

## “Peace”

*Dictionary of the Apostolic Church, Vol. II:159-160*

The etymology of the Greek word εἰρηγή is variously given as from εἰρεῖν (= Lat. *serere*), “to fasten together,” or from εἰρεῖν (cf. Lat. *sermo*), “to speak.” Besides the noun the following forms of the root occur in the writings of the Apostolic Age: εἰρηγεύειν, “to keep the peace” (never transitive, “to reconcile”) (Mark 9:50, Rom. 12:18, 2 Cor. 13:11, 1 Thess. 5:13); εἰρηνοποιός, “peacemaker” (Matt. 5:9), on which see below; εἰρηνοποιεῖν, “to make peace” (Col. 1:20), εἰρηνικός, “peaceable” (James 3:17); for the meaning in Heb. 12:11 see below.

The noun εἰρηγή occurs in all the NT writings except John, but the preponderant and most characteristic use is in the Pauline Epistles. It derives its peculiar significance from the OT שָׁלוֹם and cognate forms. In extra-biblical Greek εἰρηγή is strictly limited to its ordinary political and military-significance, meaning simply the cessation or absence of war. It does not even cover the idea of “treaty,” “truce,” for which σπονδαί is used. The LXX puts εἰρηγή for six other words besides שָׁלוֹם (cf. שָׁקַט in 1 Chr. 4:40). It is of prime importance to notice that in Hebrew and the cognate languages שָׁלוֹם is not a word formed for or originally associated with the cessation of hostilities. The root שָׁל covers a wide range of ideas, many of which have nothing to do with war and peace. The use of the word with a political or military reference is a later development. From this it must be explained that “peace” in the OT has frequently a positive content, and that it is applied in many connections to which it could scarcely have been transferred from its military use. Thus the idea of “health” is not a metaphor transferring the notion of political soundness to the bodily organism. Nor is the meaning of “prosperity” the product of the experience that political peace is indispensable to economic welfare. The root שָׁל denotes originally “wholeness,” “integrity.” This is applied to inorganic things, e.g. unhewn stones (Deut. 27:6), also metaphorically to such things as labor (1 Kings 7:51), wages (Ruth 2:12), and spiritually to disposition (Isa. 38:3) and sin (Gen. 15:16). Further, it is used of artificially produced objects in the sense of being unbroken, uninjured (Deut. 25:15, Prov. 11:1). In relation to organic processes it stands for health (Gen. 29:6), and this, in part at least, gives rise to the employment of the word in the formula of salutation, although the wider sense of security of one’s actions and interests in general enters likewise into this usage (Gen. 41:16). The Piel species of the verb has two main significations – the religious one of performing a ritual obligation (Deut. 23:22), and the forensic one of recompensing, *sensu malo* of punishment (Jer. 25:14) or of trade-exchange (Ps. 37:21). In both respects the transaction is viewed as an integrating process, the payment rounding off, rendering complete the votive state or the compensatory relationship. In dependence on the ritual usage the name שָׁלֵמִים for one class of sacrifice will probably have to be explained, for these offerings were either votive offerings or sacrifices for thanksgiving in general. The Hiphil and Hophal forms of the verb are largely denominatives from the noun in its specialized meaning “peace,” but they also signify “to give execution to a plan or purpose” – again the idea of integration (Deut. 20:12, Job 5:23, 23:14, Isa. 44:26, 28). The political notion of peace itself goes back to the same idea, inasmuch as two parties become a unit in their relations towards outsiders or in mutual intercourse. Peace is not always the sequel of war; it may be in the form of alliance, the preventative of war (1 Sam. 7:14).

From the foregoing it appears that there was a wide, only partly political or military, basis in the secular usage for the positive religious application of the word. The peace which God gives or

maintains for His people is “integrity,” “soundness,” “prosperity” in the widest sense (Isa. 45:7, Jer. 29:7). Even when “peace” occurs in antithesis to war the associations are not purely negative. The positive blessings consequent upon the cessation of war are included (Jer. 4:10, Zech. 8:10ff.). Peace as a religious *bonum* applies to the sphere of nature as well as of politics, and the former as well as the latter plays an important part in eschatological prophecy (Hos. 2:20ff., Isa. 2:1-4 [= Mic. 4:1-5] 9:5-6, Mic. 5:5, 10-15, Zech. 9:9-10). The idea of peace in relation to God Himself, in distinction, from peace in other relations, given or guaranteed by God, seems to occur in the OT only in Ps. 85:8 (but cf. Isa. 48:22, 57:21).

In the NT *εἰρήνη* has a two-fold religious application. On the one hand the military-political usage is transferred to the religious sphere. This is done in two directions: firstly, with reference to God; and secondly, as between believers mutually. Peace is the antithesis to the warfare that exists between God and the sinner. As this warfare (“enmity”) is an objective state and not a mere figure for hostile disposition towards God on man’s part, so the peace is an objectively established and maintained footing, on which God and the believer associate together. St. Paul has with doctrinal precision correlated the ideas of “enmity” (Rom. 5:10, 11:28, Col. 1:21), “reconciliation” (Rom. 5:10-11, 11:15, 2 Cor. 5:18-20, Col. 1:21), and “peace” (Rom. 5:1, 8:6, 14:17). Although the subjective, emotional experience of an inner state of peace is inseparable from this *εἰρήνη πρὸς θεοῦ*, yet the word itself does not in these contexts express it, but stands simply for the state of justification. This remains true, even if the correct reading in Rom. 5:1 is the subjunctive *εἰρηνην ἐχωμεν*, “let us have peace,” for this cannot, any more than the *καταλλαγητε τῷ θεῷ* of 2 Cor. 5:19, relate to the cultivation of a peaceful disposition towards God; it must refer in both cases to the subjective appropriation through faith of the objective peace which God establishes in Christ. It is doubtful whether any Pauline passage has *εἰρήνη* in the purely subjective sense either of disposition or of experience (cf. Rom. 15:13 with 14:17). In Phil. 4:7, Col. 3:15 peace is represented as guarding the hearts and thoughts and ruling in the hearts. This must be understood of objective peace personified, and the result ascribed to this influence exercised by peace covers far more than a feeling of tranquility. As applied to the fellowship between believers mutually, peace is a social conception, including the elements of harmony and organic cooperation (Rom. 14:19, 1 Cor. 7:15, 14:33, Gal 5:22, Eph. 4:3 [“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”], Heb. 12:14, James 3:18, 1 Pet. 3:11, 2 Pet. 3:14). In regard to Eph. 2:14-22 there is a difference of opinion among exegetes as to whether the reference of the peace embodied in Christ is to Jewish and Gentile believers mutually considered, or fundamentally to God, so as to include only as a corollary peace between the two component parts of the body of the Church. E. Haupt (*Die Gefangenschaftsbriefe*, in Meyer’s *Kommentar über das NT*, 1897, pp. 78-99) has advocated the former view, but the other interpretation seems more in keeping with the trend of the passage and the expressions used. By being reconciled to God, each for their own part, Gentiles and Jews have now become reconciled together. In vv. 14, 15 peace denotes the fellowship between Jews and Gentiles, but in v. 17 (Isa. 57:19) the peace proclaimed by the gospel is the peace with God, and the same idea is implied in v. 16.

The other branch of the NT idea of religious peace ramifies from the main OT stem. It denotes the spiritualized, Christian form of “prosperity,” “security,” “soundness,” “salvation,” associated with the word from its very earliest use. No doubt this was colored, to the mind of St. Paul at least, by the consciousness of the peace of reconciliation existing with God, but its content is too rich and too positive to be exhausted by it. In this sense we find the word in the salutations at the beginning or

close of the Epistles, usually associated with *χαρις* (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, 13:11, Gal. 1:3, 6:16, Eph. 1:2, 6:23 [“peace and love with faith”], Phil. 1:2, Col. 1:2, 1 Thess. 1:1, 2 Thess. 1:2, 3:16, 1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 1:2 Titus 1:4, Philemon 3, 1 Pet. 1:2, 5:14, 2 Pet. 1:2, 2 John 3, 3 John 14, Rev. 1:4). This goes back in the last analysis to the use of the word in ordinary social salutation, which in the OT already refers not exclusively to friendly intercourse, but also to positive well-being, including health and general security. In a profound spiritualization of this conception the formula had already been addressed by Christ to the disciples after the Resurrection (Luke 24:36, John 20:19, 21, 26; cf. also Matt. 10:13, Luke 2:29, 7:50, 8:48, 10:5-6, Acts 15:33, 16:36, 1 Cor. 16:11). The rich, positive content becomes apparent in such passages as the following: Luke 1:79 (opposite “darkness” and “shadow of death”), 2:14 (= the complete Messianic salvation, because “peace on earth” is parallel to “glory in the highest,” which has Messianic significance, and because the men who receive the peace are characterized as objects of the Divine *εὐδοκία*; cf. also 19:42), John 14:27, 16:33, Acts 9:31, 10:36 (= the object of the gospel-proclamation), Rom. 2:10 (associated with *δοξα* and *τιμη* as the eschatological reward for working good), 14:17, 15:13, 33, 16:20 (the result of the conquest of Satan), Gal. 6:16 (“mercy and peace”), Eph. 2:17 (content of the gospel-message), 6:15 (“the gospel of peace”), Phil. 4:7, Col. 3:15, 1 Thess. 5:3 (the opposite of eschatological peril = *ασφαλεια*), Heb. 7:2 (Christ, like Melchizedek, King of Peace), 12:11 (the fruit of righteousness consisting in peace; cf. Isa. 32:17 and James 3:18). The general soteriological reference is also favored by the fact that God is called “the God of peace” (Rom. 15:33, 16:20, 1 Cor. 14:33, 2 Cor. 13:11, Phil. 4:9, Heb. 13:20), as conversely the peace is also called “the peace of God” (Phil. 4:7). In the light of this wider, positive conception it becomes probable that the *ειρηνοποιοι* of Matt. 5:9 are not merely promoters of peace in the sense of reconcilers between man and man, but those who actively procure and produce peace (= salvation) for others.

It will be noticed that the prophetic picture of political peace among the nations is not reproduced in the NT. No doubt this is largely due to the elevation of its eschatology to a higher, transcendental plane. Pre-Christian Judaism, while making considerable use of the idea of peace, remains at bottom particularistic, whilst Christianity is thoroughly universalistic, although the program of political peace is not explicitly enunciated in its writings.

The NT conception of peace offers no real point of contact with the Stoic *απαθεια* and the Epicurean *αταραξια* (cf. 1 Cor. 7:15, Phil. 4:7, Col. 3:1, 15). It is not psychologically conceived as in these systems, but soteriologically. The peace of the NT is not independence of outside conditions in the citadel of man’s subjectivity, but the fruit of an objective real salvation with God.