

The Visitor's Pulpit.

Peace: A Fact and a Feeling.

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

ROM. V. 1.—"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. Our first thoughts shall cluster about that most important of all matters—peace with God.

Naturally we have no peace. God is angry with us because we are sinful, and we are at variance with God because he is holy. God cannot agree with us—"How can two walk together except they be agreed?" And we cannot agree with God—

for "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." There is a breach between the rebellious creature and the righteous Creator.

HOW WE GAIN PEACE.

Let me briefly explain to you the way in which we come to possess peace with God. We are criminals condemned, though we do not consider ourselves to be in such a critical condition. We persist that we are righteous, we decline to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the law, and we refuse to own the justice of the sentence.

Dost thou say, "Not guilty"? Then, man, thou challengest thine accuser to bring forward the evidence which will soon spoil thy conceit, and crush thee with its weight. But before there can be peace between us and God we must with all our hearts plead "Guilty."

We must confess the truth, for God will never agree with liars, nor with those who indulge self-deception. He is a God of truth, and dissemblers can have no communion with him. Being guilty, we must take the place of the guilty: it is our proper position, and it is due to the Judge of all the earth that we take it; to refuse to do so is contempt of court.

It seems a stern demand, and very galling to our pride, to have to stand in the dock, and in answer to the question of "Guilty or not guilty?" to reply, "Guilty, Lord, guilty." Whatever the consequences may be, guilty. But to some of us it could not now plead otherwise. We are so conscious of our guilt that we cannot escape from a sense of it.

We cannot look upon a single day without being convinced of sin; and in reviewing our past lives from our childhood, we are over and over constrained to blush at the memory of our waywardness and our wilfulness, our perverseness and our provocation. The faults and the follies that have tracked our course haunt us, till our very looks would tell the truth though our tongues were silent.

Dear hearer, before thou canst have peace with heaven, thou must take up thy true position, and plead guilty. It is his work to convince us of sin, and if he shall exercise his divine office upon any of us, we shall no longer profess, like the Pharisee that we are not as other men, but like the publican we shall heartily pray, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

Supposing that, with confusion of face, contrition of heart and aroused conscience, we own and acknowledge our inexcusable guilt, the next thing requisite to our peace is that we should admit the justice of the divine sentence, and reverence instead of reviling the Judge of all the earth, against whom we have so grossly revolted.

Now, however frequent reflections may sound, they certainly are not acceptable with God. Of this thing, my friend, I warn thee—if in the natural hidousness and deformity, thou wilt think nothing too bad for it.

I would not, if I could, lift a finger to prevent God from punishing sin. Whatsoever a man soweth, that must he reap; the result of sin must follow its commission. The foundations of society would be undermined and there would be no living in the world if there were no laws, or if laws might be violated with impunity. There would indeed be no proof that there was a great Judge of all the earth if he did not do right, and if he does right he must punish sin, for it ought to be punished. Were I the Judge of quick and dead, the first thing I would do would be to condemn myself, for I deserve condemnation and punishment.

I pray the Spirit of God to bring you, my hearer, not only to be convinced of sin but of righteousness and of judgment to come. God is righteous in fixing a day in which he will judge the world by the man Christ Jesus, according to our gospel.

This appears to be a painful process, to be bound to confess your guilt, and then to bare your neck to the sword of vengeance, and to say, "Thou wilt be justified when thou judgest, and wilt be clear when thou condemnest, for against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight;" yet there cannot be any peace with God till we come to it, because there can be no peace with the God of truth where there is any prevarication. Lasting peace must be founded upon everlasting truth. The fact is, we are guilty, and we deserve the punishment which God apportions to guilt, and we must agree with that truth, grim as it looks, or else we cannot be friends with God.

The next essential to our receiving justification is this: the prisoner is guilty, sentence is pronounced, and he admits the righteousness of it; he is asked if he has anything to say why the sentence should not be executed, and he stands speechless; and now comes in the abounding mercy of God, who, in order to our peace, finds a substitute to bear our penalty, and reveals to us this gracious fact. He puts his Son into the sinner's place. Voluntarily doth the divine Advocate take upon himself our nature, and come under the law, and by a sovereign act Jehovah lays upon him the iniquity of us all. That sin having been laid on Christ, he has borne it and carried it away. In his own body he bore it on the tree. The transgressions of his people were made to meet upon his devoted person: those five wounds tell what he suffered, that marred countenance bears the tokens of his inward grief, and that cry—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—indicates to us, as far as we are able to understand it, what he endured when he stood in the sinner's stead, the sin-bearer and the sacrifice.

When the Lord enables the soul to perceive that Christ stood in its stead, then the work of appropriating the justification is going on. Christ died "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," for he "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." He was "made a curse for us: as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Christ hath once suffered for sin, and this is the foundation of our peace.

The point wherein faith comes into contact with pardon is when faith believes that the Son of God did come and stand in the sinner's stead, and when faith accepts that substitution as a glorious boon

of grace, and rests in it, and says, "Now I see how God is just, and smites Christ in my stead. Personally condemned me before I had personally sinned, because of Adam's sin, I see how he can absolve me, though I have no righteousness, because of Christ's righteousness. In another did I fall, and in another do I rise. By one Adam I was destroyed: by another Adam am I restored. I see it. I leap for joy as I see it, and I accept it as from the Lord."

This is not quite all, for now here stands the guilty one, who has owned the sentence, and he has seen the sentence executed upon another. What then? He takes his place as no longer liable to that sentence. The penalty cannot be exacted twice. It were neither in accord with human or divine righteousness that two individuals should be punished for the same offence unless both were guilty. When God devised the plan of substitution, the full penalty demanded of the guiltless surety was clearly intended to bring exemption to the guilty sinners. That Jesus should suffer vicariously, and yet those for whom he paid the quittance in drops of blood should obtain no acquittal could not be. When God laid sin upon Christ, it must have been in the intent of his heart that he would never lay it on those for whom Christ died. So then there standeth the man who was once guilty, but he is no more condemned, because another has taken upon him the condemnation to which he was exposed. Still more, inasmuch as the Lord Jesus Christ came voluntarily under the law, obeyed the law, fulfilled the law, and made it honorable, according to the infinite purpose and will of God the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. While Christ stands in the sinner's place, the believing sinner stands in Christ's place. As the Lord looked upon Christ as though he had been a sinner, though he was no sinner, and dealt with him as such, so now the Lord looks upon the believing sinner as though he were righteous, though indeed he has no righteousness of his own; and he loves him and delights in his perfect comeliness, regarding him as covered with the mantle of his Redeemer's righteousness, and as having neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing.

This is wonderful doctrine, but it is the doctrine of the Word of God. It is the doctrine whereon faith can feed and rest, and when faith receives it she says to the soul, "Soul, thou art free from sin, for Christ has borne thy sin in his own body on the tree. Soul, thou art righteous before God, for the righteousness of Christ is thine by imputation. Without any works of thine own thou art yet justified according to the righteousness of faith, even as faithful Abraham, of whom it is written, 'He believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness.'" This is a wonderful exchange, the putting of Christ where the sinner was.

And now, what does the court say?—The court says, "Not guilty, absolved, acquitted."

THE RESULT.

By this process we have come to the truth before God, and we have dwelt with each other on the line of truth. There has been no vindication or falsehood. Justice has been vindicated, mercy has been magnified, and we are justly forgiven. Strange fusion of vehement grace and vindictive wrath! Behold how judgment and mercy have linked hands together in the person of the dying, bleeding, rising Son of God. This is the way by which we obtain justification.

The soul may well have a settled peace when it has realized and received such a justification as this, seeing it is a peace consistent with justice. The Lord was not winked at sin; he has not treated sin as if it were a trifle; the Lord has punished transgression and iniquity. The rod has been made to fall, and the blessed shoulders of our Lord have been made to smart under the infliction. If justice had never been satisfied the human conscience would not have been content. The proclamation of unconditional mercy would never have satisfied a human mind. If we had to preach to you that God forgave you irrespective of an atonement, no awakened conscience would welcome the tidings; we should still have to confront the question, "Where is justice, then?" We should be unable to see how the law could be vindicated, or the moral government of God maintained. We are quite at rest, when we see that there is as much justice as there is mercy in the forgiveness of a believer when he passes by sin as he would in holiness, and that God is as glorious in holiness when he passes by sin as he would have been had he cast the whole race into the abyss of unfathomable woe.

II. I now come to the second part of this subject, which is this: Faith brings us into the state of peace which I have explained, and afterwards faith gives us the sense of peace. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God."

Will you please to notice that the sense of peace follows upon the state of peace. We do not get peace before we are justified, neither is peace a means of justification. No, brethren, we are justified first. "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." God justifies the ungodly. We have no peace till that is done. At least there may seem to be peace, a horrible peace—the peace of death and of daring presumption—when man says, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, and talks about rest when there is a conscience seared as with a hot iron—and a mind drugged with presumption, so that he sleeps that awful sleep which is the presage of waking up in hell. From such peace may God deliver us! But real peace—the peace of God and peace with God—must spring out of our being justified in the way which I have been trying to describe. The man who is justified, according to the text, at this moment has a sense of peace with God, but this is only true of those who by faith are justified.

There be some among you who, I trust, are really believers in Christ, who are constantly prone to fret and say, "I have no lasting peace." I am a believer in Jesus, and I have a measure of peace at times, but I do not enjoy fulness of peace. Well, now we must look at this a little, and the more closely we inspect it the more convinced we shall be that peace is the right of every believer. What is there now between him and God? Sin is forgiven. What is more, righteousness is imputed. He is the object of eternal love: he is more than that—he is the object of divine complacency. God sees him in his Son, and loves him. Why should he not be at peace? "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God," said Jesus, "believe also in me."

Christian, there is no ground of quarrel between you and your heavenly Father. God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. To you the Lord virtually says, "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, I have made them as wool. Though they be red like crimson, I have already made them as snow." When he says, "They shall be as he is speaking to the sinner; but to you they are so. You are justified. Why have you not peace, then? You have a claim to it, and you ought to enjoy it. What is the reason why you do not possess it? I will tell you. It is your unbelief. You are justified by faith, remember; and it is by faith that you obtain peace with God; and when you are doubting and fearing instead of simply believing—when you are questioning and grumbling, then it is that you lose your peace; but in proportion as your faith stands, so will your peace with God abide."

Most assuredly we do enjoy peace with God in this respect—that we know he loves us. He would not have given his Son to die for us if he had not. He would not have devised this matchless plan of atonement, if he had not loved us. Moreover, we feel a fervent love to him in return. We do not love him as we wish to do, nor as we hope to do; but we do love him for all that. We can say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

EXTENT OF THE PEACE.

Of the excellence and virtue of this peace we make daily, hourly proof, for now we are not afraid to go to our covenant God for all necessary things, and to seek his face for help in time of trouble, why, to some of us this resorting to God has become so habitual, that we speak with him every hour of the day. Nothing hampers us; we fly to him for counsel or support. We no longer ask leave to do so, for he has given to us the private key and the perpetual settled peace. We have not always such settled peace with our fellow creatures, for at times we so much lack confidence in them that we could not divulge to them our troubles; but we have peace with God; such an amity that we can always have recourse to him, assured of his sympathy and his readiness to come to our relief in every time of need.

Our habit of prayer proves that we have peace with God; we should not think of praying to him if we believed that he was our adversary, or if we doubted his good-will. If we felt not go to him in our hearts to him we should not go to him as we do, with a childlike hope, in time of distress.

This peace with God makes us dwell in him. I am sure that every soul that has been justified by faith delights in God. You do not always feel him near, but, when he is near, it is the joy of your spirit. What are the best and piest moments you ever know? Are not those in which you have communion with God? What days can you be upon with the greatest satisfaction and ardently wish to have repeated? Are not those in which his majesty and have been so revealed to your spirit with mingled awe and sweetness you realized intensely his power and his energy?

O what a good God he is! Bad as are, how good he is! Now, take care you indulge in this delight very often; you delight in anything else you will idolater, but he has said, "Delight in the Lord, and he will give thee the desire of thy heart. You cannot be too delighted with your God. Is he not portion itself? Are we not, in all rejoiced to have such a God? We do not have one attribute changed nor one pointment of his sovereign will in the degree moved from his order." Let us as he is, and do as he pleases, and our shall delight in him. "Yea, though slay me, yet will I trust in him," when you can delight in God, though cannot delight in yourself, it shows you have peace with him, and are satisfied.

One more evidence of being at peace with God is when you can with confidence look forward to the time of your departure out of this world, and say, "I can trust, O Lord, be with me." When can fall in with the hymn we were singing just now: "How is rejoiced!"

HOW TO REJOICE.

"Bold shall I stand in that great day. For who aught to my charge shall lay? While through thy blood absolved I am From sin's tremendous curse and shame we are not afraid of the day of judgment because we have peace with God hence we are not afraid to die. There is a record and diary be the righteous God and his redeemed people, and hence fear is banished. He given to us his Spirit to dwell in hearts, and now we desire that each wish may be prompted by his will. Mind is agreed with the mind of God wishes us to be holy, and we wish holy. He would kill sin in us, and we to have it killed. He wishes us to seek his glory, and we desire that he be glorified in us, in our whole spirit and body. The lines of our life run parallel with the life of God, though upon a lower level. We can never be as holy as the glory of his nature, but still we are to be holy as he is holy. The life of us is divine, for we have been begotten again by himself, and henceforth we Christ, and Christ in us, and so we peace with God: Amen."

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