

Jot & Tittle

A Journal Devoted to the Study of the Inspired Word of God

April 2017

Romans 5 (Part 1)

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The book of Romans is central to Christian theology and the fifth chapter of Romans is central to the whole book. As one writer stated, “If you wish to know whether a man is a theologian, turn to his Greek Testament, and if it opens of its own accord to the fifth chapter of Romans, and you find the page worn and brown, you may safely set him down as a devotee of the sacred science.”¹ It would be fruitful, therefore, for Christians to understand an overview as well as the doctrinal details of Romans 5. Romans 5 presents the results of justification by faith, and Romans 5:1-11 highlights the fact that justification by faith results in peace with God. The first five verses of Romans 5, the focus of this article, can be captioned “Justification: we have been declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Justification results in peace with God (5:1).

Romans 5 hinges on the truths Paul presented in the previous chapters of this epistle, the transitional word “therefore” providing a link to the concept of justification by faith expressed Romans 3 and illustrated in Romans 4. “Justified” is a past tense passive verb,

meaning that God is the author of justification and that this is a past event in the life of the believer that takes place at the moment of faith and carries lasting, permanent effects. “While justification brings to the believer a new and permanent status, justification itself is a once-for-all-act by which God acquits the sinner.”² The term “justification” refers to that work of God whereby sinful people are legally declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s death. This concept means that we’re brought into line with God’s holy standard, that we’ve been made right with God. It doesn’t mean that we become perfect in our practice, but refers to a positional truth. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ we are justified, counted as righteous by God.

Once we’ve been justified by faith we have peace with God. The verb “have” indicates an existing condition, although some Greek manuscripts, by the change of a single vowel, present this verb as a conditional possibility, “let us have.” The first rendering is preferable contextually.³ We “have” peace with God. This peace is a constant, relational condition, not a fluctuating experience. The “peace of God” (Philippians 4:7) changes with our circumstances and with our daily reliance on God. But “peace with God” is a description of our standing before God. It doesn’t change. Peace with God includes a close friendship, a reconciled relationship (compare verse 11). This peace is ours through “our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Justification results in access to God’s grace (5:2a).

Based on our justification, we have “access” or “entry rights” into God’s grace. This term can refer to the believer’s initial entrance into fellowship with Jesus Christ, but more likely points to the believer’s ongoing access to the Lord.⁴ In fact, we have “access” to God Himself as is seen in Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12 where Paul uses the same word. We can approach God freely, albeit reverently, because we are justified. Romans 5:2 states that we have access to “this grace,” the grace in which “we stand.” We live in the realm of

God's grace. We "stand" in that grace. When we need God's special grace to get us through difficult times it's already there and available to us. God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, is a constant and reliable source of comfort and strength.

Justification results in rejoicing in the hope of God's glory (5:2b).

As believers in Jesus Christ we possess a confident expectation, or "hope," for the future. Christian hope isn't mere wishful thinking but a confident anticipation of God's fulfilled promises. Because we have this kind of hope through Jesus Christ we can "rejoice" in that hope, literally "boast" (in a pure sense) in the fact that we will one day be in God's presence. "Confident rejoicing" may be a way of capturing the meaning of this verb in this context.⁵ We confidently rejoice (boast) in the confident anticipation (hope) of God's glory, the radiance of His divine majesty.

Justification results in rejoicing in the midst of character-building trials (5:3-4).

When we realize that we have a future hope, our present circumstances seem more tolerable. We can, therefore, confidently rejoice ("boast") even in our sufferings. These "sufferings" may be limited to those directly related to persecution for our faith.⁶ However, the general trials of life can also be included in this term. "Indeed, in a certain sense, all sufferings are 'on behalf of Christ.' This is so because all the evil that the Christian experiences reflects the conflict between 'this age,' dominated by Satan, and 'the age to come,' to which the Christian has been transferred by faith."⁷ The basis for our rejoicing is justification. As those who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ we can rejoice over the fact that suffering builds us up spiritually. It produces "perseverance" (endurance), which in turn produces "character" (tested and approved character), and finally "hope," an enhanced awareness of our confident anticipation of the future (verse 2). James 1:2-3 presents a similar progression from trials through perseverance to maturity.

This all means that, because we are justified, God has not given up on us but is forming us into precious gems for His Kingdom.

Justification results in the outpouring of God's love through the indwelling of God's Spirit (5:5).

Paul says that this kind of hope never disappoints, or embarrasses, us (compare Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:33; 10:11). "A hope which fails of realization does put one to shame, but the hope which is based on the promise of God is assured of fulfillment (cf. 8:24-25)."⁸ We know that our expectations will be fully met in Jesus Christ when we go to be with Him. This promise is based on the love of God, that is, His love for us. God continually pours out His love into our hearts. When we were justified by faith in Christ, our new standing opened the avenue for God's love to flow into our innermost being. We can now experience the love of God and also express that love to those around us. This love comes by means of the Holy Spirit who has been "given" to us. The Holy Spirit indwells every true believer upon receiving Jesus Christ, and the Spirit is the mark of the true Christian (Romans 8:9). The Holy Spirit helps guide the believer and serves as a down payment (Ephesians 1:13-14) or guarantee of our salvation. As Romans 5:1-5 reveals, the blessings we receive through justification by faith are truly amazing.

¹Lewis French Stearns, *Present Day Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893). Cited in *Systematic Theology*, Volume II by Louis Sperry Chafer (Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary Press, 1947), 297.

²Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 298.

³John R. Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 139.

⁴Moo, 300.

⁵Moo, 302.

⁶Stott, 141.

⁷Moo, 303.

⁸F. F. Bruce, *Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 127.