

October 27/28, 2012

The Gospel Story: We Have Peace

A Study of Romans

Romans 5:1-11

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“You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I’m telling you why: Santa Claus is coming to town. He knows when you’re sleeping. He knows when you’re awake. He knows if you’ve been good or bad, so be good for goodness’ sake.”

Maybe Santa Claus is so popular because he uses an operating system that makes sense. I mean, think about this: This guy has a list, and he’s checking it twice. He’s gonna find out if you’ve been naughty or nice. The man is a legalist!! (*laughter*). We know the implications: If you’ve been nice, you get a present, but if you’ve been naughty, you get nothing. That’s an operating system that makes sense because that’s how the whole world operates. But the operating system comes with a price tag. In that operating system, it is impossible to be at peace. It comes with fear; it comes with guilt; it comes with shame; it comes with anxiety. How do you know how nice is nice enough? And how naughty is *too* naughty? And who decides that? And maybe I was nice today, but what about yesterday? What about the day before? What about tomorrow? There’s no way to find peace in this system, because it’s a performance-based system, and that always creates anxiety. But what if there was a different way? A way that’s not a little bit different. A way that is radically different. That’s what we want to talk about this morning. If you have your Bibles, turn to Romans chapter 5. Romans chapter 5, verse 1 starts with the word “therefore.” And we’re going to “therefore” our way through Romans. This is going to be one of the challenges, is Paul makes a very tight, systematic argument that keeps working its’ way backwards: “Because this is true, therefore...” Like links in a chain, if you miss one link in the chain, you start to lose track of the argument.

Therefore, having been justified by faith,

This is not a chapter on how to be justified by faith—that’s chapters 3 and 4. Paul is now narrowing his argument to those who believe: “*Having been* justified by faith.” Now I think it is worth noting, for those who would reduce the gospel down to merely a ticket to Heaven, if that’s Paul’s intent, we have already covered that—all you need is the first four chapters. But this is a sixteen chapter book. The first four chapters get us to our ticket to Heaven, but *having been justified...* what are the implications of that? What are the rewards of that? How does it radically change your life? It takes 16 chapters to get in that discussion.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God

A performance-based operating system can never deliver peace. Enough is never enough. Perhaps you grew up with a parent where enough was never enough. Perhaps you have a boss where enough is never enough. It’s never gonna be enough. It’s never gonna be good enough, and you feel that tension inside. But what God offers, *having been justified by faith, we have peace*. God offers us an intimate, personal, meaningful relationship, because when He looks at

us He sees His own righteousness. Imagine trying to have an intimate relationship with one who has a clipboard, and he's making a list, and he's checking it twice, and he's wondering if you've been naughty or nice! How do you rest in that environment? How do you find peace in that environment? How do you experience intimacy in that environment? A lot of Christians fail to experience intimacy with God because they don't understand: the war is over! We have *peace* in the presence of God.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God (*how does that happen?*) through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace

“Have obtained” is a verb tense meaning have obtained and continually obtain. In other words, the door is always open. My opinion would be it's unfortunate that the New American Standard uses the word “introduction.” In my opinion, it's a total miss. The Greek word is “access,” specifically, access into the king's chamber. Think about a first century world with a monarchy: you simply could not just casually stroll into the presence of the king. It doesn't work that way. It was a very sacred privilege to have access into the king's chambers. Perhaps there's a little bit of a glimpse, too, into the Holy of Holies, that Jesus became the propitiation: the blood was poured through the Mercy Seat. All of that happened in the Holy of Holies: a place where the High Priest was only allowed, and only once a year. But when Jesus died on the Cross, when He said, “It is finished,” the veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place was torn in half, exposing the Holy of Holies. And the meaning of that was that because of what Jesus has done on the Cross, we now have access directly into the presence of God. And so that's what the text is talking about: that we have, and always have, the door is always open. It has granted us access into the King's chambers. If you view God as someone who is constantly assessing, judging, determining if you're gonna get a lump of coal or you're gonna get a gift, that's not a very attractive image. It's not someone's presence that you want to find refuge in. Have you ever thought about this—that perhaps in the times when you need God as a place of refuge the most is the times we often avoid God the most? Because we think God's angry and He's judgmental. On the day when I've totally blown it, and probably in that moment need God as my refuge more than any other time in my life, we find ourselves avoiding God and distancing ourselves from God, because we think He has a clipboard! And you've been naughty, and don't come in today! It's a totally wrong image. As a matter of fact, that's what he says:

...we have obtained our introduction (*our access*) by faith into *this* grace

Notice the word “*this* grace.” The grace that made it possible for God to justify the ungodly; the grace that makes it possible for once-sinful people to enter into the presence of a holy God; the grace that makes it possible for God to see His own righteousness when He looks at you, is the grace that defines the atmosphere of God, the presence of God, the environment of God, the glory of God, the atmosphere of God. When you're in the presence of God, the very air you breathe is the air of grace! That's the operating system. That's the way it works. It's totally, radically other-than anything this world has to offer. He says:

...into this grace in which we stand;

What gives me my confidence? What gives me my ability to stand confidently, boldly in the presence of God? It's believing this is true—that when I'm in the presence of God, the very air I breathe is the air of God's grace. I believe that, and it gives me what I need to stand. He says:

we exult in hope of the glory of God.

The word “exult” is a very expressive term. Some translations have the word “rejoice,” but I would say that's not enough. It's more than rejoicing. It's actually *boasting*. Ultimately, the word means to “glory in,” that this is so utterly awesome that I actually boast in it, I glory in it. Glory in what?

...we exult in hope

Whenever you see the word “hope” in the Bible, it's not hope like “I hope the team wins,” or “I hope we have this for supper tonight.” Hope is always a guarantee, but it's yet future, an assured expectancy. So when you see the word “hope,” it's always saying, “This is guaranteed, but it's still to come.” What is guaranteed and still to come? Well, he says in the text:

...hope of the glory of God.

What's he talking about there? He's talking about God's redemptive plan from Genesis to Revelation, that God will redeem all creation back. It's a plan that started in Genesis chapter 3: God made a promise that He would once again bring life back out of death, and even though the enemy has made a mess of this world, God promised that at the end of the day, “I win! I will sit and reign as the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. The world will know I am God!”

You have these magnificent pieces in the New Testament. For example, in Ephesians chapter 1, you have this picture of the exalted Jesus having conquered death and sin, once and for all, raised into the heavenlies above every power, above every force, above every authority in the Universe. It's this spectacular picture of Jesus seated in the heavenlies in all His glory...but about the time we're about to drink that in, Paul says the most shocking thing. He says, “Actually, Jesus is not seated there alone; but you, as one who has been justified by faith, are seated with Him in all of His glory.” Your future is more magnificent, more awesome, than I could begin to describe, and it is guaranteed, not on the basis of your performance, but on the basis of the fact that you have been justified by faith. The promise is: You have been justified; I promise that you'll be glorified. In other words, I'm gonna take you all the way to the finish line, and it's going to be more spectacular than you can imagine.

Ephesians chapter 2 says, “You are God's masterpiece. You will become so magnificent that God will hold you up in the heavenlies, and the angels will gasp at the wonder of what you have become, and God will say, “On the basis of My grace, I did that!” John, in 1 John says, “One day, Jesus is going to appear and the world shall see Him as He is in all of His glory and all of His magnificence.” But John goes on to say the most outrageous thing: Not only in that moment will we be *with Him*, but John says we *shall be like Him*. The promise is: justification all the way to glorification, I will not let you down. That's what he's saying.

And not only this, but we also exult (*that's our same word—we boast, we glory*) in our tribulations, knowing that tribulations bring about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint

What does he mean we exult, we glory, we boast in our tribulations? He's not saying that we really like to suffer, that we like tribulation. "Oh joy, here comes another one!" I mean, that would be foolish. What he is saying is that in the midst of the most difficult times in life we celebrate, we rejoice, we glory, because we know God is at work, and this will produce in me perseverance—which is staying-power—and that will produce character, and character gives me hope, and hope will not be disappointed. In other words, God has promised: "Having been justified, I promise you'll be glorified, and no matter how hard this world gets, no matter how difficult or how unfair, no matter how hopeless it may seem, I promise you, your future is magnificent!" Knowing that's where the journey ends gives me what I need to make it through the most difficult moments of life. And he says this is a hope that will not disappoint—literally, will not bring shame. I'm not going to get to the end of the story and be ashamed because I believed something foolish, because God made me a promise and let me down. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if we as Christians hope in something that's only good for this world, we are people to be pitied. We've bought into a lie. But the promise is based on the Resurrection of Jesus that this is real, this is true, and we'll not be ashamed.

Now part of what he's talking about here is that on the basis of our performance, we're not going to lose this. We're not going to fall by the side of the road right before we get to the finish line. You say, "Boy, I don't know. You don't know my last week!" It's a bit troubling. How could I really know that's true? Well, he tells you:

...because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Every single person who has been justified by faith has the indwelling Holy Spirit. It's not possible to be a Christian without having the Holy Spirit. God's promise is, "I'm in this so deep that having been justified by faith, I will actually put My presence in you through the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit's job is to *continually* ("at a high volume" is what the language means) pour My love into your heart. That's My commitment to you, that I will get you to the finish line." This is not an impersonal business transaction. You're not a name in a phone book to God. As a matter of fact, it's worth noting this is the first time Romans has introduced the concept of the love of God. God is saying, "This is a love relationship. I did this because I want you! I did this because I love you! I did this because I want to spend forever with you! This isn't some game we're playing here, and I'm so deep in this thing that I'm actually going to dwell in you, and I'm going to be always pouring My love into your heart because I want you to know I love you, and I'm there for you, and I promise you I'm going to get you to the finish line. You gotta trust Me with this."

Paul anticipates some people thinking, "Man, this is *too* good to be true! I don't know!" So he moves into a discussion that uses a first century technique that would have been very common.

Basically, the technique is this: You go from the most difficult to that which is much easier. So the argument goes like this: The most difficult thing was to justify the ungodly, but if God was able to justify the ungodly, the easy part is keeping you to the finish line. If you got the hard part done, why would you think He doesn't have the capacity to finish the job? So look at how he lays that out:

For while we were still helpless, (*which we all were*) at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

This is the hard part—how do you take someone who is ungodly and make them right in the presence of God?

For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die.

Sometimes that language confuses us, because we don't understand those terms the same way. A "righteous" man is referring to someone who is pious, someone who is respectable. But the argument is, just because someone is respectable doesn't mean you'd probably die for them. The idea of "good" has more the idea of relationship: someone you know, someone you love, someone you care about. So just because somebody is respectable, you wouldn't die for them. But if it was someone that you deeply loved, maybe you would.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

He didn't die for us because we're righteous. He didn't die for us because we're good. We were sinners. We were at war with God. We were enemies of God. We were ungodly. But if Jesus was willing to die for us, as sinners, why would we not think that He would finish the job now that we have been justified by faith? Verse 9:

Much more then, having now been justified (*we're back to verse 1*)...having now been justified (*How?*) by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

So this is the argument: The hard part is how do you justify the ungodly? God's love was so compelling that He was willing to die for someone who is a sinner in order that that person (we) might be justified by faith. If He was willing to do that, then can't we trust Him that we will be saved (future tense) from the wrath of God? It's worth noting again that the text is talking about salvation as future tense. We tend to kind of get stuck referring to "saved" always in the past tense—"When were you saved?" "Well, 1983." But the Bible talks about salvation past, salvation present, salvation future. Even though the one we talk about the most is past, that is the one the Bible talks about the least. The one we talk about the least is the one He talks about the most, and that's future: "Having been justified by faith," the promise is you will be saved in the future. God is going to get you there. If He did the hard part, why would He blow it in the easy parts? That's the essence of the argument there. Verse 10:

For if while we were enemies, (*Now he's rehashing the same basic technique, the same argument*)

For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God

The word “reconciled” means a change of status from enemy to friend. If we were actually enemies of God, we were ungodly. We were at war with God. But He has the love and the capacity to actually take us from enemy to friend. That’s the hard part: if He was able to do that, “reconciled to God.” How?

through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved (*future tense*) **by His life.**

In other words, if by His death He did the hard part, why would you not believe that through His life He can do the easy part? What would possibly convince you that God somehow along the way isn't gonna get the job done? Why would He send His Son to die and shed His blood that you might be justified, only to ultimately fail to get you to the finish line? What sense does that make? Basically, Paul's argument is this: If God's love was so compelling that He would justify you, as an ungodly sinner, why would you think now He would fail you as His friend? If He did that for you when you were at war with Him, you were His enemy, why would you think He would let you down now that you're His friend? That's the argument that Paul is making. Verse 11:

And not only this, but we also exult (*There's our word again, we rejoice, we celebrate, we glory in. In what? How? in God (How?) through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*)

Now through Jesus, we who once were enemies of God have been made God's friend. In God's presence we celebrate, we dance, we glory, we rejoice. Why? Because He's not there with a list! He's not checking it twice! He's not wondering if you've been naughty or nice! This is not the air you're breathing in the presence of God. You have been justified. When God sees you, He sees His own righteousness. The God who did the hard part has promised, now as His friend, “I'll do the easy part, and get you all the way to the finish line, and give you a future that's beyond what you can even begin to imagine.” So when we're in the presence of God on our best days, and when we're in the presence of God on our worst days, we celebrate. Last week we saw in Psalm 32 that David had the audacity in his confession of his adultery and his murder to say that he still knew that God would not credit this sin to his account. On his worst day, he found refuge in the presence of God, because the air he was breathing was the very air of grace.

Why do so many Christians still identify themselves by their shame, by their guilt, by their struggles, by their failures? Okay, I get it, you've blown it. Join the club! We've all messed up, but friends, please listen to me, the war is over! The pressure is off! You have been justified by faith. If God did the hard part, why can you not trust Him—now that you're His friend—to do the easy part? He promises He's going to get you to the finish line and it will be spectacular, no matter how hard life gets, no matter how many ways you blow it, no matter what's done to you; in your deepest pain, you can find joy in knowing this is not how the story ends. The promise is

“No matter how bad it gets, I’ll get you there because you’re My friend, and I’ll get you to the finish line, and I’m just telling you, it is magnificent, and that will be your home forever!”
Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God, our forever friend.

Our Father, we’re thankful this is true. It’s just pretty radical, very other-than anything we’ve known in this world. In some ways, it almost seems like the Good News is just too good. Maybe that’s why we doubt it. God, give us the courage to believe by faith that this is true, that we might live as people with hope. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. The lyrics to “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” seem to capture well the operating system of this world. We get rewarded or punished based on whether we were naughty or nice. Can you name other ways we learn this operating system? (work, sports, hobbies, school, parenting, legal system, etc.)
2. Does this mean these operating systems are bad or evil or contrary to God in some way? Explain. Practically, what might grace look like in some of these environments?
3. Why is it so hard to fully comprehend how God’s operating system of grace could be true?

Bible Study

1. Review briefly what Paul has taught us about how God is able to “justify the ungodly.”
2. Read Romans 5:1-5. What does the “therefore” refer to in 5:1? The “having been justified” tells us what follows are the results or benefits of being justified. What are those benefits according to this text?
3. What allows us to “exult” in our tribulations? What does this mean?

4. Read Romans 5:6-11. Paul uses a technique common in the first century that argues from the difficult to the easy. In other words if this is true (the hard part) then certainly we can believe this is true (the easy part). According to this text what is the hard part and what is the easy part? How does this assure us that our hope won't disappoint us?

5. The references to "saved" in 5:9-10 are future tense. Paul states in 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God for salvation. How does it help to define salvation as past, present and future? IF our concept of our salvation is primarily past tense (was saved) how does that effect our understanding of the bigger Gospel story?

Application

1. Summarize the benefits of having been justified by faith.

2. How does this affect how you view yourself and your circumstances?

3. How does the peace that comes from justification by faith equip you to function well in a performance based world? Will you perform better or worse as a result of the peace you experience having been justified by faith? Why?