had to pay the price of peace.

One day Don watched the warriors of the warring tribes form a line opposite each other. The chief of his tribe took his newborn son from the arms of his wife. She sank to the ground, wailing in uncontrollable grief. Then the Chief walked down the line of his warriors and each of them put their hands on his child. With determination and resolve, the chief walked across the open space between the two warring tribes. He stood face to face with the enemy chief and placed his son in his enemy's arms. The enemy chief then walked down the line of his warriors. In full view of the father and the father's tribe, each enemy warrior placed his hands on the baby boy. Next, the warriors turned and disappeared into the bush with the infant. The baby was gone, never to be returned.

The Richardsons wondered what all this meant. One day the chief explained it, "*I offered my son as the peace child for our tribes. As long as my son lives there will be peace between our tribes. If he dies, war will resume. Anyone who kills a peace child will himself be killed.*" Don pondered the significance of the peace child ceremony. In a flash of insight, he realized the Chief had given him the cultural key that would open this stone-age people to the truth about Jesus Christ. One day he gathered the elders together and told them the story of God's Peace Child. Don spoke of the war that rages between the kingdoms of this world and the Kingdom of God and of how the Father sent Jesus, His Son, to this earth as His Peace Child to make peace between God and man.

Jesus, the Child lying in the manger, was to later be the Man hanging from the cross. And while obviously there is an element of tragedy in that, ultimately it was a triumph. For that is why He came – to be the long-awaited Peace Child. Merry Christmas, my friends! The best message we could hear this season – the finished work of Christ for you and for me! We can have peace with God. No wonder the angels sang! My prayer for us all is that these readings, these songs, these times together would be used by the Lord to awaken in us the wonder and glory of what it meant for Jesus to come as He did. And what we can now be ours. Peace with God. Peace with God.

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(anchor) we must respond with praise to God and an end to our striving.