

## Romans 5:1-2 Peace with God

### Introduction

We've all I'm sure been embarrassed on occasions when we responded to what we thought was someone speaking to us in a public place. For those of us with uncommon first names to hear 'our name' called out makes us poised to respond as we look to see who it is that called out. Usually such incidents are quickly resolved with a witty comment and smiles and everyone gets on with what they were doing before. On other occasions it is a little more complex. A couple of weeks ago a message was left on my answer-phone from a man who left his name and asked me to call him. I could not recall knowing anyone of that name but I dutifully called back the next day. I found out which mission agency he represented and received the reply slightly later in the conversation that I had requested a visit from a representative of that organisation. This left me puzzled as I had done no such thing, though I had spoken to the UK office of that mission a couple of times in the last few years. Between five and ten minutes into the conversation the man said that he looked forward to visiting a named Baptist Church in the Borders where my namesake Brian Talbot is the pastor. Suddenly all was explained and our confusing conversation could be resolved. Finding out who it was that this mission representative really wanted to contact was vital in that context!

When we read God's Word it is equally important to note to whom the author has written his message; for what reason and in what particular context. All Scripture is inspired and profitable for our edification, but discerning whether a passage displayed conduct to avoid or actions commended to the readers, for example, is vital when seeking to apply the text to our own lives. In the book of Romans the apostle Paul uses different pronouns in different sections of this letter. We must always remember that the original letter had no chapter or verse divisions which we added many centuries later for ease of reading and study. These divisions are not inspired only the actual text of Scripture! In Romans 1, in an autobiographical section, the apostle has spoken about his calling and his personal desire to have fellowship with these Christians in Rome, most of whom he has never met. The passage reaches a crescendo in Romans 1:16-17: *For **I am** not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.*<sup>17</sup> *For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'* Here is personal testimony from Paul. In the second half of chapter one he describes the seriousness of the sins of pagan Gentiles and refers to them, for example in Romans 1:21 (*For although **they** knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*) These people who had no time for God or for Paul and his message were unlikely to be hearers or readers of this letter. In Romans 2 the apostle has in mind Jewish recipients of his message, for example, in Romans 2:17: *Now **you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God...*** and addresses why Jewish people need the good news of the Gospel. By the later verses of chapter three his audience in principle has expanded to the whole of humanity. Romans 3:19-20 states: *Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that **every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.***<sup>20</sup> *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.* The problem of sin and the need of the good news of Jesus is a universal one. Yet not everyone chooses to embrace it. In Romans 3:21-22a declares: *But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.*<sup>22</sup> *This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ **to all who believe...*** The rest of chapter three covers the wonderful blessings that are ours when we belong to Jesus. In Romans 4 Paul paints a picture of God's redemptive purposes on a bigger canvas going back to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation and explaining how the

Gospel was just as effectively applied to him as to believers of the apostle's day. Romans 4:3 states: *What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.* However, at the end of Romans 4 and into chapter five the apostle makes plain that the glorious truths he is about to go on to explain in Romans chapters five to eight are for all believers whether Jews or Gentiles who place their trust in God through Jesus Christ. Romans 4:23-25 state: <sup>23</sup>*The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone,* <sup>24</sup>*but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.* <sup>25</sup>*He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.* God's people together equally are the recipients of these blessings that flow from the salvation Jesus obtained on the cross in our place. Paul in Romans 5:1-11 will explain very briefly what are the result of our justification, following on from a first section demonstrating our need of it in Romans 1:18-3:20; then the means of justification in Romans 3:21-4:25. In Romans 5:1-2 the apostle highlights three blessings that are ours as a result of being justified through the sacrifice of Jesus in our place.

### **1. We have been given peace with God (Romans 5:1)**

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

(a) **The Peace of God** It is best on this occasion to begin by saying what the apostle is not saying here. Paul is speaking about peace with God not concerning the peace of God. When Christians speak to one another about peace in relation to God the vast majority of times it will be with reference to the peace of God. There are very familiar and pastorally helpful verses that are often used to refer to it. Paul, in Philippians 4:6-7 wrote: <sup>6</sup>*Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* <sup>7</sup>*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Isaiah 26:3 is an equivalent verse in the Old Testament that communicates this truth very clearly: *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in You.* In life we face some very difficult situations. There are health situations that can be life-threatening or if not potentially terminal are certainly life-changing with all the uncertainties that brings as long cherished hopes can no longer be realised. Obviously the deaths of close family members or friends, especially when unexpected, can shake us and require a special effort to regain our equilibrium as we seek to move forward and rebuild our lives in the light of this difficult news; for other people it can be the loss of a job or career that we had expected to continue in until retirement or at the other end of the scale coming to terms with the fact that a career we had sought has never materialised and our cherished aspirations are left hanging in the air. Innumerable possible relational challenges within our immediate families or the breakdown of marriages or other relationships can equally be traumatic experiences for us to handle. While reading or hearing these words inevitably some of us will mentally jump to people and situations we know of at this time. Promises such as the two quoted above are precious and valuable when we are experiencing hard times. We thank God that He stands with us in such unpromising situations –which may not have an end-date this side of heaven. Like Job of old we rejoice that our future beyond the grave is taken care of: *I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand on the earth.*<sup>26</sup> *And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God;* <sup>27</sup>*I myself will see Him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!* (Job 19:25-27). I hope this is your testimony too? If not I want to encourage you to put your faith and trust in the Lord today! We Thank God for the peace of God and the quality it brings to our lives as Christians. However, Paul is speaking here of something else, namely peace with God.

(b) **Peace with God** The idea here is that human beings because of our sinfulness have been alienated from God, a position of potential hostility with Him – and for some people in the world an actual state of hostility, not least in regimes like the one in North Korea where even declaring a simple belief in God results either in a relatively quick execution by an agent of the state or years in a torture camp prior to a slow and potentially painful death. In the first part of his letter to this church Paul, after his autobiographical statements, explains the seriousness of the plight of humanity outside of faith in Jesus Christ. Romans 1:18 states: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness...* Paul is not rejoicing at the restoration of a previously damaged relationship between God and His people, but the reconciliation of two parties that had been going in completely different directions. Through the sacrifice of Jesus a reconciliation that would otherwise have been impossible had been accomplished between God and humanity. The wrath of God against sin was justly satisfied through the offering of our substitute and sin-bearer the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 3:25-26 declares: *God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of His blood – to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished* <sup>26</sup> – *He did it to demonstrate His righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus*. The NIV footnote to Rom.3:25 indicates that the first part of that verse can equally be translated: *God presented Christ as the One who would turn aside His wrath, taking away sin, through the shedding of His blood...* I have peace with God objectively as a settled state of affairs because of the perfect once-for-all time sacrifice of Jesus. This is a fact. When the devil puts condemnatory thoughts into your mind and says words to the effect of: ‘you are not good enough to be a Christian’ or ‘how can you call yourself a Christian when you keep thinking those thoughts, or speaking those words or making those inappropriate behavioural choices’. Or ‘How do you expect God to continue to love you or want you in His family when you are so far from perfection its unreal!’ Like our Lord in the wilderness when tempted by the Devil, to reply to him with God’s Word. Our circumstances are of course different to those of Jesus, but the principle of using the sword of the Spirit –the Word of God against the evil one is just the same. God accepts me because Jesus is perfect. God accepts me because He accepted the perfect sacrifice of His Son in my place once for all time. Hebrews 10:12-14, contains these wonderful words: *But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God,* <sup>13</sup> *and since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool.* <sup>14</sup> **For by one sacrifice He has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.** Hallelujah! What a Saviour! Is He your saviour? Have you the assurance that He died in your place? If not ask Him? Everyone who genuinely asks for salvation through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross will receive it. Jesus said: *Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.* <sup>8</sup> *For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened* (Matthew 7:2-3). Have you asked? Are you seeking? Have you found Him? It is not ‘we might have peace with God’; nor is it ‘we hope to have peace with God’, but from the moment we reach out by faith to God through Jesus, under the prompting influence of the Holy Spirit we have peace with God! This is why Paul can write: *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 5:1).

(c) **Peace despite earthly circumstances** Our feelings change from day to day depending on a wide range of circumstances that we may experience in our personal or family circumstances. This peace with God that Paul describes in Romans 5:1 is not dependent on our circumstances or our feelings. Christians are not exempt from the storms of life. We face disappointments in the workplace; setbacks in family situations; discouragements even

through the actions of fellow Christians at times; all these and other trials that test our faith cannot change our blessed status of possessing peace with God.

**Horatio Gates Spafford** (1828–1888) was a prominent American lawyer best known for penning the Christian hymn *When peace like a river attendeth my way* following a family tragedy in which four of his daughters died. In 1861 he married Anna Larsen of Stavanger, Norway. The Spaffords were well known in 1860s Chicago. He was a prominent lawyer, a senior partner in a large and thriving law firm. He and his wife were also prominent supporters and close friends of evangelist Dwight L. Moody. A series of family tragedies began in 1870 when their only son died from pneumonia at the age of four. Spafford invested in property development north of an expanding Chicago in the spring of 1871. When the Great Fire of Chicago reduced the city to ashes in October 1871, the same year that Spafford invested in Chicago real estate, it also destroyed most of Spafford's sizable investment. Two years later, in 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday somewhere in Europe, and chose England knowing that his friend D.L. Moody would be preaching there in the autumn. He was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four children, daughters eleven-year-old Anna “Annie”, nine-year-old Margaret Lee, five-year-old Elizabeth “Bessie”, and two-year-old Tanetta. On 22 November, 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on the steamship *Ville du Havre*, their ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel and 226 people lost their lives, including all four of Spafford's daughters. Anna Spafford survived the tragedy. Upon arriving in England, she sent a telegram to Spafford beginning "Saved alone." Spafford then sailed to England, going over the location of his daughters' deaths. According to Bertha Spafford Vester, a daughter born after the tragedy, Spafford wrote the hymn *It is well with my soul* on this journey. [information in many sources]

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

It is well (it is well),  
with my soul (with my soul),  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.  
(chorus)

My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to His cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!  
(chorus)

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:  
If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pain shall be mine, for in death as in life  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.  
(chorus) (CMP757)

Only a person who knew they had peace with God could write such words of incredible faith, in spite of the circumstances.

2. **We have been guaranteed access to the grace of God** (Romans 5:2a).

...through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand; literally these words in Romans 5:2a can be rendered: ‘through Him we have obtained our introduction into this grace in which we have taken our stand’ [John Stott, *Romans*, p. 139]. In addition to peace with God there are further blessings that are ours in Christ. Instead of the law of God pointing the finger and shouting - ‘failed’; the grace of God is our experience and ‘forgiven’ is the declaration. All the blessings of God to His children are received by faith. God does not impose His gifts on any of us. All are gracious blessings He is more than willing to bestow, but they are not experienced by us until we are directed by the Holy Spirit to heed and respond to His wonderful invitation. We enter God’s family by His unmerited favour (grace); we continue till the day we die due to His unmerited favour; one day we will enter His nearer presence –as a result of the reception of His amazing grace. No-one is a Christian because they are brighter in intellect or more upright in living than the next person; sometimes we can be less endowed with such faculties or less disciplined in daily living than some people who make no profession of faith in God at all. Here the Greek perfect tense is used by Paul indicating that we gained access to this grace of God at a particular time in the past but continue to have access to it in the present day by day. The same tense is used by Paul in the second key verb here ‘to stand’. We were enabled to stand for God in the past equipped by His Spirit when we first came to faith in Christ. However, He continues to give us the same grace and will continue to enable us to stand for Him each day until the day we leave this life. This is sufficient grace. Who granted us the ‘introduction’ to God the Father? Jesus of course. It was His sacrifice that made it possible. How do we continue to stand in God’s grace. The Bible tells us very clearly. I John 2:1-2 states: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. **But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.** <sup>2</sup> He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.* Paul confirms John’s statement in Ephesians 2:18: *For through Him [Jesus] we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.* We all fail at times and fall into sin, but we need never despair, because when we are truly sorry He will forgive and restore us to fellowship with our heavenly Father. The words of Hebrews 4:14-16 are so encouraging in this respect: *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet He did not sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us then approach **God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*** Though we must never presume on the grace of God, we must never despair of standing outside of it in our hour of need either. Romans 5:2a makes it plain that as children of God we can come into God’s presence in prayer at any time and know that He will hear and answer our prayers. Paul in Ephesians 3:12 declared: *In Him [Jesus] and through faith in Him we may approach God **with freedom and confidence.*** To have access to the Queen of our country, our Head of state, there is a formal process which a citizen must follow in order to request an audience. Yet even if we request it sincerely and politely there is no guaranteeing that it will be granted. She may be too busy or have other priorities that day. In any case as a human being she is finite and has a limit to what can be accomplished on any given day. What a glorious contrast with our amazing God who has no such limits to His accessibility. Our relationship with God is continuous and secure in Christ. What wonderful good news. But have you received it and experienced it yet? If not it can be yours today. Don’t think you cannot come to Jesus because you are not good enough –none of us are good enough; don’t think you cannot come to God for salvation because you cannot keep it up. None of us in our own strength can manage it – only through the equipping and enabling power of the Holy Spirit is it possible. .

### 3. **We are rejoicing in our hope of the glory of God** (Romans 5:2b)

... *And we boast [rejoice] in the hope of the glory of God.*

Yet the apostle has one more thing to encourage us in Romans 5:2. God's gift of salvation to us does not have a twelve month guarantee before it expires; even a fifty year guarantee I once read of with respect to an early bicycle in the United Kingdom. We can get excited says Paul because of what God has prepared for us beyond the grave. *And we boast [rejoice] in the hope of the glory of God.* Glimpses of this glory, of our future inheritance are experienced on earth. Yet whatever is experienced now does not even begin to compare with what lies in store for us in the future. The first followers of Jesus were privileged to see something of this reality in the person of Jesus in His earthly ministry. John wrote these words in his gospel: *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. **We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*** (John 1:14). Have you ever had any glimpses of His glory in your experience? Do you have any expectancy of God at work in your life in coming days giving you a taster of the indescribable heritage that God has prepared for those who love Him? We are one with the rest of humanity in needing to hear the bad news found in the words of Romans 3:23: *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,* but when we become a child of God by faith through His grace we receive the incomparably greater good news of the Gospel so that we can *boast [rejoice] in the hope of the glory of God.* There are times when we feel discouraged as Christians and can be very low in spirits. This is quite normal as Christians are not exempt from either the happiness or sorrows, joys or heartaches that are common to humanity. Paul's words to the Church at Corinth are appropriate ones to finish with: *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> **For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.** <sup>18</sup> *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal* (II Corinthians 4:16-18). May God help us to do that by His Spirit, for Jesus' sake, Amen.*