

A Peace to Hold You

The rewards for signing on to the Christian Life are immense and surprising. Yes, there is certainly a cost to be paid for standing for Christ, but the benefits and blessings of belonging to Christ are extraordinary. Seven such blessings will be considered in these Covid Studies; and the first of these is 'Peace with God'.

Icebreaker



Often those who become members of a particular organization, or citizens of a country, receive gifts upon 'signing up' or declaring their allegiance: eg a cap and a keyring when joining a sporting club; or a certificate and a plant when joining a country. What has been the best reward that you've ever had in signing up to something?

Read: Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Introduction

The opening word of this Bible passage, 'Therefore', pulls together the major points of the first four chapters of Romans, namely that anyone in the world, Jew or Gentile, can be set in good standing with God when they place their trust in Jesus Christ. This action of being put right with God is called being 'justified by faith'. The word 'justified' (v1) is a legal term, and in this context, refers to having a right standing with God with respect to God's standards.

Question 1

How is it possible for anyone to be in good standing with God, in light of the painful fact that we have all fallen short of keeping God's Law? (v1)

(Just for clarity: Faith does refer to our personal trust in Jesus, but it is not the grounds for our justification. Faith is like the key to a treasure-box. It is not the treasure, but simply the access to the treasure. The treasure of course is the perfect obedience and perfect atonement of the Lord Jesus, which are the perfect grounds for our justification.)



Question 2

What does this Bible passage say is the result of being justified by faith? (v1)

According to this verse, is it possible to have this peace with God apart the gospel? What phrase makes this clear?

What phrase in verse 2 makes it clear that a Christian has immediate possession of this peace upon placing their trust in Christ?

What can we say about our relationship with God prior to this trust?

The point that Paul now moves on to make (5:2b) is that this legally-sound and incontestable peace that we have at the start of our Christian journey, will also be there at the end. (In chapters 5-8 of this letter, Paul assures Christians that this state of being justified will hold right to the end of their lives, and even through difficult and dangerous trials and battles with sin. His famous conclusion at the end of the 8th chapter (8:38,39) is well known and well worth reading again.)

Question 3

Instead of defeating Christians and separating them from God, what do trials, under the hand of a wise God, actually do? (v3,4)

What role does the Holy Spirit play in this? (v5)

How does Paul remind us of the deep love of God? (v6-8)

How then should a Christian handle a difficult time like a pandemic?

Case Study 1

Roger is a new Christian, but during the corona season, found it hard to read the Bible and pray. He even caught himself feeling unconcerned for those in less fortunate countries who were struggling with the pandemic. One night Roger himself suddenly caught the coronavirus and died! Will he, or won't he, go to heaven?

Case Study 2

Ming put her trust in Christ in her teenage years, but now in her twilight years is suffering from dementia, and is not even clear that her own name is Ming. When asked about her faith, she huffs and puffs, but can't say anything remotely sensible.

Unfortunately she too catches the coronavirus and dies. Will Ming go to heaven?

What a wonderful thing it is to have faith in Christ, and what a wonderful thing to be able to rest comfortably in His perfect righteousness.

Read the following section from *The Pilgrim's Progress*



Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall; and that wall was called "Salvation". Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run; but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a Cross, and a little

below, in the bottom, a sepulchre [a grave]. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble; and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said, with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death." Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him, that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks.

Now, as he stood looking and weeping, behold three shining ones came to him, and saluted him with, "**Peace be to thee!**" So the first said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee"; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment [clothes]; the third also set a mark in his forehead, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bade him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the Celestial Gate.

Question 4

Can you decipher the three individual gifts that Christian receives?

- (1) From the first angel (See Romans 4:7,8)
- (2) From the second angel (See 1 Corinthians 1:30)
- (3) From the third angel (See Ephesians 1:13)

What five-letter word beginning with P, might sum up these wonderful gifts?

If you don't yet have this peace with God, then do what Christian did: Run to the Cross! (Remember: There's no other way to have peace with God apart from faith in Christ.)

Question 5

In verse 9-11, amongst other things, Paul makes the point that the peace that we have with God is not just legal and judicial, but personal and relational. What word in these verses signifies this? (v10,11) **This means that the peace that we have is not just one of the courtroom, but also one of the lounge-room!**

Can you think of a famous story that Jesus told that illustrates this aspect of our peace with God?

What is the difference between the terms 'justification' and 'reconciliation'?

What is possible in being reconciled, that is not possible in being justified? (If you're stumped, the next section will help.)

Theological Reflection

It is important for Christians to know the difference between what are called the “two Ps”. The first is that “capital-P, Peace” that is given when we are justified by faith, and that is objective and incontestable and grounded in the perfect work of Christ. This “capital-P, Peace” is the peace that is described in Romans 5:1. The second is that “small-p, peace” that we commonly describe as our feelings of peace, and that is subjective and fluctuating and influenced by our response to trials, and our moods, and our obedience, and our use of the means of grace. This “small-p, peace” waxes and wanes in the course of our walk with God, and explains why we can be reconciled to God, but yet sometimes feel troubled and agitated and ‘out of sorts’ in our relationship with God.

Question 6

Horatio Spafford begins his famous hymn as follows:

*When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, You have taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul*



Which of the two Ps do you think Spafford is referring to in the first line of his hymn? According to Spafford, what is it that Christians have been taught to say? Where have they been taught to say such a thing?

Case Study 3

Mary has been a Christian now for many years, but suddenly finds herself feeling troubled in this corona climate. She’s worried about getting sick. She’s angry with those who don’t keep their social distance. She’s annoyed at those who strip the supermarket shelves of necessary goods. She feels sad in her heart, depressed in her soul, and she finds it hard to pray. Perhaps she’s fallen out of the Faith and is no longer a believer. What do you think? What would you say to Mary (at a distance of 1.5m of course)? (Try to pick up on some things from this 5th chapter of Romans.)

Memory Exercise

To close, why not take a moment to memorize Romans 5:1, and then recite the verse together as a group.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

If you’re game, you could also sing together the first verse of Spafford’s Hymn!

Prayer

Finish in prayer – thanking God for the treasures of the Gospel, casting your burden upon Him, and taking consolation in being today and forever, through faith in Jesus, at peace with God.