

Justification is just the start

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2018

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well, today we are continuing our study in the book of Romans. We've been working through this book over the past few weeks and we've come to chapter 5 and today we're going to study the first five verses together. 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. In this letter, Paul's great theme is the Gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ and throughout the chapters we've been studying,

Paul is explaining how the Gospel works. When you read Romans, it can sometimes feel quite complicated but it's helpful if we recognise that throughout these chapters, Paul is building up a big argument in which he presents the nature and workings of the Gospel. He's told us that God is righteous. God has these standards from which he will never ever deviate but we are unrighteous. We have rebelled against God. This has made us liable to judgment.

God is righteous, God is a fair judge, God can only be consistent and so we come under that judgment and we all fall short of God's perfect standards. As God's standards are up here and perfect, none of us can say that we're there. We all fall short in different ways. None of us can say that we match up to the glory of God and so Paul is saying that because of that, we are accountable to God's law and we're inevitably found guilty and the righteous result of that is that we provoke the wrath of God. However, Paul has told us at the end of chapter 3 that God has sent his Son as our Saviour and he has come to serve as a propitiation which means you'll remember to turn away the wrath of God. So although God's law means that justly God's wrath is coming down upon us, Christ has come to cover us and to stand in the way and to turn the wrath of God away from us and onto ourselves and onto himself. So our sin is accounted to Jesus and Jesus's righteousness is accounted to us therefore when God looks at us, he does not say condemned, he says justified. We are declared righteous by the judge and Paul's great emphasis is that we don't get that by earning it. We get it as a gift which is received by faith. So that takes us up to the end of chapter 3. Then in chapter 4, we look at this last week, Paul gives us a great example from Abraham in the Old Testament to show that he too was justified by faith. He was saved through trusting God's promise just as we are. The only difference between us and Abraham was that Abraham was looking forward to a promise that was going to be fulfilled. We have the amazing privilege of looking back to see that it was indeed a promise that was kept by God. And at the heart of it all is this great doctrine of justification by faith and theologians have often said that the gospel hinges on justification by faith. It's like the turning point, the centre point on which everything else revolves around. But that raises a question, does the gospel conclude at justification by faith?

Is justification the goal of the Christian gospel? And we might immediately find ourselves thinking, well yes, but the amazing truth is that the answer is no. Justification is a vital part of the gospel. But here in chapter 5, Paul is teaching us that justification is actually just a stepping stone into a whole new realm of amazing blessings. And it's important that we never ever forget that God does not simply want to give you justification.

He wants to give you way more. And if we understand justification properly, then that should make perfect sense to us. Because remember, justification is a legal term. It is a declaration that is made by the judge. So imagine that you are standing in a court and you are facing condemnation and all the awful consequences that come along with that. You're standing in the court, you're fully expecting condemnation, you know that that's what you are liable to, you know that that is a fair and just sentence. So you are about to hear the judge's sentence. And yet at that moment, instead of the judge condemning you, the judge says justified. Now that would be an amazing moment to be declared righteous even though you knew that you were worthy of the worst. But if that happened to you, you wouldn't just stand there forevermore marvelling at what the judge had said. You would go and run to your family and embrace them. You would go out into the world and enjoy the amazing privilege of freedom. And you would go on with the rest of your life rejoicing and thinking to yourself, I never, ever want to go back where I was. Because although justification is amazing, what comes after it is even better. And that's what Paul is telling us here in Romans chapter five. He's telling us some of these extraordinary blessings that follow on from justification.

[7 : 21] And he highlights four things that we have if we are justified, if we put our trust in Jesus. And I want us to look at these things together. But it all hinges on justification.

Notice as he says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, as a result of our justification, we are now entitled to some extraordinary blessings. And so there's four things in particular, and we'll look at them together. Number one, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, justification has brought a change in our status. Instead of being declared unrighteous, we are declared righteous. As a result, we now have a change in relationship with God. Sin had made us enemies of God. We were alienated from him.

We were separated from him. And the evidence of that is still evident, is still visible in the world around us. People are hostile to God. People push God away. People mock God. People want nothing to do with God. You only have to look at the world to see that there's that alienation, that hostility between humanity and God. And as Paul has said, that unrightly provokes God's wrath because God is hostile towards unrighteousness. He's righteous.

So anything that's unrighteous is utterly unacceptable to God. But Paul is saying that because we have been justified, that alienation and separation has been replaced with peace.

And the theological term for that is reconciliation, which Paul mentions in verse 10 and 11. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more.

[9 : 25] Now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life? More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. We were once enemies with God, but now that enmity has been exchanged and replaced with friendship.

We have peace with God. Now, it's really important to recognise first and foremost that peace with God is a fact, not a feeling. There are times as Christians when we feel an amazing sense of peace. Paul describes that as a peace which passes all understanding. And it's an amazing thing. But we don't always feel like that, do we? Sometimes we don't feel at peace, sometimes we worry, sometimes we sorrow, sometimes we are afraid. And it's very easy to think that if we don't feel peace, we are not at peace with God. So for example, we make a mistake in our lives and we feel a sense of regret and frustration and disappointment.

And because we don't feel at peace with ourselves, we can very easily think that God is even more disappointed with us and would want nothing to do with us because we have mucked up again.

And for that reason, we think that our friendship with God has been spoiled. It's so easy to feel like that. I'm sure you feel like that. I feel like that very often. You feel like you're just a big letdown to God and that God would never really call us his truest and best friends. But all of this is a reminder of how notoriously untrustworthy our feelings are. Because first and foremost, peace with God is not a feeling. It's a fact. And it's vital that we recognize that there's a difference between peace with God and peace from God.

Peace from God is a wonderful feeling of assurance and security and safety that sometimes we get as Christians, but not necessarily very often. Peace with God is a guaranteed consequence of your justification. It's not a feeling. It is an objective reality. It is a fact.

[12:10] It is something that nothing can ever take away. In other words, if you are a Christian or if you become one, which you can, you can become one even today. If you're a Christian or if you become one, it is a theological fact that God is your friend forever. That's what Paul is saying. Your justification means that you now have peace with God. You are reconciled to him. The enmity that once ruined your relationship with God has now been exchanged for peace and friendship. And your feelings have got no effect on that whatsoever. Because if you are a Christian or if you become one, you can never be alienated from God again.

You can never become an enemy of God again. You can never provoke the wrath of God again. He has made your friendship an unbreakable friendship. God has made peace with you. He has made your friendship with him a theological fact. And it's so important to remember that because it's so easy to think that God is just annoyed with us. The truth is that God is at peace with you. You are no longer enemies. You are friends.

Now when we talk about that, we can easily find ourselves thinking, how can our peace with God be guaranteed and constant when we muck up so much? Because as Christians, we all muck up. We all stumble. We all doubt. We all worry. We are all tempted by things that we shouldn't be tempted by. We all give in to temptations that we should never give in to. We all muck up and we all make mistakes and you could easily say to yourself, Thomas, how can you say that God's friendship with you will never ever ever change when we make so many mistakes in our lives? Well, the reason we can say that is because the peace that we have with God is through our Lord Jesus Christ. Your favour with God never rests on what you do. It rests on what Jesus did. That's why it's unbreakable and that's why it's so amazing. If you are a Christian or if you become one, you have peace with God because you are united to Jesus Christ. You are God's friend because you are united to God's Son.

And this is where we see just how amazing the Gospel is because in terms of spoiling the relationship between God and humanity, we're the ones who mucked everything up. We are the ones who disobeyed. We are the ones who suppressed the truth. We are the ones who exchanged the truth of God for a lie. We turned away. We provoked God's wrath. When it comes to our friendship with God, we did all the damage. But God wants to put that all right. We broke the relationship. He has come to restore it. We damaged the friendship.

He has come to fix it. We made enmity. He has come to make peace. We have peace with God. Now that does not mean that as Christians we can't do things that are displeasing to God. We can still grieve the Holy Spirit. We can still do things that God doesn't want us to do. And we do that all the time, regrettably. But the whole reason that we grieve Him if we sin is because we are sinning against our friend. That's why we grieve Him. And it's such an amazing privilege in the Gospel to be able to say that we are friends with God.

[16 : 59] And that's what you are. If you are justified, you are friends with God. God looks at you, says, that person, he or she, they are my friend. And if you are not yet a Christian, or if you are not sure, or if you are seeking the Lord, please, please recognise that that is what God wants to do with you as well. He does not want to be your enemy. He wants to be your friend. God wants your friendship. God wants to make peace with you. And all that you have to do is just rest on what Jesus has done. Our peace is through our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace with God is not a feeling. It is a theological fact. It is a glorious theological fact. And of course, when we recognise the fact of our peace with God, it will very, very often lead us to a feeling of peace from God. Because as we often say, it is in theology that you will find through assurance. We have peace with God. Secondly, through him, we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. Paul has just told us that we have peace with God, but that peace is not some distant accord. Our friendship with God is not formal or nominal. In the midst of the judicial language like justification, it is easy to think that God's relationship with us is all official and cold and formal.

But we must never, ever think that the Gospel of Jesus Christ simply gives us a formal connection to God. Because the truth is, our justification gives us the most extraordinary of privileges.

It gives us access to God. By faith, we have access to the grace of God. And we are able to stand not simply as God's acquaintances or as associates, but as his precious, beloved people. That's why when Jesus illustrates how God reacts to a repentant sinner, what does he describe to illustrate that? When you, when you think of somebody becoming a Christian, what's the great illustration that Jesus uses? Does he present the illustration of a judge signing off a sheet of paper, which formally formalizes a peace treaty? No, he doesn't. When Jesus illustrates how God reacts to a sinner like you repenting, he describes a father running to meet his prodigal son and he throws his arms around his beloved child and embraces him and pours his love out upon him and does everything he can to reassure this poor lost child who once was lost and now is found. So when God justifies us, he doesn't just want to end hostility. He doesn't just want to offer official reconciliation.

He wants to draw us into his arms and to bless us with the abundance of his grace. He wants to give us access to himself. And that we word access is an amazing word. The Greek word that's used, it basically conveys the idea of gaining admission into the presence of somebody who's in a high position. It speaks of having the right to speak. So just think about that. Just imagine that if you are a Christian or if you become a Christian today or if you become a Christian this week, you have a right of access to God. Now we don't in any way earn that right. It's given to us by God's grace. It is through Jesus Christ.

But even though we don't deserve it, even though we don't earn it, we have it. You have a right of access to God. You have the right to talk to God. You have the right to his time. You have the right to his attention, to his care, his comfort, his wisdom. And nobody can ever take that right away from you. Nobody can ever say to you, God doesn't have time for you or that God's got better things to do than listen to you. Nobody can ever say that God is not interested in you. Nobody can ever say that to you. And you might say, well, Thomas, nobody ever does say that to me. And that's probably true. But all too often we say it to ourselves. It's so easy to think that God would not want us anywhere near him. But through faith in Jesus Christ, you have an immutable right of access to God himself. And because of that access, we have all the privileges of Christian living. We have a right to worship God, even though God is massively big and we are pathetically small, yet we can come and worship him. We can sing to him. We can praise him. We can thank him. And despite our major weaknesses, our worship is actually pleasing to God.

[23 : 22] As you worship God today, you are pleasing God Almighty. We have a right to worship. We have a right to pray to God. You can talk to God anytime. You can talk to him about your life. You can ask God for things. What do you need for the week ahead? What is it that makes you think when you think of the week ahead, we all have these things. I don't know if you're like me, but I have these things. You remember them. You think, oh, I need to do that. Or I've forgotten to do that. Or I don't know if I can do that. We all have these things that kind of put a chiver of nervousness down our spine. I don't know if I can do that. Or I need this. I need that. Ask God because you've got the right to ask him. We can intercede for others. We can pour out our burdens to him. We have a right to pray and we have a right to repent. And that's really, really important to remember because that's a right that we constantly need to exercise. We make mistakes. We sometimes make very, very silly mistakes in our lives, but we have a right of access to God whereby we can come to him and we can say that we're sorry. As a Christian, or if you become a

Christian, you've got a right of access to God. Nobody can keep you away from him. And even though that seems too good to be true, you can be absolutely certain that you have this right of access. Why? Because it's God who's given it to you. And as Christians, we stand on the basis of that right every step of the way. Thirdly, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. As a result of our justification, we have peace, we have access and we have hope. Now, Christian hope is not a kind of nervous optimism that is hoping that the

Bible will be true and hoping that one day we might get to heaven, but we're not really sure if it might happen or not. That's not Christian hope. Christian hope is the certain expectation and the excited anticipation of all that lies ahead of us. In other words, Christian hope is explaining the fact that with God, the best is yet to come. And this is where we see perhaps most clearly that justification is not the conclusion of the Gospel. In reality, justification is just a starting point from which amazing blessings will follow. And the culmination of these blessings is nothing less than the glory of God. That's what Paul says, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Now, that's the kind of phrase that's easy to read, but you think, well, what exactly does that mean?

What's Paul mean when he says, we hope in the glory of God? Well, the glory of God just speaks of how magnificent God is. It speaks of his infinite worth, his brightness, his splendor. All that's just amazing about God. What is God like? He is glorious, utterly indescribably majestic, beautiful, radiant, perfect in goodness, perfect in wisdom, perfect in gentleness, perfect in righteousness, perfect in holiness, perfect in love. Everything about God is as substantial and as bright as it can possibly be. And in the Gospel, God is saying, I want to be all of that for you. As Christians, we have an amazing hope because God's great goal is to bring us to glory, to bring us into his presence so that we will be with him forever and experience for ourselves all the wonder and magnificence of his glory. Which is why as Christians, when we die, our souls go to be with him in heaven and when Christ returns, our bodies will be raised and we will dwell forever with

God in the new creation. And there, you will experience the glory of God like never before.

[28 : 19] Have you ever thought of that? That the very best of what you experience of God today is only a shadow of what we'll experience then. So now we experience joy in the Lord, then our joy will be overflowing. Now we experience peace, but then our peace will be totally complete. Now we know God's gentleness, but then we will experience the tender care of God more closely and more personally than ever before. Remember, what's the first thing God is going to do to you when you get to heaven? He's going to wipe away your tears.

Now we know God's love in the midst of a hard world, but then we will know God's love in all of its wonderful fullness. As Christians know, we experience joy, peace, gentleness, love and so many other blessings from God and these are amazing. But the astounding thing is that the very best of what we have now is just a glimpse. It's just a shadow. It's almost as though God says, you wait until you get the glorified version of my love and my gentleness and my peace and my joy. If you are a Christian or if you become one, you are justified and that justification has put you on the path which culminates in enjoying the glory of God forever. And that's why as Christians we have such an amazing hope and it is that hope which is key to enduring suffering. That's exactly what Paul says in verse 3.

He says, not only that, 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. Suffering is a reality that we all face and it's incredibly hard and I'm sure that you are all experiencing it in one way or another today. But the key point is that as Christians no suffering is pointless and no suffering is useless because it's actually going to help you grow in endurance so that you can keep going and it's going to help shape your character to make you more like Jesus and as your character grows, as your mind is conformed more and more to God's ways, you'll be able to see even more clearly how much God has prepared for those who love him. And that's why no matter how hard it gets you will never be put to shame. So often the world puts us to shame whether it's in school where people pick on us and ostracise us and laugh at our expense or whether it's at work where colleagues speak about us behind our back or say one thing to our face and then act completely differently to everybody else or whether it's in a community where you find yourself caught up in hostilities between people and you find that you're on the receiving end of aggression in places that you never expected us. So often we find ourselves put to shame suffering and and and exposed in our experience but Paul is reminding us that no matter how much you suffer as a Christian God will never be ashamed of you.

Ever. He will never abandon you to scorn and disgrace. He'll never ostracise you. He'll never be one thing to your face and another thing behind your back. God will never ever do anything other than say she's mine. He's mine. They are my friends. And in the end God will simply take you home and crown you and love you as his very own. So suffering is incredibly hard but never forget that it's only taking you one step closer to that glorious day. So because of our justification we've got peace with God. The enmity has been replaced with friendship. We have access to God and his grace so we can come to him whenever we need for the help that will take us through our lives and we have hope in nothing less than the glory of God and all the splendour and wonder that comes with it. But finally and very briefly we also have the Holy Spirit because God's love has been poured into your hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Paul says there the Holy Spirit has been given to you. It's reminding us of the amazing truth that if you're a Christian or if you become one you are justified by the blood of Jesus Christ and God himself comes to dwell in your heart. That's what the Bible describes as baptism in the spirit and it's the experience of every single believer at the moment of their conversion. When you come to faith, when you are justified, God himself comes to dwell in your heart making you the temple of God. As a Christian you have the Holy Spirit and that of course means that God is with you. That's the great promise that God makes. He says I'll never leave you nor forsake you. How is it that God keeps that promise? He keeps it by coming to dwell in your heart by the Holy Spirit. That's the great guarantee that alienation and hostility is gone because God himself has come to make his home in you. And I want to ask the question what is the Holy Spirit going to do in your heart? If you're a Christian or if you become one what's the Holy Spirit going to do in your heart? Well there's a lot that the Bible teaches us. The Holy Spirit does a work of sanctification whereby we are renewed in our minds and made more and more like Jesus. The Holy Spirit writes God's law onto our hearts so that we think more and more biblically in our lives. And the Holy Spirit is working to produce fruit so that the reality of God's presence on the inside is visible on the outside.

The Holy Spirit does an amazing work in your heart. But here in verse 5 Paul tells us something else that the Holy Spirit is doing in your heart. He says that he is pouring God's love into your heart. Now just think about that. The Holy Spirit has got an awful lot to do in my heart and in yours. There's a lot of renovating work to be done. There's a lot of baggage in our hearts. There's a lot of sinful nonsense in my heart that needs to be sorted out. And so as the Holy Spirit comes into my heart there's a heck of a lot that he can criticise. The Holy Spirit can find an awful lot wrong with me. But Paul is telling us that he's not come to criticise. He has come to pour into your heart the deepest comfort and assurance that God loves you. So before God sorts you out he first and foremost wants to show you that he loves you so, so much. And that's why the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Adoption later on in chapter 8. By whom we cry, Abba, Father.

[37 : 21] God himself has come into your heart because he wants to pour his love into you. And for you to know that through faith in Jesus Christ you are God's precious, beloved child and he is your devoted dad. He's pouring his love into your heart. Justification is just the start. The judge has declared you righteous but that's not what the judge really wants to do. What the judge really wants to do is to make you his child, to bring you into his family and to pour his love upon you forever. That is where the Gospel is going to take you and for every single one of you it can all be yours through a simple childlike trust in Jesus Christ. Do you know all you have to say to God is this, Lord I need you. Please save me. Amen. Let us pray.

God our Father we thank you for justification by faith but we thank you that that is just the start and from there we have so many amazing blessings. Thank you God that you are our friend. Thank you that we have access to you. Thank you for the hope that we have in you and thank you that you've promised to come and dwell in our hearts by your spirit. Lord how we need you. We pray that every one of us would trust in you. Lord please give us eyes that can see how great you are and how wonderful the Gospel is. We thank you for everything. Amen.