

Romans: The Good News of God

Standing in Grace

Romans 5:2a

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Scripture

In the first four chapters of his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul explains how we come into a right relationship with God. The good news of God is that we can come into a right relationship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is called *justification by faith*.

Now, as he begins chapter 5, the apostle Paul writes about the *blessings* of justification. Having explained *how* we receive justification, he now explains *what* justification gives us.

In Romans 5:1-11 we read of several blessings of justification. Let's read Romans 5:1-11, paying special attention to verse 2a, which is our text for today:

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 More than that, 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.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5:1-11)

Introduction

Dr. James Montgomery Boice, in his commentary on Romans, and on which today's sermon is based, says that "one of the most important principles of sound Bible interpretation is that not everything written in the Bible is for everybody."¹

Old Bill's hospital bed is surrounded by well-wishers, but it doesn't look good. Suddenly, he motions frantically to the pastor for something to write on. The pastor lovingly hands him a pen and a piece of paper. Bill uses his last bit of energy to scribble a note, and then dies.

The pastor thinks it best not to look at the note right away, so he places it in his jacket pocket.

At Bill's funeral, as the pastor is finishing his eulogy, he realizes he's wearing the same jacket when Bill died.

"Bill handed me a note just before he died," he says. "I haven't looked at it, but knowing Bill, I'm sure there's a word of inspiration in it for us all."

Opening the note, he reads aloud, "Help! You're standing on my oxygen hose!"

We acknowledge every day that messages are addressed to certain individuals and not to others. One of the tasks of a pastor is to make sure that he delivers the right message to the right person.

This is important to note because the first four chapters of Paul's letter to the Romans is a message for everyone. In those chapters Paul explains how a person is justified by faith.

Now, beginning in Romans 5:1 the apostle Paul begins to explain the *blessings* of justification by faith for those who have already been justified by faith.

Review

In Romans 5 the apostle Paul explains the blessings of justi-

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 511-518.

fication by faith.

Before we begin today's lesson, let's quickly review what we have learned so far.

I. Our Position in Christ (5:1a)

Let us notice in the first place our position in Christ.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1a, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith. . . ."

The apostle Paul begins by stating our position in Christ. If we are Christians, then we have been justified by faith.

He is summarizing all that he has said in Romans 1-4. He is summarizing all that is true of a Christian.

If we are Christians, then we have been justified by faith, and that is our position in Christ.

II. Our Possessions in Christ (5:1b-2)

But what are the blessings of our justification? What are our possessions in Christ?

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1b, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, *we have*. . ." certain possessions.

It is important to note that these possessions are the sure and true possessions of all Christians at all times.

A. Peace with God (5:1b)

Our first possession in Christ is peace with God.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:1b, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Before we were justified by faith we were at war with God. But, having been justified by faith, we are now at peace with God.

Peace *with* God is not the same as the peace *of* God.

Peace with God is a permanent change of relationship with

God. It is objective and never changes.

However the peace of God is subjective and variable, depending upon how we react to certain situations.

Lesson

In Romans 5:2a, we come to a second blessing of justification, a second possession in Christ.

B. Standing in Grace (5:2a)

Our second possession in Christ is standing in grace.

The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:2a, **“Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand.”**

1. A Few Important Definitions

There are a number of very important words in this verse: **access, faith, grace, and stand**. But these can be used in different ways, and it is not easy to see how they all go together in this sentence.

Let me define each one, taking them in the order I think will get us to the meaning of this verse most quickly.

*The first word is **grace**.* **Grace** is usually defined as “God’s unmerited favor.” But **grace** is actually more than that. It is “God’s unmerited favor in spite of our demerit.” You see, it is not that we are somehow innocent or neutral. No. We were actually at war with God, and we had broken his law. We rightly and fully deserve God’s wrath and condemnation. But, instead of conviction we receive forgiveness. That is **grace**.

Grace is what lies behind God’s entire plan of redemption. That is why Paul can use it in writing to the Ephesians, saying, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not

your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

*The second word is **faith**.* The **faith** referred to in Romans 5:2a is the **faith** in Jesus Christ by which we are justified. It is not merely knowledge and assent, but it includes entrusting ourselves fully and completely to Christ.

*The third word is **access**.* The Greek term lying behind this word **access** is *prosagoge*, which can mean “access, or right to enter, or freedom to enter, or even introduction.” Since it is used of the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer in Ephesians 2:18, it has sometimes been said that the Holy Spirit “introduces” us to God.

What does the word mean here? The important thing to see about its use in Romans 5:2a is that it is preceded by the verb “**we have . . . obtained.**” The tense of the verb indicates that something happened in the past, but has continuing effects into the present. Therefore, just as we have been justified, and we continue to remain justified, so we **have obtained access** into grace, and we continue to have access into this grace in which we stand.

*And the fourth word is **stand**.* By now we can see how it should be taken. By the grace of God we have been brought into the position of justification, and that is the grace in which we have the privilege to **stand**. Before, we were standing without, as children of wrath. Now we are standing within, not as enemies or even as pardoned criminals, but as sons and daughters of Almighty God.

2. Access to the King

In his short but valuable commentary on Romans, Ray C. Stedman illustrates the nature of our standing in grace by the Old Testament story of Queen Esther.²

Esther was a young Jewish woman living in the days after the fall of Jerusalem, as a result of which the majority of the Jewish people had been carried off to Babylon. At the time of her story,

² Ray C. Stedman, *From Guilt to Glory*, vol. 1, *Hope for the Helpless* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1978), 134-136.

the king was Xerxes and he was ruling at Susa.

Xerxes sought a bride to replace the deposed Queen Vashti and found one in Esther. She became his queen after being taken from the home of her cousin and guardian, Mordecai, to live in Xerxes' palace.

A great enemy of the Jews named Haman was also living in the palace. Haman hatched a plot against the Jews in which Xerxes unwittingly signed a decree that would result in death for all the Jews in Persia. Mordecai got a message to Esther, telling her about the plot and saying that she must go to the king and tell him what was about to happen and prevent it.

But, Esther explained, there was a problem. It was a law of the Persians that no one could approach the king unbidden. If a person approached the king in the inner court without being summoned, there was only one result: death—unless the king held out his golden scepter to that person and thus spared his or her life. Although Queen Esther had not been summoned to the king for thirty days, even she could not approach him without danger of being put to death.

Mordecai explained to Esther that she had undoubtedly been brought to her position “for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14) and that there was no one else who could intervene to save her people.

Esther agreed to go to the king. She spent three days in prayer and fasting, asking the Jews through Mordecai also to fast and pray with and for her. Then, at the end of her period of preparation, she put on her most royal robes and stepped into the king's inner hall. The king was sitting on his throne, facing the entrance. When he saw Esther he was so pleased with her beauty that he stretched out the scepter that was in his hand and thus accepted her. So Esther had access to the king, and through her the Jews were eventually spared.

This is what Paul says has happened to us through the work of Jesus Christ and the application of that work to us in our justification.

But the parallel is not exact, and for us the result is even

more wonderful.

Esther was beautiful, and the king was pleased with her.

But, in our case, sin has made us highly offensive to God and we have not even tried to approach him. Still, God has loved us. He sought us when we were far from him. He sent his Son to die for us, taking the punishment for our sin upon himself. Now, because of Christ's work, we have been brought into the palace where we enjoy God's favor and have continuing access to him.

The author of Hebrews puts it this way: "Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. . . ." (Hebrews 10:19, 22).

3. Boldness and Confidence

That aforementioned verses from Hebrews obviously deal with prayer. This suggests that, although Romans 5:2a is not speaking explicitly about prayer, all this obviously has bearing on our right to approach God in prayer and receive things from him.

Besides, we are encouraged in this thinking by the fact that one of the key words of Romans 5:2a, "**access**" (*prosagoge*), occurs in two other passages in the New Testament and that each of these has to do with prayer. Both are in Ephesians.

The first is Ephesians 2:18: "For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

And the second is Ephesians 3:12: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."

These passages teach two things about prayer, which are based on the fact that we have been given access to God the Father through his work of justification.

First, our access to God is direct. By this I mean that we do not need human mediators in order to have access to God. Of course, we do need to have access to the Father through the one true Mediator, Jesus Christ. He has opened the door to the Father,

and given us access to the Father once and forever.

This truth is taught in Ephesians 2:18. It comes at the end of a paragraph in which Paul has been referring to the barriers that once divided men and women from God and from each other.

In the Jewish temple, to which he refers, there were walls designed to protect the approach to God. If you were to have approached the Temple Mount in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus Christ, you would have been confronted with a wall that divided the Courtyard of the Gentiles from what lay beyond. That wall meant what it said. No Gentile could go beyond it, and the penalty for violating the sanctity of the inner courtyard was death. Even the Romans upheld this penalty, and there were signs placed in warning, two of which have since been discovered and are in museums.

Jews could go forward. But even Jewish worshipers would soon come to a second wall. This wall divided the Courtyard of the Women from the Courtyard of the Men. Here all Jewish women had to stop.

Beyond that was still another wall, and past it only Jewish priests could go. They could perform the sacrifices and enter the Holy Place of the temple. But here there was a final barrier, the great curtain that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. Beyond that barrier only one person could ever go, and that was the High Priest, who could enter only on the Day of Atonement to present the blood of the sacrifice that had been offered for the sins of the people moments before in the outer courtyard.

That elaborate system taught that the way to God was barred even for the elect people of Israel. God could be approached, but only through the mediation of the priests. Gentiles were without access at all, unless they first became Jews and approached by the Jewish route of priestly mediation.

But now, says Paul, those dividing walls of partition have been broken down, and the reason is that when Jesus died, God removed the ultimate barrier, the curtain that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

Do you remember how the great curtain was torn in two from

top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:51)? This signified that atonement for sin had been made by Christ and accepted by God. The barriers of sin were now gone for all who would approach God on the basis of the death of Christ. For these—everyone who has been justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone—access to God is now direct. There are no human mediators needed, none save Jesus!

Therefore, you can come to God directly at any time of day or in any place and know that he hears you and will answer your prayers.

And second, our access to God is effective. This truth is taught by Ephesians 3:12. It emphasizes that through faith in Christ “we have boldness and access with confidence.” Confidence in what? Obviously that he will hear us and answer our prayers according to his wise and perfect will.

We can pray wrongly, of course, and we often do. But when we pray according to the wise will of God, we can be confident that he will both hear us and answer our prayers.

My favorite story in this respect is about Martin Luther and his good friend and assistant Frederick Myconius. One day Myconius became sick and was expected to die within a short time. On his bed he wrote a loving farewell note to Luther; but when Luther received it he sat down instantly and wrote this reply: “I command you in the name of God to live, because I still have need of you in the work of reforming the church. . . . The Lord will never let me hear that you are dead, but will permit you to survive me. For this I am praying. This is my will, and may my will be done, because I seek only to glorify the name of God.”

The words seem shocking to us, because we live in less fervent times. But Luther’s prayer was clearly of God and therefore effective. For, although Myconius had already lost the ability to speak when Luther’s letter came, in a short time he revived, and he lived six more years, surviving Luther by two months.

Can we be bold in prayer, as Luther was? There is a hymn by John Newton, the former slave trader and preacher, that puts it

quite well:

Come, my soul, thy Suit prepare:
Jesus loves to answer prayer.
He himself has bid thee pray,
Therefore will not say thee nay.

Thou art coming to a King,
Large petitions with thee bring.
For his grace and power are such,
None can ever ask too much.

Not only is our access to God direct, it is also effective. That means that when you pray according to the wise will of God, you can be confident that he will both hear you and answer your prayers.

Conclusion

Friends, our approach to God may be intimate. We know this because Jesus taught us to use the intimate term *abba*, meaning “daddy,” when we pray. It is the term Jesus used when praying, and it is the term he passed on to us: “Our *Abba*, who art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9).

God is our King, which is why we can be bold in bringing large requests to him. But he is also our dear heavenly Father, and the access that we have as a result of our justification through the work of Christ has brought us into his home as beloved sons and daughters.

Let us remember that as we pray. Amen.

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and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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PRAAYER:

Our Father, thank you for the blessings of justification by faith.

I thank you for the blessing of standing in grace.

We are so grateful that just as we have been justified by faith, we now stand in the grace of God.

And because of that grace we have confidence that you both hear and answer our prayers. Give us boldness and confidence that when we pray you will answer our prayers in accordance with your divine will.

And all of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.