**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**ROMANS-008**. **LET US HAVE PEACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

*Romans 5:1 (R.V.)*

In the rendering of the Revised Version, Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, the alteration is very slight, being that of one letter in one word, the substitution of a long o for a short one. The majority of manuscripts of authority read let us have, making the clause an exhortation and not a statement. I suppose the reason why, in some inferior MSS., the statement takes the place of the exhortation is because it was felt to be somewhat of a difficulty to understand the Apostle's course of thought. But I shall hope to show you that the true understanding of the context, as well as of the words I have taken for my text, requires the exhortation and not the affirmation.

One more remark of an introductory character: is it not very beautiful to see how the Apostle here identifies himself, in all humility, with the Christians whom he is addressing, and feels that he, Apostle as he is, has the same need for the same counsel and stimulus that the weakest of those to whom he is writing have? It would have been so easy for him to isolate himself, and say, Now you have peace with God; see that you keep it. But he puts himself into the same class as those whom he is exhorting, and that is what all of us have to do who would give advice that will be worth anything or of any effect. He does not stand upon a little molehill of superiority, and look down upon the Roman Christians, and imply that they have needs that he has not, but he exhorts himself too, saying, Let all of us who have obtained like precious faith, which is alike in an Apostle and in the humblest believer, have peace with God.

**I. Now a word, first, about the meaning of this somewhat singular exhortation.**

There is a theory of man and his relation to God underlying it, which is very unfashionable at present, but which corresponds to the deepest things in human nature, and the deepest mysteries in human history, and that is, that something has come in to produce the totally unnatural and monstrous fact that between God and man there is not amity or harmony. Men, on their side, are alienated, because their wills are rebellious and their aims diverse from God's purpose concerning them. And--although it is an awful thing to have to say, and one from which the sentimentalism of much modern Christianity weakly recoils--on God's side, too, the relation has been disturbed, and we are by nature the children of wrath, even as others; not of a wrath which is unloving, not of a wrath which is impetuous and passionate, not of a wrath which seeks the hurt of its objects, but of a wrath which is the necessary antagonism and recoil of pure love from such creatures as we have made ourselves to be. To speak as if the New Testament taught that reconciliation was lop-sided--which would be a contradiction in terms, for reconciliation needs two to make it--to talk as if the New Testament taught that reconciliation was only man's putting away his false relation to God, is, as I humbly think, to be blind to its plainest teaching. So, there being this antagonism and separation between God and man, the Gospel comes to deal with it, and proclaims that Jesus Christ has abolished the enmity, and by His death on the Cross has become our peace; and that we, by faith in that Christ, and grasping in faith His death, pass from out of the condition of hostility into the condition of reconciliation.

With this by way of basis, let us come back to my text. It sounds strange; Therefore, being justified by faith, let up have peace. Well, you will say, but is not all that you have been saying just this, that to be justified by faith, to be declared righteous by reason of faith in Him who makes us righteous, is to have peace with God? Is not your exhortation an entirely superfluous one? No doubt that is what the old scribe thought who originated the reading which has crept into our Authorised Version. The two things do seem to be entirely parallel. To be justified by faith is a certain process, to have peace with God is the inseparable and simultaneous result of that process itself. But that is going rather too fast. Being justified by faith let us have peace with God, really is just this--see that you abide where you are; keep what you have. The exhortation is not to attain peace, but retain it. Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown. Being justified by faith cling to your treasure and let nothing rob you of it--let us have peace with God.

**II. Now a word, in the next place, as to the necessity and importance of this exhortation.**

There underlies it, this solemn thought, which Christian people, and especially some types of Christian doctrine, do need to have hammered into them over and over again, that we hold the blessed life itself, and all its blessings, only on condition of our own cooperation in keeping them; and that just as physical life dies, unless by reception of food we nourish and continue it, so a man that is in this condition of being justified by faith, and having peace with God, needs, in order to the permanence of that condition, to give his utmost effort and diligence. It will all go if he do not. All the old state will come back again if we are slothful and negligent. We cannot keep the treasure unless we guard it. And just because we have it, we need to put all our mind, the earnestness of our will, and the concentration of our efforts, into the specific work of retaining it.

For, consider how manifold and strong are the forces which are always working against our continual possession of this justification by faith, and consequent peace with God. There are all the ordinary cares and duties and avocations and fortunes of our daily life, which, indeed, may be so hallowed in their motives and in their activities, as that they may be turned into helps instead of hindrances, but which require a great deal of diligence and effort in order that they should not work like grains of dust that come between the parts of some nicely-fitting engine, and so cause friction and disaster. There are all the daily tasks that tempt us to forget the things that we only know by faith, and to be absorbed in the things that we can touch and taste and handle. If a man is upon an inclined plane, unless he is straining his muscles to go upwards, gravitation will make short work of him, and bring him down. And unless Christian men grip hard and continually that sense of having fellowship and peace with God, as sure as they are living they will lose the clearness of that consciousness, and the calm that comes from it. For we cannot go into the world and do the work that is laid upon us all without there being possible hostility to the Christian life in everything that we meet. Thank God there is possible help, too, and whether our daily calling is an enemy or a friend to our religion depends upon the earnestness and continuousness of our own efforts. But there is a worse force than these external distractions working to draw us away, one that we carry within, in our own vacillating wills and wayward hearts and treacherous affections and passions that usually lie dormant, but wake up sometimes at the most inopportune periods. Unless we keep a very tight hand upon ourselves, certainly these will rob us of this consciousness of being justified by faith which brings with it peace with God that passes understanding.

In the Isle of Wight massive cliffs rise hundreds of feet above the sea, and seem as if they were as solid as the framework of the earth itself. But they rest upon a sharply inclined plane of clay, and the moisture trickles through the rifts in the majestic cliffs above, and gets down to that slippery substance and makes it like the greased ways down which they launch a ship; and away goes the cliff one day, with its hundreds of feet of buttresses that have fronted the tempest for centuries, and it lies toppled in hideous ruin on the beach below. We have all a layer of blue slipper in ourselves, and unless we take care that no storm-water finds its way down through the chinks in the rocks above they will slide into awful ruin. Being justified, let us have peace with God, and remember that the exhortation is enforced not only by a consideration of the many strong forces which tend to deprive us of this peace, but also by a consideration of the hideous disaster that comes upon a man's whole nature if he loses peace with God. For there is no peace with ourselves, and there is no peace with man, and there is no peace in face of the warfare of life and the calamities that are certainly before us all, unless, in the deepest sanctuary of our being, there is the peace of God because in our consciences there is peace with God. If I desire to be at rest--and there is no blessedness but rest--if I desire to know the sovereign joy of tranquillity, undisturbed by my own stormy passions or by any human enmity, and to have even the beasts of the field at peace with me, and all things my helpers and allies, there is but one way to realise the desire, and that is the retention of peace with God that comes with being justified by faith.

**III. Lastly, a word or two as to the ways by which this exhortation can be carried into effect.**

I have tried to explain how the peace of which my text speaks comes originally through Christ's work laid hold of by my faith, and now I would say only three things.

Retain the peace by the exercise of that same faith which at first brought it. Next, retain it by union with that same Lord from whom you at first received it. Very significantly, in the immediate context, we have the Apostle drawing a broad distinction between the benefits which we have received from Christ's death, and those which we shall receive through His life. And that is the best commentary on the words of my text. If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. So let our faith grasp firmly the great twin facts of the Christ who died that He might abolish the enmity, and bring us peace; and of the Christ who lives in order that He may pour into our hearts more and more of His own life, and so make us more and more in His own image. And the last word that I would say, in addition to these two plain, practical precepts is, let your conduct be such as will not disturb your peace with God. For if a man lets his own will rise up in rebellion against God's, whether that divine will command duty or impose suffering, away goes all his peace. There is no possibility of the tranquil sense of union and communion with my Father in heaven lasting when I am in rebellion against Him. The smallest sin destroys, for the time being, our sense of forgiveness and our peace with God. The blue surface of the lake, mirroring in its unmoved tranquillity the sky and the bright sun, or the solemn stars, loses all that reflected heaven in its heart when a cat's paw of wind ruffles its surface. If we would keep our hearts as mirrors, in their peace, of the peace in the heavens that shine down on them, we must fence them from the winds of evil passions and rebellious wills. Oh! that thou wouldest hearken unto Me, then had thy peace been like a river.