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Peace with God - Part 1

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The Bible for Today with John Stott - Premier

John Stott shows us that peace is far more than the absence of conflict or noise. He explains that true peace is different because it relies not on external circumstances but on our relationship with God through Christ.

Transcript

There are many, many different kinds of peace. There's international peace, peace between the races, the nations and the tribes. There is industrial peace, peace between the government and the bosses and the unions.

There is domestic peace, peace between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters. In a peace, peace of mind and heart and conscience, true peace is deeper than all theirs. It's something more basic still, it's peace with God.

Welcome to the Bible for today with John Stott. The 20th century gave us a number of great evangelical Bible teachers and for many, John Stott stood above them all. Perhaps no one raised the standard of biblical teaching as did Stott.

When a TV reporter once asked him, "You've had a brilliant academic career, a first at Cambridge, rector at 29, chaplain to the Queen," what's your ambition now, John replied, "to be more like Jesus?" It was Jesus Christ that he made preeminent in all his teaching. After he preached his home church of all souls, Lang and Place, it was packed and people even sat on the stairs. During John Stott's centenary, we are bringing you some of his finest Bible teaching from almost 60 years of ministry.

Finding peace is one of our highest ambitions, be it world peace between nations, peace in our neighborhood or peace in our family. It's possible to shut ourselves away to find peace, but still not be at peace with ourselves. There's clearly a problem here and today John Stott explains why we'll never find peace when we're looking for it in the wrong place.

The pursuit of peace is a universal obsession. If only I knew where I might find peace,

people are saying all over the world. Constitutionally, human beings find it almost impossible to live with conflict.

The ear cannot live with dissonance. It waits until the discord is resolved in harmony. The mind cannot endure conflict, and when conflicts arise in the mind, we drive them into the unconscious or subconscious from which volcano they later erupt in many strange and unexpected forms.

At home too, in marriage and in other relationships, although we quarrel with one another from time to time, we cannot endure a perpetual friction. So if we can't bring ourselves to apologize or to seek a reconciliation, then we resort to appeasements and other kinds of shabby compromise. But deeper still than all those, there are tensions in ourselves that we find it very hard to identify.

We feel that we are not at home in the world. We're out of tune with nature. We're out of gear with reality.

And faces, stress, conditions of a psychosomatic origin, nervous breakdowns, even suicides, all these bear witness to human alienation and the absence of peace. Of course innumerable remedies are proposed. Some people travel, hoping that way to escape from the monotony of bored lives.

Other people dabble in Eastern mysticism, hoping like the smiling Buddha, to find peace through withdrawal from conflict. Other people paradoxically enough seek peace in work and try to drown their uneasiness in feverish activity. Other people resort to tranquilizers by day and barbiturates by night in their anxious quest for peace.

All these people are crying, oh, that I might have the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at peace. But all of them discover that escape is not the way to find peace. One person who tells us that his head would fit sterile the translator of the rubriart of Irma Cayam, who thought he knew the recipe for peace.

Fed up with his wife, he left her. Fed up with life in a city, he migrated into the country. Fed up with a daily treadmill of work, he developed his own program that was more leisurely and more congenial.

When he kept doves, the birds of peace as a hobby and peace continued to elude him. You know the old Chinese proverb, we have Chinese friends in church this morning. If you want to be happy, says the old Chinese proverb, if you want to be happy for one hour, get drunk.

If you want to be happy for three days, get married. If you want to be happy for eight days, then kill your pig and eat it. But if you want to be happy for ever, become a gardener.

Well, that's one recipe. I quite like the one of my nieces a good many years ago when she was only six years old and was asked what she liked to do most. Oh, she said, I love to stay at home all day with mommy eating tomatoes.

Well, you won't find peace that way. Now with that introduction to the topic of peace, I ask you to take your Bible and we look at our text. We're looking at this foundation text for four weeks.

We began two weeks ago and it's Romans 5, verse 1. Therefore, the conclusion of the long argument, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, since we have been pronounced righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ. Some of us were thinking about that two weeks ago. This God has accepted us through Jesus Christ.

Now this is our text today. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. I learned several tremendous truths in that text.

One true peace is peace with God. You see, if you're looking for peace, and I guess everybody here is, you've got to define the kind of peace you're looking for. Peace is a very rich and a very varied concept.

There are many, many different kinds of peace. There's international peace, peace between the races and the nations and the tribes and how ardently we desire that in our day. There is industrial peace, peace between the government and the bosses and the unions.

There is domestic peace, peace between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters. There's inner peace, peace of mind and heart and conscience, freedom from tension and anxiety. But it's about none of those things my text speaks.

True peace is deeper than all those. It's something more basic still, it's peace with God. No peace is a relationship with God characterized not by conflict but by peace, rejoicing in the enjoyment as we have been thinking this morning of his forgiveness.

We need to meditate on this together. The root cause of human restlessness is neither physical, nor mental, nor emotional. Nor is it situational, the job, the marriage, the neighbor next door, etc.

No, the root cause of human restlessness is moral and spiritual, it's conflict with God. There are people in church this morning who have no peace because they are at conflict with God. While you are in that state, you will never find peace or the peace you find will be very superficial indeed.

For if God exists and we who are Christians, of course are convinced that he does, if behind and beyond everything that we can see and hear and touch, there is an ultimate personal loving reality we call God. If this God made us in his own image and likeness in

order that we should know him and love him and serve him, then of course we shall never find ourselves until we find him. Of course we shall never experience peace or integration as human beings while we are alienated from our Creator.

Of course not, it's ludicrous to suppose that we could. If there's things that are true, the fundamental human tragedy can be very simply stated. It is an ordinary people like us who were made by God, like God, for God, and are trying to live without God.

That is the fundamental human tragedy, and it's not only the human tragedy, it's also the human trauma. It explains our anguish, our meaninglessness, our lostness. Listen, if we don't know God, our Creator who made us in his own image, to know him and love him and serve him if we don't know God, we're lost.

We're aliens in his world. We're like vagrants with no fixed abode. We're displaced persons, stateless.

We're like bits of plankton, floating, drifting, purposely on the ocean of time. Or in the plain language of the Bible, the wicked, that means us, who's rebelled against God, the wicked, are like the tossing sea that cannot rest, whose waves cast up, mire, and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

That is for those who are in conflict with God. You see, on the one hand, there is our rebellion against God. Sin isn't just breaking isolated commandments.

I hope there isn't anybody here who imagines that sin is just breaking isolated commandments. Sin is a proud refusal to acknowledge our dependence upon our Creator. Sin is a self-centered assertion against God.

Sin is making a bid for my own autonomy. It's rebellion against God. Then on the other hand, there is God's judgment upon us.

What the Bible uninhibitedly calls his wrath is anger. But God's anger is not like our anger. Our anger is full of hurt, pride, full of malice and venom.

There's nothing like that in the anger of God. God's anger is holy, anger. It is implacable, settled, antagonism to evil.

The wrath of God is his unwillingness to compromise with evil or to condone it. So you see, our rebellion against God on the one hand and God's judgment upon us on the other are the causes of our alienation and of our loss of peace. And I say to you, when you begin to see this that stares us in the face, this reality, certainly then that we are ready to appreciate the simply marvelous possibility of peace with God.

Do you know it? Peace with God. Peace with God is not just laying down the arms of our rebellion. That includes that.

It's more than that. Peace with God is God turning away from his own wrath and receiving us and adopting us into his family as his beloved children. I tell you, my friends, there is no peace like peace with God.

It's peace with God that leads to the peace of God that passes all understanding. And our judge becomes our father when our creator becomes our friend. And we lift our eyes to him and seek his face.

And we see upon his face not the old frown of displeasure. How about the new smile of forgiveness? And he lifts the light of his countenance upon us and he gives us peace. True peace is peace with God.

It leads to peace with others across the barriers of race and rank and color and culture and class, or that it begins as peace with God. It leads to an inner tranquility, even in the midst of calamities and in the midst of all the anguish of the world. There is an inner serenity through peace with God.

It tells us that we are no longer aliens in a far country. At last we have come home. It is the very foundation of our humanness.

You cannot be a human being if you don't have peace with God, your creator. That's the first thing I spent long on it, but it's so important. True peace is peace with God.

That's where it begins. Secondly, true peace is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did you know that Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament as history's greatest peacemaker? It's called the Prince of Peace, one of his great names. At his birth the good news was proclaimed, "Peace on earth." As a result of the goodwill of God towards men, as that familiar Christmas message rarely means. That is death we were told in the scripture that Tom read earlier, "He made peace through the blood of his cross." That is the great purpose of his death was to make peace between God and man and between human beings and one another.

Because on the cross, in that awful God-forsaken darkness, Jesus Christ made himself one with us in our sinful humanity. He accepted responsibility for our guilt. He stepped into our shoes.

He bore in his own innocent person the condemnation that we deserved. And only he could do it because he was a unique person. Only he is God the eternal Son who became a human being.

And it is as God and man that he bore our sin, guilt and judgment in his own body. Because he was condemned, we may be justified. The occasion as we saw two weeks

ago is our acceptance as righteous sin, God's sight.

That is possible only because of what Christ did when he bore our sin and guilt on the cross. As was predicted of him in Isaiah 53, he was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed by our iniquities, the punishment which brought us peace was upon him.

And with his stripes or wounds, we have been healed. Now the Christian who has been to the cross and in great humility at the foot of the cross has received a full and a free forgiveness. Not because of anything we have done, but because of the sheer mercy of God in Jesus Christ.

The Christian will never stray far from the cross. True, there are mysteries in the cross that our minds cannot fully fathom how it was possible for the one person Jesus to be both God and man simultaneously. For how God can have been in Christ when he met Christ's sin for us simultaneously, there are mysteries the human mind cannot fully fathom.

But the historical evidence is there in the words and deeds of Jesus. And it is this mystery that the church has always believed. Peace with God is through our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why, friend, if you want peace with God, it's the Jesus Christ you must come. So good just coming to the church, the church can't give you peace. So good coming to clergy, we can't give you peace.

You've got to come to Jesus Christ. He made peace by the blood of his cross and it's only there at the cross that you can find peace with God. And it's our responsibility to make Christ known to proclaim the good news of peace.

The Christian soldiers' feet were shoes that are called a readiness to preach the good news of peace because how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who publishes peace. But as we do so, we're not like the false prophets in our testament days who said peace, peace, when there was no peace, and who didn't take the rebellion of Israel or the judgment of God with dear seriousness. We proclaim peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We proclaim Jesus Christ as the only mediator between God and man. We proclaim the cross as the only righteous foundation upon which a righteous God can accept the unrighteous without either compromising his righteousness or condoning our unrighteousness. That's what we proclaim Christ and him crucified.

So first through peace is peace with God. Second it's peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ who died as a peace maker. And thirdly it's peace with God through Christ which we have.

Now having been justified by faith we have peace with God. What a tremendous statement that is. Would that every one of the thousand or so in church this morning could say it from the depths of their heart conviction.

Now I think we need to break this down a little bit. What a first that this is not an invitation it is an affirmation. Now I know and some of you may have different English Bibles that there are actually two readings in the Greek text.

There is only one letter between the two. One makes the verb a subjunctive and would be translated. Notice have peace with God.

The other would make the verb an indicative and would therefore be translated. We have peace with God. There is only one letter's distinction between the two readings and they are fairly evenly attested.

Nevertheless I venture to say that the context demands an affirmation because what Paul is doing at the beginning of the Romans 5 is describing the consequences of justification. He says having been justified by faith, having been declared righteous in God's sight through Jesus Christ. We have peace with God.

It's the consequence of our justification. In theological language if you relish that kind of thing then we may say that justification includes reconciliation. But if you prefer basic English then we say it is because God has accepted us that we are now his friends.

You've been listening to the first part of a message by John Stott on what it means to have peace with God which he'll conclude next week. This message is part of a series of sermons John preached on foundational text at all souls church in London. And you can hear the rest of the series along with hundreds more sermons by visiting the All Souls Church website.

John's book Basic Christianity has sold millions of copies and been translated into more than 60 languages. It gives one of the clearest explanations of Christianity and how you can find peace with God only through Jesus Christ. Details of how to obtain a copy can also be found on our website premierchristianradio.com/JohnStott. The legacy of John Stott lives on and is growing touching every level of society across the world.

Today Christian leaders throughout the majority world are being equipped to provide pastor training and resources in their own countries thanks to the vision of John Stott who donated all his book royalties to support this ministry through Langham Partnership. To find out about this and other ministries John Stott founded go to premierchristianradio.com/JohnStott. Join us at the same time next week for more from The Bible for Today with John Stott.

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