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Enjoying God Ministries

Romans #20

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The Spiritual Harvest of Justification

Romans 5:1-11 (1)

The founder and first President of Dallas Theological Seminary was Lewis Sperry Chafer. He died in 1952. When I was a student there we were required to read most of his 7-volume *Systematic Theology*. Virtually every theological issue was addressed in those seven volumes, some of which I disagree with.

Notwithstanding my objections to a few of Chafer's views, I always appreciated the way in which he described the blessings of salvation. In volume three of his systematic theology Chafer listed and explained 33 things that happen to us at the moment we are saved in Christ. He refers to them as "those mighty positions and possessions which are wrought instantaneously and simultaneously by God at the instant an individual exercises saving faith in Christ. When recorded in detail," wrote Chafer, "it will be seen that there are at least thirty-three of these stupendous, supernatural divine undertakings and that the sum total of these achievements is the measure of the difference between one who is saved and one who is lost" (3:226).

Chafer called these thirty-three blessings the "riches of divine grace." John Stott calls them the "blissful consequences" of justification (139). Several of them are mentioned here in Romans 5:1-5 by the apostle Paul. They are: justification by faith, peace with God, access into God's grace, joyful boasting in hope of the glory of God, and the experience of God's love through the Holy Spirit. There are actually in Romans 5:1-11 several more of these "stupendous, supernatural divine undertakings" on our behalf that come as a result of our having been saved. But today I'll restrict our time to an exploration and celebration of those mentioned in vv. 1-2.

We have been Justified by Faith in Christ (v. 1a)

The first of these blessings is one that we've already had occasion to examine before. In fact, Romans 1-4 is almost entirely concerned with the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So let me just briefly summarize what we've seen thus far.

Let's begin with a reminder about the nature of justification by faith alone. Justification, unlike sanctification, does not come to you and me in pieces. We don't get a little bit justified when we first exercise faith in Jesus, only then to get a little more justified the next day as we continue to have faith in Jesus. Justification is not progressive. It does not come to us in stages or parts. You can't be half justified and half unjustified. It does not grow or increase, nor does it diminish or decrease. Once you are justified, you are justified completely, finally, and forever. Your status as righteous in God's sight does not fluctuate. It does not change. It cannot improve or deteriorate. It cannot be added to or subtracted from.

Furthermore, justification is not a truth that you can feel. It is a status or position to which you are elevated. Of course, pondering justification can bring a great emotional response. Thinking about justification can lead to tremendous feelings of exultation and joy and peace and gratitude. But these are the effects of justification. They are not themselves what it means to be justified. All this to say that justification is legal. It is forensic. It refers to our standing in the sight of God.

The righteousness that is ours by virtue of justification is imputed to us. That word "imputed" is important to understand. It is not the same as the word "imparted." When God "imparts" something to us he infuses us with some blessing or experience, like holiness or peace or love or power or gifts of the Holy Spirit. To "impute" something is to reckon or count or to credit something as true.

And we have seen repeatedly how we are justified, and Paul says it clearly once again here in v. 1. It is by faith, not by works or obedience. Our faith will work. Our faith will produce the fruit of obedience to God's revealed will. But we must never confuse the cause and the effect. The cause of justification, or better still the means by which it is ours, is faith. The effect of justification, the fruit that it bears, is a life devoted to God, a life that gradually over time reflects more and more the moral and spiritual image of Jesus in us.

Before we go any further, please note the words "therefore" and "since" in v. 1. It is *because* we have been justified by faith that these additional blessings are ours. Everything we read about in Romans 5 to the end of the book is the result of our having been justified in the past. These two words tell us that there are certain inevitable deductions which may be drawn from the fact that we have been justified. There are implications and effects that follow or flow from the fact that we are reckoned as righteous in God's sight.

It is just as obvious that if you have not been justified by faith in Christ, these blessings are not yours. In other words, Romans 5:1-5 is written exclusively for Christians. My hope is that if you have not yet put your faith in Jesus, if you are not yet justified and regarded as righteous by God, that you will be stirred to trust Jesus as you reflect on these glorious benefits that come with that decision.

We have Peace with God (v. 1b)

Virtually everyone, except warmongers and other deranged folk, wants peace. They want peace of mind, that sweet, inward serenity that comes from a feeling of satisfaction with who we are and what we are doing. Peace in the home, between husband and wife, and among the children, is rightfully a high priority for us all. Of course, politicians love to talk about and campaign on the promise of peace in our society and among nations of the world.

But the greatest peace of all, that peace apart from which all other peace is a vain and empty charade, is peace with God. Several observations are in order.

First, to be at peace “with God” is a result of justification. This means that prior to justification we were at war with God. We were his enemies. But no more! Later on, in Romans 5:10, Paul will make it clear that it was while we were “enemies” of God that we were reconciled to him. Once again, we see how amazing divine grace truly is.

But why does the non-Christian world seem to care so little, if any at all, about peace with God? Perhaps they do not relish being at peace with God because they do not believe they are really at war. One of the more difficult and frustrating responsibilities that all Christians share is trying to persuade people, whose lives are outwardly prosperous and peaceful, that they are in fact at war with God (see Rom. 2:5; 5:10; 8:7; Eph. 2:3; John 3:36). They fail to realize that every moment of every day in which they refuse to acknowledge him as God, honor him as God, thank him, and devote their lives to him is an act of cosmic rebellion. With every breath of unbelief, they assault the dignity and glory of God, choosing instead to devote their lives to money or power or pride or any number of other man-made idols (see Rom. 1:21ff.).

Second, to be at peace “with God” as a result of justification implies a cessation of the hostility that once existed. But how did this come to pass? Something profound had to have happened to remove the hostility that both God and man experienced in their relationship with one another. And I can assure you it didn’t come about because any human being came to God waving a white flag! Here is how Paul described the removal of this hostility and enmity:

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col. 1:19-22).

Third, being at peace with God means far more than simply the absence or cessation of hostility. We are currently at peace with China, in the sense that we are not engaged in armed conflict. But hostility and suspicion and animosity and opposition and a destructive competitive spirit still characterize our feelings and beliefs toward one another. But when Paul talks about being at peace with God, he means not only the end of enmity but the inauguration of intimacy, friendship, and love. From enmity to amity!

If you were to stand before a Judge in a court of law, accused of a crime, there may be no personal relationship between the two of you. He may feel no hostility toward you should you be convicted and sentenced. He may not experience any sense of friendship or tenderness toward you if you were to be found not guilty. But between God and the saved sinner there is a real, personal engagement, a reconciliation, a spiritual relationship of the highest order.

Fourth, this means that you no longer have to lie awake at night, trembling in fear that God’s gonna’ get ya. You are perfectly at peace with him. He is perfectly at peace with you. All charges of sin and condemnation have been dismissed. He does not look on you with a disgruntled frown or a threatening, angry sneer. Everything about you and God is peaceful. Hostile feelings are forever gone. You can sincerely and joyfully sing, “It is well with my soul.”

Fifth, it’s important we observe Paul’s use of the preposition “with” rather than “of”. Peace “with” God is descriptive of an objective relationship we sustain to him. The peace “of” God is a subjective feeling that we experience as a result of that relationship. Peace “with” God is a legal position. The peace “of” God is an experiential tranquility, a spiritual serenity that we feel as a result of the fact that we are at peace with God.

If you make peace with a person with whom you had previously been at war, although outward hostility may have ceased and words of anger and bitterness ended and attempts to hurt the other person are over, you may still feel ill at ease in that person’s presence. But once we have peace “with” God we cannot help but begin to experience the peace “of” God.

You may recall Paul's words in Philippians 4:7 where he referred to "the peace of God which surpasses all understanding" that will "guard" our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The amazing thing about this is that he primarily has in mind God's peace; not just the peace that he gives but the peace that he himself experiences as God. The peace that God imparts to us, once we are justified, is the very peace that characterizes God's heart. It is truly "his" peace.

Your life on the outside may be an unmitigated disaster. Your financial status may be at rock bottom. Your physical health may be in considerable decline. But on the inside, you can remain calm, at rest, and perfectly peaceful. Isaiah said this of God: "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you" (Isa. 26:3).

When Paul describes this peace as something that "surpasses all understanding" he means that it is so marvelous and majestic and inexpressible that human intelligence is incapable of comprehending its significance. He means that God's peace is far and away above or surpasses any and all human attempts to contrive some plan to overcome anxiety. No mind, no method, no formula for overcoming worry and fear can compare with the peace that comes from God through prayer.

Paul says this peace will "guard" us. He uses a military term that would have evoked familiar images in the minds of the Philippians. The city of Philippi housed a Roman garrison and the sight of soldiers keeping careful watch over the area would have been a common phenomenon for these Christians. God's peace, like a garrison of soldiers, will stand guard over your hearts and mind. In the midst of God's peace, you are as secure from worry and fear and anxiety as any well-armed fortress.

And don't overlook the fact that it is our hearts and minds, not our bodies or property or bank accounts that are guarded. And perhaps most important of all, it is "in Christ Jesus" that this happens. The promise is only for believers, those who have been justified by faith. We see this in Romans 5:1 as well. It is "through our Lord Jesus Christ" that we have this peace. Any supposed "peace" that people claim to have with God that didn't come through the shed blood and resurrection life of Jesus is make believe. They may convince themselves that they are at peace with God, but if it didn't come as a result of being justified by faith in Jesus, it is only a delusion.

So, although peace "with" God is a reference to the end of all hostility and enmity and describes our standing with God, it inevitably entails and produces the experience of the peace "of" God in daily life.

Sixth, we must never forget that peace with God is a gift of God. We ourselves can't make peace with God. God has to make peace with us by means of the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. One often reads an obituary that says, "Having made his peace with God, he departed this life." Not really. God is the one

who takes the initiative to make peace with us, and only then are we able to be at peace with him. There is a story of an elderly man on his death bed after having lived a long life of honoring Jesus. A young pastor spoke to him and said: “Have you made your peace with God before you go to meet him?” “No,” came the blunt reply. “God made peace with me many years ago through the blood of the cross and I’ve been living in it and enjoying it ever since!”

Seventh, it must be emphasized yet again that genuine, true, fruitful and lasting peace with God only comes, as Paul says, “through our Lord Jesus Christ.” I know that many claim to be at peace with God. They insist that all is well with their soul. They are comfortable with where they are in life and are self-assured that God is pleased with them and that they are destined for a blissful eternity. But their so-called relationship with God is not grounded in the person and work of Jesus. It is only because of what he has done for sinners at the cross and their unqualified faith and trust in the sufficiency of who he is and what he has accomplished that we can have peace with God. Many claim to “feel good” about where they are spiritually. They may give you the impression that they are flourishing spiritually and in every other way. But if this experience is not the fruit of faith in Jesus and only in Jesus, they are deluded.

Paul expands on this all through Romans 5. The “faith” by which we are justified is faith in *Jesus*. The peace that we experience is “through our *Lord Jesus Christ*.” It is “through *him*” that we have access into grace. And all this is possible, as v. 6 will make clear, because “*Christ* died for the ungodly.” “*Christ* died for us,” he declares in v. 8. We have been “justified by *his* blood” (v. 9a), that is, the blood of Jesus. And we will be saved now and in the future “by *him*” (v. 9b). We are reconciled to God “by the death of his *Son*” (v. 10a) and will “be saved by *his* life” (v. 10c). And Paul concludes the paragraph in v. 11 by saying that we rejoice in God “through our *Lord Jesus Christ*.” Everything is rooted in, tied to, wrapped around, connected with, and only by means of *Jesus*.

Our Access into God’s Grace (v. 2a)

I have to admit that this next blessing sounds a bit strange on the first reading. Elsewhere Paul talks about our being granted “access” to God. In Ephesians 2:18 he says it is “through him,” that is, through Christ, “that we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.” The “both” here is a reference to Jew and Gentile alike. But here in Romans 5:2 it is into “this grace” that we have been granted access. And it is “in” this grace that we “stand.” This is odd language. What does it mean?

It is surely the case that when we pray we have “access” to the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit. We need never set an appointment with God, hoping he might have time for us, to hear our concerns and complaints and requests. Nothing stands in the way of our coming to the glorious Creator of the universe beyond our own hesitation or misguided fears. This “access” also likely points to the idea of continuing opportunity to enjoy the presence and power of Christ. He is never far away. He is always near. You don’t have to wait until our service on Sunday morning to experience the proximity and closeness of Christ.

I can still remember, as if it were yesterday, the joy I experienced whenever, as a young boy, I would walk into the Federal National Bank building in Shawnee, or as a teenager when I entered the Commercial Bank and Trust in Midland, Texas, or as high school senior at Security National Bank and Trust in Duncan, Oklahoma. I didn't have to stop at the secretary's desk or get anyone's permission to visit my dad, who, as you can see, was a banker. I would boldly walk in, moving past everyone else, and step into his loving and welcoming presence. How could I justify this? Simply because he was my father and I was his son, just as you are sons and daughters of the Most High God!

Sometime ago I read a story that took place following the Civil War here in America. A dejected Confederate soldier came to the White House but was denied entrance. A young boy approached him and asked why he was so sad. The soldier explained how desperately he wanted to see President Abraham Lincoln. But every time he tried to make his way into the White House the guards would cross their bayoneted guns in front of the door and turn him away. The boy motioned for the soldier to follow him. When they arrived at the door the guards came to attention, stepped back, and opened the door. He then led that Confederate soldier directly into the office of the President. The boy's name was Tad Lincoln. The soldier gained "access" through the President's son. And so too have we gained access to the Father through the person and work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

But here Paul speaks of our access into "grace." What could that possibly mean? Note first of all it isn't simply into grace that we have been given access, it is into *"this"* grace, a reference to the grace that Paul has been explaining in the first four chapters of Romans, the grace of God by which we are justified (Rom. 3:24).

I think at minimum it means that the whole of our lives, every moment of our existence, with every breath we take and every choice we make, we are surrounded and engulfed by God's grace. Grace isn't simply a principle. It is a power. It is the ever-present sustaining energy of the Holy Spirit that says, "You don't have to work to gain my favor. You don't have to strive to prove your worth. I am with you, in you, surrounding you, loving you, helping you, enjoying you, based solely and simply on my unmerited favor and delight."

The "grace" in which we stand is the assurance that at the final judgment we will survive. But it is also a "grace" that we presently experience. It is the realm or domain or state of being in which all believers live. It is that privileged position we have in Christ.

Paul isn't talking about a periodic approach to God where you have to schedule an appointment and then wait for your time. We can live and abide in this grace all the time. Not sporadic but continuous. We don't

fall in and out of grace as if at one moment we are in good standing with God and the next we find ourselves on the outside looking in.

Not only do we have access into this grace, it is in God's unfathomable grace that we "stand" (v. 2b). Standing is a posture of triumph and victory. We don't grovel in grace or crumble to the floor, nor do we strut like a banty rooster. We "stand" triumphantly and confidently. Grace is the atmosphere in which we live. It is the spiritual air that we breathe. We are covered and saturated by his grace. We are consumed and controlled by his grace. What Paul has in mind is becoming a people who go beyond merely believing in grace as a principle and actually experiencing grace as a power: animated by grace, empowered, shaped and fashioned and governed by it: our values, priorities, relationships, ministry, all of life sustained and impelled by grace.

To "stand" in God's grace means we don't believe or embrace worldly wisdom, values, goals, means, tactics, strategies, etc. It means we don't rely on human strength or cater to human desires. It means we are reliant on divine strength, living in accordance with divine standards of right and wrong, seeking God's goals and judging success by how God defines it.

Paul envisioned his entire existence, both in public and private, whether in the mundane affairs of life or in the ministry he discharged at Rome and elsewhere, as being energized and sustained and guided by the grace of God! His conduct or behavior was governed by the power of God's gracious presence. Thus, grace is more than an attitude or disposition in the divine nature. It is surely that, but an examination of the usage of this word in Scripture reveals that grace, if thought of only as an abstract and static principle, is deprived of its deeper implications. Grace is power.

It was "this grace" that alone accounts for the "power" to bear witness to Christ's resurrection and to give generously to one another in the local church (see 4:34ff.).

"And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8).

"[Paul and Barnabas] urged them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43).

"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Evidently "grace" is something (an experience, a power, etc.) in which we can deepen and expand and develop. It is anything but static.

Do you remember how Paul explained the generosity of the Christians in Macedonia? They were living in rock-bottom poverty and suffered great affliction. Yet they overflowed in generosity to help the believers

in the church at Jerusalem. How so? If the Macedonians “gave themselves to the Lord” in this ministry (v. 5), it is because *God* had first “*given his grace*” (v. 1) to them. Whatever achievement on their part is praised, it is ultimately attributed to the prior activity of divine grace.

How did this counter-cultural, counter-intuitive behavior come about? “We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor. 8:1). Don’t miss the spiritual dynamic at work here: ***grace comes down, joy rises up, generosity flows out***. It is because of divine grace that they experienced joy, and because they experienced such joy in grace that they gave so generously.

So, in what are you “standing”? In ***performance***, living each moment wondering what additional things you need to do or avoid to gain God’s approval? In ***works***, thinking that if only your good deeds outweigh the bad ones God will love you? In a ***quid pro quo*** relationship with God, living each day on the assumption that if you do this for God he’ll do that for you? In ***religion***, making sure you can check all the boxes of what your church expects of you? In ***uncertainty, anxiety, fear, and doubt***, never entirely confident that your eternal future is secure? Where and in what power are you standing, living, thinking, breathing, as you await the return of Christ? I pray it is in “this grace” that God has showered on us in Christ. Standing anywhere else is spiritually lethal.

Today, and every day, I am standing in God’s grace, not just knee deep, waste high, or even to my neck. I’m standing in the deep end of grace where its loving and forgiving waters have covered and overwhelmed me. Even when I’m standing in the streets of a world gone mad, I’m standing in God’s amazing grace. Are you?

Joyful Boasting in Hope of the Glory of God (v. 2b)

Why do I translate this phrase in v. 2 as “joyful boasting” in hope of the glory of God? There is a single Greek verb in the original text that can be rendered either as “rejoicing” or “boasting”, so I thought I would combine them and render it “joyful boasting”! Boasting in anything other than God is evil, and no one rejoices in things that are inherently bad. But we are enabled by this grace in which we stand to joyfully boast in our hope of the glory of God. So, what does it mean to say that our joyful, boastful hope is in “the glory of God”?

To answer this we must first determine where and in what ways the “glory” of God is made known to us. You may recall that John the apostle said that when the Word was made flesh “we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). This “glory” was most likely the compassion and love and power and purity of Jesus. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 that Satan works to prevent people from “seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” So, in this text God’s “glory” is revealed in the truths of the gospel. “Glory,” then, is everything about God that elicits praise and wonder and awe, especially as it is revealed in the person and work of Christ.

But how is it that you and I live “in hope of the glory of God”? The answer is found in numerous texts that speak of God’s glory as something that we will experience and enjoy and be engulfed within at the second coming of Jesus. Among the many texts that speak of this, here are a few:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the *glory* that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

“the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the *glory* of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21).

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of *glory* beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:16-17).

“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in *glory*” (Col. 3:4).

“when he comes on that day to be *glorified* in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (2 Thess. 1:10a).

That is what keeps me going. That is what enables me to persevere and endure and find strength to press on in the midst of so much brokenness and sadness and division and hate. I hang on, sometimes by the skin of my teeth, by reminding myself moment by moment each day that I am destined not merely to see but to experience and eternally enjoy the very glory of God himself. That is my hope. That is my reason and ground for my joyful boasting! Is it yours?