

Peace With God

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's reading is from Paul's Epistle to the Romans, chapter 5, verses 1 through 11, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Romans. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

[1 : 20] But God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him?

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life? Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Michael, for that reading. Always sounds a little bit better coming from a Brit, doesn't it?

Good morning, Christ Church. We're exploring this great epistle to the Romans. It's the chief letter in the New Testament. And we hear this great word, therefore, in verse 1, which starts a new section of this letter, linking us back to everything that's been said already, Romans 1, 2, 3, and 4. And I just want to start by saying one of the secrets of the Christian life is knowing how to engage this word, therefore. Therefore, if you're here exploring Christianity, the historic Christian faith is all about the thefores.

[2 : 42] It's all about thinking and reasoning and logic and deduction, right? Christianity is not about checking your brains at the door. In fact, it's a scandal when Christians fail to use the minds that God has given us to say, you know, given certain unavoidable facts, therefore, those facts must lead to certain inevitable conclusions.

And this is what the Apostle Paul is doing all the time. We read in the book of Acts, Acts chapter 17, the Acts of the Apostles, that he goes about from city to city, and he comes to this great city in Greece called Thessalonica, or Thessaloniki, if you traveled there this summer.

And it says that when he got there, he reasoned with them from the scriptures. He reasoned with them from the scriptures. Paul was constantly reasoning from revelation.

This is what he did in every city throughout the Roman Empire. It's what he does here in this greatest epistle of Romans. Paul says, based on what God has said, based on what God has done, based on the words of God and the works of God, we must deduce, we must conclude, we must say, therefore, this is the result.

And we've always got to ask this question, what is the therefore, therefore? Have you heard that before? What is the therefore, therefore? Now that Paul has expounded for us the necessity of justification in Romans 1, 2, and 3, and then Paul has expounded for us God's way of justification by faith only in Romans 3 and Romans 4.

[4 : 21] Now that he's established for us God's pronouncement over us that we are just and we are righteous in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ and his cross, and that God regards us as if we've never sinned or ever even been a sinner, now that Paul has established this great truth that we're justified in Christ alone and through grace alone and by faith alone, therefore, therefore, the apostle now in Romans 5 expounds for us the fruits and the consequences and the great assurance that justification brings to our lives.

You following me? Paul has one concern from this point onward. He wants to show us the absolute character, the fullness and the finality of our salvation which comes to us in the way he's already described as the result of justification by faith.

And having put that doctrine of justification by faith only before us, he goes on to show that if, as Romans 4 says, we believe in him who raised up Jesus Christ, our Lord, from the dead, if we believe in him who was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification, then, therefore, the proper conclusion is that our salvation is absolute.

It's complete. It's final. It's guaranteed. Nothing can ever rob you of this salvation. Do you see what the therefore is therefore? We're reasoning from revelation, right?

That's what it means to be Christian. And we come here to Romans 5. It's the most important chapter in the whole letter. We'll get to Romans 8, which I would say is the most moving chapter in this letter.

[6 : 10] But Romans 5 has the most powerful argument found anywhere in the Scriptures with respect to the consequences of justification and the finality and the assurance of our salvation.

So you ready for it? You ready to reason from revelation? I was a little weak. I was a little weak. Are you, we need some espresso this morning? We got to get the coffee over here?

Paul says in Romans 5 that in Jesus Christ, our salvation is secure, it's unshakable, and it's certain. That in Jesus Christ, our salvation is secure, unshakable, and certain.

First of all, in Christ, if you've been justified by Christ, your salvation is secure. Verse 1 says, Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The primary function of the gospel, the good news. The first thing that justification by faith only does is to change our relationship with God and to give us peace with God.

[7 : 19] That's what he says again in verse 10. He says, While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son. That's the whole line of thought from start to finish here is peace with God, being reconciled with God.

Now, many people, including us and the people that we know, are looking desperately for peace. Right? We want peace, world peace, without, peace among the nations.

Amen? We want peace, personal peace within. We want peace in our mind. We want peace in our homes. We're desperately searching for a peace in the midst of all of our misery and turmoil, in the midst of all of our unhappiness and our frayed nerves.

We really want and need peace. But Paul says what we most need is peace with God. Not the peace of God, which is a subjective experience, maybe a way to manage our anxieties.

No, peace with God, which is an objective status. It's a relationship with God that stands outside of our subjective feelings about that relationship.

[8 : 31] And Paul says if you've been justified by faith, you have peace with God and you've been reconciled to him in the past. Justification by faith removes all those obstacles that exist between God and a sinner.

Before you're justified, you're in this state of hostility and enmity with God. You're at war with God. There's an opposition.

There's an antagonism. There's a fighting with God. But if you've been justified by faith, all of that is gone. And you're now in a condition of shalom. A condition of peace.

Peace and harmony has been established between God and the one who believes that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. But you see, something had to happen on God's side and on our side for this peace to be achieved.

And we talked about that in Romans 3. That God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood. That only because God laid our sins on Jesus Christ, only because God poured out his wrath at the cross of Christ, can he look on us with favor and pardon and forgiveness and reconcile us to himself.

[9 : 47] The wrath of God has been removed on his side. The hostility that we have against God has been removed on our side. And instead of being enemies, we are now in this blessed alliance of peace with God.

And that peace with God leads to grace. And it leads to glory. If you have peace with God, you have grace and you have glory. Paul says, not only if you've been justified, not only do you have peace with God, you've been reconciled with him in the past, but you now have the grace of God and you have access to him in the present.

Therefore, since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Now, if you want to meet with a king or a queen, you don't just enter into their presence. You don't just go and have an audience with his or her majesty.

Anyone ever tried this? You don't go to Buckingham Palace and just, you have to gain admission into the palace. You have to have an escort take you into that royal throne room and present you at court and give you an introduction.

[11 : 08] These are just the procedures that have to be honored. And Paul is saying that when we were in sin, we had no right of entry. We had no access to God.

We had not been presented to him. We had not been introduced. We could not come into the presence of a high and holy God. But now that we've been justified, now that we've been reconciled to God and we have peace with God, through Jesus we've gained access.

We've been introduced into grace. And this is now our standing before the great king. We cannot go to God as we were. Sinful and polluted.

Even our best righteousness was like filthy rags. But what is grace? Grace is favor to the undeserving. Grace is approval for those who deserve judgment.

And Paul says here is Jesus who had the right of access. He had the right of entry himself. And he came and he removed our sins. And he put his righteousness on us.

[12 : 13] And he grabs us by the hand, as it were. And he takes us. And he presents us to God the Father, who by grace accepts us and delights to receive us and is pleased to bless us.

Grace. That's what grace is all about. Friends, do you understand that you have a VIP status before the king?

Do you know that you're standing before him as one of grace? And that you have been introduced by the son of the king. There's no higher introduction possible.

And that you have the privilege now, not just to go to the palace one time in your life, but you have the privilege of living in the palace. Hebrews chapter 4 says this.

It says, Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

[13 : 19] This tells us that we do not periodically approach and have occasional audience with the king. But your access to God's throne of grace, it's not sporadic, it's continuous.

It's not precarious, it's secure. We do not fall in and out of grace like courtiers who may find themselves in and out of favor with their sovereign. No, this grace is our permanent and irrevocable standing before our king.

And we get to go to his throne of grace to get more and more grace because there's an abundant, overflowing, infinite supply of grace to help us.

The same grace that brought us in is the same grace that will sustain us. Is this not great news?

Paul says if you've been justified by faith, you have peace with God, you've been reconciled to him in the past, and right now you have the grace of God, you have access to him in the present.

And he goes beyond that. He says now we also have hope in God. We have hope in the glory of God and that we will be glorified with God in the future. Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand and what we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

[14:49] Friends, we were created by the glory of God. We were created for the glory of God. Glory is just a word that means the outward shining of an inward beauty.

And we had that. We had the glory of God in the Garden of Eden. But we lost it. And Romans 3.23 says that all have sinned and we've all fallen short of the glory of God.

But the incredible news here is that we are going to get the glory back. That we're going to see God. We're going to behold his glory. We're going to enjoy this radiant vision of his beauty and his splendor and his majesty.

And that's the ultimate end. That's the final goal of our salvation. So Paul says we boast in it. We look forward to it with confidence. It thrills us in the marrow of our bones and the depths of our being because not only will we enjoy a vision of the glory of God, but we ourselves will be glorified.

I mean, if you just look at the people sitting around you this morning, we're not much to look at. At least some of us. But Romans chapter 8 says we're going to share in his glory.

[16:10] And his glory is going to be revealed in us. And that those he's justified, he's also going to glorify. And it's essential that we should be glorified because without it we'd never be fit.

We'd never be able to stand the glory of God. We would just completely fall apart before the glory of God. But God is going to remove every single sin, every single vestige of sin from our bodies and from our souls.

There's going to be no trace of self-centeredness left. And we are going to be partakers of his divine nature. We're going to shine with his radiant beauty in his glory.

If you're exploring Christianity, do you desire to have this peace with God, to be reconciled to him on the basis of the things that he's done for you in the past?

Because you can have all that. You can have it as a completely free gift. Just open your empty hands and receive it. And if you're a Christian and you're standing in this grace of God in the present, do you take advantage of your VIP access and go with confidence to this throne of grace and pray with a holy boldness?

[17:27] Are you taking time to begin every day meditating on and rejoicing in the glory of God in such a way that you would begin boasting in the glory of God now and in your hope of having the fullness of the glory of God one day in the future and that you too are going to be glorified?

Our experience of justification by faith leads us to this increasing assurance and security that my past war with God is finished and that I have this peace with God that introduces me into a grace so that I can come to God today in prayer and I can rejoice in his favor for the undeserving and that I can even look forward concerning my death and my life beyond death, my judgment before the throne of God, that great day when the verdict will come down and I have no concerns, I have no fears because I know I'm going to see the glory of God and I'm going to stand before his glory.

Paul wants us to have that kind of security and that kind of assurance of our salvation. And he says we can have it. In Jesus Christ, our salvation is utterly secure.

But not only that, in Jesus Christ, our salvation is not just secure, it's unshakable. Our salvation is unshakable. You see, in verses 1 and 2, he's telling us about the results and the consequences of justification and then he goes on, after he tells us about peace and grace and the hope of glory, he goes on in verses 3 to 5 to show us that nothing can ever shake us out of this salvation.

The worst tribulations that can come to us cannot rob us of our salvation. A further proof and assurance that you've been justified, that you've been saved, is the way that our relationship with God enables us to face the trials and troubles and tribulations of life.

[19:39] And not just the suffering that comes from being a mere human because everybody has to suffer. But he's talking about the suffering that's going to come to you especially because you follow a crucified Christ.

Right? Jesus told his disciples the night before he went to his cross in John 16, he says, in this world, if you follow me, you're going to have trouble. And that's what Paul says in Acts 14 to the disciples.

He's strengthening. He says, we must endure many hardships to enter into the kingdom of God.

And it was this trouble, it was these hardships, this suffering that very often shook the assurance of the first Christians.

These Christians throughout the cities of the Roman Empire who were hearing this glorious message of the gospel, they said, yes, it's amazing, but how can this new life of being justified by Jesus Christ be marked by tribulation?

And why is God allowing afflictions into our lives? Is God displeased with us? Is God casting us off? Does God love us? Have we really been saved?

[20 : 44] Have we truly experienced salvation? Maybe we wouldn't be suffering so much if we were doing something different. And some of us have those same questions. And so this is why Paul introduces this thought in verse 3.

He says, not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope. This suffering, the word means pressure, or stress, or difficulty, or affliction because of Jesus in our lives.

And Paul knew what this was all about. He'd been beaten, imprisoned, persecuted. He'd suffered mightily for Jesus. And how does he say that we should handle this kind of suffering? He says, we should glory in it.

We should glory in it. Paul, are you out of your mind? We should glory in our sufferings. It's an astounding statement, and particularly because at this point, the highest human thought had reached was stoicism.

Stoicism says that when you suffer, don't groan or whine. Don't grumble and complain. Just put up with it. Resign yourself to it. Grin and bear it.

[21 : 55] Just take it with a stiff upper lip. Now, if you're not going to be a Christian, I would recommend becoming a stoic. Right? It would lead to a lot less whining in our society. Many, many people are becoming Epicureans, but I would recommend checking out stoicism.

But even better is Christianity. Right? Because Paul says a justified Christian glories in their sufferings. They boast and they exult in their sufferings.

How? Because he says we know something. And what is it that we know? We know that in God's hands, suffering produces. Suffering in God's hands is not destructive.

It's productive. Our faith enables us to view our sufferings in such a way that we realize that far from working against our salvation, suffering actually is promoting and furthering our salvation.

We've been given this knowledge, this knowledge of and this insight into God's purposes and God's methods. And this knowledge causes us to know that suffering is not a sign of God's anger towards us.

[23 : 05] In fact, it's very often a sign of God's love. That suffering in God's hands is not destructive. It's productive. We know, Paul says, that suffering produces.

It produces fruit. It produces the fruit of perseverance and patience. Suffering, when it's come into my life, it causes me to see that, to realize that I need a fresh supply of the strength and the grace of Christ.

And so suffering drives me to him. It drives me to go and spend time with him. It drives me to get into his word and to plead with him and say, Lord, help, help me.

And what happens is, I realize that he's building in me something. He's producing something in me. The ability to endure. He's building into me a constancy.

He's producing in me a steadfast character and a stronger hope. He's making me more and more mature. And therefore, he's conforming me to the very image of Christ.

[24 : 08] And this is proof. This is assurance that God is working out his salvation in my life. And so Paul says in verse five, he says, and hope, when this hope is rising up in us, this hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who's been given to us.

Yes, you're going to, especially as a Christian, you're going to have trials and troubles in your life. But if your hope is in God, you're not going to be put to shame. You're not going to be shaken. In fact, you're going to be put up on your feet and realize, as Paul says in Romans eight, that you're more than a conqueror.

And why does that happen? Because on the day that you were justified, you received the gift of the Holy Spirit. And what's the Holy Spirit's ministry to us?

What's his work within us? It's to pour out God's love more and more into our hearts. And the image here is of a cloud burst, right?

You've maybe been in other parts of the country where you see a giant cloud and then at one point in the afternoon, that cloud just opens up with an abundant deluge of rain and overflowing rivers of water.

[25 : 25] And Paul is saying, that's what the Holy Spirit does. He just opens up and pours out and overflows us with the love of God the Father. A love that says, although God may be allowing you to suffer, that does not mean that he does not love you.

As Romans 8, 16 says, the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. We're the beloved children of God. And we should be asking the Holy Spirit to help us understand that. Holy Spirit, I need to know, particularly in this difficult moment, that God loves me. Would you please grant me this direct and immediate inner witness and assurance of the love of God? Holy Spirit, would you please turn this objective reality of God's love into a subjective experience of God's love? Oh, Holy Spirit, would you please cause the love of God to grow in my heart, to grow warmer and warmer and become deeper and deeper and richer and richer. And when the Holy Spirit's doing this in you, it's proof. And it's assurance that God has started his work in us. And he's going to carry us through these sufferings.

[26 : 44] And he's going to bring his work to completion in our ultimate glorification. In Jesus Christ, our salvation is not only secure, it's unshakable.

Nothing can shake it. Even the worst things that come to you are not going to shake it. But he goes beyond that. He says, in Jesus Christ, our salvation is not only secure and unshakable, finally, it's certain.

It's totally certain. If verses one to five have not been enough, if you're still wondering, if your justification is certain, if your salvation is sure and final and absolutely guaranteed at the last day, then Paul says, look at the loving character of God in action for you.

Look at what God did for us while we were utterly weak and without strength and even his enemies. He says in verse six, you see, at just the right time, while we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die, but God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[28 : 08] Now follow me. The degree of any love is measured both by the costliness of the gift to the giver and by the worthiness of the unworthiness of the recipient.

So that the more a gift costs to the giver and the less the recipient deserves, the greater the love is seen to be. And measured by these criteria, God's love is absolutely unique and therefore our salvation is totally certain.

Consider the costliness of this gift that God the Father sent his son to die for us. He gave his love to be enfleshed and embodied.

God gave all that he had to give. He could not give his son without giving his very self. But consider not only the costliness of the gift, but consider the unworthiness of the recipient.

Right? He says here that we were powerless. We had no ability to save ourselves. He says we were ungodly. We were unlike God.

[29 : 09] We didn't even love God. We didn't want God. He says we were sinners. We were missing the mark of what God intended us to be. We were falling short of the glory of God.

He says in verse 10, we were enemies. We were hostile to God. We had our backs turned against God. We were utterly unworthy. And yet for us and our unworthiness, God the Father sent his son to die for us.

God has proven his distinct and his unique love, a love that's higher than every other love. And there's no greater proof of the love of God towards us than the fact that when we were totally unworthy, God sent his son Jesus to face the horror of this sin-bearing death in our place, to take our spiritual and moral record off of us and to put the spiritual and moral record of Jesus onto us. That is the ground of our assurance. And Paul says we must draw the inevitable logical deductions from this event. If it's true, now that we understand the truth that what God has done for us in his love, it follows that God will provide everything else for us for our final salvation.

that if God has already done this hardest and greatest thing while we were unworthy, then he cannot fail to do the lesser and simpler things now that he's declared us worthy to complete the task of our total deliverance from sin and our ultimate final glorification.

[30 : 46] And that's why Paul says in verse 9, since we've now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? We need to learn what it means to be much more Christians.

How much more? If Jesus shed his blood for me when I was powerless and ungodly and a sinner, then how much more will the same Jesus do for me now that I've been justified at the infinite cost of his precious blood?

I can approach my death, I can approach the day of God's judgment with assurance and confidence because I already know the verdict and the outcome. My judgment has already happened. Christ has absorbed and satisfied God's wrath on the cross for me. He's already declared the judgment that I'm righteous because of the righteousness of Christ and therefore I have no concerns.

I have absolutely no concerns whatsoever that my final, eventual, complete salvation will be brought about by the same Christ who bled for me, who's going to come through for me on that last day.

[31 : 59] How much more? How much more? He says in verse 10, for if while we were God's enemies we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved through his life?

If God has reconciled me to himself through the cross of Christ, when I was an enemy fighting against him, then will he do any less for me now than he did before?

Surely he's going to do much, much more. How much more is he going to do for me now that I'm no longer his enemy but his friend, indeed his beloved child? Friends, he can never reverse course on us.

He can never go back on the reconciling work which he began. How much more shall we be saved through his life? Friends, Jesus died to reconcile you to God and he's not, he's not dead. He's alive. And he's been raised from the dead up into this indestructible life and he has life immortal, life abundant, life eternal.

[33 : 10] He's gone ahead of us into his risen glory as our advocate and he's interceding for us. He's there to give us all the power and the strength and the life that we need.

So how much more is he able to save us through his life? If he's begun our salvation, will he not finish it? You see, and this is why Paul says in verse 11, we boast in God.

We glory in God. We rejoice and exult in God. Why? Because God has done it all. God has done absolutely everything we needed so that in Jesus Christ, justified by him and him alone, our salvation is secure, our salvation is unshakable, our salvation is in fact certain.

How can we keep from singing? How can we keep from praising his name? How can we keep from falling down in his presence and worshiping him because we have peace with him?

We have access into his grace. We have hope in the glory of God. Friends, let's rejoice in this incredible news. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[34 : 29] Amen.