

Romans: The Hope of Righteousness (part 1 of 9)

Peace with God Means Hope in Hardship

Romans 5:1-5

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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 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.
Romans 5:1-5 (ESV)

God is not boring. Theology is relevant. Christianity works.

One of the reasons why I am a Christian is because I am convinced that the Bible is true, and I have personally seen the way that a relationship with Jesus has changed me and thousands of other people. One of the reasons I love being a pastor and teaching the Bible is because I am convinced that what is written for us in the Scriptures is real, practical, and helpful. In other words, there is a direct connection between what we talk about on Sunday and the real world in which we all live.

I saw a great example of this on Facebook this week. Tyler Trent, one of our teenagers, who is battling cancer, posted a photo from his hospital room where he was getting his third round of chemotherapy. His dad took what we had been talking about on Sundays regarding identity ("God is holy," "I am not," "Jesus Saves," "Christ is my life") and wrote it on his hospital room door. In the reflection you can see his dad taking the picture and you can see the hospital bed. The image stunned me and moved me as I looked at it. It was a great reminder that what we talk about and what we sing about in this sanctuary matters.

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Back to Romans

Today we resume our expositional study of Romans, and I am thrilled to be starting back into this glorious book. What's more, I'm glad to be starting Romans 5 because it serves as an important turning point. We are going to take nine Sundays to study chapters 5-7, and then we will pick up Romans 8 in January and February next year over five or six Sundays. I put Romans 8 in a category all of its own because of its importance and depth, but you really could consider Romans 5-8 one collected theme.

Romans 5-8 are essentially about the benefits, effects, or the practical ramifications for justification by faith alone. We will see the sweeping effects of the righteousness that God gives through faith in

Jesus Christ. Chapter 5 introduces important themes that will fully emerge and blossom in chapter 8 (e.g. God's love, love for God, glory, peace, hope, trials, endurance). Romans 5:1 marks a significant and important transition in this book.

Now, it has been a while since we have studied Romans so let me just remind you where we have been. The single word that summarizes the book is the word **righteousness**. And the central message of the book is found in Romans 3:21-24.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... Romans 3:21–24 (ESV)

The first three chapters were dark and gloomy because they identified God's holiness and the problem of our sinfulness. Chapter one established the sinfulness of those who reject God's moral authority over their lives (see 1:18-23), and chapter two established the sinfulness of those (in this case Jews) who thought that their religion and morality would give them standing with God (see 2:1-5). Chapter three summarized the problem by telling us "none is righteous; no not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God." (Romans 3:10-11) And the last half of chapter three and all of chapter four introduced the solution of faith. In summary, the righteousness that God demands in Romans 1-3 is the righteousness that He gives by faith or through faith in Jesus Christ in Romans 4. We talked about the revealing of righteousness in chapters 1-2, the gift of righteousness in chapters 3-4, and now in chapters 5-7 we are looking at the hope of righteousness.

Two Key Questions about Peace

It is good to be back in this glorious book, and our text today introduces the effects of everything we have studied so far. There is something that we "have" in verse 1 because of what we have studied before, and there are sweeping implications. The key phrase in verse 1 is "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and I would like to unpack that by looking at two critical questions about peace: 1) What does it mean to have peace with God? and 2) Why does peace with God help us in hardship? Let's try and answer these questions.

Question 1: What does it mean to have peace with God?

I am not sure whether it is more difficult to define a phrase that no one initially understands or if it is more challenging to define a phrase that every one *thinks* they understand. To say that "we have peace with God" means much more than what we realize. And understanding this is central to what it means to be Christian. So let's get to work.

1. That we are justified by faith

The first word of verse 1 is very important. The word "therefore" is an interpretive marker meaning that what follows is the conclusion of what has been said previously. Now I gave you a brief overview

of chapters 1-3, but let me take you back to chapter 4. Paul talked about how Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3) He used the story of Abraham’s faith to show that Abraham became righteous, not by works, but by believing in God’s promise. Faith is what saves, not works. That was Paul’s point.

In the last few verses of chapter four, Paul then connects that concept to the people to whom he was writing and to us.

But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:23–25 (ESV)

The term “justified” means to be made or declared righteous, and it appears all over the first three chapters (e.g., 2:13, 3:20, 3:24, 3:26, 3:28, 3:30, 4:2, and 4:5). The question connected with justification is this: “How is someone made righteous before God?” Romans 5:1 is the simplest statement that we have seen so far regarding the theme of Romans. Righteousness or justification is something that God does for us and to us. Justification is act of God’s grace.

This action of God changes our relationship with him, and that is why Paul says “we have peace with God.” In Romans 8:33, this same truth sounds like this: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.” Romans 8:33 When God declares you righteous, through faith in Jesus no one is able to bring anything against you because God has dealt with all of it. We are free! Because God has changed who we are in relationship to who he is. Peace with God is due to justification by faith, a completed action of God’s grace.

2. We are no longer God’s enemies

The phrase “peace with God” is a very important term, and we need to understand what the Bible means here. The problem with this term is that when we first hear it, I think our typical definitions do not capture the full meaning and weight of what Scripture has in mind. When we use the word “peace” it is usually as an emotional term that indicates being internally settled. We use it to describe what we are looking for in big decisions (e.g., “I decided to take the job because after I prayed about it, I had such peace.”) We use it to describe the happiness of moments in life that are tranquil and restful (e.g., “There is just something about being at the Lake that is so peaceful.”) While these uses might be true and relevant, they do not capture the depth of meaning that Paul has in mind here.

I have already hinted at where I am going with this point by virtue of how I worded this second point: “we are no longer God’s enemies.” Peace with God means that the hostility, enmity, and separation between us and God has ended through the work of Jesus. It means that God is no longer set against us because of our sin. It means that God’s wrath is no longer directed toward us, that God is no longer angry with us because of our sin.

Does the idea of God’s wrath toward sin make you a bit uncomfortable? I would not be surprised if it did because it is not the way that our culture thinks about God, and it is often not the way that Christians even talk about God. We talk much more about God’s love than we do about his wrath. We

have condensed gospel presentations that start with lines like: “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” Now I’m not suggesting that God does not love us. He surely does, but that is not the whole story.

Romans 1:18-22 told us that the God who created the world is revealing his wrath toward the ungodliness of mankind: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Romans 1:18 If you skip ahead to Romans 5:10 you will see that Paul describes us as God’s enemies. And Romans 8:7-8 tells us there is hostility between us and God, we resist his law, and we cannot please him in ourselves. The natural disposition between us and God is one of hostility and enmity. And this is enormously dangerous because of God’s holiness. It is eternally dangerous because of the reality of hell should this issue not be remedied through the atonement of Jesus.

3. We have access to him through grace

The other reality here, which is connected to having peace with God, is that those who are in Christ have a new “standing” and very special access to God. This is a word that Paul uses in the book of Ephesians to describe the effects of being “in Christ.”

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:17–18)

... according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. (Ephesians 3:11–12)

Peace with God is not just an emotional condition. It is a legal standing and a granting of access to the presence of a holy God that would be impossible were it not for the atonement of Jesus. To say that “we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” is another way of saying that we are justified by faith with a more relationship context. In Romans 8, Paul will talk about this access in familial terms such that we cry out “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15). This standing has so altered our relationship to God that we are invited to come into fellowship with him. Through Jesus we are now more than just former enemies, we are “graced” sons and daughters of God.

The point of this phrase and the two former points is simply to overwhelm us with the beauty, power, and the stunning transformation that is embedded in “peace with God.” In order to understand what will follow in this text, especially as it relates to hardship, we have to first deeply embrace the meaning and implications of being at peace with God. We need to feel with weight and the wonder of a holy God turning wrath into mercy, condemnation into justification, and enmity into peace.

In order to understand and appreciate what follows in the rest of this passage, you have to really appreciate the depth of the meaning of the phrase “peace with God.” To have peace with God, more than just an emotional state-of-mind, means that our relationship with God has been fundamentally changed.

To say that we have “peace with God” means that a holy God, who is grieved and righteously angry with the sinfulness of his creation in general and specifically my participation in that rebellion, establishes a new relationship with me when I put my faith in Jesus. To say that we have peace with God means that Jesus absorbed the wrath of God for us. It means that we have an entirely new relationship with God through Jesus. It means that we were his enemies, and now we are at peace; that we were in great danger because of his wrath, and now we are saved. Those who are in Christ have peace with God. Nothing could be more important than this reality, and it is the one thing that changes everything – including hardship.

Question 2: Why does peace with God help us in hardship?

The second theme that emerges in this text is the rather shocking connection between peace with God and hardship. In verse 3, Paul makes a statement that is rather shocking: “we rejoice in our sufferings.” This is not a natural thing for comfort-loving human beings to say. It is a very unusual statement. So let’s understand how this works as it relates to peace with God. How does this condition of “peace with God” help us in hardship? What does “peace with God” mean?

1. We love the right thing

Just before verse 3, we find this statement: “we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.” Now this thought and this point could have fit in the previous section about what it means to have peace with God. It certainly is part and parcel to peace with God. But it also serves as an important bridge between the facts of verses 1-2 to the hope of verses 3-5.

When a person is justified by faith and has peace with God, there is a new appetite for the glory of God. When peace with God becomes what you have tasted, you have a new love and affection for who God is, what he has done, and the mercy that you have experienced. Peace with God leads to joy in everything that God is.

The term “glory of God” is used all over the Bible for the essence of who God is and the consummation of his sovereign plan. Habakkuk 2:14 dreams of the day when the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the earth like the waters cover the sea. The term points to the restoration of the reign and rule of God. The Bible tells us that in the future, the glory of God will be fully revealed. In Revelation 21 it is the glory of God that gives New Jerusalem her beauty (v. 11) and its light (v. 23). The beauty of the New Heaven and the New Earth is the full display of God’s glory.

God’s glory is central to the message of God’s grace. The rejection of God’s glory for our own glory is the essence of sinfulness – “...exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:21-23) The entire human race has fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23). So the tragedy of the human condition in Romans 1-3 is the rejection of God’s glory. Yet the beauty of God’s grace is that there is a future hope of the restoration “glory” in the created world.

This hope, however, is not just a global reality; there is a personal component to it as well. Consider the following:

- In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul says that believers are being transformed from one degree of glory to another.
- In Romans 8:18 suffering pales in comparison to the glory that is to be revealed to us.
- The glory of the children of God has a direct effect on the created order (Romans 8:21).
- God ordains the election, the calling, and the justification of believers which leads to their glorification (Romans 8:30).

The Bible is about God's glory, and the gospel is the means by which believers are set on a path to glory. God's grace connects us to God's glory. The End Times feature the restoration of God's glory on the earth. From Genesis to Revelation, God's glory is a central theme. And those who have tasted of God's mercy love the glory of God. They have, by sovereign grace, acquired a taste for the glory of God. They rejoice over it, exult in it, and value it above all other things. The glory of God is their hope and joy. They rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Peace with God has caused them to love the right thing.

When our daughter Sylvia was still born a day before delivery, the grief we experienced an emotion was beyond what I had ever experienced. I was so sad at a level of depth that there really are not words to describe the waves of pain. During our hospital stay after Sarah had given birth to our deceased daughter, there was one nurse who tried to bring us comfort by saying, "You know, it is okay to be angry with God." She meant well and was trying her best to help us heal. But I said to her "Oh I'm not angry with God. How could I be after all he has done for us." Do you know why that is even a thought in my head? It is because peace with God and the glory connected to redemption through Jesus is even greater than an alive baby. Even in death we could rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Peace with God creates desires and loves and affections for God's glory that are life-giving and supernatural. Peace with God makes us love the right thing.

2. We can trust that suffering is not pointless

Now we come to verse 3 where Paul very specifically addresses the issue of suffering. His statement is meant to be a bit shocking. Not only are we justified by faith, have peace with God, stand in grace and rejoice in the glory of God, but all of this means that we rejoice in our sufferings. The linkage of joy and sufferings is designed to create tension and beg a question as to how that is even possible. Gratefully, Paul explains himself in verses 3-4 and then he fully unpacks this in Romans 8.

Romans 5:3-4 identifies that the reason a follower of Jesus can rejoice in sufferings is because of the fact there is no pointless suffering. Let me say that again even more emphatically: there is never a time in the life of a believer where bad things are only bad. If you have been around College Park, you will remember me saying it this way: "Hard is hard; hard is not bad." In Romans 8 this idea is expressed this way:

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28 (ESV)

Nothing in the life of a believer is ever meaningless, capricious, or worthless. Followers of Jesus can rejoice in suffering because somehow, some way it is part of God's kind and merciful plan to move us and all of creation toward his glory. And therein lies the potential problem.

I am going to share with you what suffering does or has the potential to do in your life, but if you do not love the outcome (the glory of God) and if you are not in awe of how you got here (peace with God) what I am about to share with you will not be valuable to you. Without peace with God and joy in the glory of God, there is no place for suffering. If life is just about being happy and pain-free or if life is not on a trajectory to something greater and more glorious than our human existence, then suffering is inexplicable and without resolution.

Romans 5:3-4 has a very different take on suffering. It says that followers of Jesus can rejoice in their suffering because of what they know about suffering. What do they know? First, they know that there is a progression in suffering. It produces something. It produces endurance and character and hope. So there is movement in suffering. It is not a pointless experience leading to nowhere. Secondly, it produces some great spiritual realities in the lives of those who follow Jesus. It produces endurance, which is the ability to bear up under difficult circumstances. It produces ability to not quit, to keep going and finish strong. Endurance produces character, which is the idea of proving that you are really who you claim to be. Do not miss this! Suffering through endurance proves that you are the real deal. Suffering demonstrates that there is a depth to what *you believe*.

*When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest on his unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale, My anchor hold within the veil
On Christ the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.*

And the final thing that Paul mentions here is hope. Suffering produces character and character produces hope. How does that work? Now Paul does not fully explain how this works exactly, but it seems that suffering not only proves that you are real but it also proves that Christianity is real. One commentator said it like this:

Sufferings, rather than threatening or weakening hope, as we might expect to be the case, will, instead, increase our certainty in hope. Hope, like a muscle, will not be strong if it goes unused. It is in suffering that we must exercise the deliberation and fortitude our hope, and the constant reaffirmation of hope in the midst of apparently "hopeless" circumstances will bring ever-deeper conviction of the reality and certainty for which we hope.¹

Suffering proves that peace with God can go this distance, walk through the valley, and give us the assurance that there is never, ever anything that ever happens which is pointless. Peace with God means that life is hard but God has a plan. And we can trust, to quote William Cowper, that "behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face."

¹ Douglass Moo as cited by in Colin Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans – The Pillar New Testament Commentary Series*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 230.

3. We know that we are eternally loved

The third and final way that peace with God helps us in hardship is that we can have assurance that we are eternally loved. Paul concludes this short section by talking about hope that is not ashamed because God's love has been poured into us through the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean that "hope does not put us to shame"? It essentially means that, at the end of the day, we will find that our belief in the peace of God was not in vain or a fool's errand. To believe something only to have it not really work or hold fast when it is most important would be tragic and shameful. Paul is giving assurance here that looking at suffering through this lens is not a silly, psychological way to deal with pain; it is the expression of what it means to be loved by God.

As evidence of this, Paul talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and his connection to the love of God. This is the first time that the love of God appears in Romans, and we will see it even more next week (in Romans 5:7-9). But here it is backed up by the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have put their faith in Jesus. It means that the Holy Spirit has been given to us in order to assure us that we are deeply loved by God and to help us through moments of suffering.

The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit personally dwells in the heart of every believer as a down payment of their future redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14) and to bear witness with our spirit that we are indeed the children of God (Romans 8:14-16). So it is the Spirit who gives us the supernatural assurance that suffering, while hard, is actually for our good. It is the Spirit who helps us to understand the painful grace of God's love.

Peace with God means hope in hardship because the fundamental and eternal problem of our sin was addressed by the death of Jesus. God saved us. He loved us. We have peace with him. That settled condition has given us an appetite for the glory of God, and a lens through which we can see suffering. While life is still very hard and unfair, there is meaning and purpose behind everything that we experience. Peace with God establishes the basis upon which we deal with every and any hardship.

So is that how you see salvation? Do you see it to be so sweeping, so beautiful and so attractive that it pales in comparison to every hardship in life? Do you see what could happen if believers really lived in this area? Do you see how they could embrace the hardest situations and even run toward the pain of life and culture because they know that they are secure in God? Do you see how this could transform the hurtful, frustrating, or painful circumstances in your life? Do you see that peace with God changes everything?

Peace with God means hope in hardship.

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