

The God of Peace
Rom 16:20

In continuing with Romans, I would like to look at one of the major themes of Romans: peace. I think it is a timely topic. It seems that especially at the beginning of a new year, people are looking for a change. We make resolutions and we set goals. Why? We want to establish peace in our lives. Everyone recognizes the need for peace because we all recognize the presence of conflict in our lives. It might be relational conflict with family, coworkers. It might be conflict in our lives, so we feel the need to reprioritize and set new goals to bring ourselves back out of the confusion of our lives.

Romans has peace as a major theme. The apostle Paul uses the word “peace” 11 times in the book, and the last mention of peace is to refer to God as “The God of peace.” We need to know what the God of peace is saying to us today because, to one extent or another, we are not at full peace. Some of us frankly don’t feel even a little peace in our lives, some of us have an ongoing but subtle lack of peace, and all of us have times where we know that we are not at peace. This is our condition. In Romans 3, Paul quotes Isaiah in saying about all men, “They have not known the path of peace.”

This is obvious when you read the paper. Here is article from before Thanksgiving found in the Alliance Review by a registered dietitian from Washington DC:

“Leaving turkey and other meats off the table could help you and your guests improve your moods, according to a new study. Researchers at Arizona State University found that when omnivores cut meat and eggs out of their diets, they experienced less tension and less confusion. Participants in a control group that continued eating meat and a group that ate fish showed no significant changes in mood.” And what is her conclusion? “Meatless holiday meals of lentils, winter squash, and perhaps soy- or wheat-based products just might help prevent the next family feud.”

I might not be a dietary genius, but I know that if you invite your family to Thanksgiving dinner and serve lentils instead of a turkey, you aren’t going to have a lot of peace around the table!

This advice is what the world has to offer. Aren’t you glad we have God’s word? We might have enough common sense not to fall for this meatless solution to peace, but we are constantly being tempted to accept the way of peace that the world has to offer. But the peace that this world has to offer is never real. Remember what Jesus said in John 14²⁷ Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Living

in the world, though, it is easy to get brainwashed by their sense of peace. What does the world say?

- The basis is psychological: peace is primarily a state of mental well-being
- The solution is circumstantial: Change your situation in order to gain fulfillment.
- We are the center of our circle of peace, branching out to others; peace comes through finding good human relationships, breaking bad relationships or controlling other peoples actions

It is easy to get into these mindsets because we are swamped with them from morning until night. But if the peace that Christ gives isn't what the world gives, then what kind of peace does Jesus give?

The reason we don't understand peace is the same reason we don't understand many things—we see from only our perspective. Let's step back and see what God has revealed about peace from His perspective. He has revealed to us that Jesus Christ is the key to all peace. God revealed a lot about His eternal and universal purposes in the first two chapters of Ephesians. Because it is such a long passage, let me summarize it:

In ages past, we didn't understand God's purposes, but when Christ came in the fullness of time, God revealed the mystery that His purpose was to bring all things together in Christ, both things in heaven and things on earth. Jesus came to call the gentiles, who had been excluded from the work of God until that time, to share the promises that God had given Israel. Jesus Himself became their peace, the peace of all mankind, by breaking down the hostility between Jew and gentile, making them into one body, establishing peace. Then, having reconciled all men as one body, He reconciled them together to God through the cross. Though they were dead in trespasses, and dead to God, He made them alive together to God. Then the Father, through the work of His might, raised Christ from the dead, seated Him at His right hand, and put every rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but the age to come in subjection under Christ's feet. Then He set Christ as head over all things and gave Him to the Church, that the Church would be the fullness of His body so that Jesus Christ would fill all in all. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace.

Now that is God's view of peace. Our view of peace is to have a better relationship with our husband or wife or to get along with people at work better. Those aren't bad things. They are just too small for God to set as His ultimate goal. He knows that those areas of peace will not be fulfilled until He brings all things into peace with the eternal center of the universe: Himself.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is the center of all things, and there can only be peace when everything and everyone in the universe is rightly related to Him—when everything is at peace with Him. And He is working toward that end. If in His nature, God is love, then in His work, He is the God of peace. So what is the work of the God of peace? How does He accomplish peace?

Do we have a truly biblical mindset? A good way to find out is to try to finish the thoughts of scripture without looking at the verse. Today's scripture tells us about the God of peace. Specifically, it tells us what the God of peace will do. Fill in the blank: The God of peace will_____. What is your vision of the God of peace? What does He do?

Let's read today's scripture lesson from Romans 16:20.

Romans 16:20The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

What is the God of peace doing? He is at this time making war on his enemies. This doesn't make sense as a good path to peace in the world's view.

God is at war with everything that sets itself up against the name of His beloved Son. The God of peace has to declare war because He can have no contender. He will not share His glory with another. There is no other god besides Him. There can be no truce because He fills all in all. He is worthy of all praise. There is life in no other. There is hope in no other. There is no other name given under heaven by which men can be saved. There is no other mediator between God and man. No person can be at true peace with another unless they are both at peace with Him.

When Jesus died on the cross, He made a way of peace through war. He now rules over all things, and He will destroy all his enemies in one way or another. Jesus has the indestructible life, and He holds the keys of death. Satan will never submit to Him, so the God of peace will soon crush Satan. Our core problem, though, is that we were also enemies of God. As the God of peace, He must destroy all of His enemies.

But praise be to God, he is merciful. Because He is merciful, Jesus is destroying some of his enemies in a different way. I was once an enemy of God, but not any more. He destroys some of his enemies by making them into His brothers and sisters, sons of God, through the cross. In the center theme of the book of Romans is the way of peace:

Rom 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

I am thankful that the God of peace is at war, destroying the enmity between us, breaking the wall that separated us. Our blessedness depends on it. We can't be at full peace until He has established full peace. Only then will we be at full peace to Him and to everyone else who is at full peace with Him.

Application A: Remember that in this age, God is at war. At this time, not all lack of peace is a bad thing. Peace does not always come through the avoidance of conflict, because the God of Peace is crushing Satan now. This can give us encouragement as we live in places of conflict right now. Just because we are in conflict does not necessarily mean that we are not in God's will. In fact, a total lack of conflict suggests that you are not at peace with God. If you are God's side, at peace with Him, you are at war with someone else. In our conflict, we just need to make sure that we are at peace with God and war with His enemies.

If we avoid war, we will not have peace. Traditionally, Christians have recognized that they are on a three-front war. James 4 summarizes our three enemies, the flesh (evil desires), the world (whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God), and Satan (we must resist Him.) I don't have time to address these now, but they are all summed up in Romans 16:19: Be wise in what is good and innocent of what is evil. You should definitely seek discipleship and mentoring for help in these areas too.

Don't believe the lie that the less conflict there is in your life, the closer you are with God.

Application B. God is making you an offer of peace. Make peace with God.

**If you are not a believer in Christ, you are not at peace with God, regardless of what you feel. But Romans teaches us the way of peace. Rom 5:1Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

To be justified means to be made right. Although there was nothing that we could do to make ourselves right with God, Jesus died to make a way. Now we are justified by faith—not a dead faith that simply believes the fact that Jesus died on the cross and rose, but a living faith, like Abraham, who by faith, was willing to offer his only son as sacrifice to God. We are justified by faith as we repent of our old lives, die to ourselves, and take up our lives in Christ. You must have faith that you will find our peace through Christ.

Again, Rom 5:1Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**If you are a believer in Christ, come into peace with God. I am not talking about a primarily subjective peace with God—how you feel things are going. Those feelings of peace or lack of peace are very useful, but they are not the end. The goal is not to feel at peace with God, but to be at peace with God. If you don't feel at peace with God right now, it is a good indication that you need to come into true peace with Him by moving into proper relationship with Him.

The word “relationship” has been hijacked in our culture to mean something like “the thing that exists between two people” as in “How is your relationship with your kids?” Relationship then tends to be a measure of the peace you have with someone. I think you are much better off if you think of relationship as being a God-given (not human developed) way of describing how two people “relate” to each other. Relationship is the thing that God has created, so that if we walk in them as God has created them, we will have peace.

Last week, Paul challenged us that this year we are to do some spiritual building like we did physical building last year. I think a good way to do that is to build our relationships with God, and to start from what He has said. He has given us relationships to Him—let's learn to walk in them in the manner that He has set out.

- He is Father, we are child. We walk in this relationship when we can say, “The son only does what he sees his Father doing.”
- We are friends. “I know what Jesus is doing, and I obey what He commands.” (John 15)
- He is Master, we are servants. In humility we say, “We have only done what we ought to have done.” (Luke 17)
- He is the Caller, we are the called. “We walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.”
- He is Saviour, we are the redeemed. We give thanks to the Lord and say He is good. (Ps107)

He is our Bread of life. He is our King. He is our Provider. He is everything to us. Sometimes we focus on one aspect of who He is, but we need to do some spiritual building in many aspects of Who He has revealed Himself to be. In practice, you need to seek out what relationships God has called you to be in with Him and walk in His way, growing at peace with Him.

**Maybe you have been a follower of Christ for a while, no major sin in your life or severely broken relationships, but you still lack peace. Maybe you can look back at a time when you were much closer to Him. You don't feel like anything has changed, but you know that you aren't as close as you used to

be. Why is that? What happened? The answer is in the question—you don't feel like anything has changed in your life.

The vital Christian life that gives peace is one in which we are ever content with what God has provided us now, but are never satisfied with our depth of knowledge and love of Him. There is no standing still in God. There is no finish line. We can stop in our growth in Christ and expect to find peace. There is no plateau in our God. It is “ever changing from glory to glory.”

J.C. Ryle, in his book, *Holiness*, writes, Of all sights in the Church of Christ, I know none more painful to my own eyes than a Christian contented and satisfied with a *little* grace, a *little* repentance, a *little* faith, a *little* knowledge, a *little* charity, and a *little* holiness. I do beseech and entreat every believing soul that reads this tract not to be that kind of man. If you have any desires after usefulness—if you have any wishes to promote your Lord's glory—if you have any longings after much inward peace—be not content with a *little* religion.

You might have been of the mindset that in your walk with God, there is a mountain you need to climb, but after that, everything will be great. But Peter tells us in his first letter that we need to diligently seek faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, and love. Then he says, 1 Peter 1:^sFor if these qualities are yours **and are increasing**, they render you neither useless nor ^(w)unfruitful in the true ^(x)knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So what is the next step for you for greater peace with God?

You need to hold on to Romans 16:20 as a promise. You need to realize that God is at war, crushing Satan, but He isn't just doing it any way. The passage doesn't say, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan.” It doesn't say, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan with His mighty arm.” What does it say? “The God of peace will soon crush Satan *underneath your feet.*”

We have peace with God when we do things His way, and He says that He will crush Satan underneath our feet. We are participating in this crushing of Satan. It is true that God is the one doing the crushing, but we are very much involved.

What does it look like for God to crush Satan under our feet? It is tempting for me to lay out a bunch of “practical” applications like, “Do A, B, and C, and then you will be crushing Satan.” But we know that the righteous will live by faith—what we really need is a transformed mind and a new faith in what God means by this passage. Then we will carry it out in living ways.

First, we need to recognize this is a promise, not a command. It is not, “Be sure to crush Satan underneath your feet.” Furthermore, it is not just an

isolated or off-hand promise, but it is an eternal promise that we are privileged to participate in. In 2 Peter 1:4, we are told that He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature,

We are given this promise so that we can grow in Christ likeness, so that we can belong to Him in a deep way. We are called to partake of Christ. What does it mean to partake? I saw recently that the theme of the women's retreat is "Taste and see that the Lord is good." To taste of the Lord is to have a portion of him; to partake of Him. When we partake in Christ's life, we have a part or share in him.

In this passage, when God promises to crush Satan under our feet, he is not giving us this promise in isolation. He is giving us this promise so that we can share in life of Christ. This promise, many of you might recognize, was given to Jesus first. It was the theme of our redemption all the way back to the beginning. Right after Adam and Eve fell into sin, God promised them a redeemer by cursing Satan who had appeared to them as a snake.

Genesis 3: ¹⁵And I will put ^(O)enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her seed;
^(P)He shall bruise you on the head,
And you shall bruise him on the heel."

Now that we are in Christ, we are partakers of the divine nature. The promise given to Jesus is now a promise given to us. We receive, through grace, the blessings and promises of our firstborn brother, Jesus. Romans 16 makes it clear that we are heirs of the promise of Genesis 3 as well. If we are in Christ, then we are heirs to his promise, and just as God crushed Satan under Jesus' feet, God will crush Satan underneath our feet. We will have peace with God as we partake deeper and deeper into Christ.

We must be diligent to meditate on the promises and pray for faith if we want to faithfully live out this promise. We need to live this promise if we want greater peace with God, but it isn't usually easy to live out this promise because there is someone else offering us peace: Satan. He has a deal the He is constantly holding out to us every time we want to live this promise of crushing his head. Here is his offer of truce: if you don't step on my head, I won't bite your heel.

The promises of God depend on faith because they don't make sense in the natural. If you find a pit of snakes in your yard, the first thing you do is go out and start stomping on it, right? No, that makes no sense, because you know that you are going to take it on the foot if you do that. So Satan plays to our natural tendencies to avoid his destruction and the destruction of his

rule. Examples: You have a rebellious teenager. You could discipline him, but no discipline seems pleasant at the time, so why not just wait and see if he doesn't grow out of this stage rather than cause a fuss? You could write a letter to the editor to oppose abortion or homosexual marriage, but then there will be a lot of letters back denouncing you. If you want peace at family gatherings, don't serve lentils; just be sure that you don't witness to your brothers and sisters. It is really rather easy to avoid getting bitten on the foot—just make sure to keep peace with Satan.

As long as you build your world to avoid the pain that comes with advancing the Kingdom, you will suffer the loss of peace with Christ. Are you trying to order your own life to avoid conflict? This is how the world seeks peace. But in this age, Peace with God means war with Satan, the world, and the flesh.

We have two choices—friendship with the world, or friendship with God. When Jesus was tempted, He had two choices—worship Satan and rule the world, or go to the cross and rule the world. Praise be to God, Jesus chose the cross. He considered it better to have a cross in the world and peace with His Father than to have peace in the world and

As partakers of the divine nature, we face the same temptation, make peace with Satan and rule in this world, or take up our crosses and rule with Christ.

I would be a bad teacher if I left you here rather than tell you how to prepare for battle. We must go back to 1 Peter 1:4 He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature,
If we want to live this promise, we need to meditate on some other promises of God and what He has promised in this battle.

- If we feel afraid, we have this promise: Luke 10:19 "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.
- If we suffer with him, we have this promise Rom 8:17 we are fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him we will also be glorified with Him
- If we die with him, we have this promise 2 Cor 4:14 He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus
- If we feel inadequate for the task, we have this promise Phil 1:6 Paul says: For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus
- If we feel unprotected on our feet, God has provided us with spiritual armor, specifically feet that are fit with the what? The readiness of the gospel of peace.

- If we feel alone, we know that Christ has gone ahead of us, and has already crushed Satan's head as He died on the cross.

So this week, grow in peace by meditating on these promises. I am not going to try to tell you how the promise of crushing Satan under your feet will play out, but I know that often people like something a little more concrete, so I will give you an example from our own midst. (Because this promise is being carried out in many lives right now. I just bring up this one because I know something of this fight.)

Many of you might not know Bob and Jan May's work because they carry it out quietly without complaining, but they are helping to care for a precious little girl in foster care. I am sure that they can tell you stories of what has gone on in their house and tell you that the work of this Christ in this life is one of conflict. They aren't being forced to do this, and they could make one call at any point and restore "peace" to their house, but they stick to it for month after month, suffering as they go. I am not trying to make them out to be perfect, and I am sure that there are many times when they ask themselves why they are doing what they are doing and questioning whether or not it makes any difference, but they are making a difference as their sacrificial love stomps down the work of Satan and the world. In this work, they, and all of us need encouragement. So, consider it pure joy when you face these trials because God is perfecting you through them. Keep up the work in Christ so that when you receive beatings (physical and emotional), you receive them on behalf of Christ. Then you will be able to praise God with the disciples, who after being beaten, praised God for being considered worthy of suffering for His Name.

Now a final word from Romans 16:20 for those of you who are not followers of Christ, or who claim to be in Christ but are not truly partakers in Him: The last word from this passage is SOON. The God of peace will soon crush Satan.

If you are sitting in this room today, putting off this offer of peace that Jesus has given to you, then the most important word for you is SOON. If you are thinking to yourself that you will do this church stuff later, then I have only one word for you: SOON. If you are presuming on God's generosity and are saying to yourself that you will accept Him later, I remind you what God says: SOON.

There might not be a better sign that you have a wicked and unbelieving heart than if you have heard this offer of peace and you are putting it off. How can you continue to stand in opposition and rebellion against the Almighty maker of all things, who, instead of snuffing you out, has extended you an offer of pardon for all your hatred of Him? More than that, he has promised that you can live forever, enjoying life as his child in his house.

How can you say that you will consider this offer later? It is spitting in His face. And yet, He is so merciful that He may offer you a chance at another time—BUT HE MIGHT NOT. Today could be your day. If you can hear my voice, then God is calling you! Don't hear the word "soon" and be a mocker like Peter describes in 2 Peter 3. They say that everything just keeps happening as it always has, and that God is a liar—His promise of soon doesn't really mean soon. But they forget that God sent the flood and in a day, judged the whole world. And they don't know that the current earth is being reserved for a judgment of fire and the destruction of the wicked. When you hear the word "Soon", think about Peter's warning: 2Pet 3:⁸But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

He desires that all would come to repentance, but do not presume upon His patience. Psalm 2: ¹²Do homage to ^(v)the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way,

For ^(w)His wrath may ^(e)soon be kindled

How blessed are all who ^(x)take refuge in Him!

Take refuge in Him! Become a partaker in the divine nature. Believe the promises that the God of peace is holding out to you!