



THE JOY OF JUSTIFICATION

SERIES: GUILT, GRACE, AND GLORY

Catalog No. 1198

Romans 5:1-2

Tenth Message

Gary Vanderet

August 15th, 1999

The fifth chapter of the Book of Romans is one of the most glorious passages in all the New Testament. The opening verse begins with the conjunction “therefore,” which connects the verses that follow with all that has gone before. Up to this point the apostle Paul has clearly shown our *need for justification*. He has painted a grim picture of the plight of mankind: We stand guilty, hopelessly lost in our sin, living under the wrath of God. Paul then went on to explain the *way of justification*: Jesus Christ came to earth and became the sin-bearer. Our sins were placed upon him, he bore them in his own body on the cross. By believing in him we are delivered from death, we are declared “Not guilty!” and given the gift of righteousness.

In the first eleven verses of chapter 5 now, the apostle will give the *results of justification*. Paul is not arguing a point, as he has been doing in the previous four chapters. He simply states his case in a series of positive claims, setting out what is our inheritance as believers. Now that we have been justified there are certain things that are true for us, and he lists the multitude of benefits. The list is so rich I will divide this passage into two parts. This morning we will look at the first three results of our justification, given in verses 1 and 2. We will conclude the section in our next study.

In these verses Paul gives not only the results of our justification, but also what should be our proper reaction to them. He uses the word “exult” or “rejoice” repeatedly throughout this passage. “Exult” is a nice religious term, one that is never used in normal 20th century conversation except in dry theological circles. “Rejoice” is a bit more familiar, but it is still not quite accurate. Almost invariably the word is translated “boast.” Boasting is simply the outward expression of where our inner confidence lies. Paul is declaring where our confidence lies, or ought to lie, as believers, as people who are justified by faith. These verses can be used as a gauge of how well we have understood and applied to our lives the first four chapters of Romans. Viewed in that light, this text is a measure of maturity, showing us whether we are growing in Christ.

The first result of our justification is that we have peace with God. Verse 1:

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ... (NASB)

J.B. Phillips renders this, “let us grasp the fact that we have peace with God.” Let us understand that we have

peace with God. Paul is not referring to a subjective feeling of peace, although certainly that too is ours as a result of our relationship with Christ. He is not talking about that “peaceful, easy feeling,” that the Eagles used to sing about, that is based on nothing but emotion. This peace is based on an objective fact.

Notice that Paul is not talking about the “peace of God,” but “peace with God.” The point, which the apostle will repeat later, is that we were God’s enemies. There was a barrier, a state of enmity between us and God, and now we have been reconciled. In the book of Colossians, the apostle says that God reconciled us to himself through Christ, making peace through the blood of the cross (Col 1:20). The war is over. We don’t have to be afraid of God any longer. We don’t have to hide from him and stay out of his way. When we kept silent about our sin, we hid from him. We regarded him as an enemy, and we avoided him. But when we confessed our sin, our eyes were opened and our perception of God changed.

The fact is, God has never been mad at us. What he is mad at is sin. And throughout eternity God has looked to the cross to take out his wrath on sin. Now that that wrath has been alleviated we are at peace with him. He is not at war with us and we are not at war with him. We belong to his family. The conflict has ended. Let us grasp that fact. That is why at the birth of Christ the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (Luke 2:14, NIV). John Stott reminds us that this peace was the paramount blessing which the prophets foretold about the Messianic age, “the *shalom* of the kingdom of God, inaugurated by Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.”¹

I will never forget the time I first grasped the significance of this peace. As a frightened, deeply insecure 18 year-old college sophomore, worried about the future, I began to read the New Testament and became deeply convicted about my sin. Then I came to understand God in a new light. I discovered that God was not the heavenly policeman I thought he was. He was not an angry judge waiting to pronounce sentence on me for everything I did wrong. God wanted to be my father. And when I received Jesus Christ, the burden that was lifted from me that night was my fear of God.

Years ago, I read a story about some Japanese soldiers who were stranded on remote islands in the Pacific after World War II. They had been living in caves, completely out of contact with the outside world, under

the impression that Japan was still at war with the United States. The Americans who found them offered them food, clothing and medical help. These men finally learned that Japan had lost the war and that peace now reigned between the former enemies. I have met some believers whose Christian lives are like that. They live as though they do not know that their war with God is over. But, the first thing that Paul says we have as a result of our justification is “peace with God.”

The second result has to do with the favored status we now enjoy in God’s presence. Verse 2a:

through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand;

J.B. Phillips translates this: “*through him we have confidently entered into this new relationship of grace, and here we take our stand.*” This translation communicates Paul’s meaning. I don’t think the apostle is referring merely to God’s undeserved love, his unmerited favor, as we normally think of grace. It is broader than that. He is referring to the “sphere of God’s grace,” as the NEB translates it. This is the privileged position of acceptance that we enjoy as believers.

Paul uses two verbs in relation to this grace, both of which describe our entrance into it and our continuance in it. First, he says, “*We have obtained our introduction...*” This verb is used in two other places in the New Testament (Eph 2:18; 3:12). One scholar says that the word “has a certain touch of formality” about it.² The image is of our being ushered into the presence of royalty. And we needed to be introduced. There was a time when we were in sin and unfit to enter God’s presence. We needed someone to bring us in.

Now, says Paul, as a result of our justification by faith through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have our introduction. Christ met us outside the throne room, took us by the hand, and walked us into the presence of God. And in his presence we found grace and mercy. Once we feared the King. It was unimaginable that we would ever be granted an audience with him. Now we not only are privileged to meet him, but welcomed in his presence. Earlier, we could never come before him, because our clothing was unsuitable and unworthy. Our righteousness was like “filthy rags,” the Scripture says. But in Jesus we have one who has the right of access, one who, having dealt with our sins, can take us and present us to the Father. He clothed us with his righteousness and took us by the hand and became our advocate.

And not only have we obtained this introduction, we stand firmly in his grace. Now that we are justified, our relationship with God comprises much more than a mere periodic visit with the King. As John Stott reminds us, we live in the temple, in the palace. He writes: “The perfect tenses [of the verbs] express this. Our relationship with God, into which justification has brought us, is not sporadic but continuous, not precarious but secure. We do not fall in and out of grace like courtiers

who may find themselves in and out of favor with their sovereign, or politicians with the public. No, we stand in it, for that is the nature of grace. Nothing can separate us from God’s love.”³ Paul will declare later, in Romans 8: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38-39, NIV).

Experiencing and enjoying our standing in grace is a hallmark of Christian maturity and stability. In “Surprised by Grace,” an essay summarizing his life, J.I. Packer describes the secret of his life and ministry in these words: “I am a shy, freaky, bookworm type person whom God has taken and set upon a rock. My stability comes from an ever fresh realization that God is my Father and I am his child. Adopted. Assured. Therefore I’m living in a less nervy, more relaxed way.” What a great, practical description of what it means to be standing in grace!

Thus we have these first two treasures as a result of our justification: peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord, and this amazing grace in which we stand in our Father’s unconditional acceptance. These are great riches, but perhaps the greatest miracle of all is found in the final phrase of Romans 5:2:

and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

We rejoice in our present peace and grace, and we rejoice in what is coming. This word “glory” which Paul uses throughout the book refers to character or worth. God’s glory is the full manifestation of his character, which is what we were destined for. God created Adam and Eve to manifest his glory, contain his person, and reflect his character. That was our destiny, too, but, as Paul puts it in Romans 3:23, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Beginning with Adam and continuing to this day, every human being who has ever lived has fallen short of the glory of God. We have not been god-like. Jesus Christ came to earth and manifested completely the character of God. And one of these days the curtain will be raised and the glory of God will be fully disclosed. Jesus Christ will appear with great power and glory. Scripture assures us of the remarkable truth that we will not only see his glory, but we will be changed into it. We will be just like him! The apostle John wrote in his epistle: “Beloved, now we are children of God and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

At that moment we will be transformed. We are being remade now, slowly being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, and that process will be completed when we see the Lord Jesus. We will be like him. Paul says that is our hope, and we rejoice in it. And that hope is not a contingency. It is not like hoping the

Giants will win the pennant! That is not the hope Paul is talking about. Hope in the New Testament is an eager anticipation of something that is real and assured. Our destiny is secure. It is going to happen. We just have to wait for it

Ray Stedman used to tell the story about a friend of his who lived North Dakota. One stormy morning in the dead of winter, when it was about 30 degrees below zero and a couple of feet of snow lay on the ground, this man looked out his window and saw the mailman leave something in his mailbox, about a quarter of a mile from his house. Wanting to see what it was, the man dressed warmly and went out into the bitter cold, the snow swirling about him, and walked to the mailbox. To his disappointment, all he found was a seed catalog. He thumbed through it and as he turned the pages, he began to be filled with the thought that spring was coming. He visualized the beauty and brilliance of the flowers and vegetables. As he stood in the snow, suddenly he felt as though spring had come. He could taste the crunch of a cucumber, smell the fragrance of red roses and feel the juice of a red-ripe tomato running down his chin. It seemed as though winter faded away for the moment and he was caught up into the beauty of spring and summer.

That is something of what Paul is trying to get us to understand and experience. Here, in the midst of the “winter of our discontent,” he wants to show us something of the glory that is waiting beyond. Even though things are tough now, heaven is our home. That is our hope. We are bound for glory.

What a blessed privilege we enjoy as people who are justified by faith! The fruits of justification relate to the past, present, and future. As we look back, because of our past forgiveness, we rejoice in the peace we have with God. In the present, we are “standing in grace” in a relationship of unconditional acceptance with God. And as we look to the future, we rejoice in the fact that our destiny is secure. We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

As we prepare for communion this morning, I want to close with a story which Phil Yancey shares in his book, *What's So Amazing About Grace?*⁴

A young girl grows up on a cherry orchard just above Traverse City, Michigan. Her parents, a bit old-fashioned, tend to overreact to her nose ring, the music she listens to, and the length of her skirts. They ground her a few times, and she seethes inside. “I hate you!” she screams at her father when he knocks on the door of her room after an argument, and that night she acts on a plan she has mentally rehearsed scores of times. She runs away.

She has visited Detroit only once before, on a bus trip with her church youth group to watch the Tigers play... she concludes that is probably the last place her parents will look for her. California, maybe, or Florida, but not Detroit.

Her second day there she meets a man who drives the

biggest car she's ever seen. He offers her a ride, buys her lunch, arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she's ever felt before. She was right all along, she decides: her parents were keeping her from all the fun.

The good life continues for...a year. The man with the big car—she calls him “Boss”—teaches her a few things that men like...She lives in a penthouse, and orders room service whenever she wants. Occasionally she thinks about the folks back home, but their lives now seem so boring...that she can hardly believe she grew up there.

She has a brief scare when she sees her picture printed on the back of a milk carton with the headline “Have you seen this child?” But by now she has blond hair, and with all the makeup and body-piercing jewelry she wears, nobody would mistake her for a child. Besides, most of her friends were runaways, and nobody squeals in Detroit.

After a year the first sallow signs of illness appear, and it amazes her how fast the boss turns mean...before she knows it she's out on the street without a penny to her name...When winter blows in she finds herself sleeping on metal grates outside the big department stores. “Sleeping” is the wrong word—a teenage girl at night in downtown Detroit can never relax her guard. Dark bands circle her eyes. Her cough worsens.

One night as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything about her life looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She feels like a little girl, lost in a cold and frightening city. She begins to whimper. Her pockets are empty and she's hungry. She needs a fix. She pulls her legs tight underneath her and shivers under the newspapers she's piled atop her coat. Something jolts a synapse of memory and a single image fills her mind: of May in Traverse City, when a million cherry trees bloom at once, with her golden retriever dashing through the rows and rows of blossomy trees in chase of a tennis ball.

God, why did I leave, she says to herself, and pain stabs at her heart...She's sobbing now, and she knows in a flash that more than anything else in the world she wants to go home.

Three straight phone calls, three straight connections with the answering machine. She hangs up without leaving a message the first two times, but the third time she says, “Dad, Mom, it's me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm catching a bus up your way, and it'll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you're not there, well, I guess I'll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada.”

It takes about seven hours for a bus to make all the stops between Detroit and Traverse City, and during that time she realizes the flaws in her plan. What if her parents are out of town and miss the message? Shouldn't she have waited another day or so until she could talk to them? And even if they are home, they probably wrote her off as dead long ago. She should have given them some time to overcome the shock.

Her thoughts bounce back and forth between those worries and the speech she is preparing for her fa-

ther. “Dad, I’m sorry. I know I was wrong. It’s not your fault; it’s all mine. Dad, can you forgive me?” She says the words over and over, her throat tightening even as she rehearses them. She hasn’t apologized to anyone in years.

[The trip seems endless. Night falls and the snow starts falling.] A deer darts across the road and the bus swerves...A sign posting the mileage to Traverse City. *Oh, God.*

When the bus finally rolls into the station, its air brakes hissing in protest, the driver announces in a crackly voice over the microphone, “Fifteen minutes, folks. That’s all we have here.” Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She checks herself in a compact mirror, smooths her hair, and licks the lipstick off her teeth. She looks at the tobacco stains on her fingertips, and wonders if her parents will notice. If they’re there.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect. Not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepare her for what she sees. There, in the concrete-walls-and-plastic-chairs bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands a group of forty brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and a grandmother and great-grandmother to boot. They’re all wearing goofy party hats and blowing noise-makers, and taped across the entire wall of the terminal is a computer-generated banner that reads, “Welcome home!”

Out of the crowd of well-wishers breaks her dad. She stares out through the tears quivering in her eyes like hot mercury and begins the memorized speech, “Dad, I’m sorry. I know...”

He interrupts her. “Hush, child. We’ve got no time for that. No time for apologies. You’ll be late for the party. A banquet’s waiting for you at home.”⁴

That is what those of us who have been justified by faith experienced when we came to Christ. After years of running, feeling alienated, and living under the wrath of God, we turned homeward to our heavenly Father and found him waiting for us with open arms. Instead of condemnation we found mercy, grace and compassion, because we have been justified by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the penalty for our sin.

© 1999 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino

1. John Stott, *Romans* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994) 139.
2. James Denney, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1970) 623, quoted by Stott, 140.
3. Stott, 140.
4. Philip Yancey, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 49-51.