

XXXI. Romans in Biblical Perspective

The Gospel of God

“Justified Freely and Forever”

Romans 5:1–5

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

May 1, 2022 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Romans 5:1-5 says [1] **Therefore**, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. [2] Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. [3] Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] 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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

There are two reasons why I am so glad to be back in Romans, this Biblical exposition of the Spirit of God through the Apostle Paul of the Gospel of God. There are two things that stand paramount and both have to do with history. One is the history of Christ's church and the place of this text in what I believe is the greatest movement of the Spirit of God that has not been surpassed since it occurred in the 16th century. This text is foundational to the Reformation. It wasn't the only movement of the Spirit of God but the greatest movement of the Spirit of God since Pentecost. Hopefully in this study I can show you why this text was so crucial in that movement of the Spirit. Secondly, is my own history. In the third and fourth year after I was converted, what is embedded in this text became clear to me, it was almost as good as getting saved all over again. So, what was it that caused at least me that kind of reaction?

Let's start with the opening verse, Romans 5:1 which says [1] **Therefore**, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. I want to transport you to the 16th Century. When Calvin embraced this text, when Luther embraced this text while teaching Romans at Whittenburg, when Zwingli, Butzer and Knox embraced this text, it was life shaking because it did not fit in the context of the theology they heard, the religion they were involved in, for they in the Roman church had a clouded, misguided and theologically abhorrent message that Romans 5:1 could not fit into.

I have on a number of occasions done crossword puzzles never with my wife and daughters because I get totally embarrassed because at times I have almost resorted to a pair of scissors to make words fit and Romans 5:1 did not fit into the theology of Rome as was taught by a corrupt clergy. It could not fit, but that became Luther's answer to his 95 problems – the 95 Theses would be addressed and much more from the truth of the Word of God as it affirms this. The first thing they had to decided was if it was ecclesiastical magisterium – is the church inerrant for if it is then I can't believe Romans 5:1 – or Biblical magisterium – is the Scripture alone our only rule of faith and practice and if that's true I have to deal with the theology of the church for it's wrong. Why doesn't Romans 5:1 fit?

It doesn't fit for the following reasons. It says 'therefore (past perfect) having (present perfect) been justified by faith...' In the theology of the Roman church that cannot be said because justification awaits sanctification. Justification is the legal term of salvation whereby guilty sinners in the eyes of God, through the work of God's grace are allowed to be called, not

forgiven, innocent. Instead of guilty condemnation, now it's innocent justification. How can that be done and God still be holy? How did you get justified in that day? First of all, you would be baptized and then the Holy Spirit would come in regeneration through the work of baptism. Then you had to proceed in your "Christian life" and you were saved and justified by faith plus works – your sanctification – which you could not know as to its efficacy until you stood in eternity and then were assigned to a place invented in the theology called purgatory whereby remaining corruption had to be purged out over years then out there somewhere you could be declared righteous and received.

In other words, it was the exact opposite of what has been taught here at Briarwood for 60 plus years from the pastors and elders which is this; your sanctification does not add to your justification. Your sanctification is the act of love, thanksgiving and worship to God for your justification. You don't live a life of obedience to Christ – uneven, imperfect, yet intentional – for grace but you live that life in grace. You don't live that life for salvation, you live that life for your Savior who has made you right before God. It is Christ and Christ alone. The works whereby you are saved are not yours, they are His. His obedience is how you are saved.

To briefly review what we have covered so far in this series the first thing the book of Romans gets to is the exposition of the Gospel of God. In Romans 1:1-16 Paul is writing to the church at Rome because at the time he cannot get to them in person and he is telling them he is unashamed and eager to preach the Gospel of God to them. Since he can't get to them in person he is writing them an exposition of the Gospel of God, the Good News and the theme verses for the book of Romans is Romans 1:16-17 which says [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it (Gospel) is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it (Gospel) the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Sometimes when I read the Bible I have no idea why the divisions of chapters and verse are where they are. One of the things that utterly befuddles me is why there would be a chapter division in front of the word 'therefore.' By definition, the word 'therefore' has to do with what comes before it so to understand what is about to be said you have to understand what was just said before the word therefore was used. To say 'therefore having been justified (declared innocent)' is unbelievably challenging to understand in light of the Bible. In the book of Job, Job says five times 'how can a man be just before God, given who we are?' How can a man, where everything is wrong with us, ever be right with God and that is what Job kept telling his friends. Now there is a promise that in Christ by faith we are not just forgiven and pardoned but innocent. Instead of condemnation – guilty – we are justified, innocent. Job said it and Paul defines it.

Why is it important that the Gospel be a message conveying the power of God? To be saved you need the supernatural intervention of the Almighty and it's available to everyone who believes. The Gospel is what declares us righteous before God. Then Paul sums up the first three chapters of Romans in Romans 3:23 which says [23] *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* That includes everyone. This means you are born spiritually dead. We're not sin sick – we're sin dead. We're not floundering in the ocean of sin wanting someone to throw us a life preserver but we're at the bottom of the ocean of sin with a ten-thousand-pound rock on top of us. We helpless and hopeless and there is no one in humanity born of Adam that can save us because they all have the same problem we do. Man made religion can't save us.

Paul even goes back to the Old Testament using Abraham as an example. He says circumcision can't save us for Abraham was saved by grace and the Gospel in the anticipation of

Christ. Genesis 15:6 says [6] *And he (Abraham) believed the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness.* Abraham was saved through an Alien righteousness that was given to him and because it became his that made him acceptable before God. He didn't know the Promised One, he just knew the promises, but he believed in the promises of God by believing in God and God fulfills those promises. Who saved Abraham? Jesus, the same One that saves you. Who's righteousness clothed Abraham? Jesus, just like His righteousness clothes you. Who's power saved Abraham? The power of God, the same power that saves you and it was done by faith, not by works. Abraham was saved at Genesis 15 but wasn't circumcised until Genesis 17 and the Law wasn't going to come for another 430 years, through Moses.

The grace that saved Abraham is what came to light at the Reformation. It was grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and the Scripture alone is our only rule of faith and practice. If the churches, counsels and clerics err which they all do, God's Word is inerrant and this is the Good News. The Good News in Romans 3 tells us we have a bad heart (helpless) and need a new one. Then it says we're hopeless because there is none who is good or righteous, no not one. There is none who seek God for they have all turned aside to their own way and our iniquity is ever before us. Our heart is so evil it turns our tongues into venomous snakes for the poison of the asp is upon on our tongue and the tongue speaks from the heart. The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. We also have a bad record; none are righteous and heaven is only for the righteous. We have no righteousness. Hell is for the wages of sin; eternal condemnation – those who commit treason against the God of glory – of the unmixed wrath of God for all eternity. I have sin and therefore I am born with the ticket to the abyss. God says He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished (Exodus 34:7, Nahum 1:3). The soul that sins will surely die for God is holy.

Paul says 'I have Good News!' Our hope comes from the Lord and our hope is the Lord. John 3:16 says [16] *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* I believe Christians work hard; we just don't work hard to get to heaven. We work hard for the One who came from heaven to save us to bring us to heaven. My problem was met by God's Son who is my Savior and solution. He first of all, gives me a new heart so I can come to Him by faith. You didn't come by faith and you were born again, no! You were born again which is why you came by faith. Jesus said in John 6:44, [44] *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* You must be born again because until you are born again you cannot see or enter the Kingdom of God. We are dead, blind and deaf and that's why grace is so amazing. Through His amazing love and His amazing grace He gave us eyes to see, ears to hear and by faith we came to Christ.

Jesus doesn't give you a patch-up heart or a coach-up heart or a religiously therapeutic massaged heart but He gives you a new heart and you come to Christ. When you come to Christ you become justified because now you have a new record for you had a bad record because of what it contained – sin – and what it didn't contain – righteousness, but then Jesus steps forward and obeys the Father. The obedience of Christ is my hope. Because of what Jesus did on the cross II Corinthians 5:21 says [21] *For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.* All those sacrifices in the Old Testament that couldn't save us were telling us how we were going to be saved and that is a substitutionary sacrifice – not a lamb, bull or goat – but the Lamb of God. The Gospel of God is God's righteousness.

God not only handles our personal spiritual problem where we get a new heart but He handles our everlasting legal problem – He takes away our crimes against Him to the fullest, by dying on the cross in our place. That is why He was sweating blood in the Garden for He knew the cup of the unmixed wrath of God, the hell that was going to be poured out upon Him to satisfy the justice of God so that all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity would be eradicated and we're forgiven, pardoned and set free from all the guilt and shame because Jesus has taken it away through the love of God in Christ.

What did Jesus do in His obedience when He took sins upon Himself? He took our sins – He became passive. The one who was actively obedient with perfect righteousness, now passively received our sins. There was six trials Jesus had to go through and He was innocent on every one of six human trials but in the court of God He became guilty because our sins were placed upon Him. The judgment of God fell on Him who bore our sins and He was paying for them. Mark 15:34 says [34] *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?"* which means, "My God, my God, **why have You forsaken Me?**" This is hell upon Him and He was forsaken because He was guilty of the imputed sins of every one of us who know Him as Lord and Savior. This is His passive obedience.

As He is doing this the blood of Christ is cleansing us and His active obedience provides for us a perfect righteousness in His life that is put to our account. We are not just forgiven, we're accepted. We're not just pardoned, we're innocent. We're not just 'not guilty' because He took guilt and shame away but we're innocent and the gates of heaven are opened because we have a perfect righteousness. We are cleansed by His blood and the gates of hell are shut. We are clothed with His righteousness and the gates of heaven are open.

Here are the five legacies blessings we get who are justified by faith in Christ. One, is we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). We have the peace of God and peace with God. We are born at enmity with Christ but in Christ we are justified, innocent and we have peace with God.

A second legacy blessing is we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand (Romans 5:2). We stand before Him and we stand in Him. In this world we stand for Him. We don't have to wait once a year for someone to go into the holy of holies for we have become the holy of holies and at any point in time we can go into the throne of God for He dwells within us. He has made the way clean by His blood. We have access to Him at any time, any place and any moment.

The third legacy blessing is we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2). This is why the Lord's Day worship is the greatest privilege and I hope one day will be embraced by all of God's people as the greatest priority of the saved. Glory, praise and worship to God is the very heartbeat of our life.

The fourth legacy blessing is [3] *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, [5] and hope does not put us to shame...* (Romans 5:3-5a). In other words, our suffering isn't punishment but it's the school bell ringing. Jesus gives a double benediction when He says in Matthew 5:11-12, [11] *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."* Whenever we suffer for Christ's sake in this world for the providences of God many times are hard but we end up rejoicing because we know God never promised us that all things are good but all things are working together for good. He is doing something in us, on us and through us, through the suffering that is burning out the dross in our life.

I have faced the hard providences like you have and I want to be the first one to confess, if I had God's power, I would have changed it, but if I have God's wisdom and knew what God knows is coming through it, I wouldn't change a thing. He knows what He is doing in us, to us and through us so we rejoice in the sufferings because of Him who is in it working on us.

The fifth legacy blessing is you have the Spirit of God and because of that God's love has been poured out into our hearts because of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). We are faultless before His throne, we stand redeemed and accepted.

Here is my takeaway. It has to do with the 'therefore' in Romans 5:1. The previous three verses say in Romans 4:23-25, [23] *But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, [24] but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, [25] who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* My sins are gone because they have been taken away at the cross along with my guilt and shame. I'm legally pardoned and His righteousness has been given to me from that same cross. At the cross He cancelled my sin debt and gave me His righteousness. If you have come to Christ this is why you can sing with abandonment, 'On Christ the solid rock I stand, faultless before His throne!' Christ took God's wrath for us so that God's holiness has been satisfied. From the cross Christ pours forth His righteousness upon us so that we are accepted in the beloved.

J. Gresham Machen was a man who had faithfully stood for Christ against the theological apostasy of his day and was disciplined out of the church because of it, lost his employment at Princeton Seminary even though he was the most marvelous professor after the death of B. B. Warfield who was also professor of theology at Princeton Seminary. From that came my alma matter, Westminster Seminary that was founded by Machen and a dear friend of his, Ned Stonehouse, a New Testament scholar. In the opening days of the church there were those that had left in order to be faithful to Christ, and Machen goes to visit three of these little congregations that came about out in South Dakota during the Christmas break as he traveled by train to get there.

The trains were not heated in 1937 and there in the biting cold his dear friend Ned Stonehouse pleading with him not to go and said he needed to rest. Machen said 'I must go.' His friend said 'they are small churches' and he said 'it doesn't matter.' Machen went and poured himself out as a drink offering. He did catch a cold on the way that did turn into bronchitis then pneumonia then to double pneumonia and on January 1, 1937 he was breathing his last breath.

The last thing he wrote was a telegram to his dear colleague who I wished I could have met for I have studied him a great deal for he was the professor of systematic theology at Westminster Seminary named John Murray. Machen wrote to Murray saying 'John, the active obedience of Christ for me, I am thankful, praise God – no hope without it.'

So, are you hopeless? You are if you are without it. Or are you filled with the blessed Hope? We don't have a gospel of cope with sins, for we have a Gospel of Hope who delivers us a Savior, who delivers us from our sins and imperfectly from their power in our sanctification and one day in glorification their presence. We have that because we have a Savior who went to the cross to redeem us and atone for our sins.

How do we know that what He did set us free and makes us right with God? On that cross He said this when He drank that cup to the bottom; "It is finished!" I know it satisfied God's justice because on the third day God the Father replied 'Amen' and He raised Him. He lives and all in Him live – right with God and God right within them.

As the hymn *One Day* so well puts it;
Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me;
Buried, He carried my sins far away;
Rising, He justified freely forever:
One day He's coming—O glorious day!

That Day will either be the most horrific Day of your existence or the most glorious Day that will usher you into eternity. It all depends on what you are doing with this Jesus today? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much that we could be in Your Word together. I pray that the inadequacies of the one giving this study would be overruled by Your commitment through the foolishness of the message preached to do Your work of salvation. If there is anyone reading this who is seeking that means that You have brought them to this because we don't seek but You seek us for You seek to save the lost. Today if they haven't come to Christ, Father, please send them to Christ this day. For those reading this who know You, please assure them from the cross to the empty tomb that they in Christ by faith have been justified and the evidence and blessings of peace with God, access to God, rejoicing in a life of obedience to the glory of God, even rejoicing in suffering for God knowing we are sealed, sanctified and sent by the Spirit of God poured out upon us. Praise God that our blessings flow, I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.