

Introduction

Romans 5 – 8

Is the gospel good news for Christians?

Too many of us behave as if the gospel were only good news for unbelievers, as if having become a Christian we have arrived, we have come to a dead end and there is no further road to travel. But that is not true! Our conversion is only the start. It is the first step on the journey of a lifetime, where the gospel profoundly affects how we think and live. It shapes how we deal with suffering, how we view our identity, how we pray, how we battle against sin, how we face opposition, where we look for security, what we devote ourselves to, what we hope for and so much more.

Paul urgently wanted the church in Rome to appreciate the gospel message and its implications for their present and future. He began his letter by setting out the need and way of justification. Justification is a legal declaration of 'not guilty'. God declares us righteous because Jesus paid the penalty for sin we deserved, when he died on the cross. Paul explained that all of us

are sinners under the just judgment of God and only through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ can we be justified, by grace alone through faith alone. Then chapter 5:1 begins, '*Therefore*, since we have been justified through faith . . . ' (emphasis added), and Paul launches into the immense privileges that believers can enjoy both now and in eternity. Chapters 5–8 are a glorious description of what the gospel means for Christ's followers: we have peace with God (chapter 5), union with Christ (chapter 6), freedom from the law (chapter 7) and life in the Spirit (chapter 8).

This devotional is based on the seminal Bible Reading series that John Stott gave at the Keswick Convention in 1965. The text is written by Elizabeth McQuoid but reworked from John Stott's original messages. The content of the Bible Readings was revised and published under the title *Men Made New* in 1966. The material was further revised and published by IVP as *The Message of Romans*, part of the Bible Speaks Today series.

Politically, economically and socially, the world is a much different place from when John Stott first gave these talks. Many of the issues facing Christians today would not have been thought of in 1965. And yet the timeless message of the gospel has never been more relevant or needed. Now, more than ever, believers require a robust

understanding of the gospel. It is much more than a ticket to glory; it lights up the way to guide you there.

The gospel is good news for you!

Day 1

Read Romans 5:1–5

Key verses: Romans 5:1–2

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¹Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

What happened when you first trusted Christ?

Paul says you were 'justified through faith'. Justification is a legal declaration of 'not guilty'. God declares us righteous because Jesus paid the penalty for sin that we deserved when he died on the cross. This momentary act leads to a permanent relationship with God, summed up by three words:

- Peace

Peace with God is the immediate effect of our justification. We were once enemies of God (verse 10) but

now, because of Jesus' death on the cross and God's forgiveness, that old hostility has been dealt with.

- Grace

The continuing effect of our justification is that 'we have been allowed to enter the sphere of God's grace' (verse 2, NEB) and we are now standing in it.

- Glory

The ultimate effect of justification, for which we hope, is 'the glory of God'. In verse 2 this means heaven, since in heaven God himself is fully revealed ('glory' is God revealed). Our 'hope' is our certain confidence that we shall see and share in God's glory, so much so that we can 'boast' or rejoice in it already.

Do you see how that one-off declaration of 'not guilty' has such an impact? It covers the three phases of our salvation. In the word 'peace', we look back to the enmity which is now over. In the word 'grace', we look up to our reconciled Father in whose favour we now continue to stand. In the word 'glory', we look to our final destiny, seeing and reflecting the glory of God, which is the object of our hope or expectation.

• Today reflect on what being justified means:

- Enjoy peace with God. Don't let past failures steal your joy or hinder your service. Christ's work on the cross has dealt with your sin and guilt, so don't let Satan rehearse it.
- Bask in God's grace. There is nothing you can do or need to do to earn God's approval. Because of Christ's death and your restored relationship with God, you are already enjoying God's favour. In response, live gratefully for an audience of One.
- Look forward to eternity with Christ. One day, you will reflect the Lord's glory perfectly. Until then, ask for his help to reflect him more and more in your priorities, values, actions and attitudes.

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

(Titus 3:4-7)