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**Romans 5:1-5, English Standard Version.**

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

**Purple snail snot.**

One of the most valuable items at the time of Jesus was purple dye. It was worth three times its weight in gold. This is why it is so rare to find purple garments or other textiles in archeological digs in the Holy Land. The color was often called royal purple or Tyrian purple, named after the City of Tyre in modern day Lebanon, where this dye was known to be harvested as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. The dye was extracted from the hypobranchial gland of a certain kind of snail. In other words, it comes from snail snot. One of those mollusks provided about .9 of a gram of dye. As a result, it took hundreds of thousands of snails to produce enough dye for a single garment. These snails lived in the Mediterranean Sea, and to get the dye, the snails had to be collected by hand from the water, crushed, salted, and

then boiled for ten or so days. Then the deep purple dye could be extracted. Only powerful officials, extremely wealthy people, and priests were allowed to buy the dye. Before the Romans took control of Israel and had access to the dye, the ancient Jewish Kings like David and Solomon wore clothing dyed with this snail snot. Incidentally, the snot apparently stank horribly. Recently, researchers at Haifa University in Israel, which I have visited, discovered that during Old Testament times, a small promontory on the coast of Israel, called Tell Shiqmona, the remains of which had long thought to have been a residential settlement, was in truth a vast purple dye factory. There, countless millions of these snails were cooked up and their snot was extracted. The Israelites thus, for many hundreds of years, cornered a huge piece of the purple dye industry in the greater Mediterranean area. They imported Phoenician workers with specialized snail snot processing skills to help run the factory. Priests, kings, and temple officials were thus able to wear distinctive, highly regarded purple garments. It was the only true colorfast dye known in the ancient world. Amazingly, a garment colored with this dye grew brighter as it was exposed to sunlight. Tyre, the now-Lebanese city, is only thirty miles north of the ancient Israelite dye factory, and so, for a least a millennium, a vast amount of money flowed into this small coastal area. Tyrian purple dye, as it was called, was one of the most valuable things in the world during biblical times.

To us, today, this seems almost ridiculous, maybe funny. But it shows us how transient the notion of earthly value can be. Today, we have innumerable things that are highly valuable. Rare, ancient coins. Metals, like Gold, Rhodium, and Platinum. Rhino horn. Plutonium. Taaffeite, a very rare stone. Tritium, another rare stone. Antimatter is perhaps the most valuable thing on Earth, valued at \$63 trillion a gram. The problem is that just to make a single gram of it, at least somebody said, would apparently call for all of humanity to work nonstop for years. (So, no, I have no idea how they managed to put a value on it). Also valuable are jewelry, rare musical instruments and books, and art created by renowned artists. The Mona Lisa is said to be worth a trillion dollars. A Hebrew Bible that was dated as being a thousand years old sold for \$38 million dollars at a Sotheby's auction in New York. There are other things that are less valuable, but still quite expensive for the average person, like rare comics and baseball cards, vintage toys if they are in perfect condition, vintage cars that have been restored with all original parts, antique furniture, and old watches. There are abstract things of great value, like the rights to popular songs and stocks of major tech companies. Notice that much of what we value are simply things that people collect and keep around. We also tend to value some rare, physically attractive things, as well as materials that are used in technological items, like electric car batteries. A lot of harm comes to

people because of valuable items: children mine precious metals in Africa, exposing them to toxic chemicals and dangerous underground mines, and children climb 70-foot trees in Brazil to pick acai berries. There have been wars over access to diamonds and oil. There are some things that are so rare, values cannot be placed on them, and people who obtain them tend to hide them in vaults because there is no way they could have obtained them legally.

It's been two thousand years since Jesus walked the Earth. Have you ever wondered what people another two thousand years from now will think of what we value today? Will the Mona Lisa or diamonds become the snail snot of the future, making people look back and laugh at us?

Consider what Paul wrote in the beginning of Chapter 5 of his extraordinary letter to the Romans:

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In this quote, Paul says that we can have peace with God if we follow the ways of Jesus Christ and thereby become justified, that is, forgiven and saved. Of course, if we are talking about coming to a state of peace with God, it means that

we were at war with God before. Paul argues in this chapter and the one before it that humanity has been at odds with God, largely by refusing to acknowledge that there is a God and that we are not gods, and that we are in fact created by God. Now that we have peace with God, we no longer forced to pretend that we can compete with God. We can love God, trust God, depend on God, and be led by God, without shame. This is because we have faith now. That faith allows to accept God's grace and live in joy despite our sufferings, which now serve to give us endurance, moral character, empathy, and hope for the future – instead of desperation. Paul says all of this because the faithful in Rome have had to suffer as a result of their faith: they have been persecuted, hunted down, imprisoned, and killed. Paul is not saying that God causes us to suffer – it is other people who inflict harm on us. But now, we can rejoice. God's love, God's grace, and our faith in God have come to us via the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the root of all blessings.

Here are the words of Jesus, as quoted in the Gospel of John, Chapter 14:

*<sup>16</sup>“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, <sup>17</sup>even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”*

The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit. Jesus says this after he enters Jerusalem on a donkey. The people have turned from praising him to treating him with suspicion.

Jesus knows that he will soon be executed. He is preparing his Apostles to carry on without him. He is telling them – and us – that we will never be alone. He is planting a helper within us. The world does not understand the value of the Holy Spirit, but we do. The Holy Spirit, who is God, lives within us. He goes on to say:

*“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”*

Jesus will not be walking the Earth, but because of that gift, the Holy Spirit living within us, we will have God with us. The Holy Spirit is our personal conduit to God.

Since the time of Jesus, the value of purple snail snot has plummeted. But the value of the Holy Spirit has not. There will come a time when all the valuable things we have in life, precious metals, art, rare stones, baseball cards, the Mona Lisa, all of it will become worthless. The Holy Spirit will not diminish in worth.

Try this experiment at home. Get a piece of paper and a pen. Write a list of all the stuff that you own personally. Put the items that mean the most to you at the top, the things that have the most personal, not financial, value to you. Think about how you would feel if you lost the item or had to sell it. For a lot of people, a car is a necessary expense for their job and for life in general, but they don't in fact care about cars at all. But consider your home, and renting a home is not a

different sort of a personal investment than paying a mortgage; I know people who absolutely love the apartments they rent. Consider your clothing, your furniture. Consider intangible things, like the memories you have of that trip to Mexico. Think about the mementos that you have in your home, things that might have zero commercial value, photos of your kids playing soccer, or that ceramic lizard you brought back from Mexico. Consider everything you own personally and write a list. It's okay if you share ownership of things with a spouse or family members.

The one thing that you should not put on your list are any humans. People are above having any value. People are made in the image of God, and we do not compare our spouses, our mothers, our children to our Subaru Outback. You also do not own any people. They belong to God, totally.

Now, remember that God owns you, and Jesus owns you because he is God, and the Holy Spirit owns you because the Holy Spirit is God, as well. But because of the incredible grace of God, the Holy Spirit can do something your car, your apartment, those memories of Mexico cannot do. The Holy Spirit can both own you and you can own the Holy Spirit. This is because the Holy Spirit lives within you. This is part of the astonishing beauty of having a triune God, a Trinity. One part of that Trinity, while it is still God, is also yours personally. Remember that last

sentence of Paul's in our quote from Romans: *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* Given to us.

I would hope that you would put the Holy Spirit at the top of your list. The Holy Spirit is astonishingly valuable. Remember the purple snail snot, once worth three times its weight in gold. This was at a time when gold was by far the world's premiere valuable. It was truly rare and very, very hard to mine without technology. Remember the purple snail snot, which we chuckle at today. The Israelites built a huge structure at a massive cost of materials and hard human labor, all to house a purple snail snot factory. Now, look at your list. Think about another two thousand years having gone by. It is the year 4024. What are people going to think about your Subaru Outback, your iPad, your dining room table, your trip to Mexico. We cannot even conceive of what humans will be doing in 2,000 years – assuming humanity still exists, and God has not called all of us home. Our objects, the things we value, might be interesting relics to them, things in a museum. Or maybe they won't be compulsive collectors like us, and it will all be just useless refuse that has no value in an incredibly advanced society. Perhaps everything we value, except the Holy Spirit, will be purple snail snot.

There has been a very slow spiritual evolution in humanity over the many, many millennia since we first evolved. Think about all those thousands of years



when people had no truly concrete idea of God. They had an inkling. There are many artifacts that strongly suggest that prehistoric people believed in an afterlife and thought there was some sort of god or gods in control of the world. We have been connecting ourselves more closely with God, and for us living in our age, the revelations brought by Jesus Christ were a massive breakthrough. The Holy Spirit living within us is an active force allowing us to incrementally come to know God better. The Holy Spirit reveals God to us. Perhaps in the future, the Holy Spirit will have had a profound impact on all of humanity. Maybe in the year 4024, the Holy Spirit, which might have a new name by then, will be at the top of everyone's list. Maybe society will have advanced so far that the Holy Spirit is the only thing on people's lists. Nothing else that they could possibly own will have any value.

Consider these words of Jesus Christ, from Chapter 13 of John:

*<sup>26</sup> "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.*

Let the Holy Spirit reveal God to you. The way you do this, the way you open yourself to revelation is by making sure that your list has the Holy Spirit at the top, and that everything else feels like purple snail snot. Please pray with me.

*God, thank you for the only thing we have in our possession that is not purple snail snot. May the Holy Spirit allow us to better understand you. Amen.*