

Romans (21): Several Blessings of Our Justification

Introduction:

Today we arrive to the fifth chapter of the epistle of the Romans. This is a major turning point in the argument and tone of the epistle. Up until this place in his letter, Paul had set forth a theological argument. He had declared and proved the doctrine of justification through faith alone -- sinners receive from God full pardon of their sins and the legal status of righteousness when they believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In his argument, Paul opposed those who would have argued against him, rejecting his teaching. His language was *polemical* in tone; it was a passionate argument. Prior to chapter 5, he would on occasion set forth his argument in the second person singular; Paul addressed his reader directly, using the pronoun “you.” But with chapter 5 Paul’s tone changes. He writes more in the first person plural, speaking as “we.” His writing is no longer polemical, but rather *celebrative*. “The Apostle speaks as one who is extremely happy and full of joy” (Martin Luther).

Paul invites the Christian to join with him in joyful thanksgiving for what the gospel provides—a new life given to God’s service in this life and a certain, glorious hope for the life to come.¹

I believe that this change of tone in Paul’s style is a major reason that we should see a shift in Paul’s teaching in his epistle.

As we attempt to understand the flow of Paul’s reasoning and appeal to his readers, let us rehearse what we have covered by our outline..

I. Introduction

- A. Salutation (1:1-7)
- B. Thanksgiving and Prayer for Paul to visit Rome (1:8-15)
- C. The Theme of the Epistle: the Gospel of the Righteousness of God (1:16, 17)

II. God’s Righteousness in His wrath against Sinners (1:18-3:20)

- A. The Unrighteousness of Idolaters (Gentiles) (1:18-32)
- B. The Unrighteousness of Those Who Judge Others but do the Same Things (Jews) (2:1-3:8)
- C. The Unrighteousness of All People (3:9-20)

III. God’s Righteousness in the Sinner’s Justification (3:21-4:25)

- A. The righteousness of God in the believer’s justification through faith (3:21-26)
- B. The righteousness of God through faith and the law of God (3:27-31)
- C. Abraham as the Father of All who have Faith (4:1-25)

But now we may consider the next section of the epistle, which may be organized in the following manner²:

IV. Hope as a result of righteousness by faith (5:1-8:39)

- A. The answer of hope (5:1-11)
- B. Hope in Christ’s triumph over Adam’s sin (5:12-21)

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 294f.

² This portion of the outline is taken from *The ESV Study Bible* (Crossway Books, 2008), pp. 2155f.

- C. The triumph of grace over the power of sin (6:1-23)
- D. The triumph of grace over the power of the law (7:1-6)
- E. The law and sin (7:7-25)
- F. Life in the Spirit (8:1-17)
- G. Assurance of hope (8:18-39)

There are those that do not believe a major division in Paul’s letter should be made at the beginning of Romans 5. Some of them believe that the major theme of justification continues from chapter 4 through the end of chapter 5. The outline in *The New Reformation Study Bible* reflects this view³. Here is a portion of their outline of this section of the epistle:

- IV. God’s Righteousness for justification (3:21-5:21)
 - A. Provided in Christ by faith (3:21-31)
 - B. Proved by the example of Abraham (chapter 4)
 - C. Guarantees blessings for the righteous (5:1-11)
 - D. Rooted in the obedience of Christ – the New Adam (5:12-21)

But I think that it is appropriate that we recognize the shift in Paul’s tone and his subject beginning with Romans 5:1. The commentator, **Douglas Moo**, gives four good reasons, one of which I already identified.

Four main arguments combine to show that Paul intends a transition in the letter at 5:1. First, the opening phrase of the chapter, “having been justified by faith,” summarizes the argument of 1:18-4:25 while preparing the way for a new topic that will build on it. Second, a shift of style at 5:1 is noticeable. 1:18-4:25 has a polemical tone – Paul is plainly *arguing* against a (mainly) Jewish viewpoint, sometimes addressing his opponent directly in the second person singular. But with 5:1, the first person plural begins to dominate, Paul including fellow Christians with him in a more “confessional” style: “we have peace,” “access,” “we rejoice,” “Christ died for us,” “we are now justified,” “we have now received our reconciliation.” While not as concentrated as in 5:1-11 (from which the quotations are taken), this style recurs throughout chapters 5-8. A third indication that a shift in focus occurs at 5:1 is the relative frequency of certain key words in chapters 5-8 in comparison with 1:18-4:25. Particularly striking is the contrast between the 33 occurrences of “faith” and “believe” in 1:18—4:25 and the three uses in chapters 5-8 (and two of the latter refer back to the argument in 1:18-4:25). On the opposite side, “life” and “to live,” used only twice in the first section, occur 24 times in chapters 5-8...

The fourth, and most important, argument for connecting chapter 5 more closely with what follows than what precedes is that it provides a more convincing reading of what follows than with what precedes is that it provides a more convincing reading of what Paul is teaching in this part of the letter than any alternative is able to give... This theme, the “hope of sharing in God’s glory” (cf. 5:2 and 8:18, 30), “brackets” all of chapters 5-8. Assurance of glory is, then, the overarching theme in this second major section of Romans.⁴

Let us read the first portion of this section, **Romans 5:1-11**.

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through 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. ³Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

³ *The New Reformation Study Bible* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), p. 1765.

⁴ Moo, pp. 292f.

⁵and 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.

⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For 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. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Let us now consider...

I. The meaning of the text

The apostle Paul had argued thoroughly for the teaching that God justifies sinners freely through faith alone apart from works. He proved his case through the rather lengthy illustration of Abraham in chapter 4. Now, beginning with Romans 5:1, Paul addresses several blessings that are received by ones who are justified through faith alone. Justification by God's grace through faith alone is the ground on which all of our hope in receiving God's promises are affirmed to us. The writer to the Hebrews alluded to this in his definition of faith. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Faith in Christ entitles the believer to all the blessings of God that are bound up in Christ.

God identifies before us several of these promises in the verses, the first being in **verse 1**. There we read, "***Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***" Paul identified the first great blessing among several that our justification before God has secured for us. Our justification is written as having taken place in the past; God justified us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Because we have been justified, ***we have peace with God.***

The subject of God's **peace** has already arisen in this epistle. In the opening greeting to this epistle to the Romans, Paul had expressed his desire that God would give His peace to these Christians in the church at Rome. Romans 1:7 reads, "***To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***" At that time, we pointed out that when the Bible speaks of God's peace that the believer enjoys, that it is in one of two forms. There is a ***subjective peace*** and there is an ***objective peace***. Both are God's gifts to His people. Subjective peace is the awareness that the believer senses in his soul that he is at peace with God. This subjective peace is what people ***feel***. Because of our faith in Christ, we sense peace, or a tranquility of soul, a settling of our guilty conscience respecting sin, when we received through faith our free and full pardon of sin due to the death of the Savior. We are secure, and if we are thinking and believing rightly, we feel ourselves to be secure. In Romans 1:7, when Paul expressed his desire for them, "***peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.***" Paul desired they would experience this subjective peace, the awareness that all is well between them and God.

All disciples of Jesus Christ ***may*** enjoy a ***subjective*** peace with God. Again, this is a ***feeling*** of peace or well being which God bestows upon His people. Not all Christians always experience this peace, but all may. **Philippians 4:6** and **7** describe this subjective peace.

In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6)

But there is also a second kind of peace that God grants His people. The Bible speaks of **objective peace**, between God and the believer. Through our Lord's life, death, and resurrection, God has brought us into a *state of peace* with the Father. This state of peace is the same for all true believers in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul is writing about in Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

This word and idea of *peace* as understood by Paul should be seen through the Old Testament meaning of the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*. Principle in the idea of *shalom* is the character of salvation that the Old Testament prophets declared would appear in "the last days."⁵

This background defines for us what Paul means by "peace with God": not an inner sense of well-being, or "feeling at peace" (what we might call the "peace of God" [cf. Phil. 4:7]), but the outward situation of being in a relationship of peace *with God*.⁶

Before we came to Christ as our Lord and Savior, we were not at peace with God. Our very beings were opposed to God. We were His enemies; we to Him and He to us. We were opposed to His rule over us, just as the people of Israel were opposed to His rule over them. But Christ as the Prince of Peace ended that hostility between God and ourselves. He gained peace for us by dying on the cross for us. This appeased God's wrath that was upon us, and as a consequence a state of peace was secured for believers. We read of this in **Colossians 1:21**,

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

This objective peace, this state of peace, belongs only to those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, for He alone may be the basis and securer of peace for sinners.

Objective peace is in the realm of fact, nothing changes our status with God as believers in Jesus Christ. God is always at peace with His people due to Christ. But **subjective peace is in the realm of feeling**. Any number of factors may cause one's sense of peace to increase or diminish--whether or not one is prayerful or prayerless, obedient or disobedient, believing or unbelieving, knowledgeable or ignorant.

The ones who in a state of peace with God are the objects of God's promise of peace. They are ones for whom Christ died, whereby peace with God is obtained and secured. They have an **objective peace with God**; that is, God is no longer at war with them. A state of peace exists between God and them. Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The reason that God is at peace with them is that they have been **reconciled**. This is stated later in Romans 5:11, "And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

Reconciliation is a word that describes the cessation of hostility between two warring factions, resulting in peace between them. And how does this reconciliation take place? It can only take place when their former hostility and rebellion ceases and the justice of God toward their crime has been satisfied. God is at war with sinners and has purposed to punish them for their sins because they have violated His laws. Justice is in order. They must answer to the Judge of all the earth. The reason that Christians alone can escape the condemnation of this unbending, inflexible justice, is that Christ Jesus bore their punishment on their behalf, when He died on the cross. And so by Him, through faith in Him, they may be reconciled to God.

⁵ Moo, p. 299.

⁶ Ibid.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, *making peace by the blood of his cross*. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him” (Col. 1:19-21).

The blessing of peace can only be appreciated fully when we consider the state of the non-believer who is *not* at peace with God. We live in a world in which people will allow you to believe in any kind of God that you like, but if you say that you believe God is a God of wrath against those that are outside of Jesus Christ, you will be rejected and opposed. Paul declared, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*.” But what of those who are not justified by faith? They do not have peace with God, rather, the wrath of God rests upon him. **John 3:36** reads, “*He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.*” People who are outside of Jesus Christ are not in a state of peace with God. There exists *a state of war* between God and them.

Jonathan Edwards wrote of their dreadful condition in his sermon entitled, “Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition.”

They are not only without God, but the wrath of God abides upon them... There is no peace between God and them, but God is angry with them every day. He is not only angry with them, but that to a dreadful degree. There is a fire kindled in God’s anger; it burns like fire. Wrath abides upon them, which if it should be executed, would plunge them into the lowest hell, and make them miserable there to all eternity. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. God has been angry with them every since they began to sin. He has been provoked by them every day, every since they exercised any reason. And he is provoked by them more and more every hour. The flame of his wrath is continually burning. There are many now in hell that never provoked God more than they, nor so much as many of them. Wherever they go, they go about with the dreadful wrath of God abiding on them. They eat, and drink, and sleep under wrath. How dreadful a condition therefore are they in! It is the most awful thing for the creature to have the wrath of his Creator abiding on him. The wrath of God is a thing infinitely dreadful. The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion. But what is the wrath of a king, who is but a worm of the dust, to the wrath of the infinitely great and dreadful God? How dreadful is it to be under the wrath of the First Being, the Being of beings, the great Creator and mighty possessor of heaven and earth! How dreadful is it for a person to go about under the wrath of God, who gave him being, and in who he lives and moves, who is everywhere present, and without whom he cannot move a step, nor draw a breath! Natural men, inasmuch as they are under wrath, are under a curse. God’s wrath and curse are continually upon them. They can have no reasonable comfort, therefore, in any of their enjoyments; for they do not know but that they are given them in wrath, and shall be curses to them, and not blessings. As it is said in Job 18:15, “Brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation.” How can they take any comfort in their food, or in their possessions, when they do not know but all are given them to fit them for the slaughter.

John Gill wrote of the wrath of God under which unbelievers exist and for their need of reconciliation with God.

First, by observing the character of the persons reconciled; which will show the cause, reason, and necessity of a reconciliation to be made; they are “enemies”; and in one of the texts referred to, they are said to be “enemies in their minds by wicked works”: which is expressive, of the internal enmity there is in their minds and hearts; the carnal mind, as every man’s mind is naturally carnal, is not only an enemy, but “enmity” itself, “against God” (Rom. 8:7), to the Being of God—wishing there was no God—to the nature and perfections of God, denying some of them, misrepresenting others, and framing him in their minds, as altogether such an one as themselves—to the purposes and decrees of God, which they cannot bear, and to which they insolently reply; and to the providences of

God, they charge with inequality and unrighteousness: and they are inwardly and secretly enemies to Christ, to his person and offices; particularly his kingly office, being unwilling that he should reign over them; and to his gospel, and the special doctrines of it; and to his ordinances, they care not to be subject unto: and so they are to the Spirit, to his Person, whom they know not, nor can receive; to his operations, which they deride and ridicule; the things of the Spirit of God are foolishness to them: and they are enemies to the people of God, there is an old and implacable enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent; the saints are hated by the world, because chosen and called out of the world; God's elect themselves, while in a state of nature, are hateful, and hating one another; Paul, a chosen vessel of salvation, was, while unregenerate, exceeding mad against the saints.

But, there is an external enmity, which appears by wicked works and sinful actions openly committed: which are acts of hostility against God, are contrary to his nature and will are abominable in his sight provoke the eyes of his glory, excite his wrath, and cause it to be revealed from heaven, and for which it comes on the children of disobedience; and all are deserving of it: sins are breaches of the law of God, render men liable to the curses of it, and to death itself, the sanction of it; they not only all with enmity to God, and show it to him, but set men at a distance from him; so that they have no communion with him, are far off, are without him, and separate from him.

But, men are not only enemies internally, and externally to God, but there is an enmity on the part of God to them; there is a law enmity, or an enmity declared in the law against them; they are declared by the law of God as enemies; traitors, and rebels to him; and as such God's elect were considered, when Christ died to make reconciliation for them; for it is said, "while they were sinners Christ died for them, and when they were enemies they were reconciled to God, the death of his Son" (Rom. 5:8, 10). Now the far greater part of those for whom Christ died, were not then in an actual sinful state, nor in actual rebellion and enmity against God; for then they were not in actual being; but they were considered as in their apostate head, as sinners in him, and so as rebels and traitors; as such they were deemed by the law, and proceeded against, proclaimed guilty, judgment came upon them to condemnation; they were, in the eye of the law, and in the sight of justice, viewed as enemies, and declared such: and this law enmity is what was slain by Christ, and removed at his death; and not that enmity that was in their minds; that was not removed by and at the death of Christ; that is removed at conversion, when the arrows of the word become sharp in these enemies, which bring them to fall under, and be subject to Christ; when they are made willing in the day of his power, to be saved by him, to submit to his righteousness, and to have him to reign over them: this is the work of the Spirit of Christ: there is a two fold reconciliation, one of which is the work of Christ, and was made at his death: the other the work of his Spirit, at conversion; when, by his grace, men are reconciled to the way of salvation by Christ; and both may be seen in one text (Rom. 5:10). If there had been no other enmity than what is in the hearts of men against God, there would have been no need of the sufferings and death of Christ to make reconciliation; but there was a law enmity on the part of God, and his justice, which required the death of Christ to take it away. Not that there was any enmity in the heart of God to his elect; that would be inconsistent with his everlasting and unchangeable love, which appeared strongly towards them at the time Christ died for them, reconciled them, and became the propitiation for their sins (Rom. 5:8,10; Titus 3:3, 4; 1 John 4:10). But they were, according to the law, and in the view of justice, deemed and declared as the enemies of God. So when the subjects of a king rise up in rebellion against him, there may be no enmity in his heart to them; yet they are, according to law, proclaimed rebels, and enemies to him, and may be treated as such, and proceeded against in due form of law; and yet, after all, be pardoned by him. There was, in some sense, a reciprocal enmity between God and men, which made a reconciliation necessary; and which was brought about by the bloodshed, sufferings, and death of Christ, when he slew the enmity of the law, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that were against sinners, so making peace (Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14).

We next may consider **verse 2**, which reads, *"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."* It is *through Him*, that

is, *Jesus Christ*, that we obtained access to all the blessings that God has for His people. In verse 1 Paul declared that “we have peace with God *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. And here in verse 2 Paul opens with the words, “*through Him*”, that is, through Jesus Christ. This is a major theme in chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 of this epistle.

That all God has for us is to be found “in” and “through” Jesus Christ our Lord is a persistent motif in Romans 5-8: peace with God comes “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1); our boasting in God is “through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:11); grace reigns through righteousness, resulting in eternal life “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21); the gift of God bringing eternal life is “in Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:23); thanks for deliverance are due to God “through Jesus Christ our Lord” (7:25); the love of God, from which nothing can ever separate the believer is “in Jesus Christ our Lord” (8:39). When we consider that these phrases occur only in one other verse in Romans (15:30), and that every chapter in this part of the letter concludes on this note, a very definite focus on this matter is evident here.⁷

All that we could possibly desire and delight in is through Jesus Christ.

God teaches us in verse 2 that “*we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.*” When Paul wrote that Christians have gained access “into this grace”, he was declaring that through faith we came into a *state* of God’s grace, in other words, into the free and full favor of God. This *state of grace* that we enjoy may be described as an *arena* or a *realm* of grace. Later in **Romans 5:20f** Paul declared,

²⁰Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,
²¹so that, as sin reigned in death, *grace also might reign through righteousness* leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This reign of grace is a realm in which we “stand”, that is, live, over against standing or living in the realm of God’s law. To use covenant language, we relate to God based upon *a covenant of grace* rather than our former relation to our Creator based upon *a covenant of works*.

Then Paul declared that in this state of grace “*we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*” Earlier in his epistle, when Paul was indicting everyone as guilty of sin, he declared, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). But through Jesus Christ we rejoice *in the hope of the glory of God*. This anticipates believers seeing God one day in His glory. John wrote, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). And so, this speaks of the future fullness of salvation that God will confer upon us because we are in the state of His grace through faith. One day we will appear as image bearers of the glory of God, God having glorified us through Jesus Christ. Paul will later declare in Romans 8:30, “And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified, *He also glorified.*” One day when the believer sees the glory of God, he will be transformed by and into that glory; he will become like Him in holy character. But when the day arrives for the unbeliever to see the glory of God in His judgment, the unbeliever will sink in fear, even abject terror.

Paul declared that “we rejoice *in the hope* of the glory of God.” We spoke somewhat of hope last week. Let me repeat precisely what we said:

Hope is the grace that God gives to His people to sustain them through their difficulties. Hope is that which gives believers strength. Discouraged people are hopeless people. But believers who are encouraged to face their trials boldly and with peace are ones who have the hope of God

⁷ Ibid., p. 300.

sustaining them. Where does the believer obtain this hope? Hope is based on the faith that one has in God that He will bring to pass what He has promised. ***Hope is ours when we possess a certain anticipation of what most assuredly will occur.*** Because the Christian believes what God has said concerning all that is promised to him through Christ, he is infused with hope, the deep-settled certainty that all the good that God has promised will most certainly come to pass. This joyous anticipation changes the believer's outlook toward all that he faces. He sees what he is enduring is temporary and that a glorious future awaits him. This anticipation of the realization of God's promises is what strengthens him to endure, yes, even rejoice through his present trials.

Here in Romans 5:2 we read that as believers "we rejoice in ***the hope of the glory of God.***" We need to understand and fix our hope, our joyful anticipation, upon the one day that we will be glorified by God due to the grace that we have in Jesus Christ. If we were thinking rightly, feeling rightly, about these matters, we would be characterized as a "***rejoicing***" people.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24, 25)