

Justification through Faith

Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Theme Statement

Growing in our understanding of the relationship between faith in Christ and justification in the sight of God, we remember our baptism daily, celebrate the gift of salvation, and live in the peace that God gives.

Exploring the Word

"I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth." Those words from Psalm 121 are words of faith, words of hope.

Paul wrote to the Roman believers about hope in a world longing for peace and justice, love and reconciliation. The hope he wrote about removed human agency in salvation and made faith the only route by which humans could have a relationship with God. Up to this point, the letter to the Romans focuses on faith to experience salvation; now Paul expounds on the effects of that faith and explores the lives and experiences of those who trust in God.

We are defined and shaped by the faith that justifies us before God. Paul makes sure we remember that the Christian life is challenging. It is about growing and being transformed.

Romans 5:1-2 Peace with God

Faith is not a once-in-a-lifetime event. It moves us into an entirely new way of being, a very real experience in the present, rooted in Christ's actions in the past, and branches of the Holy Spirit's work reaching into our lives today and in the future.

Paul describes "peace with God" as something that has been completed, something in which we can be confident. Like Abraham, all of God's people have been justified by grace through faith. This is how God has always done it.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast." This God-given righteousness is our assurance that God will continue to work in our lives, shaping them to reflect the character of Christ.

This characterization is different from the concept of "being saved" that American revivalism describes. The early church did not invent the concept of salvation. Even Jesus is not the origin. Salvation was common in the Old Testament and the Hellenistic world. The Roman caesars were often declared saviors, and the worldly good they created was called salvation. The Old Testament described salvation as deliverance from enemies, sickness, demonic powers, guilt, sin, and the threat of death.

Romans 5:3-5 Hope in suffering

Love for neighbor is prime in the Christian faith. The relational nature of faith mirrors the shape of the cross. The horizontal dimension connects us with neighbors and their suffering, and vertically, we find empowerment and hope in relationship with God. The suffering that Jesus entered on our behalf solidifies and deepens that hope.

In Matthew 5:11-12, Christ directed his followers to rejoice in persecution. Paul shows how the chain of suffering leads to endurance, character, and ultimately hope as we experience the love of God poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Our lives, including the inevitability of suffering, are incorporated into God's larger purpose for the world, part of a larger story. Paul's theology makes sense only with this eschatological hope and confidence in the final coming of God's kingdom. This concept is also found in Christ's teachings. (In Mark 13:9-26, Jesus describes the

suffering that will precede his second coming. Mark 13:13b quotes Jesus as saying, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”)

The chain of qualities listed here is similar to a form found in Romans 8:29-30 and 1 Peter 1:6-9 and may be part of an early catechism.

Romans 5:6-8 No longer enemies

“Sinners” in verse 8 is not about actions but is Paul’s understanding of the state of the universe as enslaved to sin and death. God sends the Messiah to rescue humankind even when they oppose the true God.

Only in Christ is there access to this state of grace. At peace with God, humankind no longer needs to fear God’s judgment. Christ’s death and resurrection mean that believers have peace, hope, love, and power over sin.

Romans 5:9-11 From death to life

Note in these verses who is reconciled to whom. We are reconciled, not God. We are the passive subjects of God, who is active on our behalf. Reconciled by the death of Christ, we are assured of salvation by his resurrection.

The Word Today

Charlie was interviewing members of a small-town congregation for a review of their history as they planned the congregation’s future. Several individuals mentioned Henrietta, who was known for saying to her children and grandchildren, “Remember, you are a Dawson.” When Charlie gave his verbal history to the group, he commented on the frequency of hearing about Henrietta and her predictable line to the family. Across three generations, she helped the family know who they were and what was expected of them. Her five-word speech shaped their

choices and guided their actions. Those words had become so well known that even people outside the family used them to encourage those within it.

Maybe, as followers of Jesus, we need a quick saying to remind us who we are. Paul certainly sums up our identity with nine words: “While we still were sinners Christ died for us” (v. 8).

We don’t have to live up to a certain standard before we can become a disciple of Jesus. In fact, we can’t! Paul called himself “foremost” of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15) and confessed, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19). And in case we didn’t hear it in Romans 5, in Romans 8:1 Paul spells it out decidedly: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Jesus assures us that he accepts us as we are. In John 15:16 he says, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.” Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.”

We are a work in progress. Philippians 1:6 speaks words of hope to all who, like Paul, still fail and worry that God might find them lacking. Paul assures us, “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” We are, and will be for the rest of our earthly lives, works in progress.

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. What personal qualities and attitudes have been shaped by your life experiences?
2. What are some synonyms for *boast*?
3. Nothing a person does can separate them from the love of God. Do you agree or disagree?

Exploring the Word

1. What do you know about the revivalist approach to being saved?
2. Compare and contrast the revivalist approach with the interpretation discussed in this session.
3. Make two lists, one of things people who have peace with God are free to do, and another of things they don't have to do.
4. As a group, brainstorm some other scriptures where the experience of suffering leads to a closer relationship with God.

The Word Today

1. Identify a time when you struggled with receiving God's forgiveness. What was it like when you stopped fighting God's forgiveness?
2. What phrases or scriptures remind you who you are?
3. What thoughts or habits can be hardest for people to give up in order to trust God to make them more like Christ?

Closing Prayer

*Those who love me, I will deliver;
I will protect those who know my name.
When they call to me, I will answer them;
I will be with them in trouble,
I will rescue them and honor them.
With long life I will satisfy them,
and show them my salvation. Psalm 91:14-16*

Further Study

Galatians 5:1-11

Daily Readings

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|----------------------------|-------------------|
| M. Matthew 5:9-12 | F. Romans 5:12-17 |
| T. Philippians 1:12-20 | S. Romans 5:18-21 |
| W. 2 Corinthians 11:21b-30 | S. Romans 5:1-11 |
| T. Romans 8:18-25 | |

Memorization

Romans 5:1

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.