

A Sermon for DaySpring Baptist Church  
**"May We Be Christians"**

By Eric Howell

Romans 5:1-6

May 30, 2010

At the heart of our Christian faith is the core belief that God is one, and at the same time three and that God is made known to us in Jesus who is the Son of God made flesh, who was crucified and yet rose from the dead. This sounds impossible. It sounds nonsensical to logic that surely would cock an eyebrow at the faith of three is one, and one is three, and that the divine could and would become human. Yet Jesus teaches us about the Father and the Holy Spirit. And so we believe.

Jesus said He and the Father are one. He said He would send the Holy Spirit to be our helper. He said we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It took Christians quite a while to get their minds wrapped around what it might mean to think of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as one God. Don't feel bad if it takes you a while too. And when you do get to the point at which you announce that you have it all figured out, we'll ignore you because we won't believe you.

Christians are not people who necessarily have it all figured out. We have some carefully thought out ideas about it, but we do not know how three persons can be one God, and to call God persons stretches beyond our understanding and imagination. To call God a person is to say that God is like us in some ways but very different from us in many ways. Don't let your lack of understanding, your shortcoming in knowledge paralyze you from believing. Believing in the Trinity—the threeness and oneness of God is not a matter of increased and sufficient knowledge. It is a mystery that we try to articulate, but at the end of the day any of us—from the simplest follower of Jesus to the most educated historian and theologian end up babbling like a child. One theologian said that when we talk about God, we all stutter.

That doesn't mean that Christians haven't thought about this—a lot. We have. We have tried to understand what the relationship of Father and Son is and what the relationship between Father and Son and Spirit looks like. We've tried to understand if the three are all co-eternal or if there is a hierarchy to the persons of God. We've tried to figure out what went on when the Son came and walked among us as Jesus Christ. That's really where we start.

We are called Christians because we believe in and follow Jesus Christ as the way to know and love God. Christ is not Jesus' last name. Christ means Messiah—the anointed one, the chosen one, the sent one from God. Jesus was called the Christ, the Messiah, because people who knew Him and followed Him knew that He was something special, someone unique. When Jesus asked His disciples who people said He was, they muttered a list of theories that were debated: Elijah, John the Baptist, a prophet . . . He then asked them, who do you say that I am? One of them spoke for all of them and all of us, "You are the Christ."

This is a movement of courageous faith, to profess that He is the One. Thomas says it in another way after the resurrection, “My Lord and My God.” The same faith is expressed in other various ways. Today we might say, “Jesus Christ is Lord,” or “I believe Jesus is the Son of God.” Or “Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed.” Or “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” What we mean by all of it is that Jesus Christ is the path to God and we are on that path.

Here’s how Romans 5 puts it, “Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace with God comes through Jesus Christ. This peace with God that the Bible speaks of is more than what we sometimes mean when we say “peace” to mean that inner calmness that comes from being safe and at rest. We mean a feeling, something more than an emotion; maybe a state of being that is internal to us. That’s not what is meant here. It does mean that settled feeling of being who and where you are supposed to be. But even more, it means being in right relationship with God.

Peace with God is not just an internal spiritual attitude of peacefulness and tranquility. It has the full weight of the reconciliation of an actual broken relationship. It is vitally important to remember this. Christ did not live and die just so we may enjoy a tranquil feeling and be pacified in our anxiety. Christ lived and died because something in humans, between humans, and between humans and God was so broken that only God Himself could repair it. This is what is meant by sin. And the Bible says all have sinned. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Not only were we broken, but the tools that might have repaired us were broken too.

Not only were we disobedient; but, obedience was broken.

Not only were we prideful; but, humility was broken.

Not only were we idolatrous; but, worship was broken.

Not only were we selfish; but, love was broken.

Every tool we might have thought to use to repair the sin and separation from God that we ourselves caused was itself shattered. It’s like trying to dig a hole with a shovel that is cracked in half, or trying to turn a screw with a stripped screwdriver, or trying to hammer a nail with a hammer that flops around. We had this relationship with God that was broken and anything we tried to do just made it worse.

There’s this passage in Amos that describes the gyrations and efforts of the people trying to impress God with their worship, and God was not interested. Their community was cracked. He says their sacrifices stink in His nostrils—take that away from Me, but let justice and righteousness roll down.

There's this other passage when the disciples try to honor Jesus by isolating Him from the meddling parents and their snotty kids. Their priorities were disordered. And Jesus just rolls His eyes and says, "let them come to Me. Now look at this kid, if you want to come to the kingdom of God you must be like this child."

You see the pattern . . . ?

To the one who said he knew and followed all the law, Jesus said sell everything and give it to the poor.

To the ones who were so religious that they appeared righteous, Jesus called them whitewashed tombs.

To the ones who took up arms to defend Him, He said, "put down your swords."

To the ones who were so busy doing religious duties, He said, "a true neighbor is the one who picks up a broken man on the side of the road."

To the ones who thought following Him was easy, He said, "get ready, you'll soon wear a cross."

It's like sometimes we don't even try to be obedient to God and we are wandering souls in need of direction; sometimes we are disobedient willfully against God and we are in need of correction; sometimes we are trying to be obedient and we need sharpening. It's like nothing we can do earns us peace with God. No matter what we tried or try, it's like we just keep messing it up. It's like we can't do anything except just repent of it all and ask forgiveness and seek God's mercy and guidance.

One might rightly wonder, given our inability to get this right, what hope do we have? How is it possible to make the statement, "we have peace with God?" Only in this, "we have been justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

To be justified is to be brought into right relationship with someone. When hearing the word justified, we might think of justice, but it is no blind justice that gives us peace with God. Justice would consider the evidence against us and condemn us. Instead, it is grace that gives us peace with God. God himself does what we are incapable of doing ourselves—healing, mending, forgiving, and setting on our way toward Him. It is God who cleans up the mess of humanity, who gives us hope that the mess in our relationships, in our prayers, in our morals, in our communities, between our nations, between us, and God will be healed.

Will Willimon tells about when he asked his class to write an essay, "My Life," just to introduce themselves. One essay began, "Last year I awoke from an eighteen year coma that was my life." The student went on to tell of the influence of an incredibly wonderful art teacher who had, in his words, "awakened me from the mediocrity to which I had become accustomed."

We all need an awakening from the lives to which we've grown accustomed to; the lives God would have us live in the world; that He would have us shape to the relationship with God; that God would have us enjoy.

In a few moments we will all taste some simple bread and some plain ol' juice from some grapes. In doing so, we will remember that this bread has been called Christ's body and this juice has been called Christ's blood, and we'll remember when his blood was spilled and his body was broken. And in the eating and drinking, we'll remember that the Holy God was broken to make whole the brokenness deep down in each of us. And even more than knowing or remembering, in the eating and drinking may we be awakened to the love God has poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit—a love that saves us by God's mercy. May we be Christians.