



The Fruit of Justification: Victorious Living in the Light of God's Smile

Some time ago I listened to a Christian mother voice her concerns about her adult son's manner of living. The conversation was entirely downbeat until she ended by saying, with something of a smile, "Well, at least he has fire insurance."

It wasn't until later that I fully understood what that mother was saying. She was suggesting that even though her son gave little evidence of God's work of grace in his life, he could be confident of his exemption from eternal punishment because he had said the sinner's prayer. I wonder how common that perspective is among Christians today?

Certainly it was a foreign concept to the apostle Paul. In the first five verses of Romans 5, he mentions five realities for the person who has been justified, or made right with God. To Paul, justification meant much more than simply not having to fear hell. In fact, if that was the only thing a person cared about, then Paul might have questioned whether such a soul was truly justified. If the fruits of justification are not evident in a person's life, he should search his soul to see if he actually is right with God or not.

The reality is that believers are covered by the righteousness of Christ as they trust in him and entrust themselves to him. This changes everything! Sadly, too few Christians are joyfully experiencing the robust benefits of justification. To be more blunt, besides providing "fire insurance" of what use is the doctrine of justification here and now? Romans 5:1-5 is a great place to begin answering that question as it highlights five P's of justification.

We Have Peace with God

Paul begins in verse 1: "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:"

Probably most of us know what it's like to be at war with a friend, a relative, or a spouse. In the midst of relational conflict, our whole lives are temporarily turned upside down. As the relationship is restored, peace returns. That's why making up is so great! We can smile again. We don't have to walk on pins and needles. No wonder peace is so popular.

The Bible teaches that humans are naturally at war with God. God is angry at them because of their rebellion; they are angry at God because of his authority. Romans 5:10 says that a person without Christ is an enemy of God. What a dreadful thought! It's bad enough to have human enemies, let alone a divine one.

But a believer in Jesus Christ is at peace with God. God's anger toward him has been calmed because of Christ's sacrifice on the believer's behalf. The believer has been shown the utter folly of fighting against the all-powerful God. How do we use this knowledge?

Value God's Smile

In the midst of personal conflict and struggle, it is a matchless comfort to know that the smile of God is worth more to the Christian than the smiles of people. The word for peace could be translated "harmony" When the Christian's world goes into a tailspin, he should remember that in Christ he still has harmony with God.

Make Peace Quickly

Use this knowledge as a prod to be quickly reconciled to God. It may be that you, as a Christian, are fighting against God in some aspect of your life. Consider the costliness of the peace treaty that God made with you. Right now, stop fighting against God and have your peace renewed by pleading the blood of Christ.

Are you at peace with God? Or do you still harbor the hostility humans have had against God since the fall?

We Have Personal Access to God

Paul goes on: "Through [Christ] also we have access by faith into this grace" (5:2).

Almost on a nightly basis my wife and I are awakened by our three-year-old daughter. She has the audacity to march right into our bedroom and whisper with a solemn urgency, "Dad, I can't sleep." What gives her the right to do this? Of course it's because she's my daughter; I'm her father. I don't extend that privilege to just anyone. But to my children, it's another story. One of the most tender advantages of justification is that Christians have the right to approach their heavenly Father at any time.

The Bible teaches that those outside of Christ are barred from the presence of God. After God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, he stationed angels to prevent a return to the Tree of Life (Gen. 3:24). Christ is our door to the Tree of Life (Rev. 2:7; 22:14). Believers commune with God through the work of Christ. Perhaps we should pause here and consider: Do we use this privilege on a daily basis through family and personal worship and through prayer and Scripture meditation?

If you had an open-door invitation to the Oval Office at the White House, would you use it? Our access to God is so much greater a privilege, yet it often goes unused.

We Have a Proper Sense of God's Glory

Paul continues: "[We] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (5:2).

Does God's glory make us glad? Hoping in the glory of God might sound confusing to us because we likely aren't aware of the richness of this word glory. God's glory is biblically described as his weightiness, significance, and dignity. God's glory is awe-inspiring, shocking, and overwhelming. When the glory of Christ shone forth on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples were terrified (Mark 9:1-12).

Paul says that this glory bolsters our confidence. Why? For this simple reason: that which is glorious and on our side offers great hope. Suppose the U.S. Air Force announced that to bolster national security it was going to recommission an aircraft no longer in use. The debate was between two models: the Wright Brother's bi-wing plane (whose original top speed was less than 10 miles per hour and whose first flight achieved a peak altitude of 10 feet) and the SR71 Blackbird (whose top speed exceeded 2,000 miles per hour with a peak altitude of 16 miles).

Which of these planes would offer hope of increased national security? Obviously, the one with the most glory. If you have stood next to a Blackbird, you know it's glory.

When you think about God, do you think big thoughts or small thoughts? Are you impressed with the awesomeness of God—his holiness, power, and importance? If so, then you understand why there is hope in the glory of God.

But if you think small thoughts of God, if you can reflect on God without any awe or admiration, then you understand why you do not place your hope in God. That which is small and unimpressive offers no hope.

We Understand the Purpose of Pain

"Not only that," says Paul, "but we also glory in tribulations:" Paul says pain produces perseverance leading to character and resulting in hope (5:3-4).

Pain and suffering are common to both the godly and the ungodly (Matt. 5:45). Sadly, for the unbeliever, pain is inexplicable. But if you are in Christ, then you can know that pain has a purpose. You may not know why every hurt happens, but you can at least know this: tribulation is for your ultimate good (Rom. 8:28). Specifically, suffering deepens the solidarity of the suffering Christian and the suffering Christ (Rom. 8:17).

It's been said that the true character of a person shows through in crisis. Because suffering has a purpose (perseverance, character, hope), we have an opportunity to shine forth the character of Christ before a world that is baffled by pain.

God Pours His Love into Our Hearts

Finally, says Paul, God's love has been poured out into the hearts of the justified person (5:5).

Justification—the act of being made right before God—is an act of sovereign love, which God himself performs for us. In this same chapter Paul writes: "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (v. 8). Can you imagine a greater demonstration of love? In Christ, God knelt down and embraced children who naturally hated him.

Such a great act of love must also have love as an ongoing result. Consider this divine metaphor: God's love poured into our hearts. This is something like trying to pour the ocean into a teacup! What is the result? The word overflow hardly seems strong enough.

The justified person loves. He loves when he is offended. She loves those who are quite unlovable. The reason: Christ's love to us on the cross. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11). Are the fruits of justification overflowing in your life?

The cross of Christ is so much more than a fire escape. Rather, it is the bridge between God and man that really does change everything.

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