

GOING DEEPER STUDY NOTES (January 7, 2024)

FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP STUDY

We live in a world that talks a lot about peace but has very little peace, if any, to offer. On the global scene, whenever two or more gather, conflict, disturbance, frustration, anger, bloodshed and war, often follow. That's also true on the streets of our cities, in our neighborhoods, in our homes, and in our own souls. There is, at times, a lack of peace even in churches that exist to extend the peace of God.

When do you feel most at peace? Is there a particular place, a particular time, when you experience peace? Are there particular friends and relatives who, when you are with them, elevate your sense of peace? How long does that peace last?

Let me also ask how you would define peace? For those who rarely, if ever, experience the kind of peace God intends, their definition of peace is reduced to a fragment of what it is meant to be. There is a temptation for all of us to settle for discounted peace. That's understandable when the peace we look for depends on the actions of those around us, and our own choices too.

Some world religions and philosophies attempt to provide a path to peace by counseling us to disconnect from all desires, and, in some instances, to disconnect from the world itself.

Christian faith offers a strong voice in the opposite direction. What we need first is Peace with God. And, God made that possible. Once we begin to embrace that, our view of ourselves, others, the city and world we live in, even hostility and aggression, begins to change.

Christian faith claims that until we experience Peace with God, until we surrender in our war against God, until we acknowledge Him as the Victor, as the Lord of all, as our Only hope, any peace we experience will be temporary and defined by circumstances around us, and the turmoil in us. When we embrace the peace that God offers we begin to see things differently. We discover a more profound sense of Peace. Our understanding of the frailty and fear that fuels competition, aggression and conflict grows. Our compassion deepens. We offer grace more freely. Peace with God leads us into our troubled world, not away from it. Peace with God drives us into relationships in our community, even with those who do not like us and may even attack us. Peace with God gives us a clearer sense of who we are and how valuable, and loved, we are. Peace, lasting peace, real peace, is a gift of God offered to us through Jesus.

Are You at Peace with God? (Romans 5:1-5) ESV

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, ***we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** ²Through 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. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and 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."

WHAT DOES IT SAY?

1. What does this passage tell us about our source of peace? v.1
2. What does this passage say about faith, grace, hope? v.2
3. What does Paul (the writer of this letter to the Romans) say about suffering? vv.3-5

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

4. What does it mean "we have been justified by faith"?
5. What does it mean "we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand"? What does it mean "we stand"?
6. What does it mean, "Hope does not put us to shame"?

WHAT IS GOD SAYING TO YOU?

7. Where in our world are people currently at peace (not simply putting up with each other)? Discuss.
8. Why do religious communities fight each other (Israel/Hamas, Hindu/Muslim)? Is "Christian war" ever God's desire? Discuss
9. How would you describe your own level of peace?
10. Where do you go, what do you do, to find peace? Share
11. How would you describe your personal "peace with God"? How did you find, if you have found, peace with God?
12. Who do you need to be at peace with? Pray for them. How can you be a person of peace in your home, city, church?

As you spend time praying, remember that prayer is meant to be the most natural part of your day. Prayer is a conversation: talking to God and listening to God. Thank God for the times you've experienced peace, real peace. Ask God to provide peace in your relationship with Him so that you will love Him and trust Him more. Ask God to help you be at peace, regardless of what's happening around you. God will help you to be peaceful, and to be a person who brings His peace to others, because He loves you, them too.