

Sermon Title: Peace is (and isn't) a Process

Biblical Text: Romans 14:16-19

Teaching Series: Justified by Love

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Romans 14:16-19

So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

One of the things that's easy to miss when going through a teaching series like this, in which we explore a NT letter nearly line by line, is the big picture. Christianity is not a religions of lists and laws and lessons. Nor is it a spirituality of connection and mystery. Fundamentality, Christianity is a story. And, it's easy to forget that as we slowly traverse the book of Romans.

It's a story that begins before time. God the Father, Son, and Spirit existed with perfect harmony and glory. Out of love God creates a world to enjoy that harmony and glory with him—namely human beings to reflect his image. Sin, of course, devastates this beauty and tranquility. Disorder and injustice and death lay hold of

creation. As the brokenness unfolds God gives his people a vision for reclaiming the harmony and glory sin corrupted within them and around them. That vision is a king. And through time that new king is revealed to be God the Son, Jesus.

Through his life and death and resurrection he reverses the curse of sin in our world and in our hearts. Though this healing work is instant in its effect, it's progressive in its manifestation. Meaning, what Jesus did had immediate impact. But it also has this element of process as his resurrection power reworks the destruction of sin. One day he promises to bring the fullness of his kingdom to earth, and the harmony and glory from eternity past will be fully restored.

That's the story. In many ways, no matter what we're talking about ... this is always what we're talking about. Yet, it's so easy to overlook. As we say, *we miss the forest for the trees*. I think this is what Paul is going to help us avoid today. He's going to invite us to step back and behold the whole forest, to remember the whole story.

To this day, Jewish people have a way of remembering this story in every day life through a single word: *shalom*. God enjoyed *shalom* in eternity. Creation was made in *shalom*. *Shalom* is what sin stole. *Shalom* is what will be restored. The simple translation from Hebrew is *peace*. But that barely scratches the surface of its meaning. *Shalom* is wholeness, well-being, prosperity, and security. And if that's the best way to summarize the story, then that's the best way to summarize what we're all looking for. We're all looking for wholeness, *aren't we?* For security and well-being. We all want peace.

For Christian we live in this tension. Because the Bible is clear that in Christ, we have peace. From the moment of belief we have peace with God. Yet, peace is also something we cultivate or make. In fact, we're called to be peacemakers in this story. That's what I'd like to talk about today. I want to talk about peace. I want to talk about what it means that we have peace and what it looks like to cultivate or make peace, particularly by looking at peace from three vantage points.

Here's how we'll navigate the time ...

- *Cosmic* peace. *That's with God.*
- *Personal* peace. *That is within ourselves.*
- *Universal* peace. *That is with others.*

[Prayer]

Movement 1: Cosmic Peace (vv.16-17, Isaiah 9:7, Luke 2:14, John 14:7, Romans 5:1-5)

There isn't really peace in Rome. At least not around the subject Paul's been talking about. Remember, he's been inviting his readers into freedom. They're free to disagree on matters of conscience. But this is easier said than done, *right?* In matters of food and holidays in particular they're really divided. There's conflict and hostility. Having addressed this, Paul now wants us all to step back. He doesn't want us to miss the forest for the trees. He wants us to remember our story. And so

he says, look at v.16, ***Read Romans 14:16-17 ... So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*** In other words, *move on to the things that are important. And what's the important lesson Paul wants them to see? Well, Christianity is not a religion of lists and laws and lessons. Nor is it merely a spiritual with connection and mystery. Fundamentally, Christianity is a story. It's a story about the kingdom of God. It's a story about peace.* We have made Christianity about many things, but at it's core Christianity is a story about how God is reclaiming *shalom*.

The Bible talks about peace in a multifaceted way. Which is really helpful because we long for peace in a multifaceted way. The entire story of *shalom* centers on a figure in the story whom Jewish people learned to call the Messiah, or the Anointed One. Every promise of peace centers on the person whom God promised to send to his people. The prophet Isaiah was instrumental in shaping Israel's imagination around the Messiah. In Isaiah he speaks about the Messiah as the "***Prince of Peace,***" saying, ***Read Isaiah 9:7 ... Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.*** This is an odd idea when you think about it. Usually we think of increasing governments and the reigns of monarchy being extended by force or war or power. But the Messiah's kingdom grows by way of peace and brings unending peace. The Messiah, with this holistic and lasting peace, brings *shalom*.

So it's noteworthy that when Jesus is born angels celebrate his arrival as the arrival of peace. They sing, *Read Luke 2:14 ... “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”* Jesus comes and *shalom* has come with him. Yet, his peace does not lead to an earthly kingdom of tranquility, wholeness, and victory. Instead it leads to his death and resurrection and ascension. This is something we have to contend with in the big story. *How does this fit in? How can peace be made if the peacemaker dies? How can peace be established forever, if Jesus leaves earth? Well, Jesus anticipated these questions in John 14. It's an extended lesson on peace.* He's addressing a kind of turmoil and hostility his disciples were facing within themselves and others; specifically about his coming departure. Jesus comforts them by saying as he departs his Holy Spirit would come to them, fill them and empower them to embody his teachings. And then he says, *Read John 14:27 ... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* Jesus is leaving, to go to his Father. And the world is still in incredible chaos. Countries are still led by corrupt and hostile leadership. People are still experiencing all types of burdens and anxieties and fears within themselves. And Jesus leaves. This doesn't seem like the story we were promised. I think that's because when we think about peace and our longing for peace we almost never think about our need for *cosmic* peace. And yet, the Scriptures make it plain that cosmic peace is our central and greatest needs. With all the various hostilities we face in our human existence, Jesus begins with *cosmic* peace.

Jesus could leave peace with his earliest followers because he had cosmically purchased our peace on the cross. Back in Romans 5, turn there with me, Paul anchors his entire letter on this peace, *Read Romans 5:1-5 ... Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Because of sin, there is hostility between humanity and God. Between me and God. Between you and God. This is our great problem. Our greatest need is peace with God. And Paul is saying that in Christ, the hostility between humanity and God has been appeased. Stated differently, sin disrupted the *shalom* humanity enjoyed with God in the Garden. That is sin's greatest stolen good: *peace with God.* And Jesus first order of business through his life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension was retrieving peace between humanity and God.

Because of Jesus, your greatest need has been met. Think about that ...

This *cosmic* peace makes personal and universal peace possible. You see, every longing for peace we have begins with our soul's ache to retrieve *shalom* with the God of the universe. This is precisely why peace is a process and yet it's also not. The instant peace we have with God, through faith, gives us a framework and

power to enjoy peace everywhere else. Christianity is not a religion of lists and laws and lessons. Nor is it merely a spiritual with connection and mystery. Fundamentality, Christianity is a story. It's a story about the kingdom of God. It's a story about peace.

Movement 2: Personal Peace (v.17, ref. Romans

5:2,3,5, 1 Peter 2:10)

In some ways, *cosmic* peace is what Paul has been repeatedly teaching his readers in Romans 14. After all, all this bickering and judgment is not coming from at heart which is at peace with God. It's coming from fear. It's coming from anxiety. It's coming from a heart which is trying to make peace without an anchor in the peace we have with God. This, I think, is the greatest obstacle for us as Christians when it comes to enjoying *personal* peace. Jesus has achieved something at a cosmic level that by his Spirit he is working it out in our hearts, personally. Yet, we're often tempted to keep trying to create peace in our lives without being anchored in the peace we have with God. So, *what's that look like? How do we live with peace in our souls?*

Well, since we're in Romans 5 let's look at that a bit longer. Notice how peace with God, that's *cosmic* peace, transforms our outlook of ourselves both presently and in the future, that's *personal*. Paul says, we can "*rejoice in our sufferings ... because God's love has been poured into our hearts*" (vv.3,5). You see, what is true cosmically transforms me personally. It changes the way I see and know myself.

Not only so, but it shifts the way I look into the future, "***we rejoice hope of the glory of God***" (v.2b). That's our promised future of *shalom* being fully restored. ***Personal*** peace is about how we see ourselves, our identity, and our spiritual status.

Cosmic peace is about our changed status before God. *You are at peace with God.* Personal peace is about a transformed vision of ourselves. *You are at peace within yourself though you suffer, now and through eternity.* And this is not simply some spiritual gymnastics. It's not just positive thinking. Because it's anchored in the true reality of our standing of peace with God.

But let's be honest ... we need a lot of healing in this area. *Don't we? Honestly, I spent a great deal of my week not feeling personal peace even though I wasn't questioning my cosmic peace.* In fact, I wasn't thinking much about my peace with God at all. You see? Our hearts are still in conflict. We often don't feel this ***personal*** peace Paul's writing about. That's his point back in Romans 14. Turn back there with me. There's this an unsettledness in Rome. They're not living with peace personally. Perhaps because they're getting lost in the trees. They're forgetting the story and therefore telling the story incorrectly. ***Read Romans 14:17 ... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*** In Christ, we don't merely enjoy the kingdom of God. And it's not just an etherial idea of moral formation. You and I, in Christ, are members of the kingdom. You see, our status before God has changed. Peters tells a group of suffering Christians, who were struggling to live with personal peace, ***Read 1 Peter 2:10 ... Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people;***

once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Once you weren't at peace, now you are. That's who you are. Therefore our self-concept ought to change. But, of course, this is a process. We need healing in the way we see and know ourselves. While cosmic peace is instant, *personal* peace often takes a lifetime to learn. One of the reasons is because the enemy loves for you to question your cosmic peace when your *personal* peace seems uncertain. In other words, we're supposed to allow our the reality of our peace with God to inform the way we see ourselves ... yet we often allow our feelings about ourselves to inform what we think about God. Make senses?

We're all growing in this. And just because you're growing in something does not mean it's untrue. It means you're learning. So, *how do we learn to embrace this personal peace?*

Almost every time we think about personal peace we think about our circumstances and our feelings. These, of course, are not unimportant, but they have nothing to do with your identity. These are not threat to *shalom*. These have no bearing our your personhood as a kingdom citizens or sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. That means our attempts to reclaim personal peace without an anchor in our cosmic peace will always be attempts to change our circumstance and make ourselves feel better. *Peace, with think, is a new job. Peace is a new house. Peace is a bigger house. Peace is the exact right school for my kids. Peace is a different diet. Peace is a new workout routine. Peace is more money. Peace is marriage. Peace is singleness. Peace is a different spouse. Peace is children.*

*Peace is children going to college. Peace is retirement. Peace is new friends.
Peace is getting your whole church to eat meat or celebrate the same holidays as
you. Peace is a new church building where we don't have to setup and tear down
every again. Are you with me?!*

My brothers and sisters ... Paul is helping us see that when we see peace as merely
circumstantial and emotional, we never achieve peace. That's because we've
forgotten who we are, we've forgotten we are kingdom people. And peace is not a
feeling. Peace is a circumstance. For those who are in Christ, peace is our reality.
So, if peace is about our personhood and not circumstance or feelings, *how do we
embrace personal peace? What's this look like?*

One of the ways we need healing is in the questions we ask. When we long for
personal peace, we shouldn't simply ask, *how am I feeling? And what will make me
feel better?* But just as frequently, *what is true about me? What is true about the
Lord?* That's why Paul says we can rejoice in Romans 5. Not because we feel good
and comfortable and happy all the time. But rather because the truth in suffering is
that you are still his kid ... we are still his people ... we still have peace with God.
God is at work and our suffering never has the final say. Our cosmic peace always
has the last word in a conversation with our circumstances and feelings.

I think this is a big part of what Paul is attempting to shape in his readers. He wants
to shape this self-awareness or self-concept in which what is truest about them is
not threatened by an abstained freedom or a missed experience. He wants them to

step back and locate themselves back inside their kingdom story. Back inside their kingdom identity. *Read Romans 14:17 ... For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.* Christianity is not a religion of lists and laws and lessons. Nor is it merely a spiritual with connection and mystery. Fundamentally, Christianity is a story. It's a story about the kingdom of God. It's a story about peace.

Movement 3: Universal Peace (vv.18-19, Ephesians 2:14-22)

From the cosmic and personal, Paul pushes us into this third element of Christian peace: *universal* peace. We could say, the peace we have with God and within ourselves begins to move outward to others. *Read Romans 14:18-19 ... Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.* Our acceptance or peace with God leads to a peace within ourselves. And this inward peace moves outward toward others. But like inner peace, this is an immediate reality but it's also a process.

Paul speaks about the instant reality of universal peace when he writes to the church in Ephesus. Please meet me in Ephesians 2. I want to read a fuller portion of this text because it's beautiful, but also because it gives an incredibly clear picture of how Jesus works peace immediately at a universal level. *Read Ephesians 2:14-22 ... For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one*

and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

It's beautiful. Peace is not law or a mystery or a circumstance. Peace is a person. Paul says, he himself is our peace. And because of Jesus' work on the cross he has secured a peace between people. Specifically Jesus brought enemies together. He's talking about Jews and Gentiles, different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds ... he's talking about two distinct and opposing peoples becoming family. He's talking about two very different stories being swept upon into one.

Sin has fractured our relationships with each other. Because of judgement and culture and ethnicity and so on, we were stranger, separated, and hostile toward one another. But in Christ, we become one. Our identities are wrapped up in one another. Paul says we're family, fellow citizens, even his workmanship a few verses previous. *Universal* peace is instantly achieved in Christ. But, of course, we easily are drawn back to see all the ways in and outside of the Christian church we still

have hostility and animosity and hatred toward one another. Peace is immediate, but it's also a process. This is why Paul tells his readers in Rome to "*pursue*" peace, specifically by building each other up. *What's it look like to pursue peace? What's it look like to build up one another in peace?*

Well, it looks like not eating meat if your brother will be tempted to sin. It looks like refusing to judge your sister because she's raising her children differently than you. It looks like laying down your preferences and privileges and freedoms in the same way that God in Christ loved you. Building up each other is about acting like we're really a family. *With me?* It's about living with each other in light of the reality you are at peace with God. It's about living in the light as you learn to live at peace with yourself. It's about being healed together.

You see ... Peace with God is our healing from sin. Peace within ourselves is our healing from shame. Peace with each other is our healing from judgement, anger, competition, tribalism, and racial individualism. Peace is about shalom, cosmic, personal, and universal healing. Because of Jesus, peace is our reality in this moment. And yet, peace is what we must continued to cultivate and make every day as we live within the beauty and truth of this story.