

The Cross of Christ

Lesson 8: Justification: Declared Righteous in Christ -- Romans 5:1-11

Imagine standing in a courtroom, guilty, with the evidence against you overwhelming and no defense to offer. You know what you have done; so does the judge. You brace yourself for the sentence you deserve. And then the judge does something unthinkable. He declares you righteous, not because the charges were false, but because the penalty has already been paid by another, and he announces that from this moment you stand before the court with a clean and perfect record. You walk out not merely pardoned but accepted, your guilt gone, your standing secure. That courtroom scene is what the Bible means by justification, and it is one of the most freeing truths in all of Scripture.

Justification is God's verdict over the believer. To justify is to declare righteous, to pronounce a person right with God. It is not God making us morally perfect in an instant, and it is not God pretending we never sinned. It is God declaring, on the basis of the blood of Christ, that those who are in his Son stand before him acquitted and accepted, clothed in a righteousness not their own. Paul opens Romans 5 by drawing out the result: since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The war is over. The verdict is in. And it is favorable.

Notice what this peace produces. Paul says we now have access into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. He even says we rejoice in our sufferings, because justified people can face hardship differently, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance character, and character hope, a hope that does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts. A settled standing with God changes how we meet everything else. When the deepest question of our lives, are we right with God, is answered once and for all, we are free to face the rest of life with a steadiness the world cannot give.

But we must be careful to receive this gift the way Scripture actually gives it. The peace and the standing are real, and they are by grace from first to last; we could never earn them. Yet the faith through which we receive justification is never a bare mental agreement or a one-time decision that asks nothing further. It is a living, obedient faith, the faith that hears the gospel, believes in Jesus as Lord, repents, confesses him, and is baptized into his death, and then goes on walking with him. Romans 5 sits between Romans 4, which describes the faith of Abraham who obeyed God, and Romans 6, which describes our baptism into Christ. So read these verses and rejoice in the verdict, but rejoice as those who lay hold of it by an obedient faith, and who mean to live the rest of their days in the grace in which they now stand.

Group Discussion: Many people carry a low-grade anxiety about whether they are truly right with God, never quite sure where they stand. Why do you think that uncertainty is so common,

and what difference would it make to a person's daily life to have real, settled peace with God rather than constant doubt?

Personal Reflection: Paul says the justified have "peace with God." Be honest about your own heart: do you live with that peace, or with a nagging sense that God is still somehow against you or disappointed in you? Where does that come from, and what would it mean to truly rest in the verdict God has spoken over you in Christ?

Read Romans 5:1-11

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 4:1–8, Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness; Romans 3:24–26, justified by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus; Galatians 3:26–27, you are sons of God through faith, for as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ; Acts 22:16, rise and be baptized and wash away your sins; James 2:21–24, a person is justified by works and not by faith alone; Titus 3:7, justified by his grace, we become heirs of eternal life.