

## Session 5

### AT PEACE

All who accept the gospel find peace with God.

## ROMANS 5:1-11

### FIRST THOUGHTS

We live with a basic understanding of “cause and effect.” With everything we see or experience we tend to look for some type of cause. Paul followed a similar line of logic as he walked his Roman readers through the reality of salvation and the Christian life. Sin has an effect and so does faith in Jesus.

(In PSG, p. 43) **Why is it important to find the primary cause behind some type of event? How might a person go about identifying the specific cause that created a specific event?**

### UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

#### ROMANS 5:1-21

After using Abraham as an example of one who was made righteous by faith (chap. 4), Paul turned his attention to the results of justification. The first half of chapter 5 can be divided into three parts. In verses 1-5, Paul listed the benefits of justification: peace with God, access to grace, and the hope of glory. We can even rejoice in our problems because we know God will use them to produce a proven character within us. God’s love poured into us assures us this hope will not disappoint us.

In verses 6-8, Paul recorded how God demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die for us. Paul pointed out the magnitude of God’s love by reminding believers how difficult it would be to find someone willing to offer his life even for a person of moral character. How unlikely it would be to find someone who would give his life to die for rebellious sinners, and yet this is what Jesus did.

In verses 9-11, Paul introduced the concept of reconciliation. Jesus’ death not only put believers in right standing with God, but it changed our hostile relationship with God into a relationship marked by peace that will one day result in our eternal salvation.

In the second half of the chapter (vv. 12-21), Paul again picked up the refrain of no distinction (3:22-23). Rather than the categories of Jew and Gentile, Paul gathered all of humanity into one group. We have all been affected by sin, and we all have the gift of grace available to us. Paul traced the entry of sin and death into the world by the transgression of one man, and then death spread to all people because all people sinned (5:12). However, just as death reigned because of the sin of one man, so God’s gracious gift through Jesus Christ overflows for many (v. 15).

Just as Adam’s disobedience led to his sinful act that brought condemnation to the many, so also Jesus’ obedience led to His righteous act that will bring justification and life to the many (vv. 18-19). Although sin reigned in death, “grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:21).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### JUSTIFIED WITH BENEFITS (ROM. 5:1-5)

#### VERSES 1-2

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>2</sup> We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

The phrase *since we have been declared righteous by faith* summarizes not only the preceding verse (4:25) but also the entire letter up to this point. Our right standing before God is the result of our faith in Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

The result of our justification is that we have *peace with God*. Just as God initiated the atoning sacrifice of Jesus that led to our justification (3:25), so our peace with God is not dependent on us but is *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. For Paul, peace was more than a subjective state of mind; it described the believer's relationship with God that came as a result of our justification. Jesus told His disciples that the peace He left them was categorically different from what they would experience in the world (John 14:27). This peace is not just the absence of conflict. In the midst of suffering in the world, the disciples would have peace because Jesus had conquered the world (16:33). Paul reminded the Philippian believers that the "peace of God" would protect them because the "God of peace" would be with them (Phil. 4:7,9).

In verse 2, Paul began to enumerate the benefits that come from peace with God. The Greek word translated *access* appears only two other times in the New Testament (Eph. 2:18; 3:12). In both cases, the believer's access is to God. Here the access is *into this grace in which we stand*. By emphasizing grace, Paul reminded the Roman believers that all the benefits described in this passage are the result of God's gracious gift. We live in the sphere of that grace. At the end of this chapter Paul made clear that though sin reigned through death, "grace will reign through righteousness, resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:21). Believers have firm footing when they stand in God's grace.

Paul's access to God led him to reflect on the hope that was his in Christ. The Greek word translated *rejoice* is the same word that was translated "boast" in the last two chapters. Although pride in one's own attempts to keep the law is foolish, pride in what God has accomplished in Christ is appropriate. Paul's reflection on the *hope of the glory of God* led him to brag on God. The glory in question probably refers to the future restoration of the glory present in the garden of Eden, a glory that Paul said would be incomparable (Rom. 8:17-19).

#### VERSES 3-4

<sup>3</sup> And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, <sup>4</sup> endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope.

Paul moved immediately from bragging about the glory that was to be revealed to bragging about his *afflictions*. The Greek word translated *afflictions* was used to describe that which produced pressure on the individual, either physical or emotional. It was used to describe the pain of childbirth (John 16:21), the suffering produced by a famine (Acts 7:11), and persecution caused by Stephen's death (Acts 11:19).

It is easy for us to view suffering as the opposite of hope and peace. Paul's point was that God often uses our afflictions to shape our character in His image. Rather than being crushed by the pressure, God can redeem suffering for His glory. When writing to the Corinthians, Paul used the churches in Macedonia as examples: in the

midst of extreme suffering, “their abundant joy and their extreme poverty overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part” (2 Cor. 8:2).

Paul explained how believers could respond to suffering in this way by pointing out the virtues suffering can produce. The first virtue is *endurance*, which describes the ability to bear up under the pressure produced by suffering. As an athlete must demonstrate endurance if he or she is to finish the race, the believer must bear up under the difficulties of the Christian life (Heb. 12:1,12-13).

As we endure hardship, God produces within us *proven character*. The Greek word used here is found only in Paul’s writings, primarily in Second Corinthians, and can describe the process of testing or the outcome of that testing. The extreme suffering experienced by the Macedonian believers, mentioned above, was described as a severe test of suffering. That they passed the test was seen in their proven character, evidenced by their amazing generosity (2 Cor. 8:2). Paul reminded the Philippian believers of Timothy’s proven character, demonstrated by his service to Paul in the gospel ministry (Phil. 2:22). The proven character God produces in us through our patient endurance shines through when we experience suffering. That character produces hope. Paul will deal more fully with hope in chapter 8.

## VERSE 5

<sup>5</sup> This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

*This hope* is not wishful thinking based only on a desire for a specific outcome. Hope is a confident expectation that God will act to bring to completion what He began in Christ. The Greek word translated *disappoint* is related to the word Paul used at the beginning of the letter to show his confidence in the gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel” (Rom. 1:16). The hope of the glory of God will not let us down.

Paul had this confidence *because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts*. Our ability to love others is the result of God’s love that overflows in us *through the Holy Spirit*. Because of our right standing before God based on Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for our sins, we have peace and hope that will weather all of life’s storms.

**Can you think of times in your life when God has used difficulties to produce endurance, character, and hope? Were you able to see the difficulties as opportunities for growth, or did you see them only as obstacles to your own happiness?**

JUSTIFIED THROUGH HIS DEATH (ROM. 5:6-8)

## VERSE 6

<sup>6</sup> For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

Paul used three phrases to define humanity’s position relative to God: *helpless, ungodly*, and sinners (5:8). The first word is often used to describe a person who is physically or emotionally ill or weak. In this case it describes us as powerless to accomplish anything on our own. The second and third words describe humanity as those in open rebellion to God’s law. When writing to the believers in Ephesus, Paul described his former life as one that was focused on pleasing himself rather than obeying God (Eph. 2:3).

Paul also said that Jesus’ death happened *at the right time*. Some Bible teachers see this phrase as describing the right time in relation to salvation history, comparing the phrase here with Paul’s wording in Galatians: “When the time came to completion” (Gal. 4:4). Others have suggested that *the right time* was that time when God was ready to pour out His wrath on sin and sinners. In either case, Paul’s point is that there was nothing arbitrary about the timing of Jesus’ death. It came at the time designated by the Father, and as such it was *the right time*. Under those circumstances, *Christ died for the ungodly*.

## VERSES 7-8

<sup>7</sup> For rarely will someone die for a just person — though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul demonstrated the truly remarkable nature of Jesus' death with two parallel sentences that have a slight difference in meaning. In the first sentence, Paul spoke of the difficulty in finding someone who would be willing to die for *a just person*. A difficulty arises over the relationship between a *just person* and a *good person*. Several suggestions have been offered to explain the difference, but the most logical seems to be to understand a *good person* as someone who stands in a positive relationship with the person who will die for him. It is difficult for us to imagine dying for a total stranger, even a morally-upright stranger. However, it is much easier to imagine someone being willing to die for a family member or a life-long friend. Neither of these situations explains what Jesus did; He died for people who ignored Him, and who turned against Him, and who finally killed Him.

The Greek word translated *proves* can also be translated “demonstrates” or “shows.” God's love was on display in the cross for the world to see. Paul ended this section as he began, looking again at the object and timing of God's love: the ungodly who were still sinners when Christ died for them. In verse 6 Paul said that Christ died for the ungodly; here *Christ died* for us. Rather than dying for those who were righteous or good, Christ died for sinners like us.

**Can you think of a situation in which you would willingly give your life for the life of another person? What characteristics of that person might influence you to die for him or her? What was there about us that led Jesus to offer His life for ours?**

## JUSTIFIED EQUALS RECONCILIATION (ROM. 5:9-11)

### VERSE 9

<sup>9</sup> How much more then, since we have now been declared righteous by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath.

At the beginning of this chapter Paul linked our being declared righteous through faith to the peace God has given us through His Son (5:1). In verse 9, Paul linked our right standing with God to our future salvation. In other places, Paul stressed that right standing before God was given by grace (3:24), through faith in Christ (4:23-25). Here Paul added that right standing with God was accomplished *by his blood*. The *wrath* from which believers will be saved is the final judgment God will direct against sin and evil. For believers, Christ “will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28).

Paul's claim took the form of an argument from greater to lesser: if the more difficult (greater) statement is true, then the less difficult (lesser) statement must surely be true as well. God has completed the task of declaring us righteous through the sacrificial death of His Son (Rom. 3:25). How much more can we trust Him to save us from God's coming wrath directed toward sin?

### VERSE 10

<sup>10</sup> For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

In verse 10, Paul added a description of our pre-conversion status before God: *we were enemies*. In the previous section he described us as “helpless” (5:6) and “sinners” (5:8). Paul introduced the word *reconciled* in place of

“declared righteous” (v. 9). Reconciliation occurs when a hostile relationship is exchanged for a peaceful one. The hostile relationship may be between two humans, such as men who are fighting (Acts 7:26) or a failed marriage (1 Cor. 7:11). In writing to the Corinthian believers, Paul made it clear that reconciliation happened at God’s initiative and that God was actively pursuing reconciliation with the world through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-20). Specifically, that reconciliation is made possible *through the death of his Son*, which parallels the phrase “by his blood” in verse 9. Justification describes God’s work in declaring righteous those who have faith in Jesus; reconciliation emphasizes the changed relationship we have with God because He has declared us righteous. Our status has changed from enemy of God to child of God.

In verse 9, Paul indicated what we will be saved from (“wrath”). In verse 10, Paul said we will be saved *by his life*. The meaning of this phrase is not immediately clear. Some Bible teachers have suggested Paul was referring to the life of Christ in the believer. (See Phil. 1:21.) However, given the parallel between “wrath” in verse 9 and “life” in verse 10, others have suggested Paul was emphasizing the present life available to believers—a life that allows them to overcome the power of sin in their daily lives. We share the new life made available to us through the work of Christ.

## VERSE 11

<sup>11</sup> And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation.

In the phrase, *not only that*, Paul probably intended to point back to verse 10 as a whole. Not only have we been reconciled to God, which will lead to our ultimate salvation, *but we also rejoice in God*. Paul ended this section as he had begun. Just as we rejoice in the hope of glory (v. 2) and even in our afflictions (v. 3), we rejoice in our new relationship with God. In verse 10, Paul emphasized that our reconciliation was “through the death of his Son.” Here our rejoicing is *through our Lord Jesus Christ*. God has taken the initiative in reconciling the world to Himself. He accomplished our reconciliation through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross. This reconciliation is a present possession. Though we wait patiently for the consummation of our salvation, *we have now received this reconciliation*. We should be bragging on God daily for what He has done for us in Christ.

**Reconciliation changes relationships. Can you think of concrete ways that your changed relationship with God has affected your relationships with people you interact with each day?**

## KEY DOCTRINE

*Salvation (Justification)*

Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God (Gal. 3:13).

## BIBLE SKILL

*Compare similar passages by the same writer.*

Compare Galatians 2:15-17 and 3:10-14 with Romans 5:1-2. Identify common words, phrases, and themes in these passages. What insights do you gain about justification as a result of this comparison? Write a summary statement based on the comparison.

## BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “Justified, the Meaning,” available digitally in the Spring 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator* for Explore the Bible at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).