

Our Life in Christ

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[0:00] Our passage this evening is from Romans, Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verses 1-5, and if you would like to have that in front of you, it's on page 942.

Short passage, but a remarkable one. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. 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. May God grant us understanding of His Word.

Pray with me for one second. Lord, we commit this time that we have now together into Your care, and I do ask, Lord, that You would help me to speak truthfully.

[1:17] And, Lord, that I will offer to my brothers and sisters a word that is from You, and that I, too, would have ears to hear. So we commit this time, Lord, we need to learn what You know.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. So the title of this sermon is Our Life in Christ. So that presumes behind that I'm talking primarily to Christians in this room.

But, in fact, if you are not a Christian, that is that you're exploring this, you're still asking questions about it, then this message is still for you, because it deals in ultimate things, things that everybody needs to be reconciled to, to understand.

Because, ultimately, what Paul is getting at in this passage will affect every single human being that has ever lived or will ever live. So, Paul wrote this letter to Christians, and so I am indeed our life in Christ.

But, nonetheless, I'm sure he expected there would be a few non-Christians in the meeting when it got read for that first time. And so I'm hoping that that's the case here. So I do ask you to keep your ears open, even if you are part of the hour at this point.

[2:37] It's not meant to be exclusive. It's meant to be directive. So that we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, can hear what the Apostle is teaching us. In this passage, I think we will find the basis for our life in Christ, the nature of our life in Christ, and the shape of our life in Christ.

Yeah? The basis of our life in Christ, the nature of our life in Christ, and the shape of our life in Christ. The basis of our life. How does Paul begin?

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What's that term, justified? Well, if you've been in the church, I'm sure you've heard it many times. It shows up a lot in Paul's writings. The idea of justification is, is that we are found to be right before God.

Here's a definition. It's a legal declaration concerning our relationship to God's laws, stating that we are completely forgiven and no longer liable to punishment.

[3:50] Now listen to that again. It's a legal declaration. So it doesn't necessarily mean that you are indeed inherently righteous, but God is in a position to declare that, no, I will consider you to be righteous.

And we'll find why that is in just a little bit. It's a legal declaration concerning our relationship to God's laws. Right? God tells us what His will is through His laws, stating, this declaration states, that we are completely forgiven and no longer liable to punishment.

That we are justified. And so Paul says, therefore, we have peace with God. But what are we having faith in? Well, it's faith in Jesus.

If we had time, we'd look at the therefore and find out what it's there for, and go back and look at what Paul wrote in the four chapters leading up to this, about how it is that man is not saved. Human beings are not saved by all that they do, but by what God has done.

And so as he lays out how it is that it has always been, salvation has always been by faith, that given that that's the case, Paul says then it's going to be by faith that we are therefore found righteous before God.

[5:04] So it's faith in Jesus, faith that has been accomplished through Jesus' life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, that we have peace with God.

So what Paul is saying then is that our number one problem as human beings has been taken care of. Our number one problem has been taken care of.

That is, that there is a day of judgment that awaits everyone. Everyone. And the consequences are really grave.

Listen to what Paul says when he's preaching to a group of people from Acts chapter 17. Times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, to turn away from how you used to live, or what you used to think, what you used to believe.

He calls people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man, Jesus, whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

[6:10] So here's Paul declaring to a whole group of mostly non-Christians that they need to understand something. There's going to be a day when Jesus will come, not as Savior, but as judge.

Listen to what Jesus says himself. When the Son of Man, referring to himself, when the Son of Man comes in glory, before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

And he will say to those that are on his left, the goats, depart from me, you cursed into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

See? It's pretty serious stuff. Right? This is the day of judgment. And what God has done through the gift of Jesus, by our faith in what has been accomplished in Christ, is that we are not subject to that eternal punishment.

It's an amazing thing. See, our number one problem has been taken care of. Because as the writer of Hebrews says, it is appointed for man to die once and then the judgment.

[7:23] And that reality, that there's a judgment out there, gets lost in our everyday life and our everyday needs and our everyday prayers. But the reality is, is that this is the most important thing that we have to understand about ourselves.

I had an interesting conversation with a young man in New York City. Very bright fellow. More synapses firing than I've ever fired in my head. Just a really bright guy. He's a philosophy major, getting his graduate degree in that.

A Christian. So we were talking at this party. We were sitting there talking. And suddenly, you know, came up, John Calvin came up. And he asked me, well, it's a theologian that I like. I said, well, I like John Calvin.

He said, well, I know John Calvin. He grew up within a reformed context, apparently. And I said, well, you know, Calvin says at the beginning of the Institutes that all knowledge is summed up in knowledge of God and knowledge of human beings.

And he goes on in his magnum opus to talk about just that reality. So at one point, I'm talking to him. And I said, his name is Aidan. I said, Aidan, let me ask you something.

[8:34] Now, I've been sitting through a lot of sermons recently. And they've been good sermons. They're biblical sermons. But I never hear judgment talked about. Now, Aidan is part of, right, what's called Gen Z.

He said, well, with Gen Z, you can't lead with judgment. Well, I just did. So the fact is that that's how Paul leads, right? He leads with judgment. And he meant that only as a way to say, you know, that you start with that's out there.

People really want to know why are they struggling in their life? What's their sense of meaning or purpose? Why am I here? I get all that. That's so important. The gospel answers those questions.

But what about judgment? Well, the reality is, as far as Paul is concerned, that is the most important thing. When we talk about somebody being saved, that's what they're saved from.

They're saved from judgment. See, being justified means that we are no longer at war with our Creator. That which caused that enmity, that hostility, our sin and rebellion, that's been atoned for by the sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God.

[9 : 44] We have peace with God, Paul says. Now, not only are we no longer have God as an enemy, we actually now have him as an advocate.

Yeah, God is now on our side. He's on our side every day. And not only that, we get to call him Father. Because the reality is, is that not only are we just no longer an enemy of God, we are now a child of God through the mercy of his regeneration, being born again, but also through adoption. Listen to what Paul writes from Ephesians. He chose us, writing to Christians, He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless, justified, by before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will. Now, in that same speech that we talked about from Paul, speaking when he was in Athens, about that there's going to be a day of judgment, he says at one point that he quotes one of their poets, that he says that we, as a human being, we are the offspring of God. So in some way, every human being, in some way, shape, or form, has a relationship with God. However, through adoption, our adoption by faith in Christ, our relationship with God radically changes.

[11 : 15] It changes us from one who receives benefits from a benevolent being to one who's been made a family, right? What does Jesus say? God causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

He causes the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. That is that God is gracious to all people. He pours out just benefits upon them, even though they don't know who he is or they curse him, but he still does it because he's a gracious and generous God.

However, rather than just being people who receive benefits from a benevolent being, we are made part of the family. Now, there's an entity within the United States, I don't know if it's here, called Compassion International.

And one of the things you can do with Compassion International is that you can sponsor a child in an impoverished country, in a country that's not as developed, that you can send money through the agency, and the agency will make sure they have the books that they need to go to school, make sure that they are taken care of, and you do that up to a certain age.

A lovely thing to do. But what difference would it make if you actually got on the plane, flew to the country, met the child, brought the child onto the plane, brought them back home, adopted them, they become in your family.

[12 : 32] Suddenly, they're inheritors of all that your family has to offer. Suddenly, all the benefits are now theirs, just as if they were a child. Why? Because they are a child.

You've brought them into the family. So, rather than being an enemy of God, through God's justification by faith, through the gift of what he's done through his son, our placing our hope in that finished work of Christ, we are now no longer just offspring, we are now children within the family, with all the benefits that comes from that.

Right? That's the difference between receiving benefits from a benevolent being and actually participating in the family. So, the basis of our life in Christ is the fact that we have been, by faith, justified, declared to be righteous before God and by God.

And this means we anticipate the day of judgment not as something to dread, but we await for it with joy. We await for it with heads held high.

When will the Lord come back? We can confess with Paul, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

[13 : 52] We are saved. And we can, again, without fear, rejoice in the closing words of the Bible. Jesus says, surely I am coming soon. We can say, amen.

Come, Lord Jesus. So, the basis of our life is indeed that we are justified. Justified, and it is the basis, not only how we live out this life, but our eternal life that we will possess.

See, that's what Paul means when he uses the term hope in this passage, and we'll talk about that in just a second. So, the basis of our life is the fact that we now have peace with God, having been justified by faith.

But what is the nature? What's the character of this life? He says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

So, in verse 1, where once we were at war with God, because of our rebellion and sin, we now have peace. That was a gift that was granted to us through our faith in Christ.

[15:05] As Paul says, elsewhere, by grace you have been saved through faith. In one respect, you could say that that grace has taken care of our sinful past. But what about our present?

See, our justification by faith is in the finished work of Christ, that's brought in tremendous benefit that comes with it. Not only does it make us fit for eternal life, it also provides grace for our daily life. Through him, through Jesus, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Our present is encompassed by grace.

Each day, we experience God's grace. Each day, he supplies the grace that we need. See, our faith has granted us access to daily grace.

It's the grace in which we stand. This alludes, I think, to the daily walk of a believer. God's undeserved favor rests on each hour of each day.

[16:08] God's undeserved favor, grace, rests on us each hour of every day. This means that no longer must we have in our mind or in our hearts or in our souls that we must strive to please God.

We must strive to gain his favor. See, the reality is, when we strive to gain God's favor, that is, that we can somehow win God's blessing, we are actually demonstrating a sign of our own fallenness, fallenness, the fact that we are indeed the offspring of Adam and Eve.

Because you remember, in the very first sin, the impulse was to be like God, to be God-like. And our striving to be righteous, apart from God's grace, is another evidence of how far we human beings have fallen.

Do we really think, do we really think we can be as righteous as God? And so he has no complaint, right? No judgment. No, he's not going to judge, because I'm a righteous person.

If we think that way, we are striving to be, as Adam and Eve were, when they ate the forbidden fruit, to be God-like. See, we can say there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, but we don't achieve that status in our own strength.

[17:29] Right? It's not an exercise of the will. It comes to us by grace through faith. And so this daily grace, in which we stand, as Paul talks of, is a great, I don't know about it, it's a great comfort to me, that I know I don't have to strive to win God's favor.

It's favor. He just gives it to us. Because we put our trust, our knowledge, that we need that righteousness, because there's a day of judgment coming, and I need a righteousness that I can be clothed in, and God has supplied it through the gift of his son.

And not only that, he says that I'm adopted into his family, and as a heavenly father, loves me, cares for me, and provides daily grace for me. That is a great comfort, to know that there is nothing that I can add to what God has done for me on my behalf.

To grasp that is liberty. It's liberty. Now it doesn't mean you're free to do whatever you want to do. What it does mean is that you are free to some time to win God's favor.

Martin Luther, German theologian, wonderful piece of writing I'd recommend to you anyway. All of you. The Freedom of a Christian, or a treatise on Christian liberty.

[18:50] He uses different titles. He says that justification by faith is absolutely necessary, because what it does is it frees us. It frees us to love God and to love our neighbor.

No longer are we trying to prove to God what a good person we are, and no longer are we using our neighbor to prove to God what a good person we are. No, no. Our justification, our righteousness comes solely through faith.

Faith in what God has done by grace. And as I said, to grasp that is liberty. Because if we are pressing for mere moral improvement, either from the pulpit, like, do better, or you inside yourself, oh, I've got to work harder.

By pressing for mere moral improvement, apart from faith, what that results in, usually, is some form of legalism. And it threatens the comfort that grace affords.

See, by grace we are justified, and by grace we are transformed from what we were, apart from Christ, into what we are in Christ. We don't have to say anymore, am I doing enough?

[19:56] God has done it all. So in the words of John Newton, it is, to grace, to his grace, there brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home. What's the character of the life of Christ?

It's a life of grace, encompassed by grace. And through it, he says, and through it, we can have faith, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

That hope, again, is what we're talking about, the fact that we have eternal life through our faith in Christ, that we're justified. We usually use that term hope like, ooh, I hope it doesn't rain.

Well, that's a wasted hope here. Or I hope my team wins. Or I hope I get the job. Or I hope that he likes me or she likes me. Those are not really, you know, they're not positive, confident statements, right?

But when Paul talks about the hope, he's talking about confident expectation. It's a done deal. Jesus said, it is finished on the cross. We are justified by faith.

[20:57] It is a hope set before us. And so the character of our life, the nature of our life, is grace that produces hope, a confidence in what God has won for us in Christ.

Yeah? So what about the shape of our life? Now here, I want to tread carefully. Because I don't want to be glib. I don't want to offer shallow, you know, spiritual-sounding terms when people are really going through difficult times.

But listen to what Paul says. Through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Right? Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, 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.

See, I think that progression that Paul charts there, right, endurance to character, character to hope, hope that doesn't put us to shame, that creates the ability to keep heaven in mind as we live our lives.

That's the point. That's what he's writing about. That's why we have hope. We are justified by faith. We have hope. And even in sufferings, we can have a confidence that what it is that is going through now is something that we have a hope that extends beyond our current circumstances.

[22:30] See, the shape of our Christian life looks more and more like the shape of Jesus' life. Listen to what the writer of Hebrews says. Let us run with endurance. You'll hear echoes of the same kind of language.

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now, I believe the primary thought that Paul has when he talks about suffering is persecution. Persecution that has come upon fellow believers because of their believing in Jesus.

And being persecuted for confessing Christ could cause one to doubt the wisdom of holding fast to that confession. But what Paul has discovered is that God uses persecution to deepen faith and confidence in what Christ has won for us.

Again, listen, he rejoices in sufferings because sufferings produce good fruit in a believer's life.

Endurance. What are you enduring? You're enduring the persecution that comes with the faith that has justified us.

[23:43] And who would have been persecuting him? Well, we know that the Jews, some of the early Jews, particularly the leaders, looked upon Jesus as a false Messiah. And so persecution came upon early believers.

But we also know that they were persecuted by the people around them, the pagans, the Romans. You know, when they came in and conquered somebody, they just added their gods to all the other gods. They wanted all the gods to be on their side.

Why make any of them angry? But along comes Christians saying, no, there's only one God, one true and living God, and his name is Jesus. And he's been in our midst. We've seen him. We've talked with him.

We touched him. And what that did is create persecution, both from the Jews and from the pagans. They had it coming from all sides. And so they needed to endure, to press on, to continue to endure in this faith that was bringing even persecution.

But he says, endurance produces character. Well, if what you believe in is being tested and is proven to be true, even as it's being tested, that develops character, right?

[24:47] We become more faithful. We become more loyal, more mature, more willing to speak about our faith. We become Christians with real integrity. And then he says, character produces hope, that confident expectation that heaven is real.

See, a lack of character in those moments would waver in the face of persecution. I mean, is it worth holding fast to this confession when they're about to crucify me? But having integrity, confidence, and what God has won for us causes us to look up.

As Heidelberg says, with heads held high. You remember Stephen. Stephen, an early martyr of the church. What happened with him? He, you know, read the Riot Act on the Jewish leaders and they picked up stones to stone him.

And as they're stoning him, he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven, saw the glory of God, Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, behold, I see the heavens open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

There was the hope right before Him in the midst of that persecution. There was hope. The heavens were opened up. And he was confident, as Paul says, that that hope and what God has accomplished for us and promised to us, we will never be made fools of for it.

[26:04] We will never be put to shame. Paul says, 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.

I know we're running here long, but let me just, there's this famous passage, right? This is from Romans chapter 8, the ends of Romans chapter 8. Just hear some of this for a minute. If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It's God who justifies, who is to condemn.

Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us. He says, for I am sure, I am sure that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God of Christ, from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

See, that's a bold confession. That's a bold confession and that's a result of the process that Paul outlines in this passage. We're at peace with God. We live encompassed by grace.

[27:11] We're confident in God's love. That's an ability, therefore, to really persevere even in the midst of cruel, violent, threatening, life-threatening persecution.

However, I think that in the passage that I jumped over a whole bunch of it, it isn't just persecution that's in view. It's all the ways in which the brokenness of this world makes itself felt.

tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, death, or life, angels, rulers, things present, or things to come, their powers, the height, their depth, or anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So while I think Paul's primarily talking about the kind of persecution that comes with faith in Jesus, nonetheless, he's also acknowledging that there's a lot of ways in which we suffer in this broken world.

And we don't suffer. We might feel a little marginalized, but we're not suffering like our brothers and sisters did here, but we do suffer from the fallenness of this world, our own brokenness and the brokenness of this world, physical suffering, suffering of injustice against you.

[28:23] Suffering comes with broken relationships. What Paul is saying is that if we can look upon those things and understand that it's part of what we have been saved from, i.e. that there is yet another life that we will experience, that eternal life, that is meant to give us hope even in the midst of those difficult, trying circumstances.

And I don't want to make light of it. Really, I don't want to be glib, I don't want to be shallow to suffer in this life because of mental illness, physical illness, loss of a job, broken relationships, loss of a loved one.

Those are real, real evidences of the brokenness of this world and how it is that we suffer as human beings. But God has given us a promise, a hope that lays beyond the brokenness of this world that one day there will be indeed the new heavens and the new earth, no more weeping, no more sorrow, no more crying, but peace with God experienced fully within our souls, within our beings, among our loved ones that went before us in Christ.

That's what God holds out before us and what begins to make sense of all that's going on as we live out our daily life. To know that indeed there is a way that it ought to be and you know what?

One day it will be. One day it will be. The love of God is the power behind that arc, this arc of the Christian life, basis, the nature of it, the character of it, and indeed the shape of it.

[30:06] The love of God, Paul says, is that arc, that arc behind the Christian life. And as we walk in Christ, we can expect indeed to suffer. Suffering trains us, however, in endurance.

Learning to endure is a sign of maturity. Our character is deepened. The character that is developed understands, sees with greater clarity the hope that is ours. And all of this is possible. It's produced, Paul tells us, by the love of God poured into our hearts. God has taken hold of us with His love. He has us.

And so, we'll never be made fools of through our faith in Christ. We'll never be put to shame.

Although we say, no, no, no, there's a promise waiting for me. And as they mock, as they seek to put you to death, as you wonder what's going on, it's well, no, there's a promise that one day things will be as they were meant to be, as they will be, as they ought to be.

And so, as we look at this passage, this brief, short verses, in some respects, another way to look at it is that God has taken care of our past with His justification.

[31:17] He takes care of our present with His everyday attending grace and the future is also secured for us. Past, present, and future, God has enveloped us in His love.

What an amazing thing that God has given to us in the gospel. Yes? The gospel that saves, the gospel that sustains, the gospel that points us forward, that sharpens our view of heaven, and that creates that yearning that says, yes, you know what?

That's what I'm looking for. I'm so appreciative of all that I receive in this life, but what I'm looking for is that, the hope set before us in the gospel, and to that we can cling with confidence.

Our life in Christ, marked by grace, hope, and love. What a God. What a gracious gospel. Yeah.

Let's pray.

Lord God, we thank You that we can have confidence in all that You have promised in what You have done through Your Son, that we can have confidence that despite all of our brokenness, all of our fallenness, all of our rebellion, nonetheless, in Your grace, placing our hope, our faith in Jesus, we are found righteous by You.

[32:34] You look upon us as You look upon the perfection of Your Son and say, that perfection is Yours. I receive You into my family. I receive You into eternal life.

And we thank You, Lord God, for the grace that brought that about and the grace that continues to be with us every day. Lord, we want to learn how to persevere, how to endure.

Lord, deepen our character, deepen our confidence in all that You have said, so that we will indeed know that on that day, when all things will be dealt with, when all nations will be brought up for Jesus, when all injustice will be declared for what it is, and all wrongs will be made right, Lord, that we have a part in that, in that we are members of Your family.

Lord, may we hold on to that hope, particularly in times of deep sorrow and suffering, knowing that there is something greater beyond what we are experiencing right now.

Would You remind us of that, in Your fatherly care. Lord, we thank You for the gospel. We thank You for the apostle Paul. We thank You for the conviction with which He writes, the conviction with which He preaches.

[33:49] And Lord, may we have ears to hear what Your Spirit is saying through Your Word. In Jesus' name, Amen.