

The Cross of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Justification: Declared Righteous in Christ

Romans 5:1-11

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrine at stake in this lesson is justification, and it is doctrinally sensitive, so it must be taught with both clarity and care. Justification means God declaring the believer righteous, pronouncing a verdict of acceptance on the basis of the blood of Christ. Romans 5:1-11 unfolds the blessings that flow from this verdict: peace with God, access into grace, a standing in which we stand, hope of glory, the ability to rejoice even in suffering, and a love poured into our hearts. Make sure the class grasps that justification is a real and settled verdict, not a fluctuating feeling, and that it is grounded entirely in Christ's work, justified by his blood, not in our own goodness. The peace it brings is the deep, stable peace of those whose central question, are we right with God, has been answered once for all.

Hold the means of justification exactly where Scripture holds it. On one side, justification is by grace through faith, never earned by our own merit or law-keeping; this church gladly affirms salvation by grace and rejects any notion that we put God in our debt. On the other side, the faith that justifies is never the bare mental assent of so-called faith only. Paul places Romans 5 deliberately between Romans 4, the obedient faith of Abraham, and Romans 6, baptism into Christ. James says plainly that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. So present justification as received through a living, obedient faith, the faith that hears the gospel, believes in Jesus as Lord, repents of sin, confesses Christ, and is baptized into his death for the forgiveness of sins, and then continues in faithful obedience. Grace and obedient faith are not rivals; the obedience is the God-appointed way faith lays hold of the grace freely given. Reject faith only without rejecting grace, and reject merit without rejecting the obedience of faith.

Aim the lesson at assurance that produces both rest and faithfulness. Many believers live under a low-grade anxiety about where they stand with God, never quite sure of his disposition toward them. Lead them to the settled verdict and the peace it brings, grounded not in their feelings but in the cross. At the same time, guard against turning assurance into presumption; the peace of the justified belongs to those who continue in the obedient faith by which they received it, and later lessons will warn against once saved, always saved. The formational target is a believer who rests fully in God's verdict and therefore lives wholeheartedly for him, free from both anxious striving and careless presumption.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul says, "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1). What does it mean to be justified, declared righteous before God, and why does this produce peace rather than merely the absence of punishment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by defining justification carefully, because the word is precise and precious. To justify is a courtroom term meaning to declare righteous, to pronounce a verdict of acceptance. It is the opposite of to condemn. Justification is therefore not a process of being made gradually better, nor a pretense that we never sinned, but a declaration, God's authoritative verdict that the believer stands right with him on the basis of Christ's blood.

Stress that this is a verdict, not a feeling. Our sense of acceptance rises and falls, but God's declaration does not. When God justifies, he speaks a word that settles the matter. Help the class see the relief in this. Our standing with God does not depend on the fluctuations of our spiritual moods but on a verdict spoken over us in Christ, as firm as God's own word.

Now draw out why this produces peace and not merely the absence of punishment. A criminal whose sentence is suspended may avoid prison yet still live under a cloud, never sure of his standing. Justification is more than a suspended sentence; it is a positive declaration of acceptance. So the result is peace with God, the end of hostility, a restored and secure relationship, not just escape from penalty but welcome into favor.

Note the phrase through our Lord Jesus Christ. The peace is not a vague serenity we generate but a peace mediated entirely through Christ. He is the one through whom the verdict is spoken and the peace is established. This keeps the class from grounding their peace in themselves and roots it where it belongs, in the Lord who secured it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Justification as God's verdict declaring the believer righteous (Romans 5:1; 3:24)
- A declared verdict, not a fluctuating feeling or a gradual process
- Peace with God as positive acceptance, not merely escape from penalty
- Peace mediated entirely through Christ, not self-generated
- The end of hostility and the restoration of favor with God

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to be justified, declared righteous before God?
- Why does justification produce peace rather than just the absence of punishment?
- How is a verdict more secure than a feeling of acceptance?

Question 2

Student Question:

Do you tend to live as someone at peace with God or as someone still trying to earn his approval? Where in your life does the anxiety of not-quite-knowing where you stand still show itself, and what would change if you rested in the verdict of justification?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question asks students to test whether they actually live in the peace justification provides. Many believers affirm the doctrine yet live as though they were still on trial, still trying to earn a verdict already spoken. The anxiety shows up in subtle ways: a sense that God is perpetually disappointed, a fear to approach him after failure, a feeling that acceptance must be re-won each day.

Help students name where this anxiety surfaces for them. For one it is in prayer, approaching God as a defendant rather than a child. For another it is after sin, assuming the verdict has been revoked. For another it is a general unease that they are never quite doing enough. Bringing these into the light lets the truth of justification address them.

Show the difference the verdict makes. The justified do not work toward acceptance; they work from it. Obedience becomes the grateful response of those already accepted, not the anxious effort of those hoping to be. This reframes the whole Christian life, from a courtroom we keep returning to, to a relationship secured by a verdict already given.

Aim at one concrete shift. Invite each student to identify the place their not-quite-knowing most shows itself, and to practice this week resting in the verdict rather than relitigating it. Assurance is not presumption; it is taking God at his word when he declares us righteous in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Living from acceptance rather than toward it (Romans 8:15–16)
- The persistence of works-anxiety even among believers
- Obedience as the grateful response of the accepted, not the striving of the anxious
- Assurance as taking God at his word, distinct from presumption

Discussion Prompts

- Do you live more as someone at peace with God or someone earning his approval?
- Where does the anxiety of not-quite-knowing where you stand show itself?
- What would change if you rested in the verdict God has spoken over you?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says that through Christ “we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (v. 2). What does it mean to “stand” in grace, and how is a settled standing different from feeling accepted only on our good days and rejected on our bad ones?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul adds another blessing: through Christ we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Two images deserve attention, access and standing. Access pictures being granted entrance into the presence of a king; through Christ the door to God stands open to us. Standing pictures a settled, established position; we do not merely visit grace, we live in it as our permanent dwelling.

Unpack the word stand. To stand in grace is to have a fixed and stable footing, not a precarious toehold. The justified are not perpetually slipping in and out of God's favor; they have a standing, a settled position in grace. This is the opposite of the exhausting up-and-down many believers feel, accepted on good days, rejected on bad ones.

Help the class see why this matters for daily life. If our standing depended on our performance, it would change hourly, and we could never rest. But because our standing is in grace, established by Christ and held by grace, it does not rise and fall with our spiritual weather. We stand on the same firm ground on our worst day as on our best, because the ground is grace, not our performance.

Guard against misunderstanding. A settled standing in grace is not a license for carelessness; it is the secure footing from which faithful living grows. Nor does it deny that we must continue in that grace, as the next chapters will show. It denies only that our acceptance is a daily achievement. We stand in grace, and from that standing we walk in obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Access into God's presence through Christ (Romans 5:2; Ephesians 2:18)
- Standing in grace as a settled, stable position, not a precarious one
- Acceptance not rising and falling with our performance
- A secure standing as the ground from which faithful living grows

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to stand in grace rather than visit it?
- How is a settled standing different from feeling accepted only on good days?
- How does standing in grace become the ground for faithful living rather than carelessness?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul says we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (v. 2). How does being justified reorient your hope away from the things you usually pin it on, and toward the glory God has promised? Where do you most need that larger hope right now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul says the justified rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Justification not only secures the present; it reorders the future. The hope of the believer is no longer pinned on the fragile things we usually build our lives around, health, success, security, the approval of others, but on the glory of God, the certain future he has promised to those in Christ.

Help the class see how justification reorients hope. Once our deepest standing is secure, the things we used to hope in for our identity and security lose their grip. We can hold them more lightly, because our future no longer depends on them. The justified person's hope is anchored beyond this world, in the glory of God, which no loss in this world can take away.

Clarify the biblical meaning of hope. It is not wishful thinking but confident expectation, grounded in the God who has already justified us. Because the verdict is secure, the future it guarantees is secure. Paul will say this hope does not put us to shame; it will not disappoint, because it rests on God's proven love, not on uncertain circumstances.

Aim at where each student most needs this larger hope. For one, life feels consumed by an uncertain outcome, a diagnosis, a job, a relationship. For another, hope has shrunk to getting through the week. Invite them to lift their hope to the glory of God, letting the secure future of the justified steady them in the uncertain present.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hope reoriented toward the glory of God (Romans 5:2; Colossians 1:27)
- Hope as confident expectation grounded in God, not wishful thinking
- Holding earthly things more lightly because our future is secure
- A hope that does not put us to shame (Romans 5:5)

Discussion Prompts

- How does justification reorient your hope away from fragile things?
- What is the difference between biblical hope and wishful thinking?
- Where do you most need the larger hope of God's glory right now?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul makes the startling claim that "we rejoice in our sufferings," because suffering produces endurance, character, and hope (vv. 3-4). How does being justified and secure in God's love change the way a believer can face suffering, and why is this not a denial of pain but a different way through it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul makes a claim that startles every honest reader: we rejoice in our sufferings. He is not glorifying pain or pretending hardship is pleasant. He is showing that the justified can face

suffering differently, because they face it from a place of secure standing and certain hope. He even traces a chain: suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope.

Help the class understand the logic. For those not secure in God, suffering tends to produce bitterness, fear, and despair. But for the justified, who know their standing with God is settled and his love is proven, suffering can do a different work. It becomes a forge in which endurance is built, character is shaped, and hope is deepened. The same fire that hardens one heart refines another, and the difference is the secure foundation justification provides.

Be careful and pastoral. This is not a call to deny pain, minimize grief, or pretend hardship does not hurt. Paul rejoices in suffering, not because it is good in itself, but because of what God can bring out of it for those who are his. The believer can grieve honestly and still trust that God is at work, that the suffering is not wasted, that it is producing something.

Show what makes this possible: the security of justification. Only a person sure of God's love and their standing in grace can meet suffering with this kind of hope rather than despair. When the deepest question is settled, hardship loses its power to define us. The justified suffer as those who are still, and always, at peace with God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rejoicing in suffering grounded in secure standing, not denial of pain (Romans 5:3–4; James 1:2–4)
- Suffering producing endurance, character, and hope in the justified
- The same hardship hardening one heart and refining another
- Honest grief held together with trust in God's purposes
- Security in God as what makes Christlike endurance possible

Discussion Prompts

- How does being secure in God's love change the way a believer faces suffering?
- Why is rejoicing in suffering not the same as denying pain?
- What enables the justified to find hope in hardship rather than despair?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of a current hardship in your life. What would it look like, this week, to let that hardship produce endurance and character in you rather than bitterness, trusting the God who has justified you to be at work even there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question brings the chain of endurance and character down to a present hardship. Paul's teaching is not abstract; it is meant to change how we walk through actual suffering. The question asks each student to bring a current trial to mind and consider what it would mean to let it produce endurance and character rather than bitterness.

Help students see that suffering does not automatically produce good fruit; the same trial can yield endurance or resentment depending on how it is met. The decisive factor is whether we walk through it trusting the God who has justified us, believing he is at work even there, or whether we let it harden into bitterness against him. The justified have every reason for the former.

Offer concrete handholds. Letting suffering do its work may mean refusing to nurse resentment, continuing to obey when it is hard, looking for the character God is forming, and bringing the pain honestly to God rather than away from him. It is active trust, not passive resignation, and it leans on the secure standing justification provides.

Aim at one concrete posture for the week. Invite each student to name how they will let their current hardship produce endurance and character rather than bitterness, trusting the God who has declared them righteous to be at work even in the difficulty. This is how the doctrine of justification becomes daily strength.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering met in trust producing endurance and character (Romans 5:3–4; Hebrews 12:7–11)
- The danger of letting hardship harden into bitterness against God
- Active trust rather than passive resignation in suffering
- Leaning on a secure standing while walking through trial

Discussion Prompts

- What current hardship is God inviting you to walk through in trust?
- What would it look like to let it produce endurance rather than bitterness?
- How does your standing in grace help you trust God in that hardship this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul says “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (v. 5), and grounds our hope in a love proven at the cross (vv. 6–8). How does the assurance of justification rest not on our feelings about ourselves but on God’s love demonstrated in Christ’s death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul grounds the believer's assurance not in self but in the proven love of God. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and that love is demonstrated, Paul says, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The assurance of justification rests on something outside us and unchanging, the historical fact of the cross.

Help the class see the importance of where assurance is grounded. If our confidence rested on our feelings about ourselves, it would collapse whenever we felt unworthy. If it rested on our performance, it would collapse whenever we failed. Paul anchors it instead in what God has already done at the cross, a fact that does not change with our moods or our stumbles. The cross is the fixed point to which we return when assurance wavers.

Draw out the logic Paul uses in verses 6 to 10, an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God loved us enough to give his Son while we were still sinners and enemies, how much more, now that we are justified and reconciled, will he keep and save us. The hardest part is already done. The love that justified us when we were enemies will surely not abandon us now that we are his.

Note that this love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Assurance is not merely an intellectual conclusion; God gives an inward sense of his love by his Spirit. Yet that inward sense is anchored to the outward fact of the cross, so that when feelings fade, the fact remains. The believer looks to Calvary, not the mirror, for the proof that God loves them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Assurance grounded in God's love demonstrated at the cross (Romans 5:5–8)
- The cross as the fixed point of assurance when feelings waver
- The argument from the greater to the lesser: if he died for enemies, he will keep his own (Romans 5:9–10)
- The Spirit pouring God's love into our hearts, anchored to the fact of the cross
- Looking to Calvary rather than the mirror for proof of God's love

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it safer to ground assurance in the cross than in our feelings or performance?
- How does Paul argue from Christ dying for enemies to God keeping his own?
- Where do you tend to look for reassurance, and where does Paul point you instead?

Question 8

Student Question:

When you doubt God's love or your standing with him, where do you tend to look for reassurance, to your performance, your feelings, or your circumstances? How does Paul point you instead to the unchanging fact of the cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question exposes where students actually go for reassurance when doubt comes. By instinct we look to our performance (did I do enough?), our feelings (do I feel close to God?), or our circumstances (is life going well?). All three are unstable foundations, and all three will eventually fail us, leaving assurance to rise and fall like the tide.

Help students see why these foundations crumble. Performance varies and never feels sufficient; feelings come and go with health, sleep, and mood; circumstances change without warning. Build assurance on any of these and it will be perpetually shaken. Paul deliberately points us elsewhere, to the unchanging fact of the cross, which stands firm regardless of how we are performing, feeling, or faring.

Teach the practice of returning to the cross. When assurance wavers, the believer learns to preach the gospel to themselves, to look away from the mirror and to Calvary, to rehearse the proven love of God in the death of Christ. This is not denial of our failures but the refusal to let our failures, feelings, or fortunes have the final word over what God has already declared.

Aim at one concrete redirection. Invite each student to name where they habitually look for reassurance, and to practice this week looking instead to the cross when doubt arises. The unchanging fact of Christ crucified for us is the rock on which assurance can finally rest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The instability of grounding assurance in performance, feelings, or circumstances
- Preaching the gospel to oneself in seasons of doubt (Romans 5:8)
- Returning to the cross as the practice of assurance
- God's declared verdict outweighing our failures and feelings (Romans 8:33–34)

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you tend to look for reassurance when you doubt God's love?
- Why do performance, feelings, and circumstances always fail as foundations?
- How can you practice returning to the cross when assurance wavers?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul says we have been "justified by his blood" and are "saved by him from the wrath of God," reconciled to God through the death of his Son (vv. 9–10). Explain how justification is God declaring the believer righteous through the blood of Christ, received not by a bare "faith only" but by a living, obedient faith that hears, believes, repents, confesses, and is baptized into Christ. Why is it essential to hold together both that justification is by grace through faith and that this faith is an obedient, working faith rather than mere mental assent?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it must teach the means of justification with full biblical balance. Paul says we have been justified by his blood and are saved by him from wrath, reconciled through the death of God's Son. Begin with the foundation: justification is God declaring the believer righteous, and the ground of that declaration is entirely the blood of Christ. Not our works, not our law-keeping, not our merit, but the blood of Christ is what makes the verdict possible. This church gladly affirms that salvation is by grace; we never put God in our debt, and we never earn our standing. Make that unmistakable.

Now address the means by which this justification is received, and do so with care, because here a great error must be avoided. Justification is received by faith, but the New Testament never means by this a bare mental assent or a one-time decision that asks nothing further. The faith that justifies is a living, obedient faith. Paul places this very chapter between Romans 4 and Romans 6 deliberately. In Romans 4, Abraham is the model, and his faith was an obedient trust that acted on God's word. In Romans 6, immediately following, Paul describes how we are united with Christ: we are baptized into his death, buried with him, and raised to walk in newness of life. Justification by faith and baptism into Christ are not rival ideas in Paul; they are the same gospel.

Spell out the obedient faith plainly, since this is the lesson where it must be clear. Scripture presents the response to the gospel as hearing the word, believing in Jesus as Lord and Christ, repenting of sin, confessing him before others, and being baptized into Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and then continuing in faithful obedience. Peter told inquiring believers to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. Ananias told Saul, already a believer, to rise and be baptized and wash away his sins. Paul says those baptized into Christ have put on Christ and become sons of God through faith. None of this earns salvation; it is the God-appointed way an obedient faith lays hold of the grace freely offered in the blood of Christ.

Confront the error of faith only directly but without rancor, because many sincere people hold it. James says, in the only place where the phrase faith alone appears in Scripture, that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone, and he points to the obedient faith of Abraham as proof. A faith that never obeys, never repents, never submits to Christ in baptism, is what James calls a dead faith, and a dead faith does not justify. The faith that justifies is the living faith that trusts Christ and therefore obeys him. So we reject faith only, not because we add human merit to grace, but because we take seriously what Scripture says living faith actually is.

Hold the two truths together for the class, because both must stand. First, justification is by grace through faith; we contribute no merit, and our boast is only in the cross. Second, this faith is an obedient, working faith, not mere assent; it hears, believes, repents, confesses, and is baptized into Christ, and then walks faithfully with him. Grace and obedient faith are not opponents. The obedience does not earn the gift; it is the empty hand that receives it, the appointed way the sinner comes to the Christ whose blood justifies. Teach the class to rejoice in grace and to receive it the way the New Testament gives it.

Finally, connect this to assurance without slipping into presumption. The verdict of justification is real and secure for those who are in Christ, and they may rest in it fully. But this security belongs to those who continue in the obedient faith by which they came, not to those who treat grace as a license. Later lessons will warn that Christians can fall away and must remain faithful. So the justified rest in God's verdict and therefore live wholeheartedly for him, free from both anxious striving and careless presumption.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Justification grounded entirely in the blood of Christ, by grace, not human merit (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:8–9)
- Justification received through a living, obedient faith, not bare mental assent (Romans 4; James 2:24)
- The obedient response of the gospel: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and baptism into Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:26–27)
- Romans 5 set deliberately between the obedient faith of Romans 4 and baptism into Christ in Romans 6
- Rejection of salvation by faith only, against the plain teaching of James 2:24
- Grace and obedient faith as complementary: obedience receives the gift, it does not earn it
- Assurance for those who continue in obedient faith, against presumption (Hebrews 3:14)

Discussion Prompts

- How is justification grounded in the blood of Christ rather than in our works?
- Why is the faith that justifies an obedient, living faith rather than faith only?
- How do grace and the obedience of faith work together rather than against each other?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Romans 5:1–11 as a whole, where the justified have peace, access, hope, and a love poured into their hearts. Name one specific way the verdict of justification is changing how you live before God, and one concrete way you will rest in or respond to that verdict this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the lesson and calls for a personal response. Remind the class of the riches Paul has laid out: peace with God, access into grace, a standing in which we stand, hope of glory, the power to rejoice even in suffering, and a love poured into our hearts and proven at the cross. All of this flows from the verdict of justification, received by an obedient faith and grounded in the blood of Christ.

Invite each student to name one specific way the verdict of justification is changing how they live before God. For one it may be a new peace replacing old anxiety; for another, a settled

standing replacing the up-and-down of earning acceptance; for another, a steadier hope in the face of suffering.

Then ask for one concrete way they will rest in or respond to that verdict this week, whether returning to the cross when doubt comes, letting a hardship produce endurance, or living wholeheartedly out of acceptance already given. For anyone not yet in Christ, this is the moment to point gently to the obedient faith by which justification is received, and which the next lesson will unfold in baptism into Christ. End where Paul ends, in rejoicing in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Justification changing daily life before God
- Resting in the verdict while living wholeheartedly for God
- The obedient faith by which justification is received
- Rejoicing in God as the fruit of justification (Romans 5:11)

Discussion Prompts

- How is the verdict of justification changing how you live before God?
- Which blessing of justification means the most to you right now, and why?
- What is one concrete way you will rest in or respond to that verdict this week?