

THE LETTER THAT CHANGED THE WORLD - The Biblical Theology of Romans - Part ten

Sunday, December 2nd, 2018 - 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #2091

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THE ROOTS OF ASSURANCE IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Romans 5:1-11 - "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. [6] For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

The value of working through a difficult letter like Romans with a congregation isn't *immediately* apparent. There are many passages - like last Sunday's passage on Abraham and circumcision - that make for tougher mental work. They don't sparkle and tingle with excitement. They're more like broccoli than chocolate.

But *today's study*, if considered carefully, should teach more than just the lessons of *today's text*. We should also be able to learn the value of *previous texts* - ones that didn't seem as immediately practical when we read them. In other words, good theology will always *become* more practical when *studied backwards*. We begin to see the value of regular, disciplined study as the power of previously learned truth *accumulates*. In fact, you can measure the maturity of a Christian by the appreciation he or she has for truths that *don't* seem immediately practical.

Today we're going to see how Paul's densely packed teaching from the life of Abraham and the Old Testament has relevance for the *assurance* of the Christian *today*. And there's almost *nothing* more important than knowing how we *know* we're right with God and ready for eternity.

1) WHAT JUSTIFICATION MEANS

Romans 5:1-2a - "*Therefore*, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand...."

Paul is linking these verses with all he has just been saying about Abraham and the timing of God pronouncing him justified. This *matters* to us. Justification means *peace with God*. This is not an inner emotional state. This is not the *peace of God*. This is peace *with* God because the penalty of sin and the just wrath of God against us has been appeased. In other words, this is the kind of peace that ends a war. It is the peace that comes because God has borne the penalty for my actual guilt, which is a huge problem apart from God's redeeming grace in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote a great deal about God's wrath against sinners:

Romans 1:18 - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."

Romans 2:16 - "...on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ

Jesus.”

Just in passing, it is of great interest to me that Paul actually **includes** the coming judgment of God as being **part of the gospel message**. His teaching of divine judgment is **“according to my gospel.”** I take that to mean no one is fully proclaiming the gospel without this part of the truth.

Romans 4:15 - “For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.”

All of this, however, is radically changed through the entrance of grace through faith in Christ. As Paul puts it, through faith we have **“access into this grace....”** (2).

Here is the best way to understand the specific nature of this grace. As a devout Jew, Paul knew the reality of God’s future judgment at the end time - **Romans 2:5 - “But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.”** On that coming day of judgment those whom God acquitted would be granted entrance into the heavenly kingdom.

As a Christian Paul continued to believe in the future, end-time judgment of God. Only now, through faith in Christ Jesus, believers were granted the verdict of acquittal **now**, in this **present time**. That’s why Paul talks about the grace through which we **have** (present tense) peace with God (**5:1**), and **in which we now** (present tense) **stand** (**5:2**).

So here we see another aspect of the peace of God brought about by being justified by faith. When Paul speaks of having **“access by faith into this grace”** he means justification brings more than just the end of **enmity with God**. Paul says we have been brought into a position of **favor and friendship**. There is now the joy of **adoptive sonship** and ongoing provision for **help and mercy** in this present life:

Romans 8:15 - “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”

Hebrews 4:16 - “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

We’re using these texts to bring together the different parts of the whole of justification. There are many benefits. All of this, and nothing less, is what the New Testament means when it speaks of **justification**.

But our text brings out one more grand result of being justified by faith. Paul says **“....we rejoice in hope of the glory of God”(5:2b)**. We actually enter into a **deep anticipation** of the final manifestation of God’s glorious kingdom. It isn’t here yet. But we have a **joyful longing** for it that only deepens in the face of this dark and fallen world. We long for God to be fully **vindicated** and fully **appreciated** in all His splendor.

But all of this seems so far away and distant at times. We know what it is to feel the **absence** of this glory as often as we **long** for it. So Paul now comes to the key issue of this great text. **Can we believe in justification?** There is so much **suffering** and there is so much **sin** - in **this world** and in **ourselves**.

And it’s in the presence of these two stubborn realities that our belief in justification must stand and thrive. After all, we call it justification by **faith**. And at times there is so much warring against our confidence. Paul now turns to **two enemies of belief - suffering and sin:**

2) **HOW CAN WE BELIEVE IN THE GLORY OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH?**

Romans 5:3-11 - “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. [6] For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

While there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (**Romans 8:38-39**), there are *internal enemies* to confident faith in Christ's justifying work. Paul will deal with two notorious enemies to faith in these verses.

- a) ***The presence of suffering and pain and cruelty*** - Does not the presence of suffering and pain and cruelty mock the justifying love of God? Doesn't He look rather *indifferent* to it all? How can we hold on to such a divine love in the face of so much that seems full of cruelty and hate?

This is the first issue Paul faces in **Romans 5:3-5** - “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Suffering diminishes faith to the extent that it is viewed as an *isolated event* rather than a *sovereign process* in our lives. *We* focus on how suffering *feels*. *God* works through what suffering *does*. Rather than draw belief *away* from God's coming kingdom, suffering actually gets us *ready* for it. It forms the kind of enduring character God can't create in our hearts in any other way.

Actually, suffering and trials are the tangible *proof* that even *God's* plans for our lives are shaped more according to the age to come than this present one. God uses suffering and trials to *aim our lives*, so to speak, at the future glory yet to be revealed rather than the passing fancies of this one.

This is what Paul means when he says suffering and tribulation cause us to *hope with deeper longing* for the final manifestation of *God's glory* in our lives and on this earth. This longing is the product of the Holy Spirit working in our lives - who is Himself the ultimate proof that justification by faith is a divine reality - “...and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts *through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (5:5).

- There's a second enemy of inward confidence in the justifying work of Christ:
- b) ***The presence of sin in our own hearts*** - How can we anchor trust in justification by faith when our own hearts feel wicked and unworthy?

This is the issue Paul addresses in **Romans 5:6-11** - “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that *while we were still sinners*, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if

***while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**"

The whole idea of being justified by faith loses its impact when we doubt it because of our own unworthiness. The money sentence is found in **verse 6** - "**For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**" The truth is, God is ***taken advantage of*** by all the redeemed. That's the way He designed it. If you are righteous enough to ***qualify*** for justification, you don't ***qualify***. Jesus said the doctor doesn't come for the ***healthy***. He gives himself exclusively to the ***sick***.

To bring this down to understandable pictures Paul uses a very moving human analogy. There are times when people will lay down their lives for someone else. Sometimes very noble people might step in and give their life for someone they deem more important. Sometimes a parent will lay down his or her life for their own child.

But neither of those is what happened in God's stunning act of justifying us through the death of God the Son, Jesus Christ. The whole point is we were ***made*** sons and daughters of God ***by*** faith in the death of Christ Jesus. We were ***adopted*** into God's family ***through*** Christ's death - ***after the fact***.

But when Jesus came and died for you and for me we weren't noble and we weren't family. Paul says we were ***sinners*** and we were ***enemies*** - "**....but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us....[10] For if *while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.**"

Paul's mind runs on into the future. He pictures the final, complete fulfilment of Father God's full manifestation of His glorious kingdom and our place in it. We ***shall be*** saved by Christ's life. This is still in the future, but it is unstoppable.

The point here, however, is more focused on the ***present***. If God, in the ***past*** came and died for us when we were ***enemies***, and if through Christ's ***eternally resurrected life*** nothing can thwart the consummation of his plan for us, then how can we doubt His reliability to be steadfastly committed to us ***right now***, even in this present dark age?

Celebrate the glory of such justification. Rest in it. Enjoy it. And let the love that fills your heart prompt you into grateful service and worship - **Romans 12:1** - "**I appeal to you therefore, brothers, *by the mercies of God*, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**"