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Standing in God's favour: spatial reasoning in Romans 5:1–5

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Abstract

Paul's language in Romans 5:1–5 permeates spatiality and references to the Roman Empire. These images form part of a spatial reasoning in which he wants to convince an audience, who have already heard of the good news, that no force or power can separate them from the love of God if they unceasingly orientate themselves towards God. Paul redefines ideas such as love, favour and glory in order to communicate the significance of a believer's relationship with God from a bodily perspective. This article explores Paul's spatial reasoning with specific focus on the impact thereof for the church during Covid-19.

1. Introduction

The Roman architect Vitruvius (81–15 BCE) wrote in the first century BCE that structures can promote good health when light, temperature and air movement are taken into account.³² The link between corporeality and space is undeniable and the body can be viewed as a "culture site" because impressions of space culminate and play out in the body (Pernau 2014:541).

The recent worldwide Covid-19 lockdowns made people intensely aware of the impact that spaces have on them as well as the impact

³² Cf. *De architectura* 1.10; 6.1.1–12; 6.4.1–2.

they have on their surrounding spaces. During the first week of the national Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa, a disturbingly high number of gender violence instances were reported (Mlambo 2020). Even president Ramaphosa has voiced concern about the alarming problem of gender-based violence in South Africa referring to it as a pandemic (Ellis 2020). Considering that the majority of people in South Africa identify as Christian (Schoeman 2017:3), there is a need for theological reflection to determine the role of the church in reducing these acts of violence. The pandemic offers an opportunity to rethink the church's positioning as the body of Christ in South Africa.

In Romans 5:1–5 Paul's language is permeated with spatial imagery that form part of a larger argument that spans Romans 5–8. The main argument in Romans 5–8 can be summarised as follows: Paul wants to convince his audience that no force or power can separate believers from the love of God when they position themselves to God as their ruler.³³

This article focusses on the spatial reasoning in Romans 5:1–5 where Paul employs the body as communicative strategy by portraying it as a space in which God brings peace. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's (1980:3) theory of cognitive linguistics, stating that metaphors are not merely ornamental poetic tropes, but are expressed in thought and actions pervasive to daily life, forms the basis of my research. Elena Semino (2008:54) also mentions that metaphors successfully support arguments and she lists various metaphor patterns that can form within discourse to increase persuasiveness. Metaphors have the potential to expand understanding of a subject and to transform one's way of thinking. Accordingly, a conceptual metaphor comprises a source domain (where a concept originates) and a target domain (where the concept is clarified) (Kövecses 2010:4).

This article begins with a concise review of the structure of the argument in Romans 5:1–5 which is followed by detailed analyses of the

³³ See Potgieter, A., 2020, *Contested body: metaphors of dominion*. Aosis (forthcoming).

images in Romans 5:1–5. In conclusion some implications of this spatial reasoning for the church as the body of Christ are discussed.

2. Structure of Romans 5:1–5

5:1, a) Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως,

b) εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ,

5:2, a) δι' οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν [τῇ πίστει] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην

b) ἐν ἧ ἔσθήκαμεν

c) καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ.

5:3, a) οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν,

b) εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται,

5:4, a) ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμὴν,

b) ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα.

5:5 a) ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς οὐ κατασχύνει,

b) ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν

c) διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου τοῦ δοθέντος ἡμῖν.

3. Spatial images in Romans 5:1–5

Romans 5:1 starts with a forensic image “justified by faith” (δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ πίστεως (Rom 5:1a)). Δικαιω should be interpreted in the light of the frameworks of Romans 5:1–11 and Romans 8:31–39 (Dahl 1951:37–48, Dahl 1977:88–90) as the image stems from court proceedings where an accused is acquitted (Du Toit 2003:60). The image in Romans 5:1 should be understood along with Romans 8:34 indicating that God has already justified believers (Du Toit 2003:60). The passive use of δικαιω indicates God’s initiative in his relationship with believers (Fitzmyer 1993:395; Greijdanus 1933:255;

Moo 1996:298; Wolter 2014:319). Accordingly, a believer undergoes a status change from unrighteous to justified (Greijdanus 1933:255; Moo 1996:298).

However, this forensic image is subordinated to the main image “we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ (Rom 5:1b)). This image is dense and in order to truly understand Paul’s rhetorical effectiveness with these images, the different layers of meaning must be unpacked. The first layer of understanding lies in detecting the textual discrepancy of ἔχομεν/ἔχωμεν, which influences the reading of εἰρήνην.³⁴ I interpret ἔχομεν as an indicative. The source domain of εἰρήνην ἔχομεν can be traced to the Roman *pax deorum*. This rite constituted a contract between the Roman people and the gods where the former would obtain protection and success from the latter via sacrifice (Malherbe 2008:303; Rankov 2007:69; Rüpke 2001:132). The Caesar played a vital role in this transaction as he facilitated it. However, if disasters or discord occurred, the notion was that the contract of peace with the gods had been disrupted. In order to repair the relationship, sacrifice, prayer, fulfilment of vows and the ritual of *lustratio*³⁵ would be required to protect the city from hostile influences (Aune 1993:790). Loyalty to the caesar was also displayed by participating in these rites (Rankov 2007:69). During the *Pax Romana* εἰρήνην ἔχομεν functioned as a well-known slogan indicating Rome’s

³⁴ Scholars who argue for the subjunctive “let us have peace” include Black (1973:74); Jewett (2007:348); Porter (1992:58). Greijdanus (1933:256) posits that it is without contest an indicative on the grounds of “intrinsic probability”. Furthermore, Cranfield (1975:257) argues that it is clear that Paul views the believers’ peace with God to be factual. Along similar lines, Morris (1988:218) favours an indicative reading of ἔχομεν as he argues that a subjunctive reading would indicate a choice, which is ‘un-Pauline’.

³⁵ This is an ancient Roman purification ritual that in some cases would involve sacrifice.

political and military prowess employed to uphold Rome's authority (Malherbe 2008:303).³⁶

Paul uses εἰρήνην ἔχομεν as a metaphor in which the political facet of the source domain, which is mapped onto the target domain, is illustrated as believers' relationship with God. The audience could have implicitly understood the Jewish notion of *shalom* in the target domain, but this is not part of the source domain. What is important though, is that the image conveys that believers were in a position of animosity with God and have been changed to be in a position of peace, which entails the possibility to have a future and thrive. Peace is the absence of war that facilitates the possibility to organise the future and ensures calmness and the chance for happiness (Spicq 1994:425).

However, the prepositional phrase "towards God through Jesus Christ our Lord" πρὸς τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is used instrumentally. Space forms an intrinsic part of the prepositional use of πρὸς that, along with the accusative, indicates direction, which in this case is "towards God" (ὁ θεός) (Smyth 1956:371). God enables believers who are not on his level to orientate themselves towards him "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

It is no coincidence that Paul refers to Jesus as κύριος "Lord". Κύριος would have immediately been recognised by the audience as a term that refers to political rulers as well as gods (Aune 1993:794). In Rome the perception was shared that the caesar was a god. It is enticing to interpret κύριος as Paul depicting Jesus as an alternative bringer of peace in contrast to the caesar, especially with the use of εἰρήνην ἔχομεν. However, just as easy as it is to interpret Jesus as an alternative peace bringer, the contrary can be indicated. Paul uses κύριος to refer to Jesus, but if Jesus was truly depicted as an alternative peace bringer, Paul would also have made a connection between θεός and κύριος

³⁶ Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.12; 4.74; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.160; 15.348; *Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae (OGIS)* 614 where the slogan expresses both political and beneficence of Roman rule (Malherbe 2008:303).

(Zimmermann 2007:194). It is therefore more plausible that Paul is drawing on the early church confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” as seen in 1 Corinthians 12:3 Κύριος Ἰησοῦς and Philippians 2:11 κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Paul wants to convince an audience, who already knows about the gospel, of his viewpoint. The metaphor is embedded in a Christological reference (Fitzmyer 2011:815; Zimmermann 2007:194) describing early believers’ experience and understanding of Christ (Fatehi 2000:267). The peace with God, managed through Jesus Christ “our” Lord, indicates God as the ruling party who enables believers to enter a peaceful relationship with God as they become the embodiment of peace.

The instrumental role of Jesus Christ is further elucidated in the relative clause in Romans 5:2a (δι’ οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγήν ἐσχίκαμεν [τῇ πίστει] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην). The spatial image προσαγωγή is used and it is difficult to pinpoint its source domain. There are three options. The first is unlikely as προσαγωγή is used to illustrate an area that ships cannot access³⁷ which is not coherent with the imagery in Romans 5:1–5 and according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:86) metaphors are coherent. The second interpretation is προσαγωγή as a cultic image. This use is seen in the LXX Leviticus 4:14; Exodus 29:4; Leviticus 21:18–19 and Numbers 8:9–10 in the context of God’s altar that is approached with an offering (Black 1973:75; Longenecker 2016:558; Michel 1966:177; Van Leeuwen & Jacobs 1974:102; Wright 2002:516). Paul uses a noun in Romans 5:2 and not the verb as seen in the LXX.

The third possibility is that it derives from a royal image. Bauer et al. (2000:876) list the royal connotation of προσαγωγή as the first possible interpretation. This connotation stems from a description of an audience with Cyrus described in Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 7.5.45 (Liddell, Scott & Jones 1996:1500). The spatiality of this image where the king is approached is often overlooked. Within the purview of Romans 5:1–11 and Romans 8:31–39, I argue that the body becomes the intended place

³⁷ Plutarch, *Aemilius Paulus*, 261 [13, 3]; Polybius, 10,1,6.

cordoned off by Jesus to facilitate an encounter with God that results in having peace. However, this metaphor is novel and trying to determine its source domain remains highly speculative.

Προσαγωγή is furthermore embedded in other images found in the relative clause δι' οὗ καὶ τὴν προσαγωγὴν ἐσχήκαμεν [τῇ πίστει] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐν ᾗ ἐστήκαμεν (Rom 5:2a,b). Believers have access by faith in this favour in which they stand. There is a wordplay between ἐσχήκαμεν "we have" (Rom 5:2a) and ἐστήκαμεν "we stand" (Rom 5:2b). Both verbs are in the perfect tense – the former (ἐσχήκαμεν) underscores Christ's continuing activity and the consequence thereof (Morris 1988:219; Wolter 2014:321), while the latter (ἐστήκαμεν) underscores the image of standing. However, believers are standing in this favour. The demonstrative pronoun (ταύτην) along with the noun χάρις, that refers to εἰρήνην (Rom 5:1b), enhances the spatiality.

The image of believers standing "in this favour" (εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην) requires more understanding. Paul uses χάρις, a central leitmotiv in the Hellenistic reciprocity system that kept Rome in place (Barclay 2015:24; Harrison 2003:2; Joubert 2005:187–212) and which is foreign to the LXX. Benefactors aimed to gain honour and loyalty whilst the client benefitted materially (Joubert 2005:189–190). The power of the elite was so vast that a high proportion of society depended on them (Barclay 2015:13). Although there was a government, personal patronage kept elite families under the supposed beneficence of the Caesar (Barclay 2015:36).

Paul uses χάρις in a new way by employing it to indicate the relationship between God and believers. Unlike the Roman patrons, God is a benefactor worth following and who gives unconditionally (Du Toit 2009:131). Χάρις describes believers' new position being under the influence of God's favour.

Engberg-Pedersen (2008:15) questions whether it is truly possible to speak of an unconditional gift. He interprets ἀγάπη and πνεῦμα in Romans 5:5 as precursory for the believer's reaction in Romans 8:14–39, with especially Romans 8:28 expressing believers' love towards God

(Engberg-Pedersen 2008:38). However, I agree with Du Toit (2009:131) that χάρις is constant and originates exclusively from God and Jesus Christ. Accordingly, believers stand in “this favour”.

Believers take pride in this favour with reference to hope of the glory of God (καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ). Romans 5:2c elaborates on this position of favour. A textual discrepancy is also prevalent with the verb καυχάομαι as it is not certain whether it should be read as an indicative or a hortative subjunctive. I interpret it as an indicative coherent with Romans 5:1. The verb καυχάομαι, along with the preposition ἐπί, indicates being proud of something (Bauer et al. 2000:536) which in this case is ἐλπίς that refers to τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ as the genitive indicates (Légasse 2002:340).

Gerber (2015:230) turns the typical Bultmann (1938:646–654) understanding that boasting is a theological problem for Paul around and convincingly illustrates that “boasting” is an essential rhetoric component when defending one’s argument. Paul wants to convince his audience to take pride in the hope of the glory of God.

This image of hope grounded in the glory of God becomes even richer when understood within the context. Spes, the Roman goddess of hope, played an important role in the life of Romans. Not only was she revered at birthdays and weddings, but also played a vital role in the imperial cult and Roman propaganda (Tataranni 2013:65–78). In Rome, the temple of Spes was located on the triumphal route next to the temple of Janus, who was the god of war and peace (Tataranni 2013:70–72). Hope became an extension of the Caesar’s promise of prosperity for the Roman people.

The expression τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ is also often neglected. Δόξα was used in honorific inscriptions for benefactors (Harrison 2010:156–188). Paul’s use of δόξα refers to God’s action through Jesus Christ on the cross and the resurrection through the glory of the father as seen in Romans 6:4 (Wolter 2014:322). This is also a bodily image. Different from the hope associated with the imperial household bound to military

success, believers can take pride in the hope associated with Jesus and connected to the glory of God.

In contrast to the hope of believers derived from the glory of God, they also take pride in sufferings (οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν (Rom 5:3a)). Sufferings should be interpreted from the Jewish understanding thereof (Wolter 2014:324). Paul employs a circular arrangement picking up the key word from each preceding phrase in Romans 5:3–5:5a: ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται (Rom 5:3), ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμὴν, ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα· (Rom 5:4), ἡ δὲ ἐλπίς οὐ καταισχύνει (Rom 5:5a) (Blass, Debrunner & Funk 1961:§493(3); Moule, 1953:117), employing the rhetorical techniques of *graditio* and *polysyndeton* (Wolter 2014:324). Drawing on the Jewish tradition of understanding, the rhetorical chain underscores the test that the innocent undergoes of suffering (Wolter 2014:324). The reason for this testing is seen in Romans 5:3b (εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται) as Paul assumes his audience is already aware that suffering results in perseverance (ἡ θλίψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται (Rom 5:3c) (Jewett 2007:354; Wolter 2014:324).

In Rom 5:5a it is clear that hope is not put to shame. The reason becomes clear in the clause ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν διὰ πνεύματος ἁγίου τοῦ δοθέντος ἡμῖν (Rom 5:5b,c). Paul's use of ἀγάπη underscores God's initiative in the relationship with believers (Bauer et al. 2000:7). He uses an abundance metaphor depicting God as a generous benefactor as "the love of God had been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit". The heart (καρδία) is a bodily image that conveys the inclinations, desires, purpose and mind, thus expressing a person's whole inner life (Bauer et al. 2000:508). The believer becomes the specific location of God's activity. This is a rare case where the preposition εἰς is substituted with ἐν (Oepke 1964:433). The verb ἐκχύνω functions in a metaphorical sense denoting "cause to fully experience" (Bauer et al. 2000:312). But what is more, the abundance of the Holy Spirit is also seen in Rom 8:15 and

8:23 indicating the body as the place that waits in anticipating for the redemption of the body.

Paul employs the body of the believer as the specific location where God enables him/her to have peace. It is also a place where God's love had been poured out through the Holy Spirit. Accordingly, Paul's imagery is permeated with spatiality. The believer is not only marked as a space that has the potential to be redeemed to a spiritual body and thus saved from decay (Rom 8:23;24), but also a space entrenched in the favour of God as believers stand in this favour. The hope of the believer is also based on the glory of the father through Jesus Christ which is another bodily image.

4. What does a bodily understanding of Romans 5:1–5 mean for the church?

During the national Covid-19 lockdown in South Africa, our awareness of our own bodiliness, as well as the church as the body of Christ, has increased. However, bodiliness does not describe the mere physical body, but includes the soul, mind and physical body. Paul's use of the body as a place where God's peace is possible, sheds a different light on the idea of the body as a "culture site". Firstly, this implies that we underestimate the impact we, as individual representatives of the church as well as the collective church, have on our immediate society and society at large. Secondly, Paul emphasises God's initiative in the relationship. The church should be busy where God is being busy. Thirdly, Paul does not describe the body as a perfect place. This is a place that will encounter suffering, but it is anchored in God's favour.

This renders the following questions when we talk about "culture sites": Which type of culture do we want to establish? How do we speak about bodies that are different from ours, for example differently abled bodies? How do we speak about the violence of bodies against other bodies, specifically gendered violence? As silence also sends a message. For Paul it is vital that the believer continually orientate himself/herself towards God. This orientation towards God enables

believers' bodies to become spaces that contribute to creating a culture of flourishing.

When thinking in terms of the spatial reasoning of Romans 5:1–5, it is also prevalent that the message of the gospel is anti-culture. Paul is not explicitly attacking the Roman Empire. On the contrary, he is encouraging believers to live to their fullest by understanding what God has envisioned for them. This is per implication different from their current culture. Modern Christians are also called to a counterculture that protests violence, inequality and discrimination. However, especially in a technological era where we are preoccupied with an instant-gratification mentality, we match the needs of the world instead of focussing on being an authentic Jesus culture that does not subscribe to populist ideals.

During Covid-19 we have re-realised that we are not as in control as we think and that the church has a unique opportunity to rethink which type of bodiliness we want to portray, namely a body that speaks out about gender-based violence, but also contributes to a culture where we transform patterns of violence to the intended position of having peace with God.

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