

Peace

Unwrapping the Perfect Gifts – Part I

Romans 5:1

Introduction – Peace in Our Time?

Webster defines the word “peace” as, “the condition that exists when nations or other groups are not fighting; the ending of a state of war.”ⁱ

That is a good definition, and one that we have never fully experienced on planet earth. One author wrote that the only time mankind has any peace is when both sides stop to reload.

Gerry Adams, the president of one of Ireland’s political parties, was right when he said, “Making peace, I have found, is much harder than making war.”ⁱⁱ

Following World War I, so shocked was the world community at the carnage of war, that in 1919, it formed the League of Nations to make sure it never happened again. It failed as Adolph Hitler brought the world to war again. After World War II, during the 1940’s, the United Nations was formed for the purpose of maintaining international peace . . . which it also has been unable to do.ⁱⁱⁱ

Even today, the headlines of our newspapers tell of the nuclear buildup in North Korea and the rumbling of tanks as America prepares for war with Iraq.

Our capitol city has a large assortment of peace monuments – we build one after every war.^{iv}

Peace in Paul’s Time?

Was it any different in the apostle Paul’s day? No. The world longed for peace. Their hearts soared with hope when the Roman Emperor, Caesar

Augustus, instituted the “Pax Romana,” or “the peace of Rome”.

When Paul was dictating the letter called Romans, written to the believers living in the capital city of the great Roman empire in Italy, the “Pax Romana” had existed for ninety years. However, it would end in bloodshed as well, as one Roman emperor after another killed their rivals and battled within their borders.

The prophet Jeremiah, in his time, said it well. In chapter 6, verse 14, and chapter 8, verse 11, he wrote that man may say,

. . . ***“Peace, peace,” but there is no peace.***

I think it is incredibly ironic that the same emperor who created the “Pax Romana,” “the peace of Rome,” was the same Caesar Augustus who demanded a worldwide census that forced a young couple named Joseph and Mary to register in Bethlehem. There, under the orders of Augustus, who had earlier instituted the altar of peace and offerings for peace, Mary would give birth to the Prince of Peace.

The only hope the world had for peace rested on the Roman empire, but in God’s plan, the only hope for peace was resting in a manger. The very first song, sung by the hosts of heaven at the birth of this Prince, as recorded in Luke, chapter 2, verse 14, was comprised of the words,

***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth
peace among men with whom God is
pleased.***

The world has never been able to achieve it, yet God has just announced it. God will be the one to give it. It happens to be one of His most priceless gifts.

Peace – A Perfect Gift From God Alone

Those who believe in the Prince of Peace are given the perfect gift of peace. In fact, there are several gifts, given by the Father, to those who trust in His Son.

The gift of peace

The very first gift that Paul reveals to us, as we begin our study of Romans, chapter 5, is the gift of peace.

Notice what Paul writes in Romans, chapter 5, verse 1.

Therefore . . .

I am going to stop there, but I promise we are going to cover more than one word today! By now, however, you may remember that when you see the word “therefore,” you need to know what it is there for.

This is the fifth “therefore” in Paul’s letter. Each time, he has summarized some great truth and moved to another point in his logical, clear, inspired declaration of man’s ruin . . . and God’s remedy.

In chapters 1 through 3, Paul explained mankind’s sinful heart and need of redemption. In chapter 4, he illustrated salvation as a matter of grace and not good works, through the life of Abraham.

Paul, however, does not just want to explain the background of justification, or simply explore a biography of justification. He wants to examine the blessings of justification.

So, in chapter 5, he begins by writing, “Therefore”. In other words, on the basis of what I have just explained, and what we have just explored, there is now something for us to experience.

Paul writes,

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

I want to cover two points about the perfect gift of peace:

- First, peace with God is absolutely free.
- Secondly, peace with God is an absolute fact.

1. Peace with God is absolutely free.

Paul writes,

Therefore, having been justified by faith...

You may remember that in chapter 3, verses 23 and 24, Paul wrote,

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus

Then again, in verse 28, he wrote,

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

In chapter 4, verse 5, he also wrote,

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness

This gift of peace is free!

Frankly, the reason mankind wants to earn their way into heaven is because they believe they can. It is not that they do not want anything for free, it is just that they think they do not need it to be. They believe they should be able to earn all the points they need to have God, one day, say, “Man, I’ve been waiting for you. Heaven just hasn’t been what it could be. But now that a great person like you is here, heaven will really be special.”

Mankind does not believe they are all that bad. The truth is, the human race would rather not be told that heaven has to be free because nobody will ever be good enough to deserve it. And, they certainly do not want to be told the fact that, according to the Bible, they are actually an enemy of God. Paul has explained in his letter to the Romans that there is enmity between God and man. There is, literally, a state of war.

Every sin in an unbeliever’s life on earth is a missile fired against the holiness of heaven. Every evil thought is another round of ammunition aimed at the righteousness of God. Every perversion and immorality is an offensive maneuver against the purity of Christ. That is why Jesus Christ could come and announce in John, chapter 3, verse 18, that mankind is condemned already; that they are in deep trouble before a holy God.

Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 8, verses 5 through 7a,

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the

things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God . . .

The word translated “hostile” is “echthra” (εχθρα), which could be translated, “hateful”. In other words, the mind and heart of the unbeliever is hostile and hateful and at enmity toward God.

Earlier, Paul had preached to the Athenians and told them that one day God would judge the world. He said to them, in Acts, chapter 17, verses 30b through 31a,

. . . God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world . . .

There is no such thing as neutrality. You are either God’s friend, or you are His enemy.

Now, wait a second! If you ask the average man on the street if he considers himself an enemy of God, he will say, “Of course not.”

If you ask the average unbeliever, “Do you hate God?” they will answer, “Of course I don’t hate God!”

Then, however, if you describe the God of the Bible to him as a holy and righteous Judge who will one day send the unbeliever to hell, he will hate that God.

If you talk about God in general, you might be quoted favorably on the *Donahue Show*. However, if you specifically talk about His Son, Jesus Christ, as God incarnate, before whom the world will one day stand and give an account, you will be ridiculed as an intolerant Bible thumper.

Mankind will say they are the friend of God, but the God they are friends with is one they have invented in their own imaginations and speculations. If you describe to them the God who is revealed in the Bible, they will inwardly hate Him and inwardly, and maybe even outwardly, hate you too. In their hostility toward God and His free gift of salvation, they tragically forfeit the privilege; they miss the blessing; they never get to open the gift of peace.

I recently read the testimony of Jacob Koshy. Jacob grew up in Singapore. His one driving ambition was to be a success in life; to get all the money and possessions that he could. This eventually led him into the world of drugs and gambling, where he, in time, became the leader of an international smuggling network. In 1980, he was

caught, arrested, and placed in a government drug rehabilitation prison in Singapore.

Frustrated and bitter, locked in a tiny cell, Jacob’s heart was full of hatred and emptiness. He wanted to smoke, but cigarettes were not allowed in this prison. His friends smuggled in tobacco and he would roll it in the pages of a Gideon Bible. One day, he fell asleep while smoking. He awoke to find that the cigarette had burned out, and all that remained was a scrap of charred paper. He unrolled it to read simply, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Jacob asked for another Bible and read the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. He realized that if God could save an enemy like Saul, He could save him too. There in his cell, he knelt and prayed, asking God to save him and forgive him. He began to cry and could not stop. God had redeemed him.

Jacob started sharing his story with the other prisoners and some of them believed in Christ as well. When he was released from prison, he became involved in a Bible believing church and met and married a Christian. Today, he is serving as a missionary in the Far East. He tells people wherever he goes, “Who would have believed that I could find the truth of God by smoking . . . the Word of God!”^v

An enemy of God became a friend of God . . . at peace with God. As Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 5, verse 1,

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God . . .

Peace with God is absolutely free.

2. Peace, however, is more than that. Peace with God is not only absolutely free, it is an absolute fact.

Notice again that Paul wrote,

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace . . .

He did not say, “We’ll eventually get it . . .” or “We’re working toward it . . .”.

No! Paul said, “We have it!”

The tense of the Greek language indicates that this is an established fact. You do not grow into peace with God. You do no work your way to peace with God. It is not a continuous process. It is something that is given to you the moment you turn your heart toward God and say to Him, “Oh God, I am a sinner and I now depend entirely upon Your Son to save me and forgive me.” At that moment in your life, you are justified.^{vi}

Paul declares,

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God . . .

Now, do not confuse peace *with* God with another kind of peace that the Bible refers to. There is also the peace *of* God.

The peace of God is the kind of peaceful state of mind that comes when you commit your anxieties to the will of God. Paul wrote about the peace of God in Philippians, chapter 4, verses 6 and 7.

Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The peace of God is an internal feeling; a peaceful state of mind and heart.

Paul is not talking, in Romans, chapter 5, about an internal subjective peace, but an external, objective peace. He is not talking about the peace *of* God; he is talking about peace *with* God.

The reason I stress this point is due to the fact that an unbeliever might say to you that they already have peace. They might say that they experience, at times, a peaceful state of mind. Perhaps they are involved in transcendental meditation or yoga, or they sit by a lake in the evening, or they read the Dalai Lama and feel at peace. They may even say it is a peace that God has given them.

Has it ever occurred to you that it is possible for an unbeliever, at times, to experience more feelings of peace than a believer? However, that is part of their deception. Their peace is temporary and misleading.

Alva J. McClain illustrated it this way, when he wrote,

If a man breaks the law and then flees to another country, there exists a state of enmity between that man and the American government. It does not matter how tranquil [or peaceful] this man may feel in this foreign refuge, he does not have peace with America. And if he comes back to the United States, the government will immediately initiate action against him.^{vii}

In the same way, the unbeliever may say he experiences tranquility and peace on earth. When he arrives on that eternal shore, however, the law of

God's holy justice will immediately initiate action against him.

Peace with God is not a temporary feeling, it is an eternal fact! The enmity between you and God has been removed forever by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

As Colossians, chapter 1, verse 20, tells us,

[He] made peace [for us] through the blood of His cross . . .

Peace with God is absolutely free! Peace with God is an absolute fact!

Responses to the gift of peace

There is only one of two responses that we can have to Romans, chapter 5, verse 1.

1. If we are unbelievers, we can accept this gift of peace; we can accept the gospel!

We can stuff everything we possibly can into our lives and we will not find lasting peace with God.

H. G. Wells once summed up mankind's frustration with their lack of lasting peace, when he said,

The time has come for me to reorganize my life, my peace. I cry out. I cannot [seem to] adjust my life to secure a fruitful peace. Here I am at 64, still seeking peace. It is a hopeless dream.^{viii}

My friend, you cannot have peace with God until you accept the Son of God. You cannot ignore the Prince of Peace and ever hope to unwrap this gift of peace.

Why?

In his commentary on Romans, John MacArthur repeated an illustration by Donald Grey Barnhouse about the famous missionary David Livingstone. After spending several years among the Zulus of South Africa, David went, with his wife and young child, into the interior to further serve the Lord. When he returned, he discovered that an enemy tribe had attacked the Zulus, killing many of the people, and even taking the chief's son captive. The Zulu chief did not want to make war with the other tribe, but sincerely asked Dr. Livingstone, "How can I be at peace with them while they treat my son this way." If this attitude is true in the heart of an unbelieving tribal chief, how much more is it true of God the Father toward those who trample under foot His Son, who count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing and despise the Spirit of grace.^{ix}

It is true – you cannot reject the Son of God and have peace with God. If you are an unbeliever, accept the Son as your peace treaty and receive from God the Father the eternal, perfect gift of peace! If you are an unbeliever, accept the gospel!

2. If we are believers, we have already accepted the gospel, so we should announce it!

Did you know that the word “gospel” originally came from the context of war and peace. It was originally the word used for the message of victory in battle that a messenger would deliver to the people.^x

You and I have been given the incredible privilege of delivering the news of Christ’s victory over death and the grave.

There is more to it than that, however! In II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 20, Paul gives us our unique job description as agents of God. He writes,

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Larry Richards explained that most Christians read these words through our modern understanding of the role of an ambassador. They picture the ambassador as someone who represents good will between countries. That is not the concept Paul had

in mind. In Rome, an ambassador was a messenger sent from a victorious army to one that was about to be destroyed. The ambassador brought terms of surrender and, if the defeated enemy accepted the terms, the conquering army would grant them peace and allow them to live.^{xi}

A similar thing happened when Colin Powell served as an envoy to the country of Haiti in 1994. Powell’s message to the Haitian Dictator was one of impending destruction. He informed the dictator that if he did not agree to the United States’ terms of peace, an invasion would immediately take place. As a matter of fact, the invasion force was already in place and, at the word of the president, utter destruction hinged on this man’s response to Colin Powell.^{xii}

This is what it means to be an ambassador of Christ. Destruction is just around the corner, but God is offering terms of peace.

I, as God’s ambassador, beg you, on behalf of Christ, to lay down your arms; surrender to Him. When you do, He will let you live forever with the victorious hosts of heaven! Surrender to Him and He will save you . . . and so much more.

To begin with, He will allow you to unwrap the perfect gift of peace.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 1/12/2003 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ New Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language (Danbury, CT, Lexicon Publications, 1995), p. 738.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth Boa and William Kruidenier, Holman New Testament Commentary: Romans (TN, Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), p. 151.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 151.

^{iv} Charles R. Swindoll, The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart (Word Publishers, 1998), p. 432.

^v Robert J. Morgan, Stories, Illustrations & Quotes (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 148.

^{vi} Alva J. McClain, Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace (Winona Lake, IN, BMH Books, 1973), p. 123.

^{vii} Ibid., p. 124.

^{viii} Swindoll, p. 432.

^{ix} John MacArthur Jr., Romans (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1991), p. 273.

^x Boa and Kruidenier, p. 155.

^{xi} Gary J. Bredfeldt and Lawrence Richards, Creative Bible Teaching (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1998), p. 55.

^{xii} Ibid.