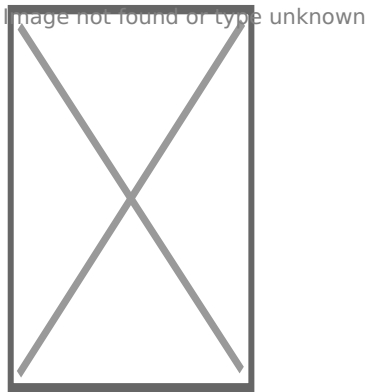


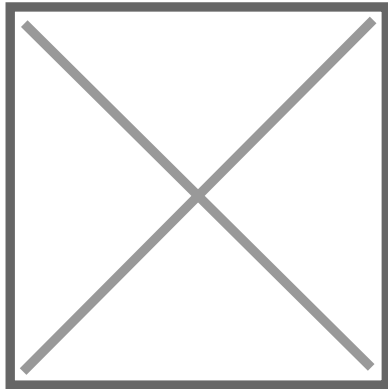
"Peace and Safety" vs. "Conflict and Danger"

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2025 at 9:00 AM

I made the following post initially in response to a private conversation, and I credit Don for researching into the background of this and helping me decide to change my opinion on it. I need to go back and cite as well the parts in DeWitt where he references this, but for now I'll just include the cite that this issue derives from from I Thessalonians 5:3:



[1 Thessalonians 5:3 - Bible Gateway](#)



[BibleGateway.com: A searchable online Bible in over 150 versions and 50 languages.](http://www.biblegateway.com)
www.biblegateway.com

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (KJV)

ὅταν γὰρ λέγωσιν *Εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια* τότε αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὄλεθρος ὡσπερ ἡ ὥδιν τῆ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσῃ καὶ οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν

I don't recall DeWitt praising "Peace and Safety" as a slogan that Epicureans *should* use, but I recall that he expressed the opinion that this quotation was a direct reference to Epicureans in fact actually using this regularly, thus leading Paul to be alluding to them in this passage. I still don't doubt that the allusion does encompass the Epicureans at least in part, but I now have a different view of the full effect of what Paul was saying.

In past years after reading that I picked up that analogy and used it myself in my writing about Epicurus. I can't go back and change the past, but if I had it to do over again given my present knowledge I would not do so, and I don't plan to use it in the future either.

In general I am fairly tolerant of DeWitt finding references to Epicureans in Paul, and I don't doubt that there might be some basis that Epicureans made statements like "Be Safe" as we do today. But in the overall context I think this "Peace and Safety" passage was intended as a non-flattering reference and isn't appropriate to be picked up positively.

Even if DeWitt is correct that the Biblical passage was intended to be a reference to Epicureans, at this point I would see the intent behind the reference be slanderous. It's effect is more like *See? All those guys are concerned about is avoiding any moment of pain!* rather than anything worth following at face value.

Yes it is true that absence of pain = pleasure, but that doesn't mean that we always choose Peace and Safety. The goal is pleasure, so just as we sometimes choose pain in pursuit of pleasure, we must sometimes choose Conflict or Confrontation and Danger when that choice will lead to greater pleasure.

Conflict and Danger is what people like Epicurus or Diogenes of Oinoanda chose when they stood up against the "... common disease, as in a plague" of "...false notions about things" which was spreading among increasing numbers of people "...for in mutual emulation they catch the disease from one another like sheep." ([fragment 3](#))

So at this point for me hearing the phrase "Peace and Safety" serves mainly as a reminder that we would not have Epicurean philosophy today if the founders and many other Epicureans along the way had not often chosen "Conflict and Danger." I don't think we can fully appreciate what the ancients thought it meant to be Epicurean unless we see that sometimes the same thing is required of us.

It's possible that "Confrontation" works better than "conflict" because "conflict" sounds more like physical combat, while "confrontation" sounds both mental and physical. For style purposes, "conflict and danger" works better, along the lines of "what doesn't kill us makes us stronger," but it needs to be made clear that the intellectual conflict is even more important than the physical. Either word works given the right context.

Post by "Cassius" of February 2, 2025 at 9:13 AM

DeWitt's References

It may be observed in passing that St. Paul quoted the words Peace and Safety as catchwords of the Epicureans, to whom he refused the honor of mention by name.⁶⁹ In this collocation Peace signified harmonious relations with neighbors while Safety meant the security of the man as a citizen, the sort of safety that Paul himself enjoyed by virtue of Roman citizenship.

St. Paul in I Thessalonians 5 identified the Epicureans by their catchwords Peace and Safety. In this collocation Peace has reference to amicable relations with neighbors, while Safety refers to the security of person and property for the citizen. The best means of obtaining the latter, according to Epicurus, was to withdraw from the multitude and live a retired life, but he thought it equally important to put forward what he called the "false opinions" on the topic, as in Authorized Doctrine 7: "Some men have chosen to become celebrities and to be in the public eye, thinking thus to achieve security from the attacks of men." He does not explicitly label this a false opinion but leaves the inference to be drawn: "Consequently, if the lives of such men are safe, they have reaped the end of Nature, but if their lives are not safe, they lack that for the sake of which at the outset they reached out by the instinct of Nature." They are not free nor in control of their environment; they have placed their happiness at the mercy of a fickle populace.

It is also manifest that he looked chiefly to friendly diplomacy to keep the environment in control. Good will is a catchword of his creed no less than Peace and Safety. It is a precondition of Peace and Safety. He wrote, for instance: "A life of freedom cannot amass great wealth because of success in this being difficult apart from servitude to mobs or monarchs but it does enjoy all things in uninterrupted abundance; if, however, now and then great wealth does fall to its lot, it would gladly disburse this to win the good will of the neighbor."

The followers of Epicurus after his death, though diligent cultivators of peace and safety, continued to display the same belligerency as their founder. According to Lucian it was chiefly the Epicureans who summoned up courage to defy Alexander the False Prophet, and the only man to accuse him to his face on a specific charge was an Epicurean, who almost paid for his daring by his life.¹¹⁷ Upward of a century before the date of this alleged occurrence it was the Epicureans in Thessalonica who by their derision aroused the indignation of St. Paul, then prophesying the second coming of Christ. In his retort he denied them the honor of mention by name but identified them adequately by those catchwords of their creed, "Peace and Safety."¹¹⁸ It may be added that the Epicureans, as usual, were in the right; the prophecy was not fulfilled.

Both Thessalonica and Corinth must have been strongholds of Epicureanism. We must learn to read between the lines. Paul had been preaching at Thessalonica about the second coming of Christ, and prophecy always aroused the scorn of the Epicureans, who denied all participation of the gods in the affairs of man. The answer of Paul to these scoffers is to condemn them to instant annihilation: "For when they shall say Peace and Safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." ^{3e} The Epicureans were not accorded the honor of mention by name, but Peace and Safety were catchwords of their sect. It was part of their ethics to live a retired life apart from the turmoil of the courts and the market place and so to seek security from the malice and injury of other men. Paul follows up the quarrel and predicts the coming of Antichrist, the model for which was Antiochus Epiphanes, the archenemy of his race and the patron of the hated Epicureans.³⁷

Post by "Bryan" of February 2, 2025 at 10:19 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Peace signified harmonious relations with neighbors while Safety meant the security of the man as a citizen

Throwing this in to show that "Peace" was also used in the context of macropolitics, in the same sense we use it: "war vs. peace."

"...For in [law courts], as the saying goes, they risk their neck whenever they serve as assemblymen, and whenever they judge cases, they pay attention to what's being said because they fear their oath -- but in the assemblies and displays of the sophists, they do not care at all, either about an oath (because they have not sworn to judge correctly) nor about whether what's being said is beneficial to the city or not (because the speech is not about war and **peace** [Εἰρήνη], about which we must sometimes vote, or if it does happen to be about war and **peace** [Εἰρήνη] or some other thing that they deliberate in their assemblies, the speech at that moment is not about anything pressing at all)."

(Philódēmos, On Rhetoric Book 3, P.Herc. 1506, col. 50, line 33 – col. 51, line 21)

Post by "Don" of February 2, 2025 at 10:37 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

It may be observed in passing that St. Paul quoted the words Peace and Safety as catchwords of the Epicureans, to whom he refused the honor of mention by name.⁶⁹

For the record: Footnote 69 is merely a citation to 1 Thessalonians 5:3. Nothing to support Dewitt's contention it was an Epicurean "catchword" is contained in that footnote.

Post by “Don” of February 2, 2025 at 11:58 AM

While I certainly see where Cassius is coming from in his posts above and I don't think he's saying what I'm adding next, I want to add that Epicureans are not going to go looking for or initiating "conflict/confrontation and danger."

Would an Epicurean defend herself against attack? Of course! To protect one's life is of paramount importance.

Would an Epicurean confront an injustice and support means to alleviate that injustice? Yes, most likely, but they would seek to understand the context.

Would an Epicurean willingly risk danger for a friend? Absolutely!

But I'm highly skeptical of the Epicurean putting themselves in harm's way needlessly or recklessly. I don't see the Epicurean "picking a fight." Will they fight if the alternative is more pain? Yes. That's the difference I want to emphasize in this thread from my perspective.

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2025 at 12:29 PM

[Quote from Don](#)

But I'm highly skeptical of the Epicurean putting themselves in harm's way needlessly or recklessly.

Right - nothing would ever be done needlessly or recklessly.

But would Epicureans confront Alexander the Oracle-Monger? Yes they did, though Lucian seems to think that one did so on a poor choice of locations. And Lucian himself called for an Epicurus or Democritus to expose the fraud.

And would Epicureans devote book after book to exposing and denouncing the errors of other schools and of religions?

Absolutely yes they did.

Would Cassius Longinus cite Epicurus himself in support of the actions he and other Epicureans like Panza took against Caesar and Antony? Yes he did.

So there is a time and season for both peace and safety and conflict and danger, all judged and weighed prudently through Epicurean principles.

That's why I wanted to clearly state that I no longer think it's a good idea to consider "Peace and Safety" as a catchword -- overemphasis on "peace and safety" can be just as harmful as overemphasis of any other intermediate goal toward the ultimate goal of pleasure.

Torquatus' examples of the actions of his own ancestors also provides a good example that is exactly on point.

Post by "Eikadistes" of February 2, 2025 at 2:34 PM

If Lucretius reflects of the attitude of ancient Epicureans, it's more like "*Wisdom and Courage*":

"⁶²When human life to view lay fowly prostrate upon earth crushed down under the weight of religion, who showed her head from the quarters of heaven with hideous aspect lowering upon mortals, a man of Greece ventured first to lift up his mortal eyes to her face and first to withstand her to her face. ⁶⁸Him neither story of gods nor thunderbolts nor heaven with threatening roar could quell: they only chafed the more the eager courage of his soul, filling him with desire to be the first to burst the fast bars of nature's portals. ⁷²Therefore the living force of his soul gained the day: on he passed far beyond the flaming walls of the world and traversed throughout in mind and spirit the immeasurable universe; whence he returns a conqueror to tell us what can, what cannot come into being; in short on what principle each thing has its powers defined, its deep-set boundary mark. ⁷⁸Therefore religion is put underfoot and trampled upon in turn; us his victory brings level with heaven." (Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.62-79; translated by H. A. J. Munro)

Post by “Cassius” of February 2, 2025 at 3:47 PM

Yes definitely that illustration of Epicurus using wisdom and courage to stand up to the gods glowering down from the sky is a good example of conflict / confrontation and probably willingness to accept danger as well (danger not from the gods but from the fraudulent priests).